

Spiritual Life #2

Functions of the Soul and Spirit

Romans 8:13

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, what we're talking about these Sunday evenings is found in Romans 8 and verse 13. Maybe you'd look at that verse since one of the great purposes that you'll find God fulfilling among us is that He'll light up verses of scripture for us all that we've never understood before. So, it's very important to bring the Bibles, or use the Bibles that we have in the auditorium here. Romans 8:13 runs like this: "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."

I think many of us in these days are all preoccupied with the crisis experience that we did have or we didn't have. "I was born of the spirit; I wasn't born of the spirit. I was baptized with the spirit; I wasn't baptized with the spirit. I do speak in tongues; I don't speak in tongues." We're preoccupied with all those issues. And this verse takes the feet right from under us on all those issues, because it states plainly it doesn't matter what you've been baptized into; it doesn't matter what you've been born of; it doesn't matter what tongues you speak in or don't speak in; 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.

The purpose of us gathering together on Sunday evenings is to talk about what it means to walk according to the Spirit. Brothers and sisters, I think that many of us so-called Christians are actually dead. We have all the words of Zion on our lips, and we go to all the right meetings and services and we can testify to the right crisis experiences. But we no longer walk after the Spirit. We've been walking after the flesh for years...and we're dead. We're dead to God. That's why we have to go to so many meetings. We can't get anything from God for ourselves. That's why we have to read so many books, because we're not getting anything from God for ourselves. We've ceased to walk after the Spirit. So why we gather together on Sunday evenings is to talk about how to walk after the Spirit.

What we've shared up to this moment is that the Bible teaches us that there are three levels to our personalities. I won't elaborate on it in detail, but it is I Thessalonians 5:23 and it runs, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those are the three levels of the personality that we can operate on.

I encouraged you last Sunday not to have purely academic discussions about whether we're trichotomous or dichotomous and whether the soul is a separate entity or the spirit is a separate entity. I'm asking you to regard it in a practical, spiritual, everyday manner. If you push me and say, "Is this the only view of the personality?" I say, bring another one; let's call it "cookie," and "cream," and "ice cream." Call it anything, but at least you need to see that God teaches us that we exist on three different levels of our personality. And it's possible to experience different things on different levels.

You can experience the wetness of water with your body but you can't experience the wetness of water

with your spirit or your soul. You can experience in a real way algebraic equations in your soul, but you can't experience them in your spirit. And the important thing that we saw last Sunday was you can experience God in your spirit, but you don't experience God in your soul. You express Him through your soul, and you express Him through your body. But you experience Him in your spirit.

You remember we said that it was very like the plan of the temple. There is a verse in I Corinthians 6:19 that tells us we have something in common with the Old Testament church of God. 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own." Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which you have within you? And in the Old Testament temple, the body was the Outer Court, or the public place, where there was daylight. Everything could be seen. You can see all that your body does with no difficulty at all. My hand is up -- it's down. I hear that -- I don't hear it. It's something that you can observe easily without difficulty.

The soul in the Old Testament temple was simply the Holy Place. There was still light there -- less light, but there was light. The light of candles, and the showbread was in the Holy Place. The priest could go into the Holy Place, and you could still see things. So it is with the soul; you can look into your soul. Your soul has thoughts in it. You can look into your soul and see those thoughts and examine them.

The Holy of Holies, in the Old Testament temple, was absolutely dark because God was there. Everybody in the Outer Court and in the Holy Place believed by faith that God was in the Holy of Holies working and revealing himself. Everything that went on in the Outer Court, out here, and in the Holy Place, went on according to the revelation that was received in the Holy of Holies.

Unless the veil was torn, that divided the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, nobody could know what was going on in there. Only God could tear that veil in twain, you remember, when Jesus died. So it is impossible for us to see into the Holy of Holies, unless from time to time God lets us know what is going on in there.

It is in the Holy of Holies in your spirit that you meet God. It is in the Holy Place, or the soul, that you meet yourself. You are conscious of yourself through your soul powers. You're conscious of the world through your body. But you're conscious of God through your spirit. And God works there as you exercise faith.

Now, loved ones, what happens with us all, and what is happening far and wide in Christendom today, is that brothers and sisters are trying to contact God in their souls. That's why they get all caught up with, "Do I feel God?" And that's why they have doubts at times as to whether God is there or not. And that's why they get caught up in introspection. The truth is, God works in your spirit by faith, by your faith.

