

DIVIDING SOUL & SPIRIT (1)

When a person is born again, the Spirit of God enters into their human spirit. There, an eternal union is made. The Bible teaches us that: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit [with the Lord]" (I Cor 6:17). The spirit of that individual, which previously was deadened and darkened, becomes alive with the Life of God. Here, in the "Holy of Holies" of our being, God takes up residence. Here then is the location of the new Life within us. It is in our human spirit which has been "joined" to God's Holy Spirit.

This new ZOE Life which we now have in our spirit is morally superior to our natural life in every way. In every aspect of living it expresses the divine nature of God. Therefore, when we live by this Life, we express righteousness. When we live by our spirit, we manifest the nature of God. This is truly what the Father is seeking—those through whom He can manifest Himself to the world.

But you will remember that we also have within us an old PSUCHE life. This life resides in our soul and can be most clearly described as our "soul life." As we have seen in the preceding chapters, this natural, human life invariably expresses the fallen, sinful nature. Therefore, when we live by our soul, we manifest sin.

We have then two sources or "locations" of life inside of us, with two different natures. Consequently, every Christian has a daily, desperate need to be able to discern when he or she is living by the soul or living by the spirit. We urgently need to experience within us the "dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb 4:12). Since living by our spirit or living by our soul produce such vastly different results, it is of the utmost importance that we be able to discern which is which. Sadly, many believers today do not even know that such a distinction exists. But if we do not know when we are "in the spirit" or when we are living by the soul, we truly are walking in spiritual darkness and do not know where we are going (Jn 12:35). Our God is light (I Jn 1:5) and He certainly desires in these last days to illuminate His children so that they can also walk in the light and not be stumbling around in confusion and darkness. In these next two chapters therefore, we will concentrate on this issue: what it means to be in the spirit and what it means to be living by our soul.

One misunderstanding which needs to be addressed from the beginning is that the Holy Spirit is often perceived as something outside of us which "comes upon us" occasionally. While this may have been true in the Old Testament times, the New Covenant experience is quite different. The Holy Spirit has already been poured out on the day of Pentecost and now is on the inside of every believer. He is not something (Someone) which we are waiting to receive externally, but which we have already received internally. He does not come and go, but dwells permanently within every believer. While our experience of His presence may vary—that is we may "sense" His

presence more or less strongly—He is always in our spirit. It is when the Holy Spirit “moves out” from our spirit and fills our soul that we experience Him with our natural senses. This may “feel” like He has come upon us, but in fact, He has simply “spread out” from the holy of holies into the holy place. In fact, the Holy Spirit can also fill the “outer court,” referring to our physical bodies (Rm 8:11).

We are going to be speaking about these “more outward” experiences later on; however, here in this chapter we must concentrate on the experiences which we can have of the Holy Spirit in our spirit. It is here that the presence of God resides, and it is here that the Source of life dwells. Therefore, it is essential for every believer to know how to discern whether or not they are in the spirit or merely living by their soul.

Some believers may not understand clearly the use of the terms in the scriptures: “in the spirit” and “in the Spirit.” Perhaps the following explanation will help give a clearer picture. In the New Testament, when a capital “S” is used in the word Spirit, it indicates the Holy Spirit. When a small “s” is used, it indicates the spirit of man or the “human spirit.” Interestingly, in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written, there were no “small” letters. All the letters were “capitals.” Therefore, in order to determine whether the text is referring to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit, the translators had to rely on the context. Occasionally, even from the context it is virtually impossible to discern whether the writer was speaking about the human spirit or the Holy Spirit. However, for us there need be no confusion. These two spirits, God’s and man’s, have now been “joined” as one within us (I Cor 6:17). Therefore, when we are “in the Spirit” we are in the human spirit also and when we are “in our spirit” we are in the Holy Spirit too.

All genuine Christian life is lived “by the spirit” that is, it is an exhibition of the Life which is emanating from our spirit. We are instructed to “walk in the spirit” (Gal 5:16,25). We are exhorted to be “led by the Spirit” (Rm 8:14). We most certainly must “worship God in the spirit” (Jn 4:24), since that is the only worship which is acceptable to Him. Paul states that he served God “with his spirit” (Rm 1:9) and that we too should serve Him “in newness of the spirit” (Rm 7:6). We must “live according to the Spirit” (Rm 8:12). Our ministry must be of the “Spirit” (Gal 3:5). Our lives should be exhibiting the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). It is important for us to “sow to the Spirit” (Gal 6:8). Our unity in Christ with other believers is “in the Spirit” (Eph 4:3). We must pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:18), “stand fast in one spirit” (Philip 1:27), have the “fellowship of the Spirit” (Philip 2:1), “love in the Spirit” (Col 1:8) and many other such things. Truly, the source of all real Christianity is “in the (S)pirit.”

