

# How does Soul differ from Spirit?

By Norman Grubb

When the writer to the Hebrews wrote about there being a "rest to the people of God," he defined it as being a ceasing from our own works. Not from work, of course: that is an impossibility; but from works proceeding from self-effort. In other words sharing God's rest does not mean ceasing from work, any more than our even-active God ceases, but resting in our work. Work which has rest at its centre is work from adequacy; work which has strain at its center (the kind we are most accustomed to) is work from inadequacy. If you go to a store to buy ten dollars worth of goods with only one dollar in your pocket, you buy from strain; if you go with twenty, you buy from rest! If our activities are dependent on our own resources, we work from strain; if upon His, we work from rest. That is also the "second rest" Jesus spoke of in Matt. 11:28-30. He worked from rest, He was so evidently relaxed. Why? Because in lowliness of heart He thoroughly knew His human nothingness, and therefore could also know His indwelling Father's all-ness; and being meek of heart. He knew how to abide in His Father's all-ness: and being meek of heart, He knew how to abide in His Father in times of stress, rather than rushing off to handle situations his own way. So He now says to us: "You are in my service, so learn the secret of rest in work from Me, learn the meaning of meekness and lowliness of heart. If you do that, you will rest, not only in your spirits from the past burden of your sins and their dominion over you, but also in your souls from the emotional stresses of daily living ('ye shall find rest unto your souls'); and then you will be able to prove what now seems a paradox as I say it: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light', when the normal experience is that a yoke is hard to pull and a burden heavy to carry." God gave me that word personally thirty years ago when I had to take up responsibility in the mission to which I belong, "Watch," He said to me. "Whenever your yoke is hard to pull, or your burden heavy to carry, you are off beams. Get on beam again!" I have found that an excellent barometer!

Now the Hebrews writer takes this further when he distinctly connects the experience of this rest with ability to discern between soul and spirit (Heb. 4:9-12); and my experience is that a great many of God's people are confused and frustrated, and live in a great deal of false condemnation, because they have not learned this distinction.

Modern psychology has invented its own vocabulary for what it considers are the subdivisions of the human personality, such as the subconscious, the id, the super-ego, and so on. But God gave us His own definition and analysis centuries ago, and that will never be bettered.

Man, the Bible says, is tripartite—spirit, soul, and body; and in that order of importance (I Thes. 5:23). In the Hebrews passage, however, it stresses that the difference between soul and spirit is very subtle, and indeed can only be recognized by inner revelation. Only the word of God, it says, applied as the sharp sword of the Spirit to the human consciousness, can pierce "even" to that depth, sever between the two, and give soul and spirit their proper evaluation; only so can we recognize the proper function of each without mistaking the one for the other, and thus enable the human personality to move forward in gear and remain there. And further to underline the depths to which it is piercing, the writer uses the analogy of "the joints and marrow," likening soul and spirit to the joints which give the bony structure of the body its flexibility in action, and the marrow which is the inner life of the bone.

The first essential is a clear recognition of the human spirit as the real self, the ego within us. Soul and body are the clothing or means of expression of the spirit. "God is spirit", said Jesus. God is the primal Self of all selves, the I Am, therefore self is spirit; and God is called in this same letter "Father of spirits," the human ego made in His image. The human spirit is sometimes described as that part of us which can know God. But it is more than that. It is the essential ego, my human "I am." The Bible tells us that it is our spirits that know ourselves; "What man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" When I say, "I myself," the I is the spirit, the ego which can look out from within, as it were, and knows the myself, the rest of me (soul and body). The dying Saviour on the cross

commended His spirit (His true self) into His Father's hands. The saints awaiting the physical resurrection are spoken of as "spirits of just men made perfect" for the true self is spirit.

The self, the human spirit, has three basic faculties—heart, mind and will. The word heart, a term often used in the Bible, is borrowed by analogy from the fact that the heart is the physical centre of the body. It indicates that love is the centre, God being love, that which He fathered in His own image is compounded of love. Love is the fountain-head of the ego. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The human spirit is love, self-love through the false union in the Fall; and when joined to Christ by grace, God's selfless love expressed through the human love-faculty.

Mind, the second faculty is that by which we know things. Not what we think about things, any more than love is what we feel about things, but the means by which we know them. "When the divine Spirit is united by grace to the human spirit, He shares His knowing with us.

The third faculty of the spirit is the will, where the choices are made under the direction of heart (love) and mind (knowledge). At this point the spirit (the ego) moves into action, expressed through soul and body. The will is the arbiter of our destiny. If the choice is for God (such choosing being the compulsions of grace), then the will of the divine Spirit takes over in our spirits, and God with His good, perfect and acceptable will works in us to will and do of His good pleasure. The will of the Spirit issues in the activities of soul and body, the willing motivates the doing; but it is now God's will through our wills.