Now, I know you hear me saying that, but you don't really believe it. Because tomorrow morning in prayer, you'll get down in prayer and you'll think, "Is God hearing me?" Now actually, if you're operating the way God wants you to, you'll never ask that question. You go in absolute faith that God is keeping His promise that, "If you speak to me I will listen to you. If you pray a prayer according to my will you can have complete confidence that I hear you." God wants you never to look in to see if He's there. That's like Lot's wife, looking back. You're turned into a pillar of salt. Your whole spirit, your life, becomes bitter. All that goes on in the spirit goes on by faith, by your faith, that God is doing what He said.

At the beginning of your Christian life, you hear Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." You've only got to open the door by confessing your sins and repenting. Then you can be sure Jesus is going to come into your heart. If you start looking into your heart to see if He's there, you'll find only doubt and emptiness. The reason is that no man can see into the Holy of Holies. We cannot see into our own spirits. It's just that God of His own gracious goodness at times rends the veil in twain, and lets us sense something that is coming out from our spirits.

But loved ones, honestly, it would save you endless pain and grief and depression if you would just accept that God works in your spirit. You cannot tell what is going on in your spirit by looking. The only thing you can look with, as you'll see in a moment, is your mind and the mind cannot see deeper than itself. The spirit is deeper than the mind.

Now if you can only grasp that, it will save you a lot of agony. You cannot tell what is going on in your spirit. God works in your spirit as you obey Him and believe. That's all. And that's it! If you say to me, "You mean, I go blind?" That's it. You go blind. You just obey God and you believe that He is keeping His promise and working in your spirit, and from time to time it will come up from within your spirit, little assurances. The Spirit of God will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, but at times it won't. You think you have complete control of it. You think you can dial a number and say, "Give me assurance" and then God's Spirit should immediately witness.

Now loved ones, the Father is in charge of this operation, it's not you. God knows how much consolation you need. The dear old saints, like Thomas A' Kempis, would talk in those terms. He would say, "This morning, God granted me the consolation of His presence." I thought of us with our instant coffee and instant everything. Let's have the house of our choice, and let's have everything when we want it. We have no idea of the way God works. The old saints talk in terms of "God granted me the consolation of His presence." We think we can dial a number and get the consolation of His presence just like that.

Now loved ones, that's not our right. It's not our right; it's God's great gift to us. Our right is one only and that's to walk blindly by faith and obedience. That's it. And the Father will keep His life in our spirits.

That's where we got to last day, loved ones, and what I suggested that we would do today, or this evening, is to discuss the spirit and the three main functions of the spirit, and the soul and the three main functions of the soul. So if you just get down to some concentrated Bible study now, perhaps we could cover that.

If you would look at John 4:23 you'd see probably what is the primary function of the spirit inside us. It's the function that we've been discussing now. John 4:23, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him."

Worship takes place in your spirit. Or, communion with God takes place in your spirit. So the basic function of the spirit is so that we will be able to commune with God. You can see that at times it helps to clap hands, but really, it's irrelevant. It's nice to clap hands if the Holy Spirit tells us to clap hands, but it isn't essential to clap hands to commune with God.

Actually, perhaps the deepest communion with God is Thomas' when he stood before Jesus having seen the holes in His side and the holes in His hands, and said, "My Lord and my God." And perhaps the deepest part of communion for us all is absolute silence before God because communion takes place there in our spirits. That's how we get to know God.

Could I just say that a lot of you are empty, desperately empty, even though you call yourself Christians, because you don't ever commune with God. That's right. You don't ever commune with God. You say prayers; you say verbal prayers; and you say thought prayers. But you don't stay on your knees long enough to get through to God. And do you see that your mind is so active all through the day that you have to let it run out before you get to the level of your spirit. So it takes time to commune with God.

Brothers and sisters, the 15 minute prayers are only good if you are having longer prayer times through the week sometime. But 15 minutes...it's hard to do much with 15 minutes. You've just got the sleep out of your eyes, and you've got some of the creaks and pains out of the body, and you've succeeded in forgetting that the car won't start and that you're going to have trouble with it, and it takes about 15 minutes to part from all those things in order to begin to commune with God in your spirit. Your spirit rises up to God. It rises up from the depths of your being. And it takes awhile to do that. Sometimes you have to go a little by verbal prayer and by thought prayer. But every time you go before God you should look forward to a time when the spirit will begin to commune with Him. And you'll sense a communion. Now, I really mean that you can know that you are speaking to Jesus directly. And you can know that He's looking at you and listening to you. That's what I mean. You can know it. You can know that He's doing that. There comes a time when your spirit rises up and begins to commune with God. Now I think many of us are missing it because of sheer lack of time. But communion with God takes place in our spirits.

