

## Some Things We Should Know About the Meaning of the Words "Spirit" and "Soul"

by Karl Kemp; February 2012

I'll always quote from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 edition, unless I mention otherwise. I have been using the NASB since the late 60s.

There is much popular teaching around the Body of Christ regarding the meaning of the words *spirit* and *soul* that is wrong. Some of these errors significantly confuse, or distort, the meaning of some very important verses of the Bible. I'll give several examples in this article. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully deal with the use of these words in the New Testament, but I'll point out some basic things we should know about the meaning of these important words.

The NASB, 1995 edition, translated the Greek noun *pneuma* as follows: breath (3), Spirit (239), spirit (103), spirits (32), spiritual (1), wind (1), and winds (1). As you can see, the NASB typically translated *pneuma* as Spirit (referring to the Holy Spirit) or spirit(s), which often refers to, or relates to, the human spirit and quite often is used of evil spirits. And the NASB translated the Greek noun *psuche* as follows: heart (2), heartily (1), life (36), lives (7), mind (1), minds (1) person (1), persons (3), soul (33), souls (14), suspense (1), and thing (1). As you can see, the NASB typically translated *psuche* as soul(s) or life/lives. When *psuche* is translated life/lives it typically refers to life in this world, not life by the Spirit, spiritual life, eternal life. (The Greek noun *zoe* is typically, but not always used of life by the Spirit, eternal life.) I'll limit this study almost entirely to verses where the NASB translated soul(s) or spirit(s) and to the meaning of these words.

Although some popular teaching makes a rigid and clear distinction between the spirit of man and the soul of man and teaches that the soul equals the mind, the will, and the emotions, typically there is no substantial difference in meaning between the spirit of man and the soul of man in the New Testament, as I will demonstrate in this article. When this popular teaching is applied to a verse like James 1:21, it greatly distorts the interpretation of this verse. We will discuss James 1:21 at the end of this study.

A person after death and separate from the body can be called a spirit or a soul. On "SPIRIT(S)," see Heb. 12:23 ("...and to the spirits of *the* righteous men made perfect"; referring to the spirits of the believers from Old Testament days who were now in heaven, but had not yet received their resurrection bodies); 1 Pet. 3:19 ("in which also He [Jesus] went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison"; this verse is discussed as part of a verse-by-verse discussion of 1 Pet. 3:18-4:6 on pages 27-35 of my paper titled "More Regarding God's Salvation

Plans for the Nations" on my internet site [Google to Karl Kemp Teaching.]); cf. John 19:30 ("Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."); Acts 7:59 ("They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, 'Lord receive my spirit.' ") On "SOUL(S)," see Acts 2:27 ("Because you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay"; see Psalm 16:8-11); Rev. 6:9 ("When the Lamb broke the sixth seal, I saw underneath the altar [the sacrificial altar] the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained"; Rev. 6:9-11 are discussed in my paper on Revelation chapters 1-10 on my internet site); Rev. 20:4 ("...and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God..."; Revelation chapters 20-22 are discussed verse-by-verse in my paper on these chapters on my internet site).

In the verses listed in the preceding paragraph, the words spirit and soul are used for the more-important immaterial (non-physical) part of man that lives on after the death of the physical body. (But the body is important; God designed us to have a body, and we will have resurrected, glorified bodies in the eternal age to come. Of course we won't need to be resurrected if we are still living on the earth when the Lord Jesus returns—we will just be glorified, including our bodies.) Along that same line, man can be spoken of as SPIRIT and body: 1 Cor. 7:34 (".... The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit..."); cf. James 2:26 ("For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."); or as SPIRIT and flesh: 2 Cor. 7:1 ("Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves [by the sanctifying grace of God in Christ] from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting [or completing] holiness in the fear of God"; this super-important verse is discussed on pages 182, 183 of my book, "Holiness and Victory Over Sin," for one place.), or SOUL and body: Matt. 10:28 ("Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.").

