

# The Salvation of the Soul

*My soul faints for your salvation, but I hope in your word. (Ps 119:81)*

## A seeming contradiction

It is my belief that Christians need to take a fresh look at certain scriptures to come to a clearer conception of what they mean. All too often certain texts, which seem contradictory or difficult, are exegeted badly or just ignored. The following are some examples:

*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end [goal] of your faith -- the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9)*

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. (1 Pet 1:22)*

*Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (1 Pet 4:19)*

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (Jm 1:21)*

Here we see something very strange and seemingly in opposition to all sound doctrine. These verses are seldom explained properly by orthodox theologians because they seem to teach that the salvation of our soul is dependent upon our works. Note that the end of *our* faith *will be* the salvation of the soul; but other scriptures explain that it is God's gift of faith which secures a guaranteed salvation, known already as we have become justified new creatures. We can *purify* our souls *through obedience*, but God's word elsewhere states that only the blood of Christ can cleanse hearts (1 Jn 1:7). We commit our souls to God in *doing good and in suffering justly*, not merely by faith. Our souls are saved by *laying aside wickedness* and *obeying the truth*, not by believing upon Christ. How do we explain all this?

Reformed expositors usually ignore the awkward words and phrases and launch into an application of the doctrine of atonement, fine in itself, but which is not based upon a careful exegesis of the texts. Some writers do see the problem (like John Gill for instance) but state that the actions of man, such as obedience or the application of our faith, are mere instruments of grace applied by the Spirit and are not meritorious works. There is some scope in interpretation for this, but it does not answer all the problems, especially not James 1:21. In any case, even if these expositions were correct, they thus posit that faith precedes regeneration - which overthrows the Calvinistic *ordo salutis*<sup>1</sup> and is just as devastating as proposing meritorious works. Inner salvation is thus achieved by faith and repentance, rather than both being the fruit of a regenerated heart.<sup>2</sup>

If we hold to the popular reformed line that man is bipartite (only soul and body), there is an insurmountable problem and Roman Catholic meritorious doctrine would seem to be supported by these verses. However, if we accept that man is tripartite in essential nature,

---

<sup>1</sup> The order of salvation. For the Calvinist this order is critical and the orthodox scheme is that the effectual calling of the Spirit causes a sovereign regeneration of the heart by God, without any action on the part of man. This is the initial cause of salvation. Man's response, also aided by the gifts of faith and repentance, is conversion.

<sup>2</sup> For a full exegetical analysis of these passages, see appendix one.

(body, soul and spirit) then the problem is not only overcome, but these verses hold wonderful and inspiring truths for us today.

## **The explanation: the tenses of salvation**

My purpose here is not to defend the trichotomy of man, but to draw attention to the salvation of the soul, a subject which is hardly ever spoken of. Not only do: Jesus, Paul, Peter and James highlight this doctrine; not only does Paul emphasise this to his earliest converts, but Jesus also repeatedly taught that the soul must be saved by certain actions in those who are his (more of this later). This is an important subject.

All the aspects of man's nature come under the sphere of salvation in their own specific way: the spirit (1 Cor 5:5), the soul (1 Pt 1:9) and the body (Rm 8:23). Paul puts all three together in 1 Thess 5:23

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Not only does Paul feel it important to identify these three organs separately, but he denotes the significance of sanctification in all three departments.

We know that man is saved by grace, not works (Eph 2:8) and that once converted, a true believer is assured of eternal life - he is justified before God and truly saved. Why then this mention of needing to save the soul by our actions? What was saved if man's soul is not saved? We also know that the body will be saved in a way that is outside our control; God will change us to be like Christ when he returns (1 Jn 3:2), we do not save our body. Yet we contribute to saving our soul. Why?

### **Fulness of salvation in the spirit of man**

The full consummation of the kingdom comes with the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Until that time we have the earnest of salvation, but not the fulness in our bodies on earth. Our spirits know the fulness of the Lord (Col 2:10), because they touch heaven, our spirit deals with spiritual things, it is the organ of heavenly perception and is the new creation of God in us (2 Cor 5:17). This is where the new man abides (Eph 4:23-24), whoever is born of God does not sin (1 Jn 3:9). On the contrary, our souls and bodies are not yet fully changed (Heb 10:39; 1 Pt 1:9, 1:22; 1 Cor 15:42; 1 Jn 3:2).

### **Present, ongoing salvation in the soul of man**

Sanctification is a process going on now. The Christian is not legally ruled by sin, since God reigns in his spirit. In terms of jurisdiction, the believer has been transferred into the kingdom of heaven, yet he can become a slave of sin (at least temporarily). A Christian walking in the light is cleansed from all sin (1 Jn 1:7). He must keep his heart clean and his conscience clear; he must flee lusts, fight temptation and strive against sin. Sanctification in the soul (considered as mind, emotions and volition by both Biblical and secular writers) is an ongoing process.

### **Future salvation will change the corporeal body of man at the second coming of Jesus Christ**

A believer cannot say that he has no sin (1 Jn 1:8), as his body is dead in sin (Rm 7:13, 25) and corruption increases (Eph 4:22 'corrupt' = *being corrupted*: present, passive participle, accusative verb, masculine singular). Only by the destruction of this body and the provision of a new spiritual body can sin be fully eradicated from us (1 Cor 15:42-46).

### **Past, present and future salvation**

The explanation for the vicissitudes of the Christian life is the difference between what has transpired already in my spirit (born again, a new creation, the new man - *past tense of salvation*), what is happening now in my soul (being saved, process of sanctification - *present tense of salvation*) and what will happen in the future (resurrected body with no sin - *future tense of salvation*). I have a perfect new man (nature) which is of Christ and in Christ, so that he lives in my spirit by his Spirit. But I have a will that sometimes chooses to sin, an emotional life which sometimes lusts and a mind which sometimes thinks wrong things. These features (volition, emotions, mind) amount to the soul. Sanctification is giving God the control of these areas and learning to die to myself in one matter at a time. My body is the expression of my soul and thus the manifestation of good or bad. It's material weaknesses hinder sanctification (it is dead in sin, it thirsts etc.), result in the soul's conflict and requires a complete transformation which will occur at the second coming.

### **Why does the soul need to be saved?**

The soul is the real me, the seat of personality. I am the unique blend of emotions, intellect and will that sum up all the rest of what makes for personality. The salvation of the soul is the process of what I do with salvation. It is the fruit I bear after receiving the life of Christ, it is the trading with the ten pounds (Lk 19:13ff) which I am given by my master. I am trusted with the investment of a life and certain gifts, what I do with them results in who I am.

