

DEREK PRINCE
MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Teaching Letter

Are You Spiritual or Soulish?



Part 3/4

Our Value, Our Worth

By Derek Prince

This Teaching Letter series, *Our Value, Our Worth*, aims to be a source of blessing to you as you discover the value God places on each and every one of us. We began this series by going back to the very beginning of man. We saw that creation, as a whole, was spoken into existence by the word of God. The creation of Adam, however, was uniquely different.

> And the Lord God formed [molded] man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [literally, a living soul]. (Genesis 2:7)

We saw as well how the Scriptures reveal the three areas which make up the total human personality: spirit, soul, and body. In this letter, as we examine how God intended each aspect of our personality to function, we will focus on one particular issue: the relationship between our spirit and our soul.

The Original Pattern

In the original pattern of creation, the spirit of man came directly from God, related directly to God, and enjoyed a perfect ordered relationship with God. God moved upon man's spirit; man's spirit moved upon his soul; and his soul directed his body. Through the devastating effects of man's rebellion, however, his spirit was compromised, and his soul took over control. As a result, unregenerate man is now controlled by the three functions of his soul: the will, the intellect, and the emotions.

When God reconciles a person to Himself, His purpose is to restore the original order, by which He once again relates directly to the person's spirit, whose spirit in turn moves upon his soul, and the soul moves upon the body.

This explains the words of David in Psalm 103:1:

> Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Through faith, David's spirit had been reunited with God and was eager to worship Him. So his spirit stirred up his soul to move upon his vocal organs to utter the appropriate words

of worship. This is a good example of the original pattern of creation at work in David's life.

Harmony versus Tension

So long as this pattern is in place, where our spirit remains in submission to God and our soul remains in submission to our spirit, we function in harmony with God and with ourselves. But if at any time we reassert our rebellion against God, our soul is no longer in submission to our spirit. The result? Our inner harmony is broken. All of us face this constant tension between the spirit and the soul.

The Greek of the New Testament has a special adjective, formed directly from the Greek word for soul, *psuche*, which describes action initiated by the soul. The adjective is *psuchikos*. The logical way to render this in English would be soulish, but unfortunately such a word does not formally exist in the English language.

Consequently, English translations of the New Testament have used a variety of different words and phrases: *natural, sensual, worldly, unspiritual, worldly-minded, without the spirit,* and to *follow their natural instinct*. English readers, for the most part, have no way of knowing that these seven different words or phrases all translate one and the same Greek word.

For the sake of clarity, throughout the rest of this letter I will use the word soulish.

This will emphasize the tension in the New Testament between that which is spiritual and that which is *soulish*.

A Spiritual Body

In 1 Corinthians 15:44–46, Paul uses this word three times to point out the difference between our present body, which is natural (soulish), and our resurrection body, which will be spiritual. A soulish body is one upon which the spirit has to move through the soul. A spiritual body would be one in which the spirit moves directly upon the body, without having to work through the soul.

For example, the cherubs which are described in Ezekiel chapter 1, apparently have spiritual bodies.

> Each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go. (v. 12)

And again, further down in the same chapter:

> Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went. (v. 20)

Apparently that is the type of body believers will have after resurrection. No longer will our spirit have to urge our soul to direct our body to make the appropriate response. Our body will directly respond to the decision of our spirit. We will be like Ezekiel's cherubs: we will go directly, without turning, wherever our spirit wills to go. What glorious liberty!

A "Soulish" Body

There are three other passages in the New Testament where the opposition between the spiritual and the soulish is more clearly expressed. In 1 Corinthians 2:14–15, Paul says:

> But the natural [soulish] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

To understand spiritual matters, the soul is dependent upon the spirit. If the soul is out of harmony with the spirit, the realm of spiritual truth is closed off to it. Can you see how important it is that we approach truth with the right attitude? It is crucial that our soul is submitted to our spirit, and our spirit in union with God.

What happens when Christians become soulish? In his epistle Jude speaks about people in the church who "are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts ... sensual [soulish] persons, who cause divisions, not having the [Holy] Spirit" (Jude 16, 19).

When the soul of a Christian is not submitted through his spirit to God, he becomes a channel through which every kind of carnality and divisiveness can infiltrate the church. This is the true, underlying cause of divisions in the Body of Christ.

The Downward Slide

But it doesn't stop there. In James 3:15, the apostle speaks about a form of wisdom which does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual [soulish], demonic. James depicts a downward slide in three successive stages: from the earthly to the soulish to the demonic.

When Christians become earthly, they lose the vision of eternity. They cannot see beyond the affairs of this life:

success, pleasure, health, and wealth. They are only interested in what their faith will do for them in this life!

