

Historical Perspective WATCHMAN NEE (1903-1972)

In Watchman Nee's book *The Christian Life and Warfare* originally published in 1927, he clearly demonstrates from 1 Thessalonians 5:23 that man has three parts.

The Word of God does not divide man into two parts, the soul and the body. Rather, it divides man into *three* parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." This verse clearly shows a distinction between the spirit and the soul. Otherwise, it would not have said, "Your spirit and soul," but rather, "Your spirit-soul." Since God has said this, we can see that there is a distinction between man's spirit and his soul. From this we can conclude that man is divided into three parts—the spirit, the soul, and the body. (7)

A complete person has a spirit, a soul, and a body

The first chapter of Watchman Nee's book *The Spiritual Man* is entitled "The Spirit, The Soul, and The Body." Here, Nee further emphasizes and elaborates on the fact that man is composed of three parts.

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. (3)

God's Salvation

God's Salvation and the Three Parts of Man

The Three Parts of Man Spoiled by the Fall of Man

Created with a spirit to receive God, a soul to express God, and a body to maintain his existence, the first man, Adam possessed a tremendous potential to express and represent God. Before this potential could be realized, however, Satan came in to damage and ultimately annul the proper function of each of man's three parts. The fall of man thus was not merely an act of disobedience and transgression; rather, it had the effect of corrupting all three parts of his being, thereby preventing man from fulfilling God's purpose.

The Human Soul Contaminated by Receiving Satan's Thought, Feeling and Will

All three parts of man were spoiled by the fall: First, his soul was contaminated; second, his body was transmuted into the sinful flesh; and third, his spirit was deadened. It is crucial that we see the tactics employed by God's enemy to corrupt man's soul (his mind, emotion, and will). This awareness will equip us to discern the strategies he continues to employ to keep man from receiving and enjoying God and thereby expressing and representing Him.

Adam possessed a tremendous potential to express and represent God

The serpent began his assault on the human mind by injecting it with doubt

Satan began to contaminate man's soul by touching the mind, thus causing the human mind to begin to doubt God's Word. In Genesis 3:1 the serpent began his assault on the human mind by injecting it with doubt: "Did God really say, You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" By responding to the serpent in verses 2 and 3, Eve opened the door of her soul to the serpent, allowing him to take another step to further contaminate the human mind. In verse 4 the serpent went on to assure Eve, "You shall not surely die!" By this time the serpentine venom had infiltrated her mind, causing her to doubt God's Word.

The second stage of the contamination of man's soul was mounted against his emotion, causing man to begin to dislike God. In this stage, the serpent sowed a seed of resentment into Eve by lying to her about God's motive: "God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). This word incited Eve's emotions, causing her to feel that God was withholding something good from her. Thus, the human emotion that was created to love God was spoiled, poisoned instead with an actual dislike for God.

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The third stage of the contamination of man's soul took place in his will, enticing man to choose the satanic tree of knowledge rather than the divine tree of life. Genesis 3:6 records, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make oneself wise, she took of its fruit and ate." This consummated the contamination of the human soul, by means of the seduction of the human will to choose the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge (Witness Lee, *Basic* 35-37).

The Human Body Transmuted into the Flesh

The body as originally created by God was a pure vessel containing only one created essence, the human nature created in God's image and likeness. But this pure body was changed in nature, that is, transmuted into the fallen flesh when a foreign element was introduced through the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This foreign element, called indwelling sin, now resides in man's flesh. This is why Paul says in Romans 7:17, "Now then it is no longer I that work it out, but sin that dwells in me." Because this evil substance has fully occupied and saturated our body we should never have any confidence in our flesh (Witness Lee, *Life-Study* 238).

We should never have any confidence in our flesh

The Spirit Deadened

The ultimate consequence of man's fall was that his spirit was deadened, thus becoming insulated from God and losing its function toward God.

**God has preserved
the human spirit
inviolate for Himself**

Ephesians 2:1 therefore says, "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins," referring to our fallen, deadened, state before we were saved. But in what part were we dead? Since our body and soul were very much alive, this verse must refer to our human spirit. We must make it clear at this point, however, that neither sin nor Satan have ever had any entrance or access into man's spirit at any time before, during, or after the fall of man. God has preserved the human spirit inviolate for Himself. Rather, it was only the God-contacting function of our spirit that was deadened.