If the soul was automatically saved, the process of my life would have no bearing at all and personality would be a nonsense. In fact, we would all be the same with: pure affections, submitted wills, and cogent thoughts. We would never fall, stray or disobey. In short, we would be zombies or robots. As it is we are all different. Some are weak emotionally and need encouragement to develop in trust. Some have weak wills and need exhortation to be disciplined. Some have wills that are too strong and need admonishing not to be headstrong. Some are weak minded and need careful teaching. Some are too clever and need to learn humility.

The place where this all takes place is in the body of Christ. It is in the community of saints that we share and mutually encourage one another to be like Christ. The salvation of the soul takes place in the hardships of life and requires the support of brothers and sisters in the Lord.

### **What is the salvation of the soul?**

What is the salvation of the soul as indicated by the texts we previously looked at:

- It is accomplished by faith and is accompanied by joy expressed in love to God (1 Pt 1:9).
- It is a purification accomplished by obedience to the truth, through the Spirit (1 Pt 1:22).
- It involves a sincere love of the brethren (1 Pt 1:22).
- It is accompanied by suffering and doing good (1 Pt 4:19).
- It is achieved by laying aside wickedness and receiving meekness (Jm 1:21).

These things all speak of the impact of sanctification in one's life. Sanctification is the saving of the soul.

## Sanctification

### What is sanctification?

A suitable basic definition is given by A. A. Hodge:

*The orthodox doctrine is that the Holy Ghost, by his constant influences upon the whole soul in all its faculties, through the instrumentality of the truth, nourishes, exercises, and develops those holy principles and dispositions which he implanted in the new birth, until by a constant progress all sinful dispositions being mortified and extirpated, and all holy dispositions being fully matured, the subject of this grace is brought immediately upon death to the measure of the stature of perfect manhood in Christ.*

*... Regeneration is the creative act of the Holy Spirit, implanting a new principle of spiritual life in the soul. Conversion is the first exercise of that new gracious principle, in the spontaneous turning of the new-born sinner to God. Sanctification is the sustaining and developing work of the Holy Ghost, bringing all the faculties of the soul more and more perfectly under the purifying and regulating influence of the implanted principle of spiritual life.<sup>3</sup>*

And another by R. L. Dabney:

*Sanctification, in the gospel sense, means then, not only cleansing from guilt, though it presupposes this, nor only consecration, though it includes this, nor only reformation of morals and life, though it produces this; but, essentially, the moral purification of the soul.*

*... We regard sanctification then as advancing that renovation of man's heart, which regeneration begins. The process of sanctification and that of the mortification of sin are counterparts. The more we live unto righteousness, the more we die unto sin.<sup>4</sup>*

### Does man contribute to his ongoing sanctification?

The clear answer is yes he does. The perfectionist idea that a crisis experience of consecration, or a baptism in the Spirit, leads to a life of rest, where holiness is effected by faith is patently unbiblical. For instance the New Testament talks of a strife against sin, which involves effort:

*I myself always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men.*  
(Acts 24:16)

*... striving against sin.* (Heb 12:4)

We have to yield our members to God's service (Rm 6:13,16 AV) and not present them as opportunities for sin (Rm 6:13,18, 12:1). Dealing with inner temptations means taking thoughts captive and disciplining our thinking (2 Cor 10:5). We have to put on the new man and put off the old (Eph 4:22-24). The Christian life is a warfare between flesh and Spirit (Rm 8:4-7; Gal 5:17). The evil deeds of the body must be mortified (Rm 8:13). In many such ways we see that sanctification, becoming more separated unto God and more cut of from the world and the flesh, involves effort and well as faith. A crisis of consecration may help me align my life properly, but it is not enough to make me holy.

*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.* (1 Jn 2:6)

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, chapter 35.

<sup>4</sup> R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 25.

So, the process of sanctification involves obedience and effort to gain purification. It is a laying aside of wickedness, of the old life, and a putting on of righteousness in practical ways. This is exactly what is said about the salvation of the soul. The salvation of the soul is the process of sanctification by other words. My spirit knows of full salvation, this is where the new man is created after the likeness of Christ, this is where the new creation dwells in righteousness.

*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (1 Jn 3:9)*

The pure seed of God in my spirit is why God can look upon me with favour, legally justified, even when I have grievously sinned. Without the sanctity of the new man, I could never approach God to confess my sins.

The body is dead in sin (Rm 6:6) and cannot be rescued. It must be consumed by the fire of God to be replaced with a new spiritual body.

My soul is different to both. It is immortal, like my spirit, and will not be consumed at the appearing of the Lord. But neither was it automatically changed at my conversion. I still sin and fail, that is - the personality which is me - still knows corruption and makes wrong decisions. It is where the old man, the Adamic nature resides in my life and this constitutes the ground of warfare, hence the striving. The salvation of the soul is the triumphing over the old nature in me as I decide to obey God instead of the flesh.

However, it must be affirmed that this effort of the believer is energised by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. The good works that we do are always predestined and empowered by God. There is no human merit in salvation. God does the good works through us (Eph 2:10; Phil 2:13).

## **What is the basis of this striving for soul salvation?**

### **Losing one's life, denying one's self, taking up the cross**

Sanctification is all about choice. It is choosing to obey God and to follow Christ rather than do what my old personality wants to do. This means that some hard decisions are inevitable. In a nutshell, to be truly set apart for God, to be holy, we have to completely die to our old way of living. This is so important that Jesus exhorts us to it seven times in the Gospel record.

- Matt 10:37-39
- Matt 16:24-27
- Mk 8:34-38
- Lk 9:23-24
- Lk 14:26-27, 33
- Lk 17:33
- Jn 12:24-25

Only things which are very important are repeated in all four Gospels, but just this teaching (as far as I am aware) is mentioned seven times in all four Gospels, plus other similar allusions (such as *'he that is first shall be last'* etc.). Furthermore, seven is an important Biblical number which indicates perfection. Such features show us that this matter is of great consequence; therefore, we must examine each mention in more detail.

**Matt 10:37-39** (parallel with Luke 14:26-27, 33)

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

**Lk 14:26-27, 33**

26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

27 "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ...

33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

This is mentioned to prospective disciples in the context of confessing or denying Christ and the need to love him even above one's own family. First note that the word 'life' here is actually 'soul' (as in the texts which follow) and the word 'lose' here has the meaning of: 'destroy', 'put an end to', 'put to death', 'abolish'.

