

*Dying to Live by Bob Smith*

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## Chapter Ten

### Spirit, Soul, and Body

Man is made up of three parts; he is a tri-unity--like God. He is comprised of *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*. The Greek word for body is *soma*; soul is *psuche*, from which we get "psyche," and spirit is *pneuma*. We need to observe the relationship of these three parts of man in counseling so as to more easily identify the source of the problem. The body we can easily identify. It is the realm of *world-consciousness*, the seat of the five senses with which we make contact with the world around us. The soul and spirit are not quite so easily distinguishable, but the Scripture makes it clear they are distinct and different: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit..." (Heb. 4:12a).

Without wanting to be arbitrary, but still endeavoring to make a distinction between soul and spirit, I find the following definitions to be helpful, even though, admittedly, there seem to be areas in which soul and spirit blend and/or overlap. This is particularly true when we observe that our mind, emotions, and will function both in the realm of the spirit and of the soul. If we keep in mind the fact that there always remains an element of mystery about these distinctions, seeking to define soul and spirit still has practical value. So this is what I've settled on: The soul is the realm of *self-consciousness* and is composed of *mind*, emotions, and will. The spirit is the realm of *God-consciousness*. The spirit of man is designed to be the place where God lives and reigns.

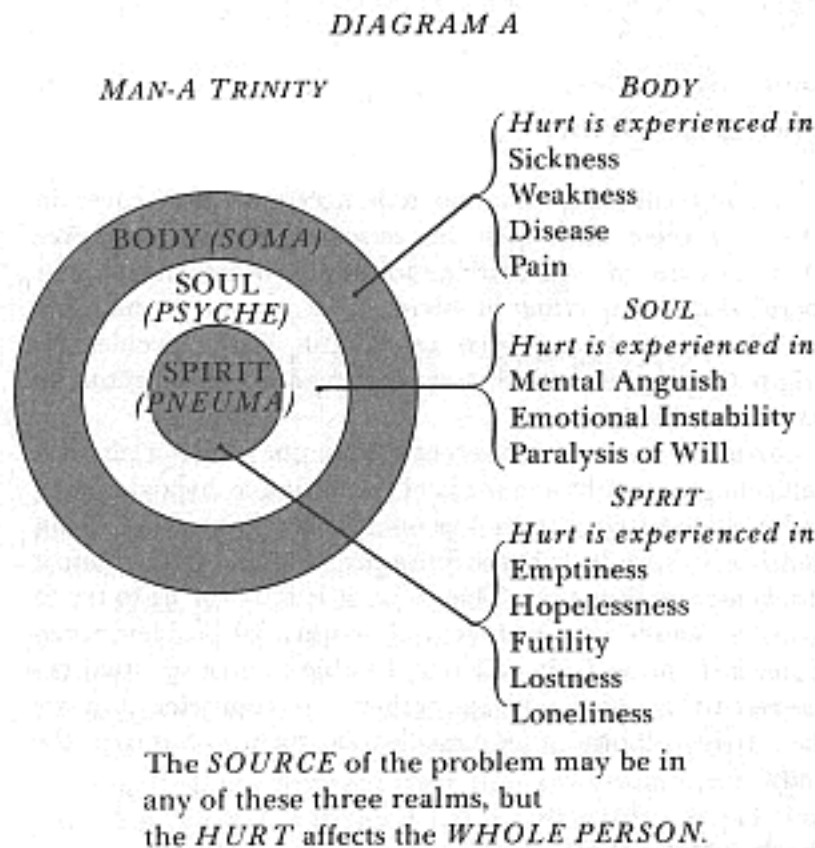
In any counseling situation it is necessary to discover in which of these areas lies the *cause* of the problem. We Christians are sometimes prone to leap to the conclusion that there must be a *spiritual* problem, so we respond to the problem in specifically spiritual terms. But if the problem is originating in *the body*, then it is wrong and/or ineffectual to try to treat the spirit.

For instance, there has recently come into focus a physical deficiency known by the medical profession as hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar. Several people in our immediate Christian family have it. It has definite psychological effects, but it is a *bodily* malfunction. Therefore, it is folly for us to try to treat the matter as a psychological or spiritual problem when it stems from the body. We may be able to give spiritual encouragement which will strengthen our counselee, but we should also ask him to see a medical doctor who can treat the *body*.

