

AN INTRODUCTION CONCERNING THE SPIRIT, THE SOUL, AND THE BODY

CHAPTER ONE

THE SPIRIT, THE SOUL, AND THE BODY

Most men today consider man as being made up of two parts: the soul and the body. The soul is the invisible part, the psychological part within man, and the body is the visible part, the outward form of man. This is man's fallen concept. Although there is some ground to it, it is not accurate. Outside of God's revelation, no ideas in this world are reliable. It is, of course, true that the body is the outward shell of man. But the Bible never mixes the soul with the spirit or considers the two as the same thing. In addition to being different terms, the soul and the spirit are actually two different substances; they are not the same. The Word of God has not divided man into two parts, the soul and the body. Rather, it has divided man into three parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." This verse clearly divides a person into three parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body. Here the apostle mentioned the believers' being sanctified "wholly." This means that the whole being of the believers is to be sanctified. What did he mean when he said that a person is to be sanctified wholly? He meant that a person's spirit, soul, and body are to be preserved complete. This is very clear; a complete person has a spirit, a soul, and a body. This verse also tells us clearly that there is a distinction between the spirit and the soul. Otherwise, it would not have said "your spirit and soul." Instead, it would have said "your spirit-soul." Since God has spoken this, we can see that there is a distinction between man's spirit and his soul, and from this we can conclude that man is composed of three parts: spirit, soul, and body.

What is the significance of distinguishing the spirit from the soul? There is a great significance. It has much to do with the spiritual life of the believers. If believers do not know the boundary of their spirits, how can they understand the spiritual life? If they do not understand the spiritual life, how can they grow in their spiritual living? Because believers are either negligent or ignorant of the distinction between the spirit and the soul, they never grow in their spiritual life. Moreover, many times they take something soulish as spiritual, constantly remain in a soulish living, and do not seek after spiritual things. If we mix up what God has separated, we are bound to suffer loss.

Spiritual knowledge has much to do with the spiritual life. But the most important thing is whether or not a believer is willing to be humble and to receive the teaching of the Holy Spirit. If he is, the Holy Spirit will, in his experience, separate his soul from his spirit, though he may not even have the knowledge about this truth. A believer with very little knowledge concerning the distinction between the soul and the spirit can experience the difference between the two. On the other hand, a very knowledgeable believer may be well acquainted with the truth about the distinction between the soul and the spirit, and yet be without any experience at all. It is best that one has both the knowledge as well as the experience. Most believers are lacking in the experience. This is why it is good to let them know the different functions of the soul and the spirit so that they will seek after spiritual things.

Not only does 1 Thessalonians divide man into three parts; other passages in the Scripture do the same. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Here the apostle divided the non-physical elements of man into two parts, the soul and the spirit, and he considered the physical part of man to include the joints and the marrow, which correspond to the mind and will. Just as a priest divided up a whole sacrifice and cut it apart with a knife so that nothing remained hidden, in the same way the Lord Jesus divides those who belong to Him, through the word of God; He pierces and divides every part, whether it be the spiritual, the soulish, or the physical. Since the soul and the spirit can be divided, the two must not be the same thing. Hence, this portion of the Word also considers man to be composed of three elements: the spirit, the soul, and the body.

Because the versions of the Bible we ordinarily use do not follow a literal translation of the words "spirit" and "soul" in a strict way, readers find it difficult to differentiate between the two just by looking at the translated words. In translating the Bible, we should translate these words literally. When men in the world translate books, they invent many new terms. Why cannot the translation of the most widely circulated Book do the same? Since God has used two different terms for the spirit and the soul, we should not confuse them.