What Jesus is saying is that the life of following him is one of dying to one's self in every form. The Christian life of true discipleship means an end to normal family priorities, to worldly ambition, to my preferred choices, tastes and desires. If I put Jesus' commandments first, I will eternally save my soul; but if I ignore the priority of his will and seek the benefits of my soul (i.e. give importance to my feelings, my choices, my attitudes, my thoughts), my soul, self life, will be destroyed. A person cannot be a true disciple if he does not live this way; we cannot water down what Jesus specifically states.<sup>5</sup>

[Losing the soul here does not mean perishing in hell. If it did, saving our soul for eternal life would necessitate going to hell first as a result of losing it! It means losing what the soul delights in at the end, not gaining one's desires.]

Here is a clear commentary of the saving of the soul mentioned by Peter. We save our soul by denying ourselves and following Christ. Christ's hearers would be very clear what he meant by the allusion to the cross. It did not mean: struggles, trials, difficulties; it meant ignominious and final death. A person who takes up his cross is on the road to a barbarous and humiliating execution. The amazing thing is that Jesus considers this death as a basic requirement of discipleship. It normally has nothing to do with martyrdom, excepting that physically dying for faith in Christ is the ultimate form of denying one's self.

Neither does losing one's life simply mean abandoning the lusts and pleasures of this life, the comforts and benefits of this world, as many expositors suggest. The word 'soul' cannot be forced to mean worldly pleasures. It is astonishing that otherwise sound exegetes make such basic mistakes in this matter. We must lose, die to, our innermost strengths, weaknesses, desires, hopes, ambitions and all that makes us what we were in Adam. We must live the new life given by God if we are to be truly Christ's disciples.

This is the same thrust as that found in the other passages.

**Matt 16:24-27** (parallel with Mk 8:34-38 and Luke 9:23-26)

---

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that Christians can lose their salvation if they don't work hard enough. Rather, it means that genuine Christians will grow in holiness and will hate their own lives. Superficial converts will not engage in this work.

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

**Mk 8:34-38** (parallel with Matt 16:24-27 and Luke 9:23-26)

34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

35 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

37 "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

**Lk 9:23-26** (parallel with Matt 16:24-27 and Mk 8:34-38)

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

[Again 'life' = 'soul' here; they are both the Greek word *psuche*.]

Added to the earlier message is a clear statement that there is a reward for works done in the context of the soul. Expositors also have difficulty with this in order to avoid the error of meritorious works in salvation. To avoid the problem, they make these passages refer to conversion as if Jesus was simply making an evangelistic statement; but he is talking to disciples (Matt 16:24), i.e. those who have already left all to follow him, converted people.

The redemption gained by Christ is not what is in view here. Jesus is talking to those who know of salvation, are already justified by faith and assured of heaven. The works are the works of the soul, enabled by grace, to put the old man to death. The application of the cross to the soul is the mortification of the old nature. Believers are to live daily by denying their own life, die to the desires of the flesh and follow the will of God. The more they succeed in doing this, the more they will be rewarded.

**Lk 17:33**

"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

Note that the first word 'life' = 'soul' but the second word 'life' is not *psuche* and is not actually in the Greek text; instead of using 'soul' the text says '*whoever shall lose it will*

save it (i.e. the soul) *alive*'.

### **Jn 12:24-25**

24 *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.*

25 *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

John adds the figurative idea of a seed dying in order to bear fruit. This ties together thoughts found in the synoptic Gospels - losing my soul, denying my self leads to bearing eternal fruit.

### **Clarification on dying to one's self**

#### *It is not masochism*

Self denial has nothing to do with the medieval practice of self-mutilation or self inflicted pain. To pay for sin, misguided penitents would whip themselves with scourges or pray on their knees along streets or up steps. Such behaviour is obviously foolish and pointless. Neither does this dying mean that believers must make themselves suffer discomfort in this life, as if relaxing was a sin. Some confused believers refuse to take valid holidays, improve their financial circumstances, sleep sufficiently, play games with their children and so forth, considering that this is sowing to the flesh. In fact, God has commanded us to look after our bodies and take necessary relaxation and strive to improve our circumstances by working hard. Dying to ourselves does not mean any of these things.

#### *It is not passivity*

The Quietists erred in this manner, they sought to eradicate passion and any human activity in meditating upon God and being lost in him. Dying to self was passivity and mysticism for them. Michael de Molinos wrote an influential book called *The Spiritual Guide*. In it he says that the highest state is consists:

*"in being totally divorced from self, being elevated above all things, being fully united with God, and in passive reflection to lose one's self fully in God, thus worshipping Him in pure love"*<sup>6</sup>

This inward contemplation is as abstruse as pagan mystics. It is a sort of reverse sensuousness; the lack of any feeling leads to an felt emptiness which is presumed to be contact with God. In fact it is a heightening of inward sensibilities and a losing of self-control. Such states make men the pawns of Satan as they are easily fooled and manipulated in this condition. [Note that extreme, modern, charismatic worship can lead to the same altered state.] In losing ourselves, dying to ourselves, denying ourselves we do not become 'no self', or zombies; we become our true self in God. We don't cease to function with personality, we become a submitted personality.

The mystical, passive methods (favoured by many evangelicals influenced by 'Christian' mystics and perfectionists) lead to acting by natural means without the Spirit: they rely on human imagination, feelings (or lack of them) and fantasies. As such, the 'spiritual' results can be mimicked by pagans using their similar techniques.

#### *What it is*

It means that we cease to place ourselves in the driving seat of our lives; we yield total control to the Lord. We are careful not to plan the future without seeking God's mind; we take no hasty action. It is all about following the Lord; we cannot do this if we take our own

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Chapter 43. E4 CD Rom.

path. True self-denial is a focusing upon the Lord Jesus and not ourselves. It is not an extreme introspection, but an ignoring of self, with its thirsts and desires, and concentrating upon Christ. It is a looking away not a looking inside.

It is also a refusal to do 'spiritual' things solely in the strength of my own personality. This is why we Christians suffer so much; God is carefully stripping back the strength of our human, inner resources so that we will lean upon him and wait for his graceful supply. The natural strength, and worldly learning, of Moses was of no use to God. After 80 years Moses had learned to be the meekest man in all the earth (Num 12:3); i.e. he was a humbled man able to rein in his personality, like a broken horse, not trusting in his abilities and ready to wait for God.

### Application

From these passages we can draw some important truths.