Then, loved ones, Mark 2:8 is another function of our spirits. "And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, 'Why do you question thus in your hearts?'" Jesus didn't hear them questioning; He perceived in His spirit. And that "knowing" that is deeper than the perception of the mind or the eyes is intuition. That is the second main function of our spirits -- intuition. Our use of it in connection with you dear ladies would give us the meaning of it. We talk about a woman's intuition. She knows something -- she doesn't know why she knows it -- she just knows it. And often we men will complain about you because you seem to have such terrific wisdom and you know the right car to buy after we've made the mistake. You knew it deep, deep down in your intuition. That is a human action of the human spirit and many people have that.

When the spirit is touched by the Holy Spirit, intuition enables you to know what God wants you to do without long discussion and analysis of situations. It's a deep knowing. "I know He wants me to do that." We know, we know we should go to this place even if everything falls on top of our heads. Even if it is a complete failure, we still know that's what God wants. Now, that's intuition. That's what we need in connection with guidance in our lives. If I could even get you to stop running around picking pages out of Scripture looking for guidance, or looking at books or scouring maps of the world, or talking to all your friends, or all your guidance counselors. If you'd just stop that and see that your God put you here on this earth for a certain purpose. If you'll stay long enough with Him in prayer, He'll tell you what to do. That brings a stability and a sense of security that nothing else does.

If I could say to you again, I think a lot of us here are running around doing things that God

doesn't want us to do at all. Because we don't spend time before Him in prayer, we have no intuition at all. We rarely use our intuition; we've rarely acted upon it, and so it's pretty dead. And when we want to know what to do, we talk to all kinds of other people, and we seek advice from everybody. If I could share this even in spirit-filled circles, this is what has elevated spiritual leaders into a non-scriptural position of superiority.

Lots of us here won't go to the trouble of seeking God at length in prayer. Instead we go to our spiritual elders and expect them to seek. Then they are forced into a position where they have to get guidance for us. They become kings where they shouldn't be kings at all over other people's lives. It's in the spirit that you can know what God wants. Each one of us can know that. You can know what God wants you to do apart from the analyzing of your mind and your thoughts.

Another function, and the third main function that we'll deal with tonight, of the spirit, is found in I Corinthians 5:3, "For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment."

And so Paul is present in the spirit and he is able to judge. He is able to tell what is right or wrong because his spirit is present with him in this case. And that is the third function: the factor in us that tells us what is right and what is wrong.

Our conscience, loved ones, belongs to our spirit. Our conscience will judge us according to what God is telling us through intuition. The times of communion that we have with Him, and after those times, God will give us in our intuition clear guidance about things. Our conscience is interesting for it will judge us in the light of our intuition. A lot of us come under condemnation because we don't act according to our conscience. Our conscience seems to be telling us some things that it's not telling somebody else and so we judge for ourselves, "Oh, well, we must be wrong. We must be wrong if that's happening." And we don't realize that there is a dear verse, I think it's in I Corinthians 10:23 that would help you to see the importance of abiding by your own personal conscience. I Corinthians 10:23, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up."

Now, we're all at different stages in our relationship with God. And your conscience will tell you to do things that the conscience isn't telling a brother who lives with you or a sister who works with you. And your growth in your spirit and the strengthening of your spirit will depend on you acting according to your conscience.

You'll see that very clearly if you look back to I Corinthians 2, where there's a verse that makes further elaboration on that. I Corinthians 2:15, "The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one." Do you see the meaning of that? The spiritual man judges all things through his conscience. He knows what is right and wrong. But he himself is judged by no one else, because no one else can tell what his conscience is saying to him.

Now, I agree with you, that there are some clear laws of God about murder and adultery and fornication that are in black and white in Scripture. But I'm assuming that if we are children of God we're at least obeying those. What I am saying to you is further than that. Your conscience now, as you begin to walk deeper after the Spirit with Jesus, is telling you things that He is not telling anybody else. If you don't respond to that, you will grieve the Spirit within you and you will go dead in your own Christian life.

