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Soul and Spirit pt. 1

Today I want to start a series on the soul and the spirit. I suppose it will continue for a few weeks. There is a Scripture in Hebrews that speaks of the Word of God dividing, cutting between the soul and the spirit. Now that Word of God is a Person, a Life, a Light, and not just a book. A Person who is a sword. A Person who is light shining in darkness. The book can't divide anything without the unveiling of the Person.

And the Lord has been, for some time now, dealing with my heart along the lines of this particular division. We've spent several weeks now talking about the division that the cross is. A division between the first and the second. A division between the old man, the old creation, the old covenant and the new man, the new creation, the new covenant. And how that division must now be worked into our hearts.

Well, now I'd like to bring it into the division between soul and spirit. And before we even get going into this, let me start by saying that soul isn't part of "the first" that we have been talking about. The soul isn't evil. The soul can be consumed with "the first". The soul can be attached to the old creation. The soul can express the old man. It can manifest evil. But the soul isn't, of itself, something we are trying to get rid of. It is something that must be conformed to the image of Christ who is the life of it. What is called "souliness" is not remedied by suppressing the soul. It is remedied by Christ's life formed in the soul of man.

So, anyway...the Lord has been dealing with me along the lines of soul and spirit. And I suppose I'll just tell you a little of why I started thinking so much about it and asking the Lord to shine light on this division.

- Bunny trail – whenever you sense the Lord is wanting to deal with you concerning a particular subject, the most important thing to do is to immediately humble yourself with respect to that subject, and offer back to him everything you think you know about it. Let it go...don't ask him to add on your knowledge. Surrender everything, and seek to see all things in His light. I can't stress that enough. DON'T ask the Lord to supplement your knowledge. All of man's carnal understanding always stands in the way of what God would reveal by His Spirit. Carnal knowledge must be replaced with spiritual understanding.

So here's why I began to really seek the Lord on this issue. I have been noticing, for some time, that the soul of man can be moved, motivated, or effected by any number of things. In fact, just about anything can dramatically effect the soul of man.

Now I suppose I've been seeing that ever since I was born again, but it started to concern me because I have seen how, in the church, we have used all sorts of techniques to move the souls of believers. In fact, I would go as far as to say, that

we have sought to master a variety of different methods that produce our desired results in the souls of man.

We'll talk about this more in detail in the weeks to come, but in so many ways we have found and exploited our ability to motivate souls to do Christian things, and yet, those things done apart from His Life as their source, are nothing. We have employed all sorts of human abilities, we have fine tuned our preaching, our music so as to pull on the chords attached to the human soul – stirring up the soul, stirring up tears, excitement, fear, obligation, longings, all sorts of emotions, attractions, stirring up (temporary) gratitude, zeal, devotion. Stirring up these things in the soul of man, and all in the name of the kingdom of God.

And yet...and YET....no movement of the soul has any value, has any eternal significance, has any spiritual meaning, unless that soul is being moved by and in accordance with the indwelling Christ. The life of God in the soul of man. The soul of man being conformed to the image of the Life that now dwells within it as spirit.

But you see, entirely apart from the increase of Christ, apart from the spirit of Christ being formed in the soul... man has sought and found ways to imitate life through motivating souls to behave in certain ways. And this is getting ahead of ourselves...we'll look at this in some detail. But I'm still trying to tell you why I want to focus in on this for a while.

The soul is a terribly dark place without the light of Christ. The soul is a wild horse... strong and untamed and also horribly deceived and easily influenced. And no external motivation (be it preaching, teaching, religion and law, music, or appeals to emotion) are going to do anything good to the soul of man. The soul of man MUST become the vehicle of expression for the life of Christ that is in us, or it will forever be an expression of itself, or an expression of the world.

And I guess the Lord began to show me how for years I had allowed religion (now I wouldn't have called it religion) to stir up my soul – toward a cause, toward a doctrine, toward a concept, toward carnal spiritual concept, towards a leader or spiritually gifted person or movement, towards a gifting, towards a concept of destiny or purpose, towards knowledge and man's wisdom.

Religion stirs up souls to act in certain ways and not in other ways. It stirs up souls to do certain things and stop certain things. It even stirs of souls to cry and hug and repent and fast and build churches and ministries and feed poor and be missionaries.

And of course I'm not saying that these things are bad. Of course they're not bad things in themselves. I am simply saying that all of this can be the movement of the soul of man completely independent of the resident life of Christ. And therefore can be empty and dead. Now that is scary. I'm not saying these things are bad, but I am saying that the soul of man can do all of these things apart from the life of Christ. And apart from the life of Christ all of these things are nothing.

Jesus says "apart from me you can do nothing", and yet apart from him we can do many, many things. But the sum of those things, apart from the movement of the sap in the vine, will be nothing. Nothing of value. Nothing of eternal consequence. Nothing of life. Nothing of fruit. Nothing of eternal purpose.