- If I want to bear genuine spiritual fruit for God in my life, I must begin by abandoning my clever ideas on how to do it. Only by dying to my natural cleverness, winsomness, passion and so on, can I hope to bear genuine fruit. This does not mean that I will never use my intellect, it means that I must let God direct my powers, not instigate my own ideas then seek to implement them by prayer and effort.
- The application of a sovereign atonement to us results in redemption, justification and adoption. There is no possible way that this can be merited to us and cannot lead to rewards. Yet rewards are clearly promised to those who die to themselves and follow Christ as true disciples. It is the salvation of the soul, the obedience in sanctification which leads to rewards. As I utilise my talent, my pound I will be rewarded (pound = *mina* in NKJV; see Matt 25:14ff; Lk 19:11ff).<sup>7</sup>

We can also draw out some important questions to ask ourselves:

- Am I familiar with the concept of dying to my own desires, ideas, and strengths?
- What was the last thing in my personality which I submitted to the cross and left it to die?
- Do I rush in to 'spiritual' strategies in the church which solely emanate from my own ideas? How do I know that my current plans are from God?
- Am I always confident in spiritual matters, un-phased by events?
- Am I concerned to save my reputation at all costs or can I let it die?
- Could I lose everything, let everything die, and still love God?
- How do I view saints who have seemingly let their ministries go into death when they could have been 'successful'?

## A Commentary by Paul

Paul tends not to use the same terminology for this as Jesus and Peter. He had a deeper revelation of the teaching of Christ than Peter was granted as Peter readily admits (2 Pt 3:15-16). This was in accordance with Jesus' promise to reveal his final teaching later through the Spirit to his chosen apostles (Jn 14:26). Paul was the last of the '*apostles of the lamb*', (1 Cor 15:8; Rev 21:14).

---

<sup>7</sup>The parable of the talents relates to spiritual gifts and natural abilities ('*to each according to his own ability*'), as various amounts are given to differing believers; but in the parable of the ten pounds, the exact same amount is given to all the disciples, this is the value of a life which we all have to invest, not varying amounts of gifts.

Paul explains about the progression of sanctification as a putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new man (in Christ). This is clearly the same as dying to ourselves.

**Eph 4:22-25**

*22 Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,*

*23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,*

*24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

*25 Therefore, putting away lying ....*

Sanctification is twofold: firstly it is a putting off of our old lifestyles and natural inner resources; secondly it is a putting on of the life of Christ in true godliness. This is why the Christian life is to be lived by faith (Rm 1:17), I must believe what I cannot see, that the strength of my life is being undercut as I choose to live by the power of Christ's life. The action of this is not a vague passivity but a deliberate choosing: not giving in to my weaknesses, mistrusting my own strengths but depending upon the sufficiency of Christ. The more we obey in denying ourselves, the more we learn and mature so that the pathways of our thinking are redirected (mind renewed).

**Col 3:5-12**

*5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

*6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,*

*7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

*8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*

*9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*

*10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*

*11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*

*12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering....*

**2 Cor 5:14-17**

*14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;*

*15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

*16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.*

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

**Rm 6:1-13**

*1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

*2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

*3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?*

*4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

*5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,*

*6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

*7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

*8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*

*9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.*

*10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

*11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.*

*13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

#### **Rm12:1-2**

*1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

*2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

The thrust of Paul's teaching is that the old life must be put off, in practice, by a deliberate choice and action since the basis of it's life is already dead, co-crucified with Christ on the cross.

The soul thus contains two men (natures): our old Adamic nature and our new, recently birthed life in Christ. This new life is immature and growing. The more we choose to put this life on, the more it grows to be like Christ. We die to ourselves, are broken in the strength of our old life; we see a manifestation of the resurrected life of Christ in our new life. Just as Gideon's earthen vessels were smashed to reveal light in darkness which confounded the enemy, so the believer gives himself to be broken and die, for the life of Jesus to be revealed in his soul by the fruit of the Spirit.

#### **2 Cor 4:6-18**

*6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

*7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*

*8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*

*9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed --*

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,

14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

### **Mortification is by the Spirit**

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death [mortify AV] the deeds of the body, you will live.*

(Rm 8:13)

‘Mortify’ means ‘to put to death’, and is only translated as ‘mortify’ in this verse by AV, hence the more colloquial translation by the NKJV. The word *thanatoo* appears 11 times in the Greek NT and always means ‘to kill’. It is used of the martyrdom of persecuted believers (Matt 10:21) as well as the plan to crucify Christ (Matt 27:1). Puritan and reformed preachers have written much on the doctrine of mortification but the use of such words alienates the modern generation and clouds the connection between Paul’s teaching here and Peter and James’ teaching elsewhere.

This verse makes clear that, although we are challenged by God to put our old nature to death by denying ourselves, this is only achieved with the help of the Holy Spirit, whose especial job it is to empower our sanctification. Denying ourselves needs grace and putting on Christ requires power.

This verse is a clear parallel to the words of Christ: we must deny our flesh or we will die, but as we deny ourselves, we gain life. The life to be gained is the fulness of spiritual life in Christ, full of peace and truth. If we fail to deny ourselves by taking up our cross, our lives will be as good as dead; but if we put to death the old nature in practice, we will know the power of eternal life day by day.

## **Spiritual fruit**

The life of Christ cannot be seen by men whilst it is in a man’s spirit. It must be revealed in a form that men can see, touch and hear. That life must be revealed by the soul. The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ: love, joy peace, patience (long-suffering), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness (gentleness) and self-control. These virtues are released through death, through the cross:

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness,*

*faithfulness,*

*23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

*24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)*

*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Rm 13:14)*

As the flesh (here, our old Adamic life) is put off (considered dead and crucified), the fruit of the Spirit can begin to form by experience in my soul. What is essentially, forensically and germinally true in my spirit (the new life of Christ), begins to be manifest in my soul - I become patient like Christ, loving like Christ, kind like Christ. God thus has a testimony to the world, a testimony which previously was only visible to angels in my spirit. This is the point of sanctification - testimony to God on the earth.

## What are the pastoral implications of all this?

It is vital that a professed understanding of the clinical details and nuances of scripture don't end in merely making an exegetical point. There must be an application of all this or the words become just hot air. It is my contention that a proper understanding of what the Bible means by the salvation of the soul, self denial, putting of the old man and taking up the cross is crucial to a proper Christian walk. Without an understanding of, at least, the key principles discussed here there can be no proper sanctification, no true walking in the Spirit. Occasionally, one meets believers who live outwardly godly lives but do not understand what they are doing and have a poor grasp of God. They are sincerely seeking to obey objective commands, including to take thoughts captive, deny themselves etc. but their lives are legalistic and lack spiritual power. It is good that they seek to walk well, but it will be better if they understand why one needs understanding and grace to do so.

In the case of pastors, it is absolutely critical that they understand these doctrines or they will be unable to lead the flock forward into true spiritual living. The Biblical church leader must be able to impart knowledge and understanding or he will not feed God's people at all (Jer 3:15). A pastor after God's own heart will instruct in Biblical knowledge first and foremost.