Thus, each of the three parts of man was damaged by the fall. The entire soul (mind, emotion, and will) was contaminated, the body was changed in nature, and the spirit was deadened. Nevertheless, this hopeless state of man's sets the stage for God's salvation, which we will examine in the [next section](#) (Witness Lee, *Life-Study* 239).

The Definition

The Definition of the Three Parts of Man:

In order to accurately and adequately define the spirit, soul, and body we must first identify the sphere in which each part functions. First and most crucial is the spirit, the faculty that enables man to communicate with God. With his human spirit, man can worship God, serve God, and know God intuitively. Second, the soul is that part which forms the personality of man and enables him to contact and function within the psychological realm. Finally, the physical body with its five senses enables man to relate to and communicate with the physical world. We will now examine each of these three parts in detail to see how they are defined throughout Scripture (Watchman Nee, *Christian* 9-10).

The Human Spirit

Our human spirit is also composed of three parts: the conscience, fellowship, and intuition. The conscience is that part which enables us to perceive right from wrong and which, accordingly, either condemns or justifies us. Through the fellowship, we are able to contact God and commune with Him. Finally, through the intuition God imparts to us a direct, particular sense or knowledge which is independent of reason, circumstance, situation, or precedent. These three faculties of the spirit: conscience, fellowship, and intuition are clearly described in Scripture.

The primary, leading part of the spirit is the conscience. In Romans 9:1 Paul testified, "My conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit." When this passage is compared to Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit," it becomes apparent that the conscience is located within the human spirit. The Spirit of God

**First
and most crucial
is the spirit**

witnesses with our human spirit, yet at the same time our conscience witnesses with the Holy Spirit. By association, then, the conscience must be part of the human spirit.

The Scriptures likewise reveal that the fellowship pertains to the spirit. Christ Himself told us that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness” (John 4:24). Worshipping God is altogether a matter of contacting God in fellowship. Furthermore, Ephesians 6:18 mentions “praying at every time in spirit,” another form of fellowship with God. Based on these verses we can conclude that fellowship is a component of the human spirit.

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Finally, we must see in the Scriptures that the intuition is also a part of the spirit. First Corinthians 2:11 says, “For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him?” This verse shows us that there are things which only the spirit of man knows, and which the soul is unable to know. This function of our intuition has the capacity to know and discern apart from human reason or circumstantial experience. For example, in the gospel of

Mark the scribes were silently reasoning within their hearts about the Lord’s statement, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” In response to their reasoning, “immediately Jesus, knowing fully in His spirit that they were reasoning this way within themselves, said to them, Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts” (2:8). This verse further illustrates that the spirit can have an inner sense and knowledge independent of the reason or outward circumstances upon which the soul’s discernment relies so heavily. This spiritual sense, or intuition, is an essential faculty of the human spirit (Witness Lee, *Economy* 56-59).

The Body

The body of man with its five senses is that part which contacts the physical world. This physical body as man’s outward frame is God’s provision for his existence; without it man would be unable to exist in the material realm. Originally, man was created with a pure, undefiled body. But due to man’s fall his body was changed in nature, transmuted, thus becoming the fallen flesh full of lust. Hence, man’s body is a corrupted body as Paul observed in Romans 7:18, “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells” (Witness Lee, *Basic* 41).

The Soul

The soul, the “person” of man, is likewise composed of three parts: the mind, the will and the emotion. God’s Word proves this clearly and definitively.

First, the Scriptures consistently identify the mind as part of the soul. For example, the Psalmist exults, “I will praise You, for I am awesomely and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, and **my soul knows it well**” (Ps.139:14, italics added).

Knowledge, no doubt, pertains to the mind. In addition, Lamentations 3:20 says, “**My soul remembers them** well and is bowed down within me.” To remember is another function of the mind. These verses clearly indicate that there is a part of the soul that knows and remembers; this part is the mind.