And we, as the church, have to reckon with this. We have to reckon with this reality because, on the one hand, there is such a lack of genuine spiritual growth in the body of Christ. We win converts, only to lose them to whatever wind of doctrine blows by. We stir up zeal, only to have that zeal greatly disappoint, times without end. We watch zeal turn into burnout. We watch tears of joy dry up and turn back into bitterness. We watch moves of the spirit turn into organizations, corporations. We have to face the lack of transformation happening in souls of those who are part of what is called the church. We have watched it and we must face it.

And on the other hand, we must face the fact that there are other things, methods, religions, etc. that are able to effect the soul of man as well. Things that are able to effect the soul of man in a seemingly powerful or positive way. Now don't hear what I'm not saying, but there are plenty of options in the world, besides Christian religion, that will make a person more amiable towards his neighbor. There are plenty of options out there that will make a soul feel happy on the inside.

And so if the moving the soul of man towards a friendly disposition or philanthropic deeds is the goal, IF THAT OF ITSELF IS TRULY OUR GOAL, we must reckon with the reality that Christianity (as a religion, not a Life) has no advantages over Buddhism or marijuana. Both of these will help you smile at your neighbor.

But is that life? But is that fruit? But is that anything? What is the goal of God? Is it the moving of the soul towards certain kinds of behavior? Is that the goal? Is it behavior modification? **Or is it the life of God in the soul of man!**

There must be something more than, deeper than, simply the movement of the soul towards more amiable behavior. There must be something more substantial, more spiritual, and therefore eternal, than just behavior modification. Almost anything will move the soul of man, but the only thing that matters is the extent to which the soul of man is filled with and made to manifest Him who is Spiritual Life.

Friends, all must come down to spiritual life. And Christ is life. Without spiritual life, without spirit and truth, the movement of the human soul comes to nothing. I don't care how good-natured and genial the disposition is. I don't care how permanent the smiley temperament seems to be. Life is the issue. Spiritual life. And yes, life will effect outward behavior. Yes, that is true. But first of all it must be life.

So I want to spend several weeks looking at the soul and the spirit. I want the Lord to divide these two things in our comprehension – not just so that we will see their distinction, but that we will learn to see what true life is, what true fruit is, what transformation is. Friend's, transformation is not simply the moving of a human soul. (I can sing a song in Em about Jesus and probably make 3 of you cry right now) Transformation is the conforming of a human soul into the image of the life that is within it.

Lets ask this question together: have we succeeded in teaching the soul to move towards that which seems good, without teaching the soul to move by the life of Christ.

And so lets just start this study by declaring once again that God has an eternal purpose for our souls. And that purpose is not found in the training of the soul to perform certain types of behavior. Far from it. That purpose is, simply put, "Christ

all, and in all". "Christ formed in me". "Christ the fullness of all". What is the purpose for your soul? To be conformed to his likeness.

Let me say something plainly. It is IMPOSSIBLE for your soul to be conformed to His likeness in any other way than the filling of your soul with His very person. Your soul can never be like Him apart from the impartation of His life, because He is entirely other than you. Your soul cannot imitate His Spirit. His Spirit must be formed in your soul. The way of growth has never been imitation, it is only impartation and formation.

The transformation of the soul, the salvation of the soul, is not behavior alteration or revision. Nor is it the adjusting, enhancing, or redirecting of human emotion. No, it is Christ Himself – a divine Person – coming to reign and rule in, on, and through your soul. Do not make the tragic mistake of thinking that the ceasing of certain behaviors or the increase of other behaviors will make you like Christ. That is a fallacy. That is an utter impossibility.

Cleaning the outside of the cup doesn't change the vile contents. Washing the tombstone will not remove the dead man's bones.

Christ Himself, He who is spirit and truth, He who is life and righteousness, He must overtake your soul. He must become the substance of your cup. Not unto your elimination, but unto His enthronement in your soul. So that you are a vessel that expresses the life of another.

So we must start there. And if we don't see this, then we can go no further. Because the problem that man is in is not simply that he is on the wrong path, or that he needs re-direction or enlightenment. If man is to be restored to God's original purpose and ultimate intention, then he must become something utterly other than what he is by nature.

Do not fall for the religious notion that Christianity is the consecration of the old man unto God. The old man is not consecrated, he is crucified. And the human soul then becomes the temple of the living God. A body for his resurrected life.

And often times I feel that we are so concerned with getting resurrected bodies, that we miss the fact that we are to be the body of His resurrection. There must be far more than an attitude or behavior change. There must be a constitutional change.

But now let's rewind and look at how we were created. Man consists of body, soul, and spirit. We are tri-partite. I don't really want to go into the theological debate created by those who think that the spirit and the soul are the same thing. I will only mention that there are some people who do not see a distinction between these two...when, in fact, there is all the difference in the world.