Apart from being able to explain the texts accurately, very often an understanding of the manifestations of soul and spirit will enable a pastor to open up an otherwise intransigent counselling situation. Time after time one meets Christians who are seeking to run the race with a lead weight on their feet. They are trying to perform spiritual duties in the strength of their human soul. This is often seen in the unspiritual worship present in so many modern churches, a 'worship' dominated by: fleshly zeal, passionate emotions, sentimentality, wilful influence, pride, pseudo-intellectuality and so forth. It is not only charismatic churches which fail here, frequently reformed assemblies applaud intellectualism and homiletics but fail to develop spiritually mature believers. At the end of the day, the pastor's task is to grow saints not to entertain with sermons.

### The need of grace

The story of David and Goliath has enthralled everyone for three thousand years. It is an archetypal saga of good triumphing over evil despite the overwhelming force of the enemy. David thus epitomises the grace of God in believers; all he had was conviction (faith) in his task and five smooth stones. The smooth stones themselves had experienced the 'suffering' of the water's rage and had all their rough edges worn down over many years. Their number (5) represents the Biblical number of grace - divine strength out of human weakness. David had no chance according to the world and the flesh, thus the opposing army ranks laughed; but David overcame the fierce opposition because God was with him and supplied his need.

This supply of grace is promised to all believers in the same God:

*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Cor 9:8)*

At ever point of need, God promises to supply what is necessary in our lack:

*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)*

The Christian life is one long testimony of God being expressed in our lives through supplying grace in place of our weakness. The only thing we have to do is to recognise this necessity of grace and deny our own strengths. Yet this is the very thing which modern Christians are not being told to do. The modern emphasis is upon: feeling good about

yourself, having a positive self-image, avoiding negativity, being optimistic, being powerful. Even reformed folk fall too easily into the trap of considering natural strengths to be what is vital; hence pastors are usually professionally trained and are usually required to be articulate. Paul and Moses, however, both avoided fine sounding words and bemoaned their weakness, but had much grace. A solid theological background and clear speech are fine assets in themselves, but they are not the foremost requirements in being a good shepherd. God wants men after his own heart to be his godly under-shepherds, just like David, the shepherd-king or more importantly, just like his own Son, the good-shepherd.

Leaders must be those who do not lean upon their formal qualifications and personal strengths, but daily cry to God for a fresh supply of grace in order to work for him. And having received grace from God, they spend themselves and give it all away, confident of a fresh supply tomorrow.

### **Walking worthy requires sound spiritual knowledge**

*9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*

*10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

*11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy. (Col 1:9-11)*

As well as pastors needing a deep understanding of the scriptures to be able to lead, the Lord's people need Biblical knowledge and wisdom to be able to live right. Without knowledge people perish (Hos 4:6). The doctrines we have looked at in this paper are not mere technicalities, they are life.

There is an ability to give a sound exposition of the scriptures and yet not impart any grace to the flock at all. Ministry needs unction. The Holy Spirit will never impart spiritual power to a man who works on the basis of his flesh, but always supports the man who trusts not in himself. We need 'wisdom' and 'spiritual understanding' as well as mere head knowledge. Intellectual knowledge is only the starting point for a deep understanding of the ways of God. How many preachers yield spiritual knowledge when they preach?

The power of godly preaching does not lie in the soul; it must come from an animated spirit empowered by God. It will use the gifts of the soul: the imagination of the intellect, the emotive power of the affections, the drive and application of the will, but these alone are not enough. Saints are only built up when God's gifts (true leaders, Eph 4:11-12) minister in the power of the Holy Spirit, to encourage and edify.

Yet this is not enough either, the Lord's people must receive this ministry and build upon it. Sitting under a lifetime of sermons, no matter how good, is no guarantee of growth in grace. Believers must grow in spiritual knowledge. Knowing why the acrostic is broken in Lamentations or being able to recite the Psalms by heart is not as important as understanding God's eternal purpose and how one fits into it. Paul's desire was that we should all be: *'filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'*. We must understand the character of God and the way he works in our lives. In this we can earnestly co-operate with him and bear good fruit.

## Appendix One

### Possible Interpretations of the 'saving the soul' Texts

*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end [goal] of your faith -- the salvation of your souls.*

(1 Peter 1:8-9)

One could try to make this read that 'your faith' is really God's gift of saving faith and that the 'soul' is a generic reference to the whole man. As a result of believing in Christ, we have joy and will receive the fullness of salvation for the whole man in the future at the second coming.

But Peter's context is one of suffering and trials being experienced by the Lord's people in persecution. He applies this as being God's means of proving the genuineness of their own faith (v7). Can Peter logically be identifying the believer's own, personal, proved, worked-out faith in verse 7 and then (despite calling it 'your faith') be speaking of the gift of faith for an unbeliever's salvation two verses later? He has already referred to these saints being elect, sanctified and sprinkled in the blood of Christ in v2, and being born again believers in v3. These folk have an undefiled inheritance and are kept by the power of God (v4-5). After a logical and grammatical stop placed by translators, Peter moves on to talk about personal trials of individual faith and explains that this is part of God's plan of continuing sanctification for them which results in the salvation of the soul. He later re-applies this to exhort them to continue (v14ff) to not be conformed to former lusts, to be holy as God is holy, and to walk in reverential fear. He then emphasises that redemption was not by former religious conduct but by the blood of Christ (v18-19).

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. (1 Pet 1:22)*

It is in this context that he then mentions the above text. 'Have purified' is not an aorist tense referring to regeneration in the past, but is an active passive verb. It literally reads: '*your souls, having purified in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to brotherly love unfeigned, out of a pure heart one another love ye earnestly*'. Peter is talking about an ongoing purification which is accomplished in the soul through obedience to the truth. It is part of his exhortation to live a holy life and love the brethren and not give in to temptation to apostatise in the trial of persecution.

*Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (1 Pet 4:19)*

He returns to this theme in 4:12 when he talks of the 'fiery ordeal' of persecution suffered under the Roman Emperor Nero. This is a cause for rejoicing, as it is fellowshiping in Christ's sufferings, just as he was persecuted by Romans. He then again exhorts the believers to holy, ethical standards and closes this section with the above text. Suffering and self denial is part of trusting the soul to the will of God and must be accompanied by doing good. We were created for good works, we honour the creator by performing them.

None of these verses are about the accomplishment of redemption by Christ which we implement through the instrument of our faith, given to us by God. Apart from making no theological sense, it forms no part in the thrust of Peter's exhortation to act righteously in

suffering.

