

ADVANCED BIBLICAL COURSE



A | D | V | A | N | C | E | D

B | I | B | L | I | C | A | L C | O | U | R | S | E

Flesh and Spirit

INTRODUCTION

Ignorance regarding the nature of the “*flesh*” and the human “*spirit*” indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit usually results in: -

- ◆ A wearisome struggle in a disciple’s life.
- ◆ Discouragement, dismay and condemnation over persistent inclination within towards sin.
- ◆ Falling into Satan’s snares, and for his deceitful schemes (Galatians 5:13 – confusing freedom and carelessness).
- ◆ An inability to submit to the lordship and authority of Jesus Christ and exercise His authority. (James 4:7)
- ◆ Lack of confidence and faith to be used of God.
- ◆ A poor testimony for the Kingdom.

MATTHEW 26:41

“*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body (flesh) is weak.*”

- ◆ The two parts in man identified – spirit and flesh.
- ◆ The nature of the problem illustrated, i.e.
 - A “*willingness*” of the human “*spirit*”.
 - The danger of the “*weakness*” of the “*flesh*.”
- ◆ The result of the weakness of the flesh re: “*falling into temptation.*”

GALATIANS 5:17

“*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.*”

The conflict between flesh and spirit, i.e. the Spirit of God indwelling man’s spirit.

GALATIANS 5:19-23

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the spirit is love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

The true nature of the “*flesh*” and of the “*spirit*” are here described.

ROMANS 7:15-25

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do but what I hate to do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

- ◆ The inner struggle between flesh and spirit experienced by Paul.
- ◆ The close link between the “*body*” and flesh – verse 23.

Note here, Paul identifies himself with his spirit in contrast to his flesh and his body. He also groups himself with his “*mind*” verses 23 & 25 and his “*inner man*” verse 22. Thus, Paul himself, his “*spirit*”, his “*mind*”, his “*inner man*” are all considered as one in this passage – arrayed in battle against his “*flesh*”, his “*body*” and the law of sin and death working through these two. The flesh has allies i.e. the “*world*” and the “*devil*.”

- ◆ The “*law of sin*” which works in the flesh and body. (Romans 7:23-25)
 - you are born with it (observe a 2 year old)
 - you cannot change it
 - you cannot get rid of it
 - you cannot reconcile it with the Spirit

I THE CONSTITUTIONAL NATURE OF MAN (THE DOCTRINE OF MAN)

In this section consideration will be given to the makeup of man – what man is. It will be endeavoured to establish what the essential nature of man is. Is he a unitary whole, or is he made up of two or more different components? If he is made up of different components, what are they?

Various words are used in Scripture to describe man in his relationship to God and to his environment, and in the structure or nature of his own being: -

- ◆ Spirit - ruach (Hebrew); pneuma (Greek)
- ◆ Soul - nephesh (Hebrew); psuche (Greek)
- ◆ Body - Soma (Greek)
- ◆ Flesh - basar (Hebrew); Sarx (Greek)

Generally it is agreed that man is basically both a material and immaterial being. It is obvious that the body is the material part of man. Soul, spirit, heart, mind, will and conscience are all facets of mans immaterial nature. It is very difficult to make hard and fast distinctions between these.

- ◆ Basic views on the nature of man

- **Trichotomy**

Believers in “trichotomism” hold that man in his essential nature is composed of three distinct elements or parts i.e. body, soul and spirit.

- The body is the physical nature of man - something he has in common with animals and plants. The body is the material part of our constitution.
- The soul is the psychological element of man. It is the basis of reason, of emotion and of social interrelatedness.
- The spirit is that element of man, which enables him to perceive spiritual matters and respond to spiritual stimuli.

The major foundation of this “tripartite” view of human nature is seen in certain passages in Scripture although Greek philosophy has contributed to its origins. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 are the two particular texts used to support this view. But what about the scriptures like Luke 10:27

- **Dichotomy**

Believers in “dichotomy” hold that man in his essential nature is composed of two parts or elements: body and soul. The body is the material part and the soul (or spirit) is the immaterial part of man.

The terms “*soul*” and “*spirit*” often seem to be used interchangeably (Luke 1:46-47) and therefore no clear distinction is made between them.

Furthermore, in Matthew 6:25 & 10:28 man is said to be made up of body and soul (psuche) whereas in Ecclesiastes 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 5:3 & 5; body and spirit (ruach, pneuma).