With all this in mind, how can a Christian know when he is in the spirit? To investigate this question more thoroughly, let us return to the tabernacle which God instructed Moses to build. As we have seen in chapter 6, this structure was divided into three parts, corresponding to the three parts of man: body, soul and spirit. It had an outer court, a holy place and a holy of holies. It is this innermost section which speaks to us of the human spirit, the dwelling place of God Almighty. In this most holy place, God instructed Moses to put the Ark of the Covenant. On the top of the ark were two cherubim of gold, one on each end, with their wings stretched out, covering the place where the glory of God appeared.

Within this ark were placed three items: a golden pot full of manna, Aaron's rod which budded, blossomed and bore ripe almonds and lastly, the two tablets of stone on which were written the ten commandments. These items were not randomly chosen but have important spiritual significance. These things were not just Jewish religious relics but still speak to us today. Significantly, some Bible teachers have isolated three

functions of the human spirit. That is, in our spirit we have three “abilities.” These three functions correspond to the three items which were placed in the Ark of the covenant. These things are very important for us to understand because when we are experiencing these three things, we can know that we are “in the spirit” or that we are in the presence of God.

GOLDEN POT OF MANNA (COMMUNION)

The first function of our human spirit is the capability of having communion with God. This is signified to us by the presence of the golden pot full of manna. Obviously, this manna speaks to us of the “heavenly bread that came down” (Jn 6:41), indicating feasting on the Lord Jesus. This celestial nourishment truly came in a golden container representing the purity and incorruptibility of Christ. In chapter 4, we have discussed in some detail about the spiritual reality of communion with God and how we can grow in this most important experience. If you are uncertain about this, please review the sections of chapter 4 about communion.

Communion means having fellowship with God. When we are in the Spirit and therefore in our spirit, we have fellowship with God. We sense His presence within us. We have a kind of continual dialogue in prayer. (See I Thess 5:17). This communion with the Most High is a sure indication that we are in the spirit. It must serve as a kind of guidepost for us in our Christian life. If this intimate fellowship and sense of His presence is lacking, then this is an indication that something is wrong. In some way, we are not where we should be. It is plainly God’s will that all of His children should “walk in the spirit” (Gal 5:16), thus indicating that this should be a normal, continuing experience for all believers. To be “in the spirit” is not meant to be a once in a while “blessing” but a daily, constant walk. Our communion with God is the source from which flows all true Christian work and virtue.

This then is the true test. To walk in the spirit is to live in close communion with God. Those who have this communion know how to eat of Him. They know how to drink of His Spirit and they know how to “live by” Him (Jn 6:57). If, on the other hand, you are not walking daily in intimacy with God and so do not know this sense of His presence, then it is quite certain that you are not walking in the Spirit. The only alternative is that you are living in the flesh, being guided by the life of the soul. Now the soul can appear very religious and can seem to do many things “for God.” Church attendance, tithing, Bible reading, praying, being “active” in the service of God—these things can all be done by the efforts of the soul. But the only source of genuine Christianity is the Spirit of God which lives in our human spirit. To be approved by God, all our words, thoughts and actions must be the result of our intimate fellowship with Him in the Spirit. To live in and by the spirit, we must be in communion with God. This is the significance of the golden pot full of manna.

THE ROD OF AUTHORITY (INTUITION)

The second item in the ark is Aaron’s rod. This staff was the symbol of divine authority—of the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Within our spirit, we also find this important function. When we are in God’s presence, we often sense His leading and direction. We will call this function “intuition.” When we are in communion with God,

somehow, in an indefinable way, we know what it is that He wants us to do. Perhaps we feel an inclination to pray. Maybe we sense a need to go visit someone or to go out evangelizing. An infinite number of instructions can be communicated to us while we are in the spirit. This is what it means to “walk with the Lord.” It is while we are living in constant communion with Him, that He directs our lives through the leadership of the Spirit. This does not mean that we “hear voices” or necessarily know exactly what to do. It is simply that we sense an inclination, a desire or a spiritual impulse to do or say a particular thing. This is the function of intuition in our spirit.