### Psychosomatic Illness

You have heard of *psychosomatic* ills, I'm sure. The word "psychosomatic" is an English language combination of two Greek words--*ps yche* and *soma*. It thus describes a bodily ailment that is caused by maladjustment in the *so ul-life* (or originating from a mental or emotional problem, whichever way you want to put it). A psychologist friend of mine tells me that modern medicine estimates that between 70 and 90 percent of all the illnesses doctors see are psychosomatic rather than physiological in origin. That is obviously a very high percentage, if the statistic is correct. Now, a psychosomatic illness is very real; it isn't just an

*imagined* illness, but it stems from a soulish cause--originating in the soul, not in the body.



## **Pneumosomatic Disease**

I have coined a word to describe another kind of illness. It is *p sychosomatic*. That is, if there is not right adjustment in the spiritual realm, the whole man is affected--in the *soul* and the *body* --although the source of the problem is spiritual. Through counseling on a *spiritual* level I have seen people change both *emotionally* and *physically*. Diagram A may help us to visualize this.

I remember one girl who came to see me with a terrible back problem. She was in such excruciating pain that she couldn't sit still. She kept trying to ease her neck, as she squirmed and twisted in her chair. As we talked, it became apparent that her deepest problem was not physical, but spiritual. She was blaming God for her illness. I was able to help her see that God had no interest in torturing her and that he really loved her. She began to see that in her despair she was blaming the very One who was the most concerned about her condition and was making herself sicker in the process. As we conversed, I suddenly noticed that she was sitting still; she was no longer squirming. She had changed right before my eyes. It was amazing evidence of how much our spirit affects our body as well as our soul. This girl's spiritual reorientation gave her the hope and heart and direction to seek medical help. As she sought the Lord's guidance to get medical help for her condition, he answered her need, and in the process she began to learn how to enjoy life in the Lord who loves her. She learned to trust the Lord instead of blaming him for her problems--and what a difference it made!

Man is designed to have his life revolve around God, reigning in the *spirit* of man. The *Spirit of God* reigning in the *spirit of man* is what we would call the normal Christian life. That is the way man is designed to function, like a wheel rotating about its geometric center. But man in his natural, fallen state is like a wheel rotating off-center--eccentric. And even Christians who are not allowing Christ to reign as their Lord are displaying the same kind of imbalance. See Diagram B. The unregenerate man's life runs this way all the time

and so does the Christian's, when he is operating in the flesh.

### DIAGRAM B

The SPIRITUAL MAN



*The Normal Christian Life*  
Man indwelt and empowered  
by the Spirit of God—every  
area of life affected, body  
soul & spirit—everything  
in balance.

The FLESHLY MAN



*Off-center—Eccentric*  
Life revolving around the  
wrong center, dominated  
by his soul (the way  
he feels, thinks, and wills  
without including God.)

### The Division of Soul and Spirit

I have already mentioned that although there *is* a difference between soul and spirit, the distinction is not an easy one to make. We may come closer to understanding the difference, however, if we think of an animal--a dog, for instance --which certainly has a soul. The soul, remember, is composed of mind, emotions, and will, and a dog clearly *thinks, feels, and makes choices*. If you are his master, he shows emotion when you come home by wagging his tail. If you are a stranger trying to invade his household, he shows emotion very clearly in another way: by growling and showing his teeth. And it's not hard to see that dogs can think; they even cock their heads when they are puzzled. And when you try to get a dog to do what he doesn't want to do, you soon discover that he has a will.

On the other hand, although you can teach a dog to put his head on his paws and assume an attitude of prayer, you know he is not praying. He is just play-acting, for he has no spirit: he doesn't worship God. Animals have self-conscious faculties of mind, emotion, and will, but they have no place for God in their lives. The spiritual quality of being able to relate to God is what makes man unique in all of creation. Man is designed to be the *dwelling place of God*, and for that reason he is a unique kind of creature. He is not just an animal, and he is not designed to be operating only on a *soul* level.

The point of all this is that we must seek to help people toward healing in the area in which the problem originates, keeping clearly in mind that the spiritual part of man is central to his being and thus pervades the whole man. Spiritual well-being promotes psychological and bodily health and can even help to override problems stemming from physical or psychological causes.

