

Spiritual or Soulish?

Dear Friend,

In my previous letter I analyzed the three elements that make up total human personality: spirit, soul and body. In this letter I will continue with the same theme, but I will focus on one particular issue: the relationship between man's spirit and his soul.

The spirit of man comes directly from God and relates directly to God. In the original pattern of creation, there was a descending relationship. God moved upon man's spirit; his spirit moved upon his soul; and his soul directed his body. Through man's rebellion, however, his spirit was set aside and his soul took over control. As a result, unregenerate man is controlled by the three functions of his soul: the will, the intellect and the emotions.

When God reconciles man to Himself, His purpose is to restore the original order, by which He once again relates directly to man's spirit; man's spirit in turn moves upon his soul; and man's soul moves upon his body. This explains the words of David in Psalm 103:1: *Bless the LORD, O my soul*. Through faith David's spirit had been reunited with God and was eager to worship Him. So his spirit stirred up his soul to move upon his vocal organs to utter the appropriate words of worship.

So long as man remains in submission to God and his soul remains in submission to his spirit, man functions in harmony with God and with himself. But if at any time man reasserts his rebellion against God, his soul is no longer in submission to his spirit and the inner harmony is broken. This means that there is constant tension between the spirit and the soul.

The Greek of the New Testament has a special adjective, formed directly from the word for soul, *psuche*, which describes action initiated by the soul. The adjective is *psuchikos*. The natural way to render this in English would be *soulish*, but unfortunately English has not produced such a word.

Consequently, English translations of the New Testament have used a variety of different words: natural¹, sensual¹, worldly², unspiritual³, worldly-minded³, without the spirit⁴, and a phrase, to follow their natural instinct⁴. English readers, who cannot get behind the translations, therefore have no way of knowing that these seven different words or phrases all translate one and the same Greek word.

Throughout the rest of this letter, I will use the word *soulish*. This will emphasize the tension in the New Testament between that which is *spiritual* and that which is *soulish*.

In 1 Corinthians 15:44–46 Paul uses this word three times to point out the difference between our present body, which is *natural (soulish)* and our resurrection body, which will



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be *spiritual*. A *soulish* body is one upon which the spirit has to move through the soul. A *spiritual* body would be one in which the spirit moves directly upon the body, without having to work through the soul.

The cherubs, which are described in Ezekiel chapter 1, apparently have *spiritual* bodies. *Each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go* (verse 12). Again, *where the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went* (verse 20).

Apparently that is the type of body that believers will have after resurrection. No longer will our spirit have to urge our soul to direct our body to make the appropriate response. Our body will directly respond to the decision of our spirit. We will be like Ezekiel's cherubs: we will go directly, without turning, wherever our spirit wills to go. What glorious liberty!

There are three other passages in the New Testament where the opposition between the spiritual and the soulish is more clearly expressed. In 1 Corinthians 2:14–15 Paul says:

But the natural [soulish] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

For the understanding of spiritual things, the soul is dependent upon the spirit. If it is out of harmony with the spirit, the realm of spiritual truth is closed to it. How important it is, therefore, that we approach truth with the right attitude—our soul submitted to our spirit and our spirit in union with God.

In his epistle Jude speaks about people in the church who *are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts. . . . sensual [soulish] persons, who cause divisions, not having the [Holy] Spirit* (Jude 16, 19).

When the soul of a Christian is not submitted through his spirit to God, he becomes a channel through which every kind of carnality and divisiveness can infiltrate the church. This is the true, underlying cause of divisions in the Body of Christ.

In James 3:15 the apostle speaks about a form of wisdom which *does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual [soulish], demonic*. James depicts a downward slide in three successive stages: from the *earthly* to the *soulish* to the *demonic*.

When Christians become *earthly* they lose the vision of eternity. They cannot see beyond the things of this life: success, pleasure, wealth, physical health. They are only interested in what their faith will do for them in this life!

Concerning such people Paul says: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable* (1 Corinthians 15:19). Christians like that often consider themselves prosperous and successful. God considers them pitiable.

After the *earthly*, the next stage is *soulish*. To be soulish is to be egocentric, self-centered. For such people, the Christian faith is a way to get what they want out of life. They suppose that *godliness is a means of gain* (1 Timothy 6:5).

The *soulish* opens the way for the *demonic*. This is one main way in which demons infiltrate the church. The question is often asked: Do Christians ever need deliverance

from demons? The words of James provide a clear answer. This downward slide from the earthly to the soulish to the demonic exposes both individual believers and whole congregations to the activities of demons.

In many places today the church is an ungodly mixture. No clear line is drawn between the spiritual and the soulish, and therefore there is no barrier to the demonic. Genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit are interspersed with manifestations that are clearly demonic. As a result, many sincere believers are confused and bewildered.

To protect ourselves we must cultivate scriptural discernment. We must learn to distinguish between what is truly spiritual and what is soulish. There is only one instrument that is sharp enough to do this: the Word of God.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Further on, in Hebrews 5:14, the writer states two conditions which we must fulfill in order to exercise this kind of discernment:

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use [practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The first condition is that we must regularly feed on *solid spiritual food* through the study of **the whole Bible**. The second condition is that we must regularly *practice* discernment. We must be continually alert, recognizing the spiritual forces that we encounter in every situation. Discernment should be as much a part of our Christian life as prayer.

Finally, let us obey the exhortation of Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:13–14:

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
Let all that you do be done with love.

Yours in the Master's service,



Derek Prince

PS: On the reverse side is a copy of a letter I received from a German psychiatrist who had a revelation of the “spiritual” and “soulish” areas of his personality.

¹ KJV, NKJ

² NKJ

³ NAS

⁴ NIV

German Psychiatrist's Discovery

Dear Mr. Prince:

Never in my life has this happened to me before: Stunned by the "news" of your broadcast tape "What Is Man?" While listening to your lecture, I saw for the first time in my Christian life the "spiritual Hans" of me somehow elevated as if on a chair and looking down onto the "soulish Hans" whose monument-like appearance seemed to crumble away.

Regenerated, this spiritual part of me, the "spiritual Hans," has survived ever since I listened to your lecture—fueled by the Holy Spirit—about 5 weeks ago. The "soulish Hans" of me—in particular its intellectual and emotional areas—*must be dragged to the cross.*

Throughout my life I have been on the outlook for some **clear** and **whole** presentation of God's Word.

You will understand that this change in my life—this being again a "triune" human being—is about to revolutionize even my profession. And for the first time in my life—now 45 years old—I see some good reason in having become a psychiatrist.

H.P., Germany