The Bible speaks of the SPIRIT being saved: 1 Cor. 5:5 ("*I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*"; the apostle Paul was looking [hoping for] his repentance). And with no essential difference in meaning the Bible speaks of the SOUL being saved, or lost: Matt. 16:26 ("For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"; see Matt. 16:24-27; in Matt. 16:25, the word translated "life" by the NASB is *psuche*, referring to life in this world); Heb. 10:39 ("But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." In that context God was warning his Christian readers who were being tempted to shrink back from being faithful to God that they must press on, by grace through faith, or forfeit their salvation [lose their soul]. In Heb. 10:38b He said, "And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.");

James 1:21 ("Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls"; we'll discuss this verse later.); James 5:20 ("let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul [the sinner's soul] from death and will cover a multitude of sins"; we'll discuss this verse later); and 1 Pet. 1:9 ("obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls").

We frequently hear that that the SOUL (in distinction from the spirit) is the mind, the will, and the emotions. It is true that it can be demonstrated (from the New Testament) that the word soul includes the mind, will, and emotions, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT THE SAME THING CAN BE SAID REGARDING THE WORD SPIRIT, as the following examples show:

ON THE MIND/KNOWING/UNDERSTANDING/THINKING, see Mark 2:8 ("Immediately Jesus, AWARE IN HIS SPIRIT that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, 'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?' " To reason in your heart is essentially the equivalent of reasoning in your spirit or in your soul.); Rom. 8:6 ("The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God." And through that testimony by the Spirit [and by the Word] we are able to know in our spirits/hearts/souls [with a very solid assurance] that we are born again children of God.); 1 Cor. 2:11 ("For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."); cf. Dan. 2:3 ("The king said to them, 'I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream.' ").

ON THE WILL, see Matt. 26:41 [and Mark 14:38] ("Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." That's one reason why we need to be born again and walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis.); cf. Luke 1:80 ("And the child [John the Baptist] continued to grow and to become strong in spirit [which certainly included his being strong in his will by the grace of God], and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.").

ON THE EMOTIONS, see Mark 8:12 ("Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, 'Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.' "); Luke 1:47 ("And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior"; Note that the word soul is used in a similar [parallel] way in Luke 1:46, "And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord.' "); John 11:33 ("When Jesus therefore saw her [Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha] weeping, and the Jews who came with her *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and was troubled."); John 13:21 ("When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Truly [Amen], truly [amen], I say to you, that one of you will betray me.' "); Acts 17:16 ("Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols."); and Acts 18:25

("This man [Apollus] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus....").

BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT MOST CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS SPEAK OF MAN BEING A TWO PART BEING (spirit/soul and body). That's OK in general, but we must understand that the words pneuma and psuche are not fully equivalent in meaning.

A misunderstanding of HEBREWS 4:12 has contributed to the confusion regarding the meaning of the words spirit and soul. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." In that context the writer of Hebrews was exhorting and warning his readers with the need to be diligent to press on in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God and to repent anywhere and everywhere repentance was required (and the epistle shows that serious repentance was required on the part of some of the original recipients of this epistle).

God's living, active, powerful Word has gone forth, and it penetrates to every part of our being. For one thing, the Word that has penetrated to every part of our being enables God to see what we are doing with Him, His Word, and His salvation in every part of our being, very much including our "hidden" motives, attitudes, and priorities. Are we being obedient or disobedient to God and His Word (on the word "disobedient," see Heb. 4:11)? Do we really love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength (see Mark 12:30)? The verse that follows, Heb. 4:13 confirms this emphasis, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

For our present purposes the primary thing we need to see is that the writer of Hebrews wasn't speaking of dividing between the spirit and the soul (of dividing the spirit from the soul), but of dividing the spirit and soul and penetrating to the hidden depths of the spirit and soul. The fact that he goes on to speak of the division of joints and marrow serves to confirm this interpretation. You don't divide between the joints and marrow, but you penetrate and divide the joints and the marrow, even as you divide and penetrate the spirit and the soul. For God to be "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" is easy once He has penetrated to the depths of every part of our being.