I am not discounting the fact that God can and does use outward things like circumstances, finances and even occasionally “fleeces” to guide our steps. But I do insist that our primary source of direction be the Spirit of God within our spirit. If we rely on superficial “happenings,” feelings, coincidences, dreams, prophecies, etc. for spiritual direction, then we are already walking in deception. You will always find that when outward circumstances are being used by God to direct you, in your spirit you will also have a “witness,” you will always have a spiritual peace. When these two things are in conflict (i.e. “outward leading” such as prophecies or random occurrences and the inner peace of the Holy Spirit in your spirit) the most reliable source of guidance is the peace of God within. The Bible teaches us that we are to let the peace of God “rule” or arbitrate in our hearts (Col 3:15). This means that as the official at some sports event has the final say, so too the peace of God in our spirit should be the ultimate judge. Never trust the opinions of others when you do not have rest in your spirit. Disobeying the inner sense of God’s leading in your spirit can lead you to disaster. Please take this admonition from someone who has erred many times in this way and lived to regret it.

When we believe that God has given us some direction in our spirit, it is never wrong to want it confirmed. We can look first to His word, to see if what we think is His voice harmonizes with what He has spoken to us through the written page. If it does, then it is probably His voice we are hearing. If not, then our impulses are wrong and we must begin again to seek His direction. We can also ask God to confirm His direction through any number of ways which He may choose. Also, we can ask the advice of other believers whom we know to be mature spiritually and sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Those most mature will not be quick to give advice but will help you sort out what God is really saying to you. Although the Lord often will use leaders to give us guidance, the man of God must never rely on another man but seek the face of God himself until he has assurance in his own heart about the direction of the Spirit. This is not a license for rebellion, but an admonition to clearly hear God yourself. Remember, it is to Him that we will answer for every deed.

The experience of the leadership of the Holy Spirit within our spirit is the experience of Aaron’s rod. When we are in God’s presence and having spiritual communion with Him, we will have an “intuition” about what to do. In this way we can be led by the Spirit. This experience grows stronger as we grow spiritually. As we mature, this sensitivity to the Spirit’s direction also becomes clearer and more defined. In this way, our Lord can lead us in an increasingly “detailed” way. Even the expression of His face or the look of His eyes can let us know of His displeasure or approval. This growing ability to know and sense the leadership of the Holy Spirit is a sign of spiritual maturity. Those who are led by the Spirit are indeed the mature sons of God (Rm 8:14).

When we are “intuiting” or sensing the leadership of God within us, then we know that we are in the spirit since this is one of the functions of the spirit. But if we wish to stay in the spirit, that is to live in the presence of God consistently, then we

must obey what the Spirit is saying. This is an important spiritual principle. If we do not listen to God and do what He wishes, then it will become impossible for us to live in His presence. When we are disobedient, our fellowship with God becomes difficult if not impossible. This is because the more deeply we enter into His presence, the louder the rod of Aaron speaks. The more we wish to be intimate with Him, the more His authority is known. If we have been disobedient to Him, the only solution is repentance. This means asking for forgiveness and also deciding to do whatever it is that God is asking us to do. How many believers today are living soulless lives because they will not obey the voice of the Lord! Perhaps they try to follow superficial religious ordinances and formulas but inwardly they know that they are not right with God.

The only alternative for disobedient Christians is to live by the soul life. Oh, they may “break through” into the Spirit once in a while during times of worship or prayer. But they cannot comfortably stay in the presence of God while His rod of authority is speaking. Think about it. If God tells you to go to China and serve Him and you do not go, will you maintain the same sweet intimacy with Him? When He says “no” to something we want, and we go ahead and do it anyway, can we remain in His presence while rebelling against Him? Perhaps we imagine that the sacrifice of Jesus will be enough to restore our fellowship with Him. But do you remember King Saul and his offerings to God? What was the Divine response? “To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams” (I Sam 15:22). To restore your fellowship with God requires not only Jesus’ sacrifice but also obedience. It is impossible to live in disobedience to God and also live in the spirit. A rebellious son or daughter will never feel comfortable in His presence. To walk in intimacy with Him, you must also obey and do whatever He asks. He must really be the Lord of your life.

