

**Romans (27):
Paul's use of the Indicative and the Imperative**

Introduction:

The major theme before us in this section of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* is the believer's **sanctification** by the grace of God. This is addressed from Romans 6:1 through 8:15. A very good definition of sanctification was formulated long ago and was expressed as the 35th question and answer of the **Westminster Shorter Catechism** (1647). It reads as follows:

Question #35: What is sanctification? **Answer:** Sanctification is the work of God's free grace,¹ whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,² and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.³

Sanctification begins with the believer's initial conversion through repentance from sin toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. God's work of sanctification had begun at conversion and God will complete His work after this life is finished and Christ returns. Paul wrote elsewhere: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). But how does God carry on this work of sanctification in His people? This is what we have set before us in Romans 6 and 7, and a good portion of chapter 8.

Let us rehearse what we have already covered in this section of God's Word. In Romans 6:1-5 we read of how believer's baptism signifies new life in Christ. It shows forth our union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Thus our baptism shows forth the death of who we were before conversion to Christ, before we received the new life that we now enjoy in Jesus Christ. In verses 6 through 11, which we introduced last Lord's Day, we read that God has caused our union with Jesus Christ so that we might become like Jesus Christ in holy character, in other words, so that we might become sanctified, become holy even as God is holy. We introduced these verses last Lord's Day, but let us now look at them more closely.

Romans 6:6 reads, "*We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*" Paul was telling his readers that their life as it had been before conversion came to an end. Our "old self" is who we were and how we lived before we came to Christ as our Lord and Savior; it was who we were and how we lived before we became Christians. The "body of sin" is a reference to the physical body of the Christian. The physical body with its senses is the instrument through which we sin. The "old man", or "old flesh", that you were before you came to Christ, had controlled your body of sin, using your body's senses to commit acts of sin. But because your old self was crucified with Christ, the new man that God made you now leads your body not to be a slave of sin. We may experience deliverance from the power of sin because of our union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection.

¹ **2 Thessalonians 2:13.** "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

² **Ephesians 4:23, 24.** "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

³ **Romans 6:4, 6, 14.** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

Romans 8:4. "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Verse 7 is a summary statement, which explains more fully the truth of verse 6. **“For one who has died has been set free from sin.”** A dead man is no longer subject to a former master. The one who died with Christ when He died upon the cross, his former life died with respect to sin. Because of this truth, we who are believers should have confidence that we will live in righteousness before Christ. This is the meaning of **verse 8: “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.”**

Verses 9 through 11 shows how our knowledge of our union with Jesus Christ should give us faith and confidence and should lead us to live for Christ.

9“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Because of this historic truth and reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and due to our understanding of our union with Him in His experience, we are to identify ourselves with Him and live accordingly. Paul is not saying that we are now continually dying and being raised. He is saying that the one decisive historical event of Jesus dying and rising, and we with Him, has **defined our identity** as Christians and **directs us in how to live** as Christians.

Now, there is a feature of verse 11 that is quite significant to our study of this epistle. Here in Romans 6:11, we find the first stated **command** thus far in this epistle. Everything that Paul had written from chapter one, verse one, through Romans 6:10, contains Paul’s straightforward declaration of historical and spiritual facts. And although Paul has implied earlier in many places that Christians ought to behave in a Christian manner, **this is the first occasion in which he issues a direct commandment to respond to his teaching**. It is worded a little differently in other translations, but the force of the command is conveyed in each one.

ESV: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

NKJV: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

KJV: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

NIV: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

NASV: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

This first command after following nearly 6 chapters of text in this epistle has several broader implications that we can point out for us. **First**, if you have opportunity to study books written about the Pauline epistles in the New Testament, especially here in this epistle of Romans, then you will read what is commonly referred to as Paul’s use of the **indicative** and the **imperative**. I would like to explain what this is and what it means. Now granted, this is not something for the novice, but it is not beyond our congregation’s capability of learning or profiting spiritually.