Here is the human spirit, the human ego, in its entirety—heart, mind, will; love, knowledge, choice.

Now we reach the important point. In what does the soul differ from the spirit? It is the means by which the invisible spirit expresses itself. God, the invisible Spirit, reveals Himself through the Son, "the express image of His person," the image of the invisible God," the brightness of His glory". This relationship of Son to Father can help us to understand the relationship of soul to spirit. Thought, word and deed are another trinity, in which the word clothes the thought and gives expression to it. In this same way the soul is the emotions or affections by which love is

expressed, the feelings warm or cold, pleasant or unpleasant. The spirit is mind, the knower. The soul is the reasoning faculty by which the mind can explain its knowledge; "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you," there is soul explaining spirit.

Now unless we have a clear differentiation between the properties of these two, we can get into a great deal of trouble, because the soul is the intermediary between ourselves and the world; and it not only channels the spirit to the world, but has the reflex activity of channeling the world back to the spirit. Emotion and reason are wide open, not only to our spirit, but to the world around. Our emotions therefore, can be very variable. We may like this or dislike that. This may appeal to us, that repel us—either things or people. We may feel exalted at one moment or abased at another; dry at one time, fresh at another; fervent or apathetic; bold or fearful; compassionate or indifferent. If, therefore, we confuse soul with spirit, we quickly fall into false condemnation. Why are my feelings so variable? Why do I feel cold, dry, far from God? Something is wrong. Why do I dislike this person, or resent this happening? I am wrong with God somewhere.

I am flagellating myself in vain. Soul is variable, spirit invariable. In my spirit joined to His Spirit, I live with an unchanging and unchangeable Christ, and am myself equally unchanging by faith. I am not my soul feelings, I am spirit. But if we had not sensitive souls, we could not be affected by the crosscurrent of human living; we should not be human. We are to be affected by them, but not governed by them, just as He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

We must be discerning. Many of our soul-emotions are illusory. We are allowing ourselves to be influenced by external appearances. We feel spiritually cold, dead, apathetic, hard, dry. We feel we need inner revival. No we don't. All we need is not to be fooled by our souls! The well of living water has not stopped springing up within us, the living bread in our spirits has not gone stale, the fire of the Spirit (with whom we have been baptized at our regeneration) has not burned low. Look within where you and He really are spirit with Spirit. There is no change. Don't be fooled by the color of your clothing—your soul

feelings. You and He in you have not changed. Indeed we shall have those kinds of feelings, and God intends that we should have, to stabilize us in the walk of faith. They are useful in driving us back to Him in our spirits. As we learn to walk more steadily in Him, we shall find ourselves less and less bothered by that type of soul-feeling. A whole lot of the hunger people say they have, or need of spiritual refreshment, is at bottom because they are mistaking soul-reactions for spirit-facts. The Reviver is already and always within! There would be much less talk of revival among Christians, if we had learned to walk in "vival"—in the fact of the unchanging life which is the real we, Christ in us.

There are many soul-reactions which we are meant to have, so long as we understand them. Jesus said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." He then said in Gethsemane: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." So Jesus was conscious of a contrary will. Was He wrong? He knew the difference between soul and spirit. With His human soul, He was meant to feel all that was involved in becoming our sin-bearer, and He did. But equally He knew that that was not His real self. His true will was His Father's will with Him, in His spirit. His soul-will was the necessary effect of the satanic pressures on Him for our sakes; but that merely drove Him to the three hours of bloody sweat when his spirit-will, His Father's will in Him, so dominated His soul that He could walk that awful Calvary path as a king. Many time believers are confused in this respect. They feel they won't be willing for this or that, it demanded them, or that they are now not willing. Quite so. They are not meant to be. In their souls they are meant to shrink and refuse. That is the natural and right impact of an unpleasant situation on us. But that is not the real we or the real will. The real will is down in our spirit where "it is God that worketh in us to will... of His good pleasure." We should not even ask people if they are willing. We cannot be. We should say, "You will never be willing. Self cannot give up self. But you can affirm in faith that God in you will will His will, and will take you along with Him."

Recently a lady was talking with me, greatly distressed because she had lost her husband. She loved and served the Lord, but she said she could not accept this blow from His hands,

and was rebellious. When the difference between soul and spirit had been explained to her, and that her feelings of distress and unwillingness to accept were just normal, but were not the real self in her; and that she could honestly tell the Lord what she felt, but that, in spite of it, she could affirm against her feelings that the Lord's way is always perfect, all came clear.