TABLETS OF STONE (CONSCIENCE)

In the ark of the covenant we also can find the two tablets of stone upon which the finger of God wrote the ten commandments. This was the law of God. But today we have another law. This one is not written in stone but upon hearts of flesh (Heb 8:10). This is a function of our spirit which we will call “conscience.” This “part” of the spirit, the conscience, seems to operate to a very limited extent even before a person is born again. Perhaps God allowed this glimmering, smoldering vestige of spiritual light within man to help him be aware of his sin. However, once we are born again, this part of our spirit becomes more and more active. We become increasingly aware of when we offend our Lord or someone else. Many times, no one has to tell us that we have done or spoken something wrong. Perhaps we have done nothing which is against the written code of the law. But deep within our spirit we know that we have offended our precious Savior. How do we know? It is because this part of our spirit, our conscience, is speaking. The “law of the Spirit of life” (Rm 8:2) written within us is operating.

This function of the spirit is very important. This “ability” to know when we are pleasing to God or not, lies at the very core of our relationship with Him. Our God is a living person and so we need to take care of our relationship with Him just as we would with a good friend or spouse. If we have offended or angered someone with whom we have a close relationship, then we need to get things right with them if we are to continue to have intimacy with them. It is no different with God. We cannot expect to have a close, personal relationship with Him when we are offending His person. For example, when you are fornicating with your boyfriend or girlfriend can

you also live in His presence? Will “pleading the blood of Jesus” make Him blind to your offensive behavior? No! We can only be right with our Lord by actually being right with Him.

When we have erred in our attitudes, thoughts, words or actions, this “conscience” part of our spirit becomes active. It works to convict us of sin. And when it does, then it becomes necessary to deal with this sin in the light of God. This involves repentance and a decision never to offend our Lord in this manner again. It involves not only saying we are sorry to Him, but actually being sorry. If we do not work to maintain this kind of clear relationship with Jesus, we will find it impossible to live in the spirit. When our conscience speaks to us, we must take all the necessary steps to make things right.

REMEMBERING OUR BROTHER

Not only is this true in our relationship with God, but He also requires that we maintain right relationships with others. If in our daily life we offend others in some way, we must also do whatever is necessary to make things right with them. We read in Mt 5:23: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” To “bring your gift to the altar” here means today that we come into God’s presence to worship Him and have communion. Our “gift” is the blood of Jesus. But why is it that when we are in our Lord’s presence we suddenly begin to “remember” our brother. This is because in His presence the conscience begins to speak. The more closely we approach His throne, the louder the voice of conscience in our spirit becomes. The only solution to this is to go and get things right with those whom we have offended.

This is an absolutely essential spiritual principle. Without knowing and following our conscience, we will go nowhere spiritually. It is impossible to walk in communion with God when our conscience is troubling us. Paul, the apostle was keenly aware of this fact. He said: “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense towards God and men” (Acts 24:16). For him the question of a clean, clear conscience was of utmost importance—a matter of daily exercise. If then we have offended God, we need to get right with God. If we have offended men, we need to do whatever it takes to get right with them also. Simply repenting before God is not enough. When there are other people involved, we also must get things right with them. This means that we must go to them, apologize for what we have done and ask for their forgiveness. If face to face contact is not possible, we need to telephone, write a letter or do whatever we can do to make things right. A good conscience is so important that neglecting it can make a “shipwreck” of our faith (I Tim 1:19).

Many times our flesh resists confessing our guilt to other men and women. The problem is our pride. In order to repent, we must humble ourselves and admit that our attitudes, actions and words were ungodly. They were selfish, sinful and caused harm to others. This harm might be emotional, physical or financial. In whatever manner we have offended someone else, we must at all costs go to them and repent. We must make things right as much as is possible and ask for their forgiveness. This humbling of ourselves is absolutely essential if we are to maintain our fellowship with God. He “resists the proud” (I Pet 5:5) but is happy to have fellowship with the humble. The cleansing of our conscience will open up new vistas of communion with our God.