Note:

The only text that could possibly be interpreted this way is 1 Pt 1:22. Most expositors completely ignore the problem posed by Peter's mention of believers purifying their own souls; but those who do (such as John Gill) always place it in the context of conversion. So 'you purified your souls' really is a way of saying we believed in Christ. But this is untenable, partly for the reasons given above. But also note:

- Would an apostle make such a bald statement that man purifies his soul, if soul here meant soul/spirit? This suggests meritorious works.
- Though mentioned in the context of redemption, Peter finished stating the facts of Christ's redemption earlier. We were not redeemed by worldly things (v18); but with Christ's blood (v19); who was predestined for this sacrifice (v20); through grace we believed in him as Messiah; our faith and hope are now in God (v21). Peter then applies this salvation to ongoing conduct in v22. Indeed in v23 he specifically puts this conduct after regeneration.
- Purifying our souls cannot refer to the faith of conversion. In regeneration we receive a new nature - this is said to be a new heart and a new spirit. We are never said to receive a new soul - the soul is gradually changed and this is the process of sanctification (what changes if there is no separate soul?). If, as bipartite teachers insist, the soul and spirit are the same thing, how can salvation be something we achieve; how can we purify our spirit. Regeneration is something done by God outside our influence. Either this verse teaches that the soul is purified as the believer mortifies his flesh in sanctification and this is separate to his spirit which is already saved and changed where the new nature dwells; or, the believer saves himself, converts himself - 'you purified your souls'. If we fail to teach the difference between soul and spirit, we end up teaching works righteousness.
- The purifying of the soul is here said to be accomplished in a certain way - it was done, *in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren*. Loving the brethren and obeying the truth through the Spirit resulted in the soul being purified. Now expositors may get round part of this by saying that purifying the soul equates to believing the truth and refers to conversion, but what about loving the brethren. Fellow believers were not brethren when we were unregenerate. Neither is loving people a constituent part of conversion. Again the result is works righteousness.

There is no doubt that Peter is referring to something that happens after conversion. The purifying of the soul is a part of sanctification and involves obeying the truth through the Spirit that results in love of the brethren.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (Jm 1:21)*

The usual interpretation of this text would only make sense if it could be proved that James is talking to unbelievers up to this point. The thrust would then be: lay aside wickedness (repent) receive the word (believe the Gospel) and be saved.

But this makes no sense at all. Firstly, all accept that James is talking to Christians, his brethren (v2, 9) who receive wisdom from the Lord (v5), who ask God in faith (v6); for these and many other reasons all accept that James is talking to Jewish believers. But even if we could not be sure in the context, in verse 21 the word to be received, and which saves, is said to be already implanted in these people's hearts. This is not the redemption of the

cross resulting in conversion which James is talking about.

James starts talking about the problems of sin and its practical effects. He mentions: temptation (v12-13), lusts (v14-15), erring (v16) and anger (v19-20).; whereupon he exhorts his readers to take practical sanctification seriously: drop wicked behaviour (literally: *'put off filth and the abundance of malice'*) and meekly obey the word of God from the heart (literally: *'gently take hold of the inborn logos'*). This putting off of the old nature and putting on the new man James calls, *'the salvation of the soul'*. What could be clearer? This completely ties up with Peter's exhortation above and Paul's description in Ephesians that sanctification is: choosing the putting off of sinful flesh, putting on the life of Christ which results in soul salvation.

## Appendix Two

### Synonyms of the life of true discipleship

The side of death	The side of life
Dying to one's self	The salvation of the soul (Jn 12:24; Jm 1:21)
Taking up the cross (i.e. death)	Resurrection life (Mt 10:38; Phil 3:10)
Losing one's life ('soul')	Saving it to eternal life (Mt 10:39; Jn 12:25)
Putting off the old man	Putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24) = being renewed in the spirit of your mind
Putting to death your members	Putting on the new man (Col 3:5)
Crucifixion of the flesh	Walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:24-25)
Hating one's life/soul	Keeping one's life/soul (Jn 12:25)
Outward man perishing	Inward man renewed (2 Cor 4:16)
Present body as living sacrifice	Transformed by renewal of the mind (Rm 12:1-2)
Carrying about the dying of the Lord Jesus	The manifestation of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10)
Don't use members as objects of sin	Present your members as resurrected instruments of righteousness (Rm 6:13)
Accept that body of sin done away with	Walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4,6)

### Synonyms for wrong living

Loving your life (Jn 12:25)
Walking in the flesh (Rm 8:1)
Living according to the flesh (Rm 8:5)
Sowing to the flesh (Gal 6:8)
'Keeping on' the old man (Eph 4:22)
Slaves of sin (Rm 6:6)
Living for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15)

## Appendix Three

### What was changed at regeneration?

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps 51:10)*

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)*

Reformed evangelists have used the latter text for hundreds of years in explaining what takes place in regeneration, although the words are initially applied to Israel. A more particular stance is applied by Ezekiel to individual Israelites in 18:30-32,

*30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.*

*31 "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?*

*32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"*

Despite accepting that conversion clearly involves the creation of a new heart and spirit as the vital part of regeneration, theological explanations of sanctification subsequently become hopelessly confused with regeneration.

Taking the usually worthy Dabney as an example:

*[Regeneration] implants a life which the second [sanctification] nourishes and develops. It is the heart of man, or his soul, which is the seat of the first [Regeneration]. It is, of course, the same heart, which is the seat of the second [sanctification].<sup>8</sup>*

Thus regeneration occurs in the soul, which Dabney elsewhere states is the will, emotions and mind, and the soul is the same thing as the heart. Then this same heart/soul, despite having been regenerated, needs to be subsequently, progressively sanctified.

So, the standard explanation for the impact of sanctification upon man is that:

- at regeneration the whole man was changed, at least in some measure. This is explained as the whole soul (by which they really mean soul and spirit) in all its parts, which they also accept as comprising will, emotions and mind. [Already there is confusion as an organ of spirit cannot also be an organ of the unspiritual faculties of emotions or will.]
- Despite this, they then state that man still sins. But what part sins if his whole personality has been regenerated? If the soul is man's whole inner nature, what can sin if God has regenerated it? If my mind was made new, why should it think bad thoughts?
- If we say that man is able to sin, despite his whole soul being transformed, then God has failed in a work of redemption.
- If we say that the soul (soul & spirit) was renewed but then becomes impure, requiring cleansing just like a once new garment, then nothing in man was truly changed eternally, but the life Christ gives is eternal. There has to be something deeper which was eternally changed.
- If sanctification progressively and successfully deals with sin, why does Eph 4:22 state

<sup>8</sup> R.L. Dabney, Systematic Theology, chap. 25

that the old nature ‘waxeth corrupt’, ‘is being corrupted’. The old nature is never converted in scripture but destroyed. How can a regenerated soul get worse?