The writer of Hebrews said that God is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" here in Heb. 4:12. It would also be in line with the New Testament to say that God is able to judge the thought and intentions of the spirit, or the soul. This verse offers some limited support for the idea that we shouldn't fully equate the spirit and the soul, even though the words are very often used with no

substantial difference in meaning, but it does not support the elaborate rigid distinctions that we find in some of the popular teaching around the Body of Christ. The fact that the writer of Hebrews mentioned both the spirit and soul does not begin to prove that the spirit and soul are two clearly defined separate parts of our non-physical being. He clearly wanted to emphasize the point that no part of our being is hidden from the eyes of God. (See under 1 Thess. 5:23 below.)

It is relevant to the interpretation of Heb. 4:12 that the book of Hebrews uses the word soul in a very high sense (not limiting the word to the mind, will, and emotions of man); one verse even speaks of the soul of God. I'll quote the verses: Heb. 6:19 ("This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, (20) where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us..."; all of us who keep running the race until the end [by God's sufficient grace through faith] will end up "within the veil" [enjoying eternal glory].); Heb. 10:38b ("And if he shrinks back, My soul [God says] has no pleasure in him."); Heb. 10:39 ("But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul [instead of losing the soul to the second death, the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 20:4, 15)]." To save your soul includes saving yourself, including your spirit.); Heb. 12:3 ("For consider Him [Jesus] who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart [margin of NASB, "Literally, fainting in your souls"]; "fainting in your souls" is comparable with "fainting in your spirits," or "in your hearts," or "in your inner man."); and Heb. 13:17 ("Obey your leaders and submit to *them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.").

The way the words spirit and soul are used in the New Testament we don't find much support for the idea that the spirit and soul are two distinct parts of our non-physical being. As I mentioned the words are very often used with no substantial difference in meaning. It is significant that I didn't find any examples in the New Testament where the word soul is used where it is not essentially the equivalent of the word spirit, with the exception of Heb. 4:12; 1 Thess. 5:23. Those verses, which are both discussed in this article, fit the idea that the words spirit and soul are not fully equivalent in meaning, but they don't change the fact that the two words are typically used with no substantial difference in meaning. However—and this is very important—the New Testament puts a very strong emphasis on the fact that we must walk by/in/and after the Holy SPIRIT (not by our spirit/soul) on a continuous basis (see Gal. 5:16-25; Rom. 8:12-14, for example; these super-important verses are discussed in some detail in my book *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and in my articles with the same title). THERE IS A VERY BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR SPIRIT.

We are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. The spirits (or souls) of born again Christians are not automatically made holy or kept holy. I'll read 2 Cor. 7:1, where

the apostle Paul is writing (at least for the most part) to born again Christians, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves [by the sanctifying grace of God in Christ, which includes the work of the Holy Spirit, through faith] from all defilement of flesh and SPIRIT, perfecting [or completing] holiness in the fear of God." And I'll read 1 Pet. 1:22, which speaks of the SOUL being purified, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." Notice that the soul here includes the heart, which is at the center of man's being.

I'll mention two other errors (two closely related errors) associated with some of the popular teaching on the meaning of the words spirit and soul:

I mentioned Gal. 5:16-25; I'll quote Gal. 5:16, which is a very important verse, "But I say, walk by the Spirit [the Holy Spirit] and you [most certainly] will not carry out the [sinful] desire of the flesh." It is necessary to see that "the flesh" here (and often in the New Testament) is not at all limited to the physical body. "The flesh" here, as often, equals the old man, which is man, spirit, soul, and body (or, we could say, spirit and body, or soul and body), but MAN APART FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. Mankind has been in spiritual death and without the Holy Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness since the fall. In Christ we are born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9, for example), and we are enabled and required (by the terms of the new covenant) to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis by faith. (When we become Christians we must agree to the terms of the new covenant, which includes agreeing to walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis—what a privilege! In Gal. 5:24 the apostle Paul said, "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh [by the saving grace of God in Christ, with a strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit] with its passions and desires.") That's what the apostle Paul is exhorting his readers to do in Gal. 5:16. To the extent we don't walk by the Spirit, we will do the sinful works of the flesh (see Gal. 5:19-21), and in the worst-case scenario, we will lose our salvation (Gal. 5:21). (See my paper, "Once Saved, Always Saved?")