Our understanding of this matter requires a short grammar lesson. Verbs in every language have common traits. A verb may be distinguished as having **tense**, **voice**, and **mood**. This is true of English verbs and of Greek verbs⁴; really, it is true of verbs in every language. (1) We are probably most familiar with **tense**. We are familiar with the three most commonly used tenses--**past** tense, **present** tense, and **future** tense.⁵ (2) The verb also conveys **voice**. This aspect of the verb conveys the relationship of the action of the verb with the subject of the sentence. There is the **active** voice, in which the subject is performing the action. For example, “The boy **hit**

⁴ In addition to **tense**, **voice**, and **mood**, a Greek verb also contains **number** (singular or plural), and **person**, whether 1st person (“I” or “we”), 2nd person (“you” [sing.], “you” [plur.]) or 3rd person (“he”, “she”, “it [sing.], or “they” [plur.]).

⁵ The major tenses of the New Testament Greek verb are six in number—present, future, imperfect (past), aorist, perfect, pluperfect. Actually, the idea of “time is not the primary idea in the tense of a Greek verb, but rather tense governs the **kind** of action of a verb. For example, the tense may suggest that there is **continuous** (or durative) action, or it may suggest simple action of **occurring**, or the tense may reveal the action of the verb as having **occurred in the past but its results continue**.

the ball.” The verb has active voice in that the subject (boy) is doing the action (hit). There is the *passive* voice, in which the subject is being acted upon. For example, “The boy *was hit* by the ball.” And there is the *middle* voice, in which the subject acts in relation to itself. “The boy *hit himself* with the ball.” (3) The verb also conveys *mood*. Mood conveys the relation of the action of a verb to reality. There are three moods that a verb may convey to the reader. There is the *indicative* mood. This conveys the idea of the action simply happening; it states or *indicates* an action as occurring; this is why it is called “indicative.” An example would be, “The boy hit the ball;” this is a simple indicative statement. The indicative mood is what is commonly used in one’s explanation of a subject. Through the indicative mood you indicate certain facts to the hearer or reader. There is also *subjunctive* mood, which conveys the action as *potential*. “The boy *may hit* the ball.” The *optative* mood suggests the action as *likely*. “The boy *may possibly hit* the ball.” The fourth kind of mood is the *imperative* mood. It is the form in which a *command* is voiced. “(You) hit the ball.” It involves the response of the exercise of the will.

And so, when it is said that first Paul expresses first the *indicative* and afterward the *imperative*, it is the recognition that

the commands of God to the Christian--the imperative--follow after first an explanation of the doctrine—the indicative.

How we are to live as Christians is always based upon our understanding of what it means to be Christians. Christian living is a working out of our understanding. Doctrine precedes and leads to practice.

Second, that the first command is given here in Romans 6:11 after following nearly 6 chapters of text which was explanatory for us underscores the truth that ***Christian living is largely a function of the will exercised in response to the understanding of our mind.*** The order in which God communicates His will to us, first through the indicative and then following with the imperative, is consistent with this assertion.

God made each of us a living soul. Our soul includes the capacity for thinking, which is the function of the *mind*, the capability of feeling, which is the role of our *emotions* or affections, and the ability to act upon what we know, or believe we know, which is the function of our *will*. The mind, emotions, and will are the components of the soul. When God had originally created man, He created him with the mind or the intellect, which was to govern the soul. Adam and Eve, having been instructed by the Word of God, were to serve God in the Garden in which He placed them as they were governed by His will, that is, His Word that He had given them. Their affections, or emotions, were in tune with God’s will before their fall into sin. They delighted in knowing and doing the will of God, and they enjoyed richly the fellowship they were privileged to have with God in the garden in the cool of the day.

But something terrible resulted from their sin. Upon their sin, Adam and Eve no longer governed their faith and practice as directed by their mind informed by the Word of God, for their mind had become darkened through sin. Rather, due to their initial sin, their lusts, or desires, or affections--the emotions, took presidency in the soul. Thereafter man has insisted on doing what he *feels* he wants to do, not what he knows in his *mind* that God has told Him to do. This is a *pathological* problem that is inherent in the human race.