In our spirits we are undifferentiated. That is where we are all one person in Christ. In our souls we all vary, and are meant to. That is why the salvation of our souls is a necessity. Because it is through the infinite variety of our souls that all the glories of Christ will be seen, each of us manifesting some different facet of His unsearchable riches. But variety means contrast without contradiction. Color varies, we say clash, but all combine in the amazing spectrum of color beauty. Music, the same. There are disharmonies, but all compose the one great harmony of sound. And also with individuals. One person appeals to us, one doesn't. One we naturally like, one we dislike. Then we feel condemned. Should I not also like that one? Liking is a soul response, loving a spirit response. I love one whom I don't like. He does not appeal to me, I say; but God loves him, and God loves him in and through me. In taking that position, I have moved back, without condemnation, from soul to spirit.

Just as through our emotions we express love, so through our reasons we express knowledge; and reason vary, as emotion do. Through the reasoning faculty of the soul we can explain to others what we know, and others explain to us. I cannot know what you know. That is beyond my reach—in your spirit. What you know is peculiarly your own, part of yourself. You cannot share that. But you can give me explanations of your knowledge, which I can in turn discuss with you, and it may be that I too will come to know for myself. My reasoning faculty, there, in my soul is open to all kinds of questioning. Like my emotions, it is open to the two-way influences—of my spirit from within, of the world and men from without. That is why in my soul I may have uncertainty at the same time as my spirit has certainty. One of the best illustrations of that was the father who brought his afflicted son to Jesus. When Jesus said to him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth," his honest answer was "Lord I believe, Help thou my unbelief"! As he

looked at Jesus, and knew the kind of things He had done, down in his spirit he believed, and said so. But as he turned and looked at his son lying foaming on the ground, the reasoning faculty of his soul raised questions, and he was honest enough to acknowledge it. But that did not alter his basic faith. His spirit did battle with his soul and would not submit to its questioning; he fought doubt by affirming faith ("Lord, I believe") and by asking for help against doubt ("help Thou my unbelief"—although he got the working a bit mixed up!) The proof that faith swallowed up doubt, and spirit master soul, was that he got the deliverance.

It is not wrong for the reasoning faculty of the soul to question and doubt, any more than it is wrong for the emotions to have their varied reactions. In fact the soul reactions are the means of stirring the spirit in action. I have already pointed out that doubt and uncertainty are the seed-plot of faith, for we can never ultimately prove anything. That is what puts passion into faith. Coming to certain conclusions in heart and mind, we deliberately believe what we cannot prove. Faith is heart and mind committal. The only certainty possible to faith is the certainty of faith! Doubt and questioning, therefore, is a normal condition of the reason, of the soul, and we must avoid the false condemnation of thinking that there is something wrong with us in that condition. Unbelief is a different matter, for unbelief is not of soul, but of spirit. Unbelief means that, in my inner self, I have decided I will not believe a certain thing. I have allowed my soul-doubts to capture my spirit and enslave my will.

When we understand this balance between the spirit of faith and the uncertainties of reason, and how the reasoning faculty is given us to face squarely all the various possibilities that confront us in our life, then we enter with zest into life's dialogues. Is a thing, this? Is it that? We are not afraid of the cold wind of skepticism. We are not shaken by questions that seem to disturb our faith. We weigh things up and admit our ignorances and inabilities to produce our proofs. But, we don't live in the reasonings of our souls. We move back to where we really are—in our spirits. There, in the place where eternal decisions are made, we affirm what we know and are—by faith. Where reason has helped to clarify and confirm, we are

strengthened and thankful, and are more ready to share those reasons with others. Where reason raises questions we are always willing to consider and learn and adjust; but we never permit it to cross the bridge which is forbidden to it, the bridge of revelation from the Other Side, which has become the bridge of faith, the bridge which is nothing to do with rational concepts, but is a Living Person. In that sense opposing reasons are also our friends, because they only serve to stiffen the sinews of faith. "Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not; but one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

Our souls, therefore, whether in the emotions or reason, are the agents of our spirits, our real selves. They express Him who is the indwelling Spirit in our spirits; whether in the old life, the spirit of error; or in the new, the Spirit of truth. This means that, when it was the spirit of self-love in the old life, what our souls felt or thought in their selfish reactions was largely allowed to govern our spirits; if we didn't like a thing, we didn't like it, and so forth. But in the new life, when our souls channel in world impressions, our likes and dislikes, our doubts and skepticisms we no longer permit soul to govern spirit; gradually spirit masters soul, so that it becomes more fixed as a reflector of God's Spirit.