THE CREATION OF MAN

Genesis 2:7 says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." In the beginning, God created the figure of a man with the dust of the earth and then breathed into his nostrils "the breath of life." When the breath of life came in contact with man's body, the soul was produced. The soul is the consummation of man's body and his spirit. This is why the Bible calls man "a living soul." This "breath of life" is man's spirit, the source of man's life. The Lord Jesus tells us that "it is the Spirit who gives life" (John 6:63). This breath of life comes from the Creator. Yet we should not confuse this spirit, which is the "breath of life," with the Holy Spirit of God. There is a difference between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. Romans 8:16 shows us that the spirit of man is different from the Holy Spirit; the two are not the same. "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God." The word "life" in the expression "the breath of life" is chay; it is plural in number. This tells us that God's breathing produces two lives, a spiritual one and a soulish one. This means that when God's breath of life entered the human body, it became the spirit. At the same time, when this spirit came in contact with the body, it produced the soul. This is the source of the two lives, the spiritual life and the soulish life, within us. But we should make a distinction here: this spirit is not the life of God Himself; it is merely "the breath of the Almighty [which] hath given me life" (Job 33:4). It is not the entrance of the uncreated life of God into man. The spirit that was received in the beginning is not the life of God that we received at the time of our regeneration. The life which we received at the time of our regeneration is the life of God Himself; it is the life represented by the tree of life. This spirit of man is eternal, but it does not have the "eternal life."

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground." This refers to man's body. "And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." This refers to the fact that man's

spirit comes from God. This man then became "a living soul." This speaks of man's soul. When the spirit caused the body to come alive, man became a living soul, a living person with his own consciousness. A complete person is a tripartite being, a person with a spirit, a soul, and a body. According to this verse, man was created with two independent materials—spirit and body. When the spirit entered the body, the soul was produced. The soul is the result of the union of the spirit and the body. The body was dead, but when it met the spirit of life, a third entity was produced, the soul. Without the spirit, the body is dead. When the spirit came, the body became alive. When the spirit is in the body, something organic is produced. This something that is organic is called the soul.

Here it says that the man became "a living soul." This signifies not only that the soul is produced from the union between the spirit and the body, but that after the soul is produced from this union of the spirit and the body, both the spirit and the body are incorporated into the soul. In other words, the soul and the body are fully joined to the spirit, and the spirit and the body are incorporated into the soul. Before Adam fell, his spirit and his flesh were of course not in conflict with each other daily as it is with us today. The three elements of his being were fully in harmony one with another. These three were mingled together. The soul served as the linking chain, the seat of man's personality, making it possible for man to exist independently. The soul is the consummation of the spirit and the body, the totality of the elements within man. After man's spirit and body were fully integrated, man became a living soul. This soul is the very result of the union of the two things; it is man's own personality. We may consider an incomplete illustration: if we put a drop of ink into a cup of water, the ink and the water mingle together and become ink-water. You can say that it is ink; it is indeed ink. You can also say that it is water, for it is still water. The ink and the water are integrated together and have become a third thing—ink-water. (Of course, the soul produced from the union of the spirit and the body is an independent and insoluble element, just as the spirit and the body are.) In the same way, the spirit and the body were two independent elements, but after they combined, the combination became a living soul.

God characterizes man by his soul because in His creation man's characteristics lie in his soul. This is similar to the angels being characterized by their spirit. Man is not only a body, and he is not only a body with the breath of life, but he has become a living soul. This is why later on in the Bible we see God calling man a "soul"; He did not call man a man, but He called him a soul. The reason for this is that a man is judged by his soul. The soul represents the man and expresses the characteristics of his personality. The soul is the organ of man's free will, and both the spirit and the body are incorporated into it. It has a free will. If it chooses to obey God, it can make the spirit the master of everything, according to God's design. But it can also suppress the spirit and take as its master the part that it likes. The three things—the spirit, the soul, and the body—are like a lighted electric bulb. Within a bulb, there is the electricity, the filament, and the light. The body is like the filament, the spirit is like the electricity, and the soul is like the light. Electricity is the source of light, and light is the consequence of electricity. The filament is a physical material for conducting electricity and for emitting the light. When the spirit and the body combine together, they produce the soul. The soul bears the characteristics of the combination of the spirit and the body; it is the product of the union of the two things. The spirit is the motivating force behind the soul, while the body is the means

to express the soul. This is like electricity being the source of light, while the filament is the means through which light shines.