- Where does scripture say that the soul was regenerated?
- Either man’s soul was changed or it wasn’t. If it was changed, he could not sin as God cannot do an incomplete work. If it wasn’t changed (so that his mind, will and emotions still sin) what did really happen at regeneration (which certainly changed something)?

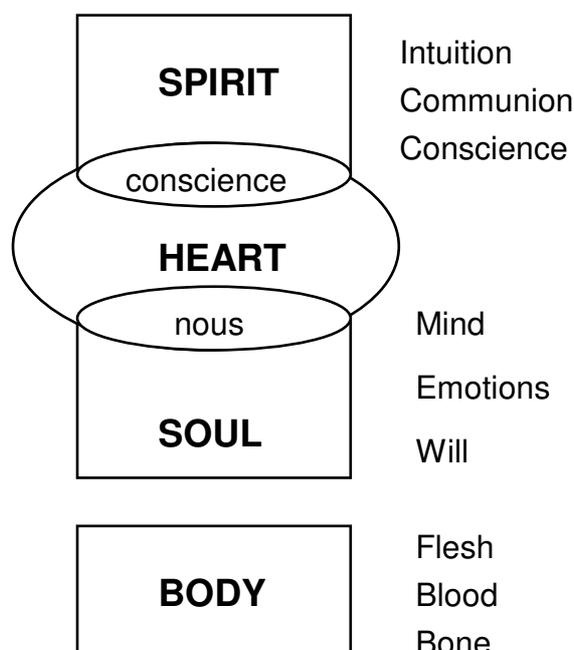
The answer is that man is tripartite, not just body and soul. Unless the soul is divided into soul and spirit there is unanswerable confusion. In this system:

- At regeneration God transforms the human heart (the absolute seat of human personality) as well as the human spirit (the seat of spiritual life); just as the texts above state.
- The soul (the organ of personal expression, comprising of mind, will and emotions) is not changed. This is left to be saved as part of the process of sanctification, finally completed at the Second Coming of Christ.
- This is why scripture can state that the old man is not only corrupt, but is being corrupted (Eph 4:22). There is a part of the soul where the old nature resides and which is never transformed but is legally ‘dead’ and finally removed at death or the Second Coming of Christ.

The obvious question is: if the soul is the personality, where is the heart if that is also the real person?

The answer is that the heart is the deepest part of the personality of man and is closely connected to the spirit (a yet deeper intuitive / communicative part of man), which is why they are transformed together. It forms the gateway from the spirit to the soul and is the nerve centre for the soul like the brain is to the body. The brain is connected to the body and commands the limbs, but it is not a limb, has no muscles and is a completely different organ. So too, the heart. The Bible explains that it is the heart which determines all our actions, it is the root and spring of our choices (Prov 4:24); because it is the gateway from God’s Spirit in my spirit, through to determining actions in my soul.

It is formed by what the Greek calls the *nous* which is part of the mind, and the conscience which is part of the spirit.



### Texts to support this

#### *What is the heart*

- The heart is the real self (Ps 4:4; Prov 4:24; Matt 12:34-35, 15:18-19).
- Heart is connected with operations of mind, e.g. to search the heart is to test the mind - Hebrew parallelism (Jer 17:10; Job 38:36, 1 Sam 2:35; there are frequent mentions of a purpose being from the heart and the mind in OT).
- The heart is connected with the human spirit (Rm 2:29; 1 Pt 3:4; Dan 5:20; Ezek 21:7; Ps 143:4; Jos 5:1; repeated mentions).
- But the spirit (the home-base of God's Spirit) is deeper than heart (Prov 20:27; Ps 77:6). Actions said to be out of the heart result from following the source in the human spirit (Ezek 13:3).
- Heart found after soul and spirit divided (Heb 4:12).

#### *What is the conscience*

- Conscience is connected with the heart (Rm 2:15, 1 Tim 1:5).
- Conscience is in the heart (Heb 10:22; 1Jn 3:20).
- Conscience connected with spirit (Rm 9:1).
- Conscience is in the spirit and is deeper than the mind (Prov 20:27).
- Conscience connected with mind (*nous*, Titus 1:15).

#### *What is the 'nous'?*<sup>9</sup>

- *Nous* is the Greek word used for the word 'mind', 'intellect', 'understanding', 'perception', 'reason'. The organ of thought and the faculty of spiritual discernment. There are other Greek words used for narrower thoughts, disposition, intention, faculty of knowledge (*dianoia*) or experiential insight, comprehension (*synesis*) and occasionally *epistamai* is used for cognisance. Various other words are used for: 'thoughts', 'consider', 'thinking' etc.
- *Nous* is especially connected with *logos* ('word', hence - expressed reason).
- The mind obviously comprises many functions, such as directing the legs to move, the

<sup>9</sup> I acknowledge a debt here to, *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Ed. Colin Brown, Vol 3, p122ff.

hands to grasp. *Nous* is not used for these lower functions but for the higher conceptual purposes of man. In Greek philosophy, *nous* was used for the highest aspect of the soul, not for the ordinary realm of thought. It is the most important part of the mind. The Greeks frequently connected the *nous* with the divine mind.

- In the Greek Old Testament, *nous* is usually connected with the heart. Hebrew language has less philosophical finesse or available words; in any case, the Hebrew emphasis is not so focused upon theoretical examination of man's inner disposition as it is with right conduct and the will.
- Most of the uses of the *nous* group of words come from Paul's writings. Like the later fathers, he sought to utilise Greek philosophical concepts, working methods and words in his exposition of anthropology and the relationship of faith with knowledge; although he rejected fleshly, Hellenistic solutions.
- Paul attaches a religious, spiritual aspect to the *nous*. It becomes a faculty of judgment in relationship with the conscience (Titus 1:15); a term almost synonymous with 'faith'. It is a corrupt mind which results in corrupt faith (1 Tim 6:5; 2 Tim 3:8). It also means the inner man, a spiritual knowledge focused upon God despite the failings of the flesh (Rm 7:23,25).
- It is the *nous* ('understanding') which the risen Christ opened that the disciples might understand (*suneimi*) the scriptures (Lk 24:45). It is the person with a functioning *nous* who understands the mystery of the divine plan (Rev 13:18, 17:9; note that *suneimi*, 'understanding', is not used here).
- Paul speaks of the *nous* of God (Rm 11:34), the *nous* of the Lord and the *noun* (accusative case) of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).
- The ability to perceive spiritual things is called *noeo* (from *nous*). The action of *noeo* is an activity of the heart (Isa 6:9-10); a spiritual recognition ('understanding', Jn 12:40, 'perceived' Rm 1:20; 'understand' Matt 24:15). Thus, knowledge of God is through the *nous* of a believer applying itself as perception (*noeo*).
- In simple terms, in the New Testament *nous* is the faculty of spiritual discernment within the mind and heart. In comparison, *dianoia* means: human understanding, the ability to think and the resulting attitude of faith. Men who lack any comprehension of God suffer from *anoia*, the absence of *nous* or *dianoia* (Lk 6:11; 2 Tim 3:9).