I have heard quite a few Christian leaders (based, at least to some extent, on their misunderstanding of the words spirit and soul) say that the apostle Paul was exhorting us to walk by our born-again human spirits, not by the Holy Spirit. For one thing, many verses show that we are required (we have the privilege) to walk by the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis (cf. Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:2-14; Gal. 5:16-25; 6:7, 8). The Lord Jesus earned that right for us through His all-important atoning death. We will walk by/in/after the Holy Spirit on a continuous basis, by grace through faith, or we will be defeated to one degree or another. We are not called to be defeated by sin or Satan and his hosts.

Although most Christians will agree that Paul was speaking of walking by the Holy Spirit in Gal. 5:16, many think the New Testament puts a strong emphasis on the need for us to walk by our spirits (not by our souls). 2 Corinthians 7:1, which I quoted above, should suffice, by itself, to show how wrong it is to think

that if we walk by our born again spirits (and not by our souls) all will be well. The spirits of born-again Christians can be (and often are) defiled. Our spirits (or souls) are not automatically made holy or kept holy when we are born again.

A second, closely related error that often goes with the popular misunderstandings of the words spirit and soul is that if Christians sin, their spirits are never involved in the sin. The verse they typically use to back up that idea is 1 John 3:9, but the apostle John doesn't say anything like that in that verse. He doesn't even mention the spirit. It isn't a valid Biblical concept to speak of Christians sinning without their spirits ever being involved. In Mark 7:21-23, for example, Jesus taught that sin is of the heart, which includes the spirit. I'll quote 1 John 3:9, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed [I agree with the very widespread viewpoint that His (God's) seed refers to the Holy Spirit, but it is also true that we are born of God's Word] abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The words, "and he cannot sin" would be more literally translated, "he is not able to continue in sin," or the equivalent. I'll quote the NIV, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

Even though the apostle John exhorted his readers to walk with the victory over all sin throughout this epistle (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:1-6; 2:30; 3:3-8; 5:18), we know that he was not saying that it is impossible for true Christians to commit acts of sin (see 1 John 2:1, 2). I'll quote a few of the key verses from this epistle where the apostle John made it clear that Christians should not be sinning at all. (This is good news, very good news! God didn't say these things to condemn us but to transform us, as we appropriate His sufficient grace through faith, based on what His Word says!) "The one who says he abides in Him [in Christ] ought to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6). "And everyone who has this hope [the hope of heaven and seeing God as He is, which was just mentioned in the preceding verse] purifies himself, just as He [God] is pure" (1 John 3:3). And "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness [or, the one who is doing righteousness] is righteous, just as He [God] is righteous." There is no sin at all in any of these verses, and it is clear that the apostle was not speaking of just having a legal, positional righteousness. And there are many more such verses throughout the New Testament. (See my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*.)

I discussed 1 John 1:5-2:8 and 2:28-3:12 in some detail on pages 201-213 in the book. I highly recommend that you read what I said there. THIS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT! For one thing, many Christians, even the majority, think that 1 John 1:8 proves that Christians cannot walk with the victory over all sin during this age. It's very good news to see that they are wrong.

