

Awake, My Soul!*Anne Steele (1717–1778)*

Awake, my soul! Awake, my tongue!
 My God demands the grateful song;
 Let all my inmost pow'rs record
 The wond'rous goodness of the Lord!

Divinely free his mercy flows,
 Forgives my sins, allays my woes;
 And bids approaching death remove,
 And crowns me with a Father's love.

My youth, decay'd, his pow'r repairs;
 His hand sustains my growing years;
 He satisfies my mouth with food,
 And feeds my soul with heav'nly good.

His mercy with unchanging rays
 Forever shines, while time decays;
 And children's children shall record
 The truth and goodness of the Lord.

While all his works his praise proclaim,
 And men and angels bless his name,
 O let my heart, my life, my tongue,
 Attend, and join the sacred song!

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Spirit, Soul, and Body, Part Three: The Human Spirit

Kevin T. Bauder

The Bible describes the human spirit much as it describes the soul. Still, some differences do appear. Comparing these descriptions will help us grasp the relationship between the two.

The Hebrew term for spirit is *ruach*. This word is also used for breath and wind. The same is true of the Greek term, which is *pneuma*. These terms also designate the Holy Spirit. For example, John 3:8 uses *pneuma* for both the wind and the Holy Spirit. Then again, 1 Corinthians 2:11 uses *pneuma* for both the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Most of the time, the context indicates how the words are being used.

The first thing to know about the human spirit is that it gives life to the body. The body dies without the spirit. According to James 2:26, the body without the spirit is dead. When Jesus raised Jairus's daughter from the dead, her spirit entered into her. That is when she returned to life (Luke 8:54–55). When the Bible depicts the death of Jesus, it says that He dismissed (Matt 27:50) or handed over (John 8:30) His spirit.

The New Testament also hints that the spirit does not need to be in a body to be alive. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of the spirits of the righteous who have been made perfect. These appear to be dead saints whose spirits are now living in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the same place where Jesus is now (12:24). Their bodies are dead and buried, but their spirits are living and perfected.

Used figuratively, the word *spirit* can become a metonymy for the whole person. Paul writes about three men: Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17). He says that they "have refreshed my spirit and yours." He later writes that the Corinthians refreshed Titus's spirit (2 Cor 7:13). Speaking to the Galatians, Paul wishes that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ might be "with your spirit" (Gal 6:18). In a parallel wish to the Philippians, Paul wishes that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ might be "with you all" (Phil 4:23). "You all" and "your spirit" function as equivalent expressions. In all these cases, the spirit is simply the person.

Other times, the word *spirit* designates the immaterial part of human nature. It contrasts with the material part, the body. Paul urges his readers



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to cleanse themselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor 7:1). While *flesh* does not always mean *body*, it probably does here. In another place, Paul contrasts married and unmarried women. The unmarried can devote themselves to holiness in both body and spirit. Marital obligations can hinder the freedom of this devotion (1 Cor 7:34). Neither of these passages suggest any contrast between soul and spirit. Both contrast the spirit with the body.

The spirit can experience affections. Jesus “sighed deeply” in His spirit (Mark 8:12). This expression denotes emotional distress. Mary’s spirit rejoiced in God her Savior (Luke 1:47). At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus was “deeply moved” in His spirit (John 11:33). When, in the upper room, Jesus announced His betrayer, He became disturbed or unsettled in His spirit (John 13:23).

The spirit also forms volitions. According to Jesus, the spirit is willing or ready (the word means *eager*) to do certain things (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38). Leaving Ephesus, Paul purposed or resolved in his spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). Both desires and determinations take shape in the spirit.

The spirit also has a special connection with the mind. In Ephesians 4:23, the apostle Paul instructs believers to be renewed in “the spirit of your mind.” At minimum, this phrase links the mind with the spirit. Specific mental operations are attributed to the spirit. For example, Jesus perceived in His spirit (Mark 2:8). The human spirit is also the faculty of self-awareness. It corresponds to the Holy Spirit’s awareness of God (1 Cor 2:11).

A special problem arises with Romans 8:16. The text says that the [Holy] Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. This verse is notorious for interpretive difficulties. Does the Holy Spirit testify *to* our spirit? Or do the Holy Spirit and the human spirit testify together as greater and lesser witnesses? Is the conclusion (that we are children of God) inferential? Or is it intuitive? However one interprets the verse, the human spirit must be the locus of some form of inner perception.

Both soul and spirit experience desires. Both experience feelings. But only the spirit is said to reason and to perceive. Therefore, I am reluctant to identify the soul completely with the spirit. The descriptions of soul and spirit show slight but real functional differences.

Nevertheless, soul and spirit overlap in many ways. Both are used of the life principle or of life itself. Both can stand as figures of speech of the whole individual. Both can feel and want. Under most circumstances the two are difficult or impossible to distinguish. The line between them is a dotted line, not a solid one. Only the razor-sharp Word of God can differentiate them. Normally, they function together as a single thing. Scripture gives no reason to claim that they differ in substance.

Scripture draws a functional distinction between soul and spirit. Yet it emphasizes their similarity and even unity. Some have suggested that the soul is the center of self-consciousness. They claim that the spirit is the center of God-consciousness. Scripture does not support this theory very well. The passages we have studied show the spirit as a center of self-consciousness. They also indicate that God is the one who shepherds the soul.

What about the body? Clearly, the body is a distinct substance from the soul and spirit. It is material, while they are immaterial. Can we say more about the relationship between body and soul? That must be the subject of a future discussion.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