### The Gifts of Healing

In the listing of spiritual gifts found in I Corinthians there are two occurrences of the phrase "gifts of

healings." Note that both "gifts" and "healings" are plural, not singular. We could take this to mean a multiplicity of healings, but I think it's much more reasonable to interpret this phrase as meaning there are different *kinds* of healing and the corresponding gifts to go with them. This would be consistent with the three-part nature of man, as we observe the healings taking place in men's bodies, souls, and spirits. Since spiritual gifts are given for the common good, to build up the body of Christ, I believe that God intends to employ the gifts of healing in the church, but only in accord with the whole body of revealed truth. Let me explain.

The saving work of Jesus Christ is designed to regenerate our spirits and save our souls; so I believe that spiritual well-being and psychological stability are the heritage of every Christian, subject to delivery on demand, as we walk by faith. That is, spiritual and emotional prosperity are meant to be ours through our risen Lord, as we draw on the resources available to us through his indwelling presence. I was impressed with this in reading Paul's prayer in Ephesians. Paul prays:

... that you should know:

what is the hope of his calling,

what are the riches of his inheritance in the saints,

and what is the extremely "far out" greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the energizing of the might of his strength--that power which he put to work in raising Christ from the dead and seating him... far above all authority...(Eph. 1:18-21, freely translated).

Paul exhausts his Greek vocabulary, using all the words he can muster to describe the liberating power God is exercising in our behalf--ending with an illustration: This is the kind of power which takes a dead man and makes him alive to rule over all! This is God's provision for our spiritual victory and emotional stability, available to us as we walk by faith.

## **Unredeemed Bodies**

But in the physical realm, we have a different story. It's clear from the Scriptures that the redemption of our bodies is still in the future:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons [literally *so n -placing*: coming into the full possession of our inheritance in Christ], the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:22-23).

So our bodies are yet unredeemed, although they are *potentially* redeemed. The price has been paid in full for our total liberation, but we have yet to experience the total liberation of our bodies. That liberation is described in these terms, as still in the future: "...our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body... (Phil. 3: 20-21).

## **Ultimate Healing**

Make no mistake--I have no doubt about God's *ability* to heal the human body (after all, he made it, with all its intricacies), but he has not made himself *obliged* to heal our bodies, short of that day when we will experience the *redemption* of our bodies.

All the emphasis we see on physical healing today seems to me to ignore the fact that the ultimate healing for the Christian is to die! Any other kind of healing (whether real or fancied) is only a holding operation, postponing, but not forestalling the ultimate. For the non-Christian, it makes some sense to grasp frantically at every straw to sustain physical life. But for the Christian this kind of scrambling seems to be a lack either of understanding or confidence in what God has said on the subject.

Perhaps you are thinking: "Sure, that's easy to say when you're healthy. I'll bet Bob doesn't know what it's like to face the reality of physical pain and sickness." A few years ago you would have been right about me, but through two recent hospital episodes I have experienced the transcendent glory of the spiritual over the physical. I've learned, in the process, that the Lord is Lord of the coronary department as well as every other area of life. He can sustain us even when our hearts are failing!

In this area of physical healing I want to be an utter realist--in accord with the realistic truth of God. And I see plenty of evidence in the Bible that though God *can* heal, it doesn't always suit his sovereign purposes to do so. We have the instances of Paul's illness (Gal. 4:15), that of Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20), and of Timothy (I Tim. 5:23), in which it is clear that the Lord was not obliged to supply physical healing but chose rather to use these physical infirmities to achieve his own sovereign purposes.

The gifts of healing, then, are to be employed in the context of these conclusions:

- Healing in the spirit and soul of man is inherent in and available through the finished work of our risen Lord. Victory *is promised* in these realms.
- Physical healing *is not* available on demand, but is subject to the sovereign will of God in the fulfilling of his good purposes.
- Ultimate physical healing *is promised* to every Christian when we receive our resurrection bodies, at our departure to be with Christ, whether at death or through the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

Understanding of these facts can be vital in counseling. When the facts about healing, as set forth in Scripture, are clearly understood, much suffering can be relieved simply because confusion and false expectations have been removed. False hopes, being based on something untrue, always yield disappointment, while hope based on truth "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

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