Another important verse that is relevant to the topic of this article is JOHN 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit [the Holy Spirit] is spirit." First I'll mention and briefly discuss the popular (but what I'm sure is the wrong) view regarding the meaning of the second half of this verse, the interpretation that you often hear in our day. (I have almost never heard this wrong interpretation from Christian scholars, the ones writing the Bible commentaries, etc.) That wrong view understands these words to teach that the Spirit gives birth to our spirit; that is, it is our spirit that is born again. And the idea is typically included that our souls are not born again.

It's true that the Spirit gives birth to our spirit, but that's not what Jesus was saying here. The Spirit has come to give life to us spirit, soul, and body (or we could say spirit and body, or soul and body), eventually including our being born into the fullness of eternal life and glory, including our having glorified bodies. The verses that speak of being born again speak of the person (not just the spirit) being born again (John 1:13; 3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; and 5:1, 4, and 18). This does not mean, or course, that the Spirit of God works equally with our inner man and our bodies, but our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit even during this age. And we should be sanctified spirit, soul, and body now (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 5:23).

What Jesus was saying in the first half of John 3:6 is that MAN IN THE FLESH (man having a spirit, soul, and body [or you could say having a spirit and body, or a soul and body], but being in spiritual death, separated from God, and without the indwelling Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness) CAN ONLY GIVE BIRTH TO MAN IN THE FLESH (man having a spirit, soul, and body, but being in spiritual death, separated from God, and without the indwelling Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness). In the second half of this verse, He was saying that IT IS ONLY THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD (AND IS INDWELLED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD) THAT BECOMES SPIRIT, using the word SPIRIT here of that which is able to SEE and ENTER the SPIRITUAL kingdom of God (see John 3:3, 5). I'll quote the NAB translation for this verse, "Flesh begets flesh, Spirit begets spirit." The NIV has, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

When we become true Christians and are born of the Spirit (born again/born from above), we become SPIRIT in the sense spoken of in the second half of verse 6. However, we become SPIRIT only in a partial, preliminary sense, and we are only able to enter the first stage of the kingdom of God—we become living members of the Body of Christ, and that is a lot. When the Lord Jesus returns, we will be born into the fullness of the eternal life and glory of God by the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; also see Isa. 66:7; Mic. 5:3; Psalm 2:7; and Rev. 12:5; all of these verses are discussed in my book, *The Mid-Week Rapture*).

These words in the second half of verse 6 include our entering the kingdom of God in its fully glorified sense in the future. Then we will have a body (we won't be disembodied *spirits*), but it will be a SPIRITUAL body, which means that it will be a body designed for life in the heavenly, fully glorified dimension. (We will have a real body, but it will not consist of the physical elements of this present world; it will consist of the elements appropriate for the dimension of heaven.) The apostle Paul speaks of this spiritual body in 1 Cor. 15:43-57. The unusual use of the adjective spiritual (Greek *pneumatikos*) in 1 Cor. 15:44 ("SPIRITUAL body," referring to our glorified bodies) and in 15:46 is comparable with the unusual use of the noun spirit (Greek *pneuma*) at the end of John 3:6. These words in the second half of John 3:6 inform us that only that which has become SPIRIT will be able to see and to enter the SPIRITUAL kingdom of God (see John 3:3, 5). (1 Corinthians chapter 15 is discussed verse-by-verse in a paper on my internet site [Google to Karl Kemp Teaching].)

ROMANS 8:10 is another verse that we should discuss. For one thing, this verse (using the translation of the NASB) speaks of our spirit being alive (having life). I agree, of course, that the spirit of born-again Christians is alive, but I don't believe that is what the apostle was saying here. He was making a much more important point. I discussed this verse (in its context with the surrounding verses) in some detail in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and in other writings, but I'll limit the discussion here to the words "yet the spirit is alive" of Rom. 8:10. I'm confident that the King James Version and the New King James Version translate the Greek in the sense that Paul (and the One who sent him) intended: "but the Spirit is life," where the word Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit.