**My soul
remembers them
well**

The will is also part of the soul. Job had much to say about the will, for example, “So that **my soul would choose** strangulation *and* death rather than my bones” (Job 7:15). He also said, “**My soul refuses** to touch *them*...” (6:7). Both choosing and refusing are functions of the will, a part of the soul.

**Tell me, you
whom my soul
loves**

Finally, we can see from the Word that the emotion is part of the soul. In Song of Songs 1:7, the Shulamite speaks to her beloved, “Tell me, you whom **my soul loves**.” Second Samuel 5:8 records the opposite feeling: “And David said on that day, Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him go up to the watercourse and strike the lame and the blind, who are **hated by David’s soul**...” And in Psalm 86:4, David experienced a change in feeling: “Cause **the soul of Your servant to rejoice**...” Since love, hate and rejoicing are clearly expressions of the emotions, it is obvious that the emotion is the third faculty of the soul (Witness Lee, *Economy* 55-56).

The Functions

The Functions of the Three Parts of Man:

God created man in His own image and likeness in order to be expressed and represented through him (Genesis 1:26). Each part of this man was therefore created with a specific function in relation to God’s purpose and plan.

The Function of the Soul

To Express and Reflect the Lord

The primary function of the soul of man is to express and reflect the Lord. The soul’s expression of God is clearly portrayed in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. In response to Elizabeth’s blessing, Mary exclaimed, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior” (46-47). Mary’s spirit had exulted in God and was filled with joy, yet the joy in her spirit could not be adequately expressed apart from the function of her soul. Second Corinthians 3:18 provides a detailed description of the soul’s function of reflecting God: “But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.”

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Our soul is like a mirror designed to behold and reflect Christ. Yet in order for our soul to reflect Christ in the clearest, most unobstructed way, its fallen source must first be denied (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 9:23-25). This means that we must learn to deny our natural mind, will and emotion. Secondly, for our soul to reflect Christ alone, it must be not only denied but also purified by receiving the Word (1 Peter 1:22). Finally, our soul needs to be thoroughly transformed into the image of Christ by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Thus, when our soul is denied, purified, and transformed it is able to fulfill its intended function, the glorious, true reflection of Christ (Witness Lee, *Economy* 70-71).

The Function of the Body

The Organ for Man's Existence

Man's physical body, the least mysterious of his three parts, is simply God's provision for his existence. Without this body, man is not able to exist within the physical realm. When a man's body dies, the man himself ceases to exist. Thus, man's existence altogether depends on the fu

The Function of the Spirit

To Contact God

The Lord Jesus explained in John 4:24, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness." To worship God is actually to contact Him, based on the etymology of the Greek word here rendered "worship," *proskuneo*. This term derives from *pros*, meaning "toward," and *kuneo*, meaning "to kiss." Thus, "worship" literally signifies "to come forward and kiss." To kiss is to make intimate contact with another person. Similarly, we make contact with God in the most personal, intimate way when we touch Him as the divine Spirit in our human spirit (Vine 1247).

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To Receive God

To receive God it is crucial that we exercise our spirit

We receive initially God when we are born anew. This new birth takes place in our spirit, for according to John 3:6, "...that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Not only does our spirit function to receive God initially; it continues to function to receive God as the Spirit for the rest of our Christian life. The Lord prophesied of this New Testament experience in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will also give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you." God wisely gives His believers both a new heart to love Him and a new spirit to receive Him. As a physical illustration, our heart may love many things, but without the exercise of the appropriate faculty in order to receive those things, they can never be substantiated and enjoyed by us. For example, to apprehend and appreciate sound, we must exercise our ears, just as color is substantiated by the exercise of our eyes. Neither can we receive food without exercising our mouth. Likewise, to receive God it is crucial that we exercise our spirit.

To Contain God

Finally, our spirit functions to contain God. Second Timothy 4:22 says precisely, "The Lord be with your spirit." This word clearly designates our human spirit as the place where God makes His abode in us. Since the Lord lives within our spirit, we can accurately describe our spirit as a container of God. nctioning of his physical body (Witness Lee, *Basic* 10-11).