## Conclusion

So the heart is the deepest part of personality, the real me. It contains within it both the conscience and the *nous*. As such it is connected with the soul, yet it is also within the spirit. The spirit is deeper than the heart, the mind and the soul. Man dwells in the heart, God dwells in the spirit. This is why spiritually dead men are not physically dead men.

## Questions

1. The heart is created anew and contains the mind; but the mind is also part of the soul which is not re-created. The mind also needs continual renewing. There is confusion and contradiction here.

*Answer*

- The creation of a new heart must mean a cleansing and renewal, giving man a new start like a baby (hence born again), not a once for all perfecting. It is a new type of heart (metaphorically: flesh not stone, i.e. sensitive, not set upon sin).
- This renewal must be continued; believers can cleanse their hearts as part of salvation (1 Jn 1:9). Unbelievers cannot (Jer 13:23).
- Converts also have their mind changed and enlightened to be able to receive truth (Heb 8:10). This mind can be perverted and needs constant renewal (Rm 12:2).

2. The spirit (which is re-created and perfected) contains the conscience, but the conscience needs to be continually cleansed and matured. Explain.

*Answer*

- The perfection, of the quickening/regeneration of the spirit, must apply principally to the intuition and communion faculties in order to facilitate interaction with God and form a depository for the new man and a home for the Spirit. The Spirit could not dwell in something which is sinful.
- The conscience, like the heart is cleansed and renewed, the natural conscience is evil (Heb 10:22), it condones sin if we repeatedly, wilfully break God's law. Yet the renewed conscience can be defiled. It is a new conscience, not a perfect conscience. Like a garment (or the heart) it is perfect when new but can be seared (1 Tm 4:2), made to stumble (Acts 24:16), weakened (1 Cor 8:7,10,12) and damaged (Titus 1:15), and must be taught and developed (1 Cor 10:25-31). A goal of the Gospel is a good (1 Tim 1:5,19) and pure conscience (1 Tim 3:9).

3. If the spirit is regenerated and perfected, and if it is a holy place to provide a home for the Holy Spirit, why is the human spirit said to be able to be defiled?

- Defilement of spirit (2 Cor 7:1) must mean defilement of conscience (which is in the spirit and can be defiled, see above) resulting from wrong thinking. The Holy Spirit does not reside in the conscience but in the realms of communion and intuition. Cleansing is by renewing of the mind, and right thinking.

So, what is purely spirit is perfected: intuition, communion and the new man. But these can be ignored by us. These are the basis of our relationship with God and the seed which is to bear fruit fully at the Parousia.

What is partly spirit, or is closely connected with spirit, is changed, renewed and empowered: the heart, the conscience and the mind. But these can be defiled and corrupted and all need renewing and developing. Unbelievers cannot change these things.

The soul is not affected directly by the 're-creative' redemption of the cross. This is where the old man resides and which grows corrupt. The soul has to be denied, put under the cross and is gradually saved as it loses its influence from the old nature.

## What is it that we die to?

The soul, the true personality, is saved by putting something off, discipleship is maintained by dying to ourselves; but the apostles seem to vary the object of this mortification. The words used are: body, self, old man (nature), flesh, body of sin etc.

It is clear that in sanctification these all mean the same thing, viz. the old Adamic life that we lived exclusively in before conversion which knows nothing of grace or salvation. The words 'flesh' and 'body' themselves have a variety of meanings: the physical body, the whole man, or even a corporate group of people. So we have to be careful as we apply these words.

Sometimes Paul uses 'flesh' and 'body' interchangeably in the same verse:

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* (Rm 8:13)

Paul has used the word 'flesh' in contradistinction to the Spirit throughout Rm 8, but as he moves on to consider outward deeds (the manifestation of the fleshly principle) he chooses to use the word; 'body'. It is not the physical body which is evil, but the sinful principle which expresses itself through it. The flesh corrupts the body so that it becomes a 'body of sin', an instrument of evil (Rm 6:6, 8:10).

Sin in us has various faces. Considered as our original nature it is 'the old man'. Considered as a spiritual force it is 'flesh' not 'Spirit'. Considered as its effect on the sensual, material world it is a dead body of sin. The 'flesh' (considered as the sinful principle) and the 'old man' are synonymous as is clearly seen throughout Paul's discourses on the subject.<sup>10</sup> This is the old 'self' which we have to die to.

How is the flesh connected to the soul? The soul is a vehicle for self-expression. When it is dominated by the Spirit of God through the human spirit, the body becomes a vehicle for good works. However, when the soul is dominated by the old nature and temptation, it becomes flesh and the result in the body is a vehicle for sin.

To help us understand what is meant in practice, Paul lists the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19) or the old man (Col 3:5,9) several times, viz: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language etc. If we fail to understand the theology behind it, we have no excuse for failure because we can all see that such actions are evil and must be put off. Just attacking the deed is of no use; a branch cut off a tree will regrow. The roots must feel the blow of the axe, the principle of evil in us, the old man, must be crucified in practice.

Mortifying the old man is the removing of those things which feed it and give it strength. The more we live by the Spirit, put on the new man, the less power the old nature has. This is why crucifixion is used as a picture of denying the old life. Crucifixion was a long, slow death whereby the body was gradually deprived of strength, food, water and ultimately, breath.

The reason why we need the help of the Holy Spirit is because the root of the destruction of the old man was achieved by Christ on the cross (Rm 6:6), but we work through this principle by faith since our soul was not destroyed or finally changed at conversion. To

---

<sup>10</sup> *'The body' in the close of this verse is the same with 'the flesh' in the beginning. ... The 'body' here is the same with the 'old man' and the 'body of sin' Rm 6:6. John Owen, Works, Vol 6, p6, Banner of Truth Edition.*

implement the power of the cross in our soul, we have to live on the basis of Christ's cross by daily denying ourselves. The Holy Spirit brings this power of the cross to bear on our lives as we submit to him. Thus we save our souls.

Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version*  
© Thomas Nelson 1982

**Paul Fahy Copyright © 2001/7  
Understanding Ministries**

**Contact**

[understandingministries@yahoo.com](mailto:understandingministries@yahoo.com)