DEALING WITH THE PAST

This necessity of making things right with others applies to the past as well as the present. Far too many believers are "trying to go on with the Lord" without ever repenting and making things right from their past. They are dragging a huge amount of heavy baggage behind them and making very little progress spiritually. Many such people think that once they become a Christian, all their past is forgiven and forgotten. This is perhaps an agreeable idea, but it is not completely true. On God's part, when we have confessed and repented for all of our past sins, indeed they are forgiven. But on man's part, we also need to go to them and repent. There can be no "going on" without first going back. The word of God is clear: "God requires that which is past" (Ec 3:15). This means that we must go to those against whom we have sinned, repent, ask forgiveness and then do whatever we can to make things right. If we have stolen, we need to restore the money, investing whatever time, expense and effort this takes. If we have wounded someone emotionally, then we must admit our errors and ask forgiveness. Whether or not they also wounded us has no bearing on the situation. Whether they also repent does not change what we need to do. No sin is justified by what others have done to us.

Let us examine some illustrations here to make these points more clear. Suppose someone robbed a bank. Then the next day, this person receives new life in Jesus Christ. Does he get to keep the money? Since some insist that he is now forgiven completely, can he then forget the robbery and live off the loot? No! Let us then think of someone who has gotten a divorce in the past. Is it possible that they were completely innocent? Is it conceivable that in the entire marriage relationship they did or said nothing for which they need to repent? So then what must be done? They need to enter into contact with the person who was offended, admit every last part of their guilt for the failed relationship and ask forgiveness. It makes no difference if the other person also sinned. This fact does not even enter into our considerations. Our part is the part which needs repentance and forgiveness.

When we have sinned against another, we need to do whatever we can to make things right. If it is money, we need to repay (Lk 19:8). If we have defamed someone, we need to let the truth be known to all who were affected by our lies. As a general rule, if we have sinned publicly, we must also repent publicly. If our sin was private, we must go in private to those who were affected. Whenever possible we need to restore to others what we have taken, be it money, reputation or property.

Obviously, there are some situations which are impossible to restore. If we have killed someone we cannot bring them back to life. If we have caused someone to become pregnant or we have become pregnant outside the marriage bond, there is no way to undo this fact without sinning. We must do whatever is possible to restore when and where we can. Undoubtedly the Lord will give us wisdom in these things, showing us how and when to restore. If our hearts are truly humble and willing, He will help us to completely clear our consciences.

Certainly there are some who have what could be called "weak" consciences. They are susceptible to the accusations of the enemy. They live in continual guilt and condemnation. For them, taking all the available steps they can to clear their conscience will help them in their fight. Knowing that they have done everything to clear their past and present relationship with God and others will give them a good basis to resist further accusations. It is also possible that some live in this condemnation for things which they have not done because hidden in their hearts are other things which they do

not wish to bring into the light. This weakens their conscience and makes it vulnerable to false accusations.

To live and walk in the Spirit, these experiences of the manna, Aaron's rod and the tablets of stone are absolutely necessary. Without them, the only alternative is to live and walk in the soul. The result of a refusal to yield to God in these matters has two possible results. The first occurs when the person who is rebelling against God admits this to themselves and simply stops trying to follow Jesus. The second happens when the person resisting the authority of the Most High tries to pretend that he is still O.K. He hides his rebellion from himself and others, trying to act as if he is still a "good Christian" and feigning that nothing is wrong. This individual will then develop a merely soulish religion. By this I mean that they will still try with the efforts of the soul to obey biblical principles, go to church meetings and do the things which other Christians expect of them. However, all this will then be done without intimate fellowship with God and so can only be accomplished by human strength and natural effort. The results may appear to be good imitations of real spiritual life, but the flavor is different. Instead of the sweet fragrance of Christ, there is the dead, dry sense of demand. In place of the flowing of the water of Life, there is the execution of "duty." The person involved is often still trying to serve God but not really submitting themselves completely to Him.

It is essential for every Christian to learn to walk in the spirit. To be pleasing to God there is no other way. We can know that we are in the spirit, not by physical sensations, hearing "voices" or having strong emotional feelings, but by the experience of the manna, Aaron's rod and the tablets of stone. When we are having spiritual communion with Jesus, when we are sensing His leadership and when we know if we are offending Him, this is a sure indication that we are in the (S)pirit. And it is from the spirit that all of His virtue will flow. May God have mercy upon us that we could learn to live daily in His presence, so that from our spirit, His Spirit can manifest His life through us.