

Spirit, Soul and Body

Dear Friend,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thess. 5:23

Paul is praying for these Christians to be **completely** sanctified and he specifies the three areas which make up total human personality: spirit, soul and body.

The distinction between these three elements of our personality is little understood by most Christians. Yet the Bible provides us with a unique kind of “mirror” which reveals their nature and interrelationship, and shows us how each is intended to function. Failure to use this mirror correctly exposes us to much inner frustration and disharmony.

In the initial creation of man God said, “*Let Us make man in Our **image**,*” and “*according to Our **likeness**.*”¹ **Image** refers to man’s outward appearance. In a way that is not true of any other creature, man reflects the outward appearance of God. It was appropriate, therefore, that when the Son of God came to dwell on earth, it was in the form of a **man**—not an ox or a beetle—and not even in the form of some heavenly creature, such as a seraph.

Likeness refers to man’s inner nature. Scripture refers to God as a **triune** being: Father, Son and Spirit. Likewise it reveals man as a **triune** being, consisting of spirit, soul and body.

The account of man’s creation reveals how his triune nature came into being: “*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 being*”—more correctly, *a living soul*.²

Man’s spirit came from the inbreathed breath of God. His body was formed from clay, transformed into living human flesh. Instantly he became a living soul.

The soul thus formed is the **ego**, the individual personality. It is usually defined as consisting of three elements: the will, the intellect and the emotions. It has the responsibility for making personal decisions and expresses itself in three phrases: “I want,” “I think,” “I feel.” Unless touched by the supernatural grace of God, all of human behavior is controlled by these three motivations.

Man was created for personal fellowship with God, but his sinful disobedience produced disastrous effects in all three elements of his personality.



Derek Prince



Jerusalem, Israel

Effects of Sin

Cut off from contact with God, man's **spirit** died. This was in fulfillment of God's warning: *"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*³ The physical death of Adam's body, however, did not follow for more than 900 years.

Through exercising his will in direct disobedience to God, man became a **rebel in his soul**. Since that time, every person descended from Adam has inherited the nature of a rebel.

In Ephesians 2:1–3 Paul describes the results of rebellion that have affected every one of us: *"And you . . . were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience [rebellion] among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."*

As a result of sin, we have all been dead in our spirits. In our souls we have all been in rebellion against God. Our bodies, too, have become subject to corruption—that is, to sickness, decay and death.

Yet the boundless love of God is such that He continually longs for the restoration of His fellowship with man. *"He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us."*⁴ Furthermore, through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God has opened a way for the restoration of that fellowship which was lost.

Effects of Salvation

In Ephesians 2:4–5 Paul goes on to describe the outworking of salvation in our spirits: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."* Our spirits, being reunited with God, are alive once more. At the same time, our souls—through repentance and faith—are released from rebellion and reconciled to God.

*For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*⁵

When we realize that we have all been in rebellion against God, we understand why there can be no genuine salvation without **repentance**. Repentance means laying down our rebellion and submitting ourselves to God's righteous government.

Salvation also makes provision for the body. Delivered from the slavery of sin, our bodies become temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells and our members become instruments of righteousness.⁶ Finally, at the return of Christ, our bodies will be transformed into immortal bodies like that of Christ Himself!

Requirements for Discipleship

Jesus commissioned His apostles to make disciples of all nations. He did not tell them to make church members. Discipleship requires a radical response in each area of the personality—body, soul and spirit.

The requirement for our bodies is stated in Romans 12:1: *“That you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. . . .”* We are required to offer our bodies upon the altar of sacrifice to God just as completely as the Israelites under the old covenant offered the animals they sacrificed on their altars. There is, however, one important difference. The Israelites **killed** the animals they offered to God. The body which we offer to God is to be a **living** sacrifice.

Nevertheless, from that moment onwards, our bodies no longer belong to us. They are God’s property, God’s temples. We are mere stewards who must give an account to God for the way in which we have cared for His temple. Unfortunately, far too many Christians today continue to treat their bodies as if they still own them and are free to do with them whatever they please.

Concerning our souls, Jesus stated His requirement in Matthew 16:24–25: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself [literally, his soul] and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life [soul] will lose it, but whoever loses his life [soul] for My sake will find it.”*

Our cross is the place where we choose to die. God does not impose this upon us. We take it up only of our own free will. It is here that we must **deny our soul**. This means that we say “No” to the three demands of the soul: “I want,” “I think,” “I feel.” Henceforth, we are no longer controlled by these three motives. Their place is taken by God’s word and God’s will. As we obey the word and the will of God, we find the new life which Jesus offers us. It is only through death that our souls can find this new life.

As we fulfill the Lord’s requirement for our bodies and our souls, our spirits are liberated to enter into a fellowship with God even more wonderful than that which was lost through the fall. In 1 Corinthians 6:15–17 Paul warns Christians against an immoral sexual union with a prostitute, because this means becoming one body with the prostitute. Then, in direct contrast, he continues, *“But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”*

The implication is clear. The redeemed spirit can now enjoy a union with God which is as close and intimate as sexual union with a prostitute would be for the body. It is the spirit alone, however—not the soul or the body—that can experience this direct intimate union with God.

It is primarily through the act of worship that our spirits enter into this union with God. In John 4:23–24 Jesus said: *“The true worshipers will worship the Father **in spirit and truth**. . . . God is Spirit, and [all] those who worship Him must worship **in spirit and truth**.”* He made it clear that true worship must be an activity of our spirits.

In the contemporary church there is little understanding of the nature of worship, mainly because we do not discern the difference between the spirit and the soul. Worship is not entertainment. That belongs in the theater, not the church. Nor is worship the same

as praise. We praise God with our souls, and it is right to do so. Through our praise we have access to God's presence. But once we are in His presence, it is through worship that we enjoy true spiritual union with Him.

To be able to worship God in this way is the goal of salvation—first on earth, and then in heaven. It is the highest and holiest activity of which a human being is capable. It is only possible, however, when the soul and the body come into submission to the spirit and in harmony with it. Such worship is often too profound for words. It becomes an intense and silent union with God.

Yours in the Master's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Derek Prince". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Derek Prince

P.S. My next letter will clarify how to discern between the spirit and the soul.

¹ Genesis 1:26

² Genesis 2:7

³ Genesis 2:17

⁴ James 4:5 (NAS)

⁵ Romans 5:10–11

⁶ Romans 6:13