In Genesis 35:18, 1 Kings 17:21 and Acts 15:26, death is described as giving up the soul whereas Psalm 31:5; and Luke 23:46 describes death as the giving up of the spirit.

There are references to being troubled in spirit (Genesis 41:8 & John 13:21) and to being troubled in soul (Psalms 42:6 & John 12:27).

- **Monism**

Believers in this view, “monism,” insist that man is a radical unity. In their understanding, the Bible does not view man as composed of different parts or entities. The terms “body,” “soul,” and “spirit” are to be taken as basically synonymous. Man is viewed as a self. (Ericksen p524) It is that “body” and “soul” are not contrasting terms, but interchangeable synonyms.

- **Unity**

Believers in “unity” hold that the Bible emphasises the fundamental wholeness or unity of man’s nature and that all attempts to divide man into certain essential elements have no Scriptural warrant.

In considering the question of man’s essential make-up (nature) the issue is not whether terms such as “soul” and “spirit” may be used but whether the Bible teaches that man is composed of two or more distinct substance or parts. This is not a question of whether or not dual, triple or multiple aspects of man’s nature may be conceived. Obviously, the Bible, in using terms such as “body,” “soul,” “spirit,” “mind,” “heart,” etc., indicates that various aspects of man’s nature may be separately conceived.

It is a vastly different matter, however, when the simple duality of body and soul is taken to indicate a scientific substantial dichotomy of nature, which suggests an essential dualism in man. It is quite legitimate to use terms such as “body,” “soul,” or “spirit” to describe different aspects of man’s nature.

The evangelists (Matthew 22:37 & Mark 12:30) did not wish to indicate significant distinctions between elements in man but rather that Christ commanded people to love God with the whole being. Genesis 2:7 simply states that man was formed from the dust of the ground and that he became a living being (“soul” - nephesh) when God breathed into him. It says quite clearly that he became a living soul - that man is a soul; not, man has a soul.

The essence of man’s nature is that his being a living soul is wholly dependent on the life-giving breath of God. He is fundamentally a creature of God who can have no existence apart from the breath of God. Scripture places much emphasis on the whole man. Man is to be treated as a unity. His spiritual condition cannot be dealt with independent of his physical and psychological, condition and vice versa. Man, as a whole being, is the object of God’s love, not only his soul or spirit. It is the whole man who is restored, saved and called into the service of God. (Romans 5:7-10 & 12:1-2 & 1 Corinthians 6:8-20)

The body is not, as in Greek philosophy, regarded as the prison-house of the soul. Salvation is not escape from the physical into the spiritual. Man’s ultimate hope is the resurrection of the body. (1 Corinthians 15:12-20)

ROMANS 5:12

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all man, because all sinned.”

The “*law of sin*” came through Adam’s fall.

ROMANS 5:19

“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

The “*law of sin*” passed on to all men, for the entire human race was in Adam and Eve.

ROMANS 8:5-13

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

ROMANS 8:1-3

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.”

The answer to the problem is in “Jesus Christ” – Romans 7:25, through the “law of the Spirit of life” – Romans 8:2.

ROMANS 6:1-13

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body

to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer that parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”

- ◆ **Romans 6:9-10** – Jesus’ death defeated sin.
- ◆ **Romans 6:2-5** – in Baptism we are united with Jesus in His “*death to sin.*”
- ◆ **Romans 6:6-7** – through Jesus’ death we have been set free the “*law of sin and death.*”

II HOW TO APPLY THE POWER OF HIS DEATH TO OUR LIVES

- ◆ **Romans 6:12** – make a decision – to be through with the flesh and the law of sin. You have the choice. (cf. Galatians 6:7-8 & Colossians 3:1-4)
- ◆ **Romans 6:11** – adopt the right attitude – towards the law of sin, the flesh and the body – by setting the mind on the “*things of the Spirit.*” (cf. Romans 8:5-8; Galatians 2:20 & 5:24 & Colossians 3:5) i.e. believe the Word of God and the finished work of Jesus regarding sin – confess it, declare it.
- ◆ **Romans 6:13** – don’t make provision for the flesh and the body to express their wrong desires or meet those desires. (cf. Galatians 5:16-17)
- ◆ **Romans 8:13** – by the Power of the Holy Spirit, overpower the flesh and the body. (cf. Galatians 5:23... self-control)

MATTHEW 26:41

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

MATTHEW 6:13

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”

Do spiritual warfare.

III GOD SAVES THE WHOLE MAN

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23

“And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And may your spirit, soul and body be preserved blamelessly.