Concerning such people Paul says: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). Christians like that often consider themselves prosperous and successful. But what does God think? He considers them pitiable.

After the earthly, the next stage in the downward slide is soulish. To be soulish is to be egocentric—self-centered. For such people, the Christian faith is a way to get what they want out of life. They suppose that "godliness is a means of gain" (1 Timothy 6:5).

The soulish stage opens the way for the demonic. This is one key way in which demons infiltrate the church. The question is often asked: Do Christians ever need deliverance from demons? The words of James provide a clear answer. This downward slide from the earthly, to the soulish, to the demonic, exposes both individual believers and whole congregations to the activities of demons.

Cultivating Discernment

In many places today, the church is an ungodly mixture. No clear line is drawn between the spiritual and the soulish, and therefore there is no barrier to the demonic. Genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit are interspersed with manifestations that are clearly demonic. As a result, many sincere believers are confused and bewildered.

To protect ourselves, we must cultivate scriptural discernment. We must learn to distinguish between what is truly spiritual and what is soulish. There is only one instrument sharp enough to do this: the Word of God.

> For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Two Conditions

Further on, in Hebrews 5:14, the writer states two conditions which we must fulfill in order to exercise this kind of discernment:

> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use [practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The first condition is that we must regularly feed on solid spiritual food through the study of the whole Bible. The second condition is that we must regularly practice discernment. We must be continually alert, recognizing the spiritual forces we encounter in every situation. Discernment should be as much a part of our Christian life as prayer.

Finally, let us obey the exhortation of Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:13–14:

> Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.

What About You?

As you read these words, are you realizing that your spirit needs strengthening in order to rule over your soul? Do you want to be more like King David, who regularly exhorted his soul to praise God? If you have that same desire, let's cover this in prayer now.

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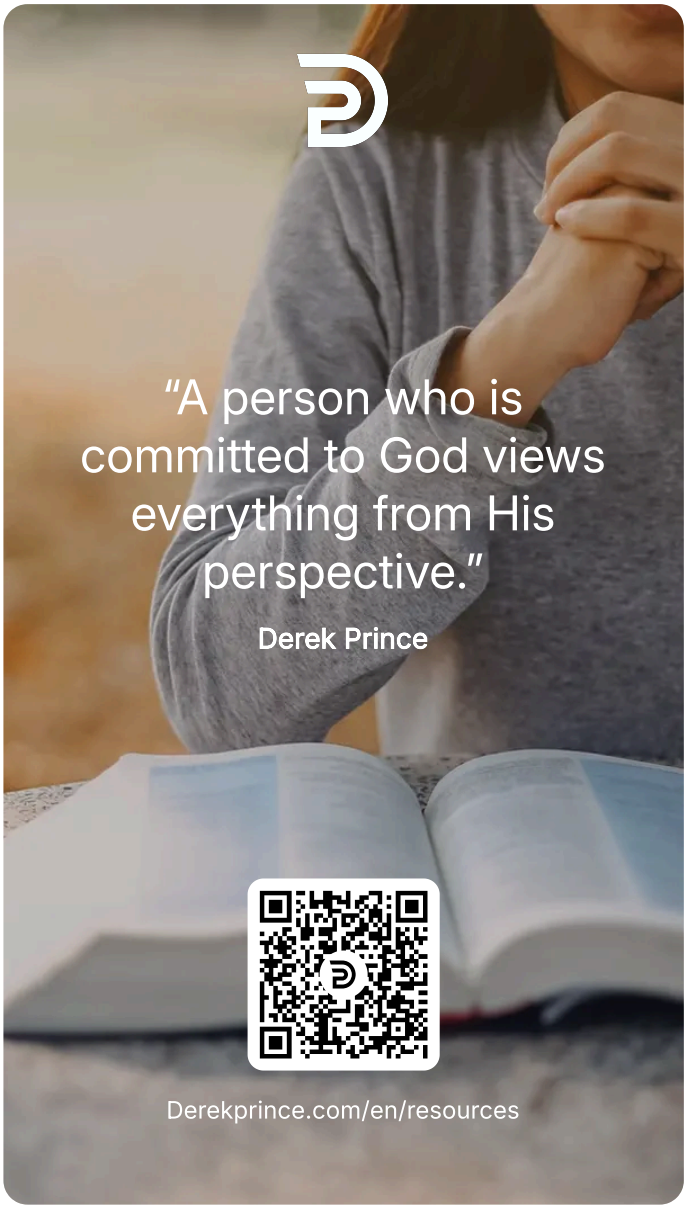

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