Born-again Christians have life, including in our spirits, by the indwelling Spirit of life (the Holy Spirit). There is no source of life (spiritual life or physical life) but God (the triune God). In Rom. 8:2, for example, Paul speaks of the "Spirit of life" who "has set [us] free from the law [or, governing principle] of sin and of death." Before the Spirit of life came to dwell in us through the Lord Jesus and His atoning death, we were spiritually dead, and we were slaves of sin; we were separated from God and without the Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness. In Rom. 5:21, the apostle spoke of the fact that after the rebellion of Adam "sin reigned in death"; that is, sin reigned over all of Adam's descendants, since they were spiritually dead (meaning that they did not have the indwelling Spirit of life). In the verse preceding Rom. 8:10 (8:9), Paul has just mentioned that "the Spirit of God dwells in [us] now." And in Rom. 8:11 the apostle goes on to speak of the fact that God will give life to our mortal bodies at the end of this age "through His Spirit who dwells in [us]." After we are glorified, we will have glorified bodies, bodies designed for us to live in the dimension of heaven, not mortal bodies that will die physically if Jesus doesn't come first.

We (born again Christians) have life now because we have been redeemed out of the kingdom of sin, spiritual death, the devil, and darkness through the atoning

death of the Lamb of God and by the indwelling Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness. We maintain this life by staying faithful to the new covenant, which includes the call for us to walk by the Holy Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness on a continuous basis, by grace through faith. (See Gal. 5:16, for example; cf. Gal. 5:24). As we saw above in 2 Cor. 7:1, the spirits of born again Christians can be defiled. We are dependent on God and His grace, which includes all the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit of life, righteousness, and holiness. Apart from the indwelling Spirit of life, there is no spiritual life for us. Apart from the indwelling Spirit of righteousness and holiness, there is no enablement for us to walk in the righteousness and holiness of God, with the victory over sin. The apostle Paul repeatedly speaks of these things throughout his epistle to the Romans (and in his other epistles), as do the other writers of the New Testament.

Let's discuss 1 THESSALONIANS 5:23, which is another very important verse that relates to the topic of this article. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved [be kept] complete, without blame at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."

A little background information will help us understand this super-important verse. The Christian church at Thessalonica had been recently founded by the apostle Paul "amid much opposition" (1 Thess. 2:2). He even found it necessary to leave Thessalonica (on the occasion of his first visit there) before he wanted to. (See Acts 17:1-16; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14-18; 3:1-13.) In 1 Thessalonians Paul mentioned some of his concerns regarding the state of the newly founded church at Thessalonica, which he had just learned about from Timothy, who had just returned to Paul after visiting Thessalonica (see 1 Thess. 3:1-9 [espec. verse 6]; 3:10-13; 4:1-12; 5:14, 19-22).

With this background information, 1 Thess. 5:23 falls into place. The apostle prays that God will SANCTIFY ENTIRELY these recently converted Christians and then preserve [KEEP] THEM IN THIS ABIDING STATE OF HOLINESS, so that they will be WITHOUT BLAME AT THE COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Paul prays that God will do all that is necessary to bring about the full sanctification of the church at Thessalonica. He was not thinking of a lifetime of growth in holiness, but of a transformation to an abiding state of holiness very soon, as soon as possible. We should continue to grow (grow in knowledge; grow more like the Lord Jesus; etc.) throughout our lives in Christ, but in the ideal case we will not be growing out of sin, because we will be living in an abiding state of holiness, with the victory over all sin. It must be understood that we must cooperate with God's sanctifying grace by faith, in accordance with the terms of the new covenant spelled out in the New Testament, or we will not be sanctified (cf., e.g., Rom. 6:1-23; 8:12-14; 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 7:1; Gal. 5:16-25; and Eph. 4:17-5:14).

For God to send the apostle Paul to Thessalonica was one way that He could substantially meet the need of this church. See 1 Thess. 3:1-10. The apostle wanted the Thessalonian Christians (and all Christians) to live their entire Christian lives WITHOUT BLAME before God (cf., e.g., Phil. 2:15, 16). Living in this state, they would always be fully ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they would be WITHOUT BLAME on the day of judgment. The Lord Jesus taught us that one reason we must always stay ready for His return is that we don't know when He will return (cf., e.g., Matt. 24:42-51).