However, we should clearly remember that in this life the soul is man's consummate expression, while in the next life and in resurrection the spirit will be man's consummate expression. This is why the Bible says, "It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44). Since we are now joined to the resurrected Lord, through Him the spirit can control our whole being. We can control our being because we are not joined to the first man Adam, who was a living soul, but to the last Adam, who is the life-giving Spirit.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE SPIRIT, THE SOUL, AND THE BODY

The body is the "world-consciousness," the soul is the "self-consciousness," and the spirit is the "God-consciousness." There are five organs in the body which afford man the five senses. This physical body enables man to communicate with the physical world. This is why it is called the "world-consciousness." The soul comprises that part in man known as the intellect, which makes man's existence possible. The part of love generates affections toward other human beings or objects. Affections originate from the senses. All these are parts of man himself; they form the personality of man. Hence, they are called the "self-consciousness." The spirit is the part with which man communicates with God. With this part man worships God, serves Him, and understands his relationship with God. Hence, it is called "God-consciousness." Just as God dwells in the spirit, the self dwells in the soul, and the senses dwell in the body.

The soul is the meeting point; here the spirit and the body join. Man communicates with God's Spirit and the spiritual realm through the spirit and receives and expresses power and life in the spiritual realm through this spirit. He communicates with the outside world of senses through the body; the world and the body interact with one another. The soul lies in between these two worlds and belongs to these two worlds. On the one hand, it communicates with the spiritual realm through the spirit, and on the other hand, it communicates with the physical world through the body. The soul has the power of self-determination; it can make decisions concerning the things related to it in the environment and can choose or reject them. It is impossible for the spirit to control the body directly; it requires a medium. This medium is the soul, which was produced when the spirit touched the body. The soul is in between the spirit and the body; it binds the spirit and the body together as one. The spirit can rule over the body through the soul and subject it under God's power. The body can also induce the spirit through the soul to love the world.

Among the three elements of man, the spirit is joined to God and is the highest. The body is in contact with the material world and is the lowest. In between the two is the soul. It takes as its nature the nature of the other two. As such it becomes the linkage of the other two parts. Through the soul the two parts can fellowship with each other and can work together. The function of the soul is to maintain the spirit and the body in their proper order so that they will not lose their proper relationship with one another. In this way, the body, which is the lowest, will submit to the spirit, and the spirit, which is the highest, will be able to control the body through the soul.

The soul is indeed the chief element in man. The soul looks to the spirit for the supply which the latter has received from the Holy Spirit and communicates to the body what it has received so that the body may partake of the perfection of the Holy Spirit and become a spiritual body.

Man's spirit is the noblest part of man; it dwells in man's innermost part. The body is the lowest and remains outside. The soul dwells between the spirit and the body and is the medium of the two. The body is the outer shell of the soul, while the soul is the outer shell of the spirit. When the spirit tries to control the body, it has to do so with the help of the intermediary soul. Before man fell, it was the spirit (through the soul) that controlled the whole being. When the spirit wanted to do something, it communicated to the soul, and the soul activated the body to follow the order of the spirit. This is what it means for the soul to be the medium.

The soul is potentially the strongest part because both the spirit and the body are incorporated into it, take it as their personality, and are affected by it. But in the beginning, man had not sinned, and the power of the soul was fully under the control of the spirit. Hence, the power of the soul was the power of the spirit. The spirit could not drive the body by itself; it had to do so through the soul. We can see this from Luke 1:46-47: "My soul magnifies [present tense] the Lord, and my spirit has exulted [perfect tense] in God my Savior." Here we see the change in tense according to the original language, which indicates that the spirit must first exult before the soul can magnify the Lord. The spirit first communicates the exultation to the soul, then the soul expresses this exultation through the organs of the body.

In conclusion, the soul is the seat of personality; man's will, intellect, and emotion all lie in the soul. The spirit is the part with which man communicates with the spiritual realm. The body is the part with which man communicates with the physical realm. The soul is in the middle of these two parts. It exercises its judgment to determine if the spiritual realm is to rule or if the physical realm is to rule. Sometimes the soul rules through its intellect and senses; when that happens, the psychological world rules. Unless the soul yields its rule to the spirit, the spirit cannot rule. Hence, the soul has to authorize the spirit to rule before the latter can rule over the soul and the whole body. The reason for this is that the soul is the origin of man's personality.