I suspect that a lot of us have lost a sense of aliveness in our relationship with God because we've

daily grieved our conscience. We have daily ignored our conscience. Now do you see that He will tell you all kinds of things that He'll tell nobody else? He'll tell you not to look in certain places, and He won't be saying that to somebody else. Somebody else will be able to read Time magazine and your conscience will say to you, "Just enough. Your mind is being dissipated in all directions. Just leave that. Just leave it. You'll be able to take it up again, but just leave it." He'll say to you, other people can watch that program on television, that's all right. But you, I want you not to watch it. They'll be all kinds of little things that you can do personally for your Lord. And if you do it, you'll find a new spirit of life coming up within you.

Brothers and sisters, respect your conscience because your conscience is not that of a pagan. A pagan conscience can only go according to the information that the mind has. But a Spirit-filled conscience goes according to the guidance that God has given you through the intuition of your spirit. So respect your conscience. I'm preaching to myself when I say that, because you see, we're all at different stages. And as we go to different stages, there will be certain things that you can do that I can't do, and certain things that I can do that you can't do. And so the spiritual men and women can't judge each other, but they do have to be judged by their own conscience and they have to act according to that conscience.

Brothers and sisters, if you would do that, you would find the body of Christ becoming such a combination of exciting individualistic personalities that you would not believe such a group of people could exist. But we are becoming conformed to the image of this world, the world of Christendom. Because we're becoming little robots who do what everybody else tells us to do, and are failing to grow in our own spirits. So the conscience judges according to the intuition of his spirit. Loved ones, you have to abide by your conscience; you have to abide by your conscience.

That's the way those three operate together. You can see why when you don't commune with God, you're virtually giving up the ship. Really. When you miss prayer during the day you may run for two days, but I doubt if you can run for more than two days. I think you bluff yourself when you think you're still operating in the spirit after two days of prayerlessness. I think you're bluffing. I think I was bluffing when I did it. I think we continue to operate in our souls because there is a great deal of soul Christianity around. There are a lot of Christians who are "soul Christians." And that's what we do. We continue to operate on a level of our souls, but we're no longer operating in a level of our spirits, because communion with God and our spirit is the basis of intuition and it's the intuition that our conscience judges. When we don't commune with God for one day or two days, you're operating in the soul level after that. You still call yourself a Christian, but actually, you don't have any spirit life to communicate to anyone else.

You fall into the same situation as many other pagans because, do you see, pagans have spirits; they have spirits. The only difference is their spirit is not related to God and is not energized by His Holy Spirit. But their spirit is very much alive, so it's important for you to realize that the scripture does not praise or admire people who are spiritually alive. There are lots of people who are spiritually alive to evil spirits. People like Jeanne Dixon [a medium in the newspaper] are very alive to all kinds of spirits. Spiritualists are very alive to a whole spiritual world that has nothing in common with Jesus. The scripture does not praise people who are just spiritual. It praises people who are spiritually alive to God.

Everybody has a spirit that is more or less alive. Some people are very spiritual, some are not very spiritual, but don't be misled because people are interested in spiritual things. There are all kinds of séances, all kinds of revelations that evil spirits give, all kinds of miracles that evil

spirits can perform through people. They make them very spiritual people, but they're not spiritually alive to God. So the pagans do have spirits.

However, the great majority of us have spirits that are so weak and so sick that they're virtually nonexistent. And so in most people's lives, (and of course, I'm asking you to be careful of your own), the soul is the stronger factor. The spirit is almost completely crushed under the heel of the soul. I hesitate to say it, but I'm afraid that the great majority of Christians have spirits that are crushed into virtually nothingness. Let me tell you a secret. They are among even the charismatic Christians. I think there are great numbers of loved ones who are regarded as charismatic Christians and their dear spirits are dead. They have no real daily communion with God in prayer. They exist on the level of the soul all the time. And so in the Bible you'll find that there are some verses that refer to functions of the soul and yet it uses the word "spirit". That's to show you plainly that there are people who so die in their spirits that their souls actually do the things that their spirits should be doing.