1 Thessalonians 3:10-13, which is an important cross-reference for 1 Thess. 5:23, is discussed on pages 183-185 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*; 1 Thess. 4:1-8, which is one of the many passages which show that we should be living in (we have the privilege to live in) an abiding state of holiness now, is discussed on pages 180, 181; and 1 Thess. 5:23 on pages 178, 179. In 1 Thess. 5:23 the apostle Paul speaks of our SPIRIT and SOUL and BODY being sanctified entirely and then kept in that state, so that we will be without blame when we stand before God when Christ returns. In 1 Thess. 3:13 Paul simplifies the picture and speaks of our heart (instead of our spirit and soul and body) being established without blame in holiness before God when Christ returns, but there is no substantial difference in meaning. Paul's readers would have understood that our bodies and everything associated with our lives on earth must be sanctified too (cf., e.g., Rom. 12:1, 2).

Regarding the words "spirit and soul and body," I believe it is clear (based on verses like Matt. 10:28; 16:26; Acts 2:27; 1 Cor. 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1; and Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4) that the apostle Paul could have said "spirit and body" or "soul and body" and adequately communicated what he wanted to say. It was highly unusual for Paul to use the words "spirit and soul" together like this; we don't find these words used together anywhere else in the New Testament, with the exception of Heb. 4:12, which we discussed. By using the words "spirit and soul and body," he more forcefully communicated the idea that every part of our being must be sanctified. Consider Mark 12:30 (cf. Deut. 6:5), "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." It is clear that we are being exhorted here to love God with every part of our being. You would not want to say that the "heart," "soul," and "mind" are three different parts of our being, and notice that the word spirit isn't even mentioned here.

As I mentioned, the fact that the words spirit and soul are very often used with no substantial difference in meaning does not mean that the words are fully equivalent in meaning. We can undoubtedly say that the word SPIRIT is more appropriate than the word soul, for example, when we think of a Christian walking by the Holy SPIRIT, or prophesying by the SPIRIT or speaking with tongues by the SPIRIT (see 1 Cor. 14:2 ["in *his* SPIRIT he speaks mysteries"], 1 Cor. 14:14 ["For if I pray in a tongue, MY SPIRIT prays..."], or being SPIRITUAL BY THE

HOLY SPIRIT (see 1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1; 14:37), or of the Holy SPIRIT bearing witness with our SPIRIT that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). It is significant that the word *pneuma* is so often used for the Holy Spirit. Out of the 380 uses of *pneuma* in the New Testament, the NASB translates "Spirit" with a capital "S," referring to the Holy Spirit, 239 times.

The Greek adjective *pneumatikos*, which was derived from the noun *pneuma*, is typically translated "spiritual" by the NASB. It is used, for example, of spiritual (by the Spirit) gifts; of God's Law, which is spiritual; of our spiritual bodies, which we will have after we are glorified; of the spiritual person, who is led by the Spirit; and of the spiritual forces of evil arrayed against us. The Greek adjective *psuchikos*, which was derived from *psuche*, is translated "natural" 5 times and "worldly-minded" one time by the NASB. In 1 Cor. 2:14 it is used of the "natural" (unspiritual) man, who does not walk by the Holy Spirit. The NIV translates, "The man without the Spirit." I believe the apostle Paul was including many of the Christians at Corinth in the unspiritual category; even though they had been born of the Spirit, they were not walking by the Spirit on a consistent basis. See 1 Cor. 3:1-4. Paul made it very clear throughout this epistle, and other epistles, that they were going to have to repent of that unacceptable condition. The NASB translates this adjective "worldly-minded" in Jude 1:24, and the words that follow in that verse are "devoid of [Literally, "not having"] the Spirit." Also, as I mentioned, when *psuche* is translated life/lives (which it is 43 times in the New Testament) it typically refers to life in this world, not spiritual (by the Spirit) life.