The soul is the master of a person because man's will is part of the soul. When the spirit controls the whole being, it is because the soul has yielded itself and has taken a lower position. If the soul rebels, the spirit will not have the power to control it. This is the meaning of "free will" in man. Man has the absolute right to make his own decisions. He is not a machine which turns according to God's will. He has his own faculty of deliberation. He can choose to obey God's will, and he can choose to oppose God's will and to follow the devil's will. According to God's arrangement, the spirit should be the highest part and should control the whole being. Yet the main part of man's personality, the will, is of the soul. Man's will (soul) has the power to choose to let the spirit rule, to let the body rule, or to let the self rule. Because the soul is so powerful, the Bible calls it "a living soul."

THE TEMPLE AND MAN

The apostle said in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" After reading this verse, we can see that the apostle was inspired to consider man a temple. Just as God dwelt in the temple in time past, in the same way the Holy Spirit dwells in the believers. The Bible compares man to the temple. In doing so it depicts the three elements of man most conspicuously.

We know that the temple is divided into three parts. The first part is the outer court, which everyone can see and into which everyone can go. All outward worship is offered to God here. Further in, there is the Holy Place. Here, only the priests can enter. In the Holy Place the priests offer the blood, the oil, the incense, and the bread to God. Although they are very close, they are not the closest, because they are still outside the veil and cannot enter into God's presence. God dwells in the Holy of Holies from which He radiates His infinite glory. The Holy of Holies is otherwise dark. No one can come before Him. Although the high priest is allowed once a year to enter the Holy of Holies, this only demonstrates all the more that before the rending of the veil there was no one within the veil.

Man is a temple of God. Within man there are also three parts. The body is like the outer court; it is outside, and its life is seen by all. It is here that man should obey all God's commandments. It is also here that God's Son died for man. Further in, there is man's soul, which is the inward life in man; it includes man's feelings, will, and mind. This is the Holy Place to a regenerated one. His love, thoughts, and desires are all here. In this place there is much light, everything is clear and obvious, and the priests come in and out to serve God. However, further in, there is the Holy of Holies behind the veil, which is unreachable by human light and is a place invisible to the human eyes. This is "the secret place of the Most High" (Psa. 91:1). It is the habitation of God, a place that no man can reach unless God removes the veil. This is the human spirit. Man not only has a body and a soul but a spirit as well. This spirit is deeper than man's consciousness; it is the place unreachable by man's feelings. It is in this place that man fellowships with God.

In the Holy of Holies there is no light, for this is God's habitation. In the Holy Place there is light because there is the lampstand with seven branches. In the outer court everything is exposed under the sun. This is a picture of a regenerated person. His spirit is like the Holy of Holies, where God dwells. This place is entered by faith and is totally dark. This is a place which the believer cannot see, feel, or understand. The soul is like the Holy Place, where there is much power of understanding, many thoughts, much knowledge, and many rules and where one comprehends both the things in the psychological world and the things in the physical world. In this place there is the shining of the lampstand. The body is like the outer court; it is seen by all. All its activities and living are visible to everyone.

The order that God gives to us can never be wrong. It is: "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thes. 5:23). It is not "soul and spirit and body," nor is it "body and soul and spirit." Rather, it is "spirit and soul and body." The spirit is the noblest; hence, it is mentioned first. The body is the lowest; hence, it is mentioned last. The soul lies in between; hence, it is placed in between the soul and the body. After we have clearly seen God's order, we will see the wisdom God has in comparing man to the temple.

We see how the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer court correspond with the order and the degree of importance of the spirit, the soul, and the body.

The work of the temple revolves around the revelation in the Holy of Holies. All the actions in the outer court and the Holy Place are determined by the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. The holiest place within the temple and the place which all other places are subject to and depend on is the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies there does not seem to be much work; it is very dark. All the activities are in the Holy Place. All the works in the outer court are controlled by the priests in the Holy Place. Indeed the Holy of Holies is a quiet and still place. Yet all the activities of the Holy Place are directed by the inspiration of the Holy of Holies.

The spiritual significance of this is not difficult to understand. The soul is the organ of our personality. It includes the mind, the will, the emotion, etc. The soul appears to be the master of the activities of the whole being. Even the body is under its direction. Yet before man fell, although there were many activities and works with the soul, they were all under the control of the spirit. God's order is: (1) the spirit, (2) the soul, and (3) the body.