Even before a person begins to have these two divided in their own comprehension, I believe the issue is easily settled with a simple reading of Scripture. Hebrews, as we mentioned, even speaks of how the Word of God needs to cause us to see their distinctiveness. But beyond this, 1 Thess. 5:23 Paul prays that "the whole man", or "your whole person" which he defines as "spirit, soul, and body" will be made blameless.

In James, Scripture talks about the soul's senses. In 1 Cor. 14:14 Paul says "my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful". In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul teaches that spiritual reality is not comprehended by "soulful" people.

It is, as T. Austin Sparks says "as dangerous to make one what God calls two as it is to put asunder what God makes one".

I think that's true. And I'll stand firmly there. Now, on an exact understanding of the faculties of the soul and spirit I won't bother to debate you beyond the basics. But I will give my opinion...which I think is pretty accurate. (otherwise it wouldn't be my opinion).

The body is simply the earthen vessel. It is of the earth and for the earth. And it is always making manifest in the earth that which fills the soul. And, often times, there is nothing that is filling the soul except for earthy things. Which is sad, but either way the body is the tool of the soul.

The soul is generally broken down into mind, emotion, and will. Your reasonings and understanding, your affections and emotions, and your volition or desire. And I think that is quite accurate, but I would add that it is the seat of self-consciousness, self-awareness, self. The ego.

The spirit also has three faculties – communion, intuition, and conscience. Communion is the joining or communicating with other spirit. That is where we are joined to the Lord. That is also, I believe, where man can commune with demonic spirits. Intuition is spiritual knowledge. It is the knowing of things that doesn't come by reason or logic or education, but from a spiritual knowing. Its difficult to describe, but I suppose we all have some experience of that. Conscience would then be our created sense of morality, the knowledge of what is good and evil.

But what is most important about the spirit of man is that it can be joined to the spirit of God. This is salvation. The spirit of man is born again, it becomes the recipient of an altogether different life – the life of God.

And I don't want to spend a lot of time on those distinctions, only just say them. Because it is not really that important that we mentally understand these things. What is important is that Christ, who is spirit, is joined to our spirit by new birth, and then transforms our soul into the expression of his life. Now that is important. It is important that the Word of divides the two in our spiritual comprehension, but not necessarily in our theology.

Here's another thing the soul of man loves – theology. Theology has its place in the describing or communicating of that which is life. But a soul can do theology, love theology, study theology, and teach theology entirely void of life altogether. So, lets look out for that.

And (before we go on) that is really what I want us to begin to realize this morning. I want us to realize that all things of spiritual life must find expression through our soul...if there is to be any fruit, any growth, any transformation. BUT....!.....the things that we think are the fruits of spiritual life can be counterfeited by the soul.

That is so important. The spirit of God can move me to tears, BUT...so can a well trained motivational speaker, an E minor violin concerto, or onions. The Spirit of

God can motivate my will to serve my neighbor...but so can a soulish sermon with emotional appeal. The Spirit of God can stir up my affections, my mood, my desires. But these can also be stirred up by that which has nothing to do with life.

And we must come to see the danger in this. Only that which is out from the Vine is the fruit of the Seed. But we live in a world that is a soulish system. We live in a soul world. Almost everything we come in contact with is based upon desire, emotion, feeling, reason, argument, will, choice, determination.

As T. Austin-Sparks says

“What a large place is held by the various forms of soul activity. In one direction we have fear, grief, pity, curiosity, pride, pleasure, admiration, shame surprise, love, regret, remorse, excitement etc. In another direction we have imagination, apprehension, fancy, doubt, introspection, superstition, analysis, reasonings, investigations, etc. In a third direction, desire for possession, knowledge, power, influence, position, praise, society, liberty, etc. And in still another direction, determination, reliance, courage, independence, endurance, impulse, caprice, indecision, obstinacy, etc.”

And I am not, and please don't hear what I'm not saying, I am not saying that all of this is wrong. But I am saying that all of this can be utterly unprofitable and of no account at all if it is not coming out from Life. If it is not the outworking of the indwelling Christ. If the soul is not conformed to the image of Christ who is the very life within it.

And in this lies a very great danger for today's church. A church in which we seem to be employing all of technology, and sound, and lighting, and emotion to pull on the hearts and desires and wallets of believers. There is a great danger in this. What is the danger? The danger is that all that seems to be so alive will turn out to be dead.

Revelation 3:1 “I know you, that you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” Revelation 3:17 “Because you say, I am rich (seeming to be, feeling to be spiritually rich)... and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

And this, we know, is what happened in the garden of Eden. That which seemed so good, so desirable, desirable to make one wise, good for food, appealing to the eye...turns out to be something other than the tree of Life.

Do you see how Satan won that victory? He attacked the soul. The reason, the desire, the will was his target. And his promise? – to be like God.

And what the Lord has been showing me, ever more clearly, is that the soul of man has always, and will always, be susceptible to this deception. A deception that continues to pervade God's church until we see that the life of Christ must fill the soul of man.