

2 – BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

In the human being, there are three distinguishable functionalities, although they cannot be separated into distinct parts like in a machine: 1) the material body (the physical aspect); 2) the invisible soul (the life force, vitality aspect, inner-self, or essence of life); and 3) the ethereal spirit (the God-centered or divine aspect).¹

A computer system can be a useful analogy. Think of the body as the hardware (processor, memory, input/output interface, power supply, etc.), the soul as the central operating system software (like Windows® or Android®), and the spirit as application program software (like the ‘Phone’ or ‘Messages’ app) that provides communication and interaction with the one true God. More on this later.

Plants and fungi have a body and a proto-soul.² Animals have a body and a primitive soul (they are capable of relating to humans and to other animals). Humanoids living prior to Adam and Eve, or not directly descended from Adam and Eve, have a body, a more advanced soul, and a primitive spirit. Human beings descended from Adam and Eve, have a God-given higher advanced soul and a God-given activated spirit (known as spiritual vigor).³

The body touches the material world through the five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Sensory data flows to the processors in the soul, resulting in imagination, conscience, memory, reason, and the ‘affections’. The spirit receives processed data (impressions) from the soul (both material and emotive in nature), and processes them further, resulting in the mystical passions of faith, hope, reverence, prayer, and worship.⁴

THE NATURE OF SOUL AND SPIRIT

The soul and the spirit have often been intermingled. While not altogether incorrect, for the purpose of clarity of thought, it’s probably best to keep them separate. Both in Greek and in Hebrew, soul and spirit are distinguished by different words (*psyche* vs. *pneuma* in Greek – *nephesh* vs. *ruach* in Hebrew).

The Bible also seems to distinguish three functionalities of the complete person. For example, Saint Paul prays to God for sanctification of the people of his church in preparation for the Lord’s coming:

May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May he preserve you whole and entire – spirit, soul, and body, irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Thessalonians 5:23

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews also provides an example:

Indeed, God’s word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12

However, it should be understood that the nature of the human being is holistic – he/she should be understood as an integrated whole rather than the sum of various separate parts. The entire human body shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God’: It is precisely because it is infused with a soul and a spirit, that a living creature becomes a human being and not just an animal. The human person, created in the image of God, and **WILLED** by God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual.

The human body is an integral element of ‘conscious spiritual existence’ – a spirit-filled organic entity – which emerges from a composite whole being comprised of body, soul, and spirit.⁵ The human body is a spiritualized material entity precisely because it is enlivened by a soul and a spirit. Though made of body, soul, and spirit, the human being is an integrated unity.

The unity of body, soul, and spirit is so profound that one has to consider the soul and spirit to be the ‘structural form’ of the body. It is because of the soul and spirit, that the body, made of living matter, transforms into a human being. There are not three natures united, but rather the integrated union forms a single nature.

NOTES

1 Biblical references to the human spirit can be found in Psalm 34:18, 142:3, 143:4,7; Isaiah 57:15, 66:2; Proverbs 15:13, 16:19, 17:22, 18:14; and Job 7:11, 17:1.

2 Life forms at a lower level of complexity than plants, fungi, and animals – the protists, bacteria, and archaea – have a proto-soul at the most fundamental level.

3. However, because of the ‘Fall’, the God-given soul and spirit are degraded in fidelity from what they were when originally given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

4. The soul is accessed through the bodily senses, the rudimentary emotions (drives and instincts), and the mind. The spirit is accessed from the mind through the soul.

5. Human nature can also be considered as ‘conscious spiritual existence’.