JAMES 1:21. This verse is a good example of how a popular (but wrong) idea about the meaning of the word soul (which is tied to the wrong ideas about soul and spirit) can result in a wrong interpretation of a very important verse. "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." I'll also quote verse 22. "But [or, better, "And"] prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

James is exhorting his readers to once-for-all and completely put off anything and everything that is sinful and inappropriate for Christians and to walk in line with God's Word, His Word of the gospel of the new covenant that informs us, for one thing, what He has provided for us (by His saving grace in Christ Jesus) and what He requires of us. This is the ideal that we have been called to, and God's grace is sufficient. We are called to (we have the privilege to) put off everything that is sinful and to walk in the righteousness and holiness of God through the atoning death of the Lamb of God and by the indwelling all-powerful Spirit of holiness and righteousness through faith. This is what it means to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" of James 1:22. They "delude themselves" with the thought that they can have authentic Christianity without being doers of God's Word. It is important to see that James warns his readers in these verses that if they don't take his exhortation seriously, it will (in

the worst-case scenario) cost them their salvation. On God's word, see James 1:18 which speaks of God's "word of truth."

On putting off everything that is sinful and defiling and putting on the righteousness and holiness of God once-for-all and completely, see, for example, Eph. 4:22-5:1; Col. 3:1-11; Rom. 13:11-14; and there are very many more such passages throughout the New Testament. See my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

The words "to save your souls" mean to not lose your souls to spiritual/eternal death, the second death of Rev. 20:14, 15. JAMES 5:19, 20 is an important cross-reference, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth [the truth of God's word, which includes the need for Christians to walk in the righteousness and holiness of God by His grace (see Eph. 4:24)] and one turns him back [influences him to repent through intercessory prayer, speaking with him, etc.], (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul [the sinner's soul] from death [spiritual death, eternal death] and will cover a multitude of sins." The sins he has committed will be covered (forgiven), and we can also think of the multitude of sins that he will not go on to commit. Furthermore, we can think of the great multitude of sins of others that would have resulted because of his sins if he had not repented. Sin spreads like cancer, only it is much more destructive than cancer, being able to destroy the spirit/soul of man.

Some other passages that speak of saving your soul and/or losing your soul to spiritual/eternal death are: Matt. 10:28; 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38; Heb. 10:35-39; 1 Pet. 1:9; cf. Luke 12:20; Acts 3:23; Rom. 2:9. Also see 1 Cor. 5:5, which speaks of the spirit being saved (through repentance), instead of being lost. Compare James 2:14; 4:12 on being saved, or lost.

I'm sorry to say that I have often heard a different interpretation of James 1:21, an interpretation based on a popular (but wrong) understanding of the meaning of the word soul. They say that James did not say anything about saving or losing your soul here (which is a very important topic to say the least): He was just telling them that they need to study and meditate on God's word which will gradually renew their minds. This interpretation is based on their view that that the soul, which is distinct from the spirit, equals the mind, will, and emotions.

It is true, of course, that we need to continue to study God's Word, but James was giving a powerful exhortation here, warning his readers that they were in very real danger of losing their souls. They needed to "prove [themselves to be] doers of the [God's] word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). God needs to get very blunt with some Christians to try to wake them up to see the seriousness of their need to repent and make God, His Word, and His righteousness and holiness top priority. There is no satisfactory

alternative! We must be true believers! "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Although the interpretation that says that James was only exhorting his readers to get their minds renewed is widespread on a popular level (which is quite popular in some Christian circles in our day), I wouldn't expect many scholars to make this error. I looked at some thirty-five commentaries on James 1:21, and I didn't find even one commentator who misinterpreted what it means to save your soul.

May God's will be fully accomplished through this article and His people be blessed!

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