Therefore the function of the soul becomes attributed to the spirit and the function of the spirit becomes attributed to the soul. You'll find one in Proverbs 17:22. "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Well, of course cheerful is something that the emotions experience, not that the spirit experiences first. And a downcast spirit really refers to a downcast or depressed emotion. Depressed emotion dries up the bones. But the word "spirit" is used because in this person in whom this is true, the spirit is virtually dead altogether. And that's what we find in our own lives. When your spirit becomes crushed, you come to a meeting like this and you worship in the soul. That's right. Because your spirit is only made alive by the Holy Spirit pouring in as you commune with God and spend time with God. But if you don't do that, and you come out to this service with no prayer preparation, then you actually worship in your soul.

Now, I'll just show you very quickly, loved ones, the functions of the soul. And you can find them easily if you look at some of these verses. It's Psalm 41:2. "The LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; thou dost not give him up to the will of his enemies." The Revised Standard Version translates it "will". The word is "nephesh" in the Hebrew, and it is N-E-P-H-E-S-H. It means "soul." And that's why that verse reads in Hebrew, "Thou dost not give him up to the soul of his enemies." And the Revised Standard Version, of course, translates it "will."

The will is one of the functions of the soul by which you're determined to do this or do that, to make judgments and to execute actions in your own life and to say words. Your will determines what you do. Your will is the central general in your personality that directs all the other parts of your soul and your body. So the will is the function that makes decisions and that executes action. It is in a way, the key point together with the conscience, of your own personality. So the will is one of the functions of your soul.

Then if you look at Proverbs 3:21 you'll find another function of the soul. "My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion; let them not escape from your sight, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck." Wisdom and discretion are life for your soul. Wisdom and discretion are found in the mind. That's where you exercise wisdom and discretion. The mind with the ability to size up situations, judge things, reason, argue, debate and think is a function of the soul. So you have the will and you have the mind.

The third one, that we should glance at before we finish this evening, is I Samuel 18:1. In fact,

Psalm 42:5 might be better to look at. Cause it's one that's very relevant to many of us. Psalm 42:5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God." Your emotions are the third main function of your soul.

Brothers and sisters, do you see the whole danger? God alone can give life to your spirit. He does it on the basis of two conditions that you fulfill. One is belief; you must believe that He's working. You must not doubt and try to look in and find out if He's working; you must believe. And two, you must obey. If you believe and obey, or you trust and obey in daily Bible study and prayer, His Spirit comes into your spirit. He shows you in your intuition what you should do. Your conscience constrains you to do that. Your will obeys your conscience and directs your mind and emotions to make your body do what God wants. That's His plan.

But, if you don't trust and obey, if you don't believe and obey Him, if you start looking in and doubting whether He's there or not, if you disobey Him in the matter of daily prayer and Bible study, if you disobey Him in some other part of your life, your spirit becomes crushed after about one or two days. It becomes crushed deep down.

But, the old thing that comes to the rescue is up here in the mind with all kinds of murky reasons. "Well, I'm a Christian." "Well, the person in the office thinks I'm a Christian." "Well, I know when this discussion comes up, I know the Christian line on this." So with the old mind you express the Christian line, "Yes, I'm against that." And, "Well, at least I witnessed. My prayer life is in bad shape; I'm not very aware that the spirit is coming through me, but at least I said the right thing." Probably you spoke death.

It's very hard to operate up here at all as a Christian and spread anything but death. That's usually what you do. Unless you're coming from a spirit that is alive and that is in daily communion with God, anything that you produce by your soul is worthless. It has no spiritual life because your soul is your great self. It's your SELF. That's the way you operated before you even became a child of God. That's the way the four billion people in the world operate. They operate, most of them, on the basis of their soul with a very few on the basis of spiritual contact with evil spirits. A much smaller few operate on the basis of the contact of their spirits with God's Spirit.

So, loved ones, you can see how all important that old hymn is, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." I pray that this week you will be Spirit-filled people. Not people who were filled with the spirit three months ago or five years ago. I pray that you'll be people filled with the Spirit each day of this week. I pray that you'll stay with God long enough to receive that dear Spirit of His.

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, I ask you for my brothers and sisters and for myself, that you'll make it clear to us through the blessed conscience that you've given us; you'll make it clear to us when we're not acting according to the intuition that you're giving us. Lord, whatever everybody else is doing, what does that matter? It matters nothing. Lord, we thank you that you've called us to personal obedience, to a personal Lord. We would commit ourselves to obeying you personally so that our spirits may be filled with your Spirit and our souls may express the life that is coming from you. We ask this, that we may be spirit Christians and not soul Christians, for your glory. And now the may the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with

each one of us, now and throughout this coming week. Amen.