God addresses and corrects this problem in His people through *regeneration*, or the new birth, which God brings to pass in sinners, which results in their understanding, responsiveness, and obedience to the Word of God. Their new spiritual *understanding* of who they are and who God is and who God’s Son is, being Savior and Lord, once again begins to govern their *affections*, which results in their compliant purpose and commitment to do the will of God; they will to do God’s will because they love what they have come to know about God and His Word. As the Scriptures say, it is “he who does the *will* of God” that abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

And so, every fallen human being has this pathological problem, which is the usurpation of the emotions over the mind, our lusts becoming the leading functionary of the soul. As the Scripture says,

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same *mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ***that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God*** (1 Pet. 4:1f).

There you have it—there are two ways of living with two destinies. Christ died so that we should live according to the will of God as we are directed by our *mind* to understand that will, lest you continue to order your life according to your *lusts*, which will result in your certain damnation.

And so, although I address matters of the mind and the content of doctrine that we are to understand and live by, I am cognizant of this inherent problem that we all have to a degree, myself included, that we need to overcome. When I hear one say that he or she is tired of doctrine, weary of teaching, and just wants to *experience* God or *feel* God, I am aware that person is not being governed by the Word of God or the Spirit of God, but rather that person is being governed by his lusts, his desires fueled by his emotions, not by the truth of God. Further, when I hear of people who profess to be Christian but they claim they are led by impressions of the Spirit, impulses of the moment, which they regard are the leadings of God, I recognize those people as not led of the Holy Spirit, but rather their own lusts lead them about. These impressions and impulses are not born from the objective truth of the will of God.

We each have a sin principle that exists in our being which will lead us astray if not countered and corrected by the truth of the written, revealed, will of God. Sadly, we tend to resist the truth because we are prone to do what our fallen “hearts” want to do. God’s work of sanctification increasingly corrects this problem as we give ourselves over to learning and doing the Word of God. And so, even in Christendom there exists a suspicion of the intellect, or even a direct rejection of the role of the mind in the matter of a person’s spiritual life, in preference for other things. This problem we have in that we are prone to be governed by our emotions (lusts) is undergird, even reinforced, by a common *theological* problem. Let me explain.

Now, it is a commonly accepted belief among Christians that man is a trinity: he is a soul, a spirit, and a body. But most historic Protestants did not hold this view, but rather they viewed man as a duality. Man is a body and soul, and frequently the soul is identified as a spirit. And so, the common understanding goes something like this:

When God created man and woman, Adam and Eve, God created each of them with a *body*, a *soul*, and a *spirit*. *First*, there is the *body*, which is understood (rightly, I might say) as being the means by which a human being is able to interact with the physical world through his physical senses. *Second*, there is the *soul*, which is viewed as the sphere of the mind (intellect), the emotions, and the will; this is the center of a person’s personality. But *thirdly*, and most importantly many would say, is the *spirit*, which is said to proceed immediately from God and which gives spiritual life to the soul and body. *The spirit is viewed as a separate entity from the soul, being the true and highest spiritual self which able to know God, hear from God, and communicate with God.* It is then said that when Adam and Eve sinned, that spirit in each of them, which is characterized by spiritual life and knowledge, died, and was thus extinguished. And since the fall, when one is born into the world he is soul and body only, for he does not have a spirit, for he is spiritually dead. He needs the new birth, when God causes his spirit to be created anew in him, so only then does he have the capacity to know God and relate to God through his own “spirit.”

And so, the sum of the matter is this: the common evangelical believes that as a person he is comprised of a body, a soul, and a spirit; he believes that he has a spirit that is distinct from and different in nature from his soul.

But because this is believed to be the biblical teaching, the following assumption is embraced: What is most important for the Christian, it is taught and asserted, is to know God, hear from God, and relate to God in one’s “*spirit*”, not in the “*soul*”, for the “*soul*” can only experience God to a lesser degree and in an imperfect manner. What sadly results is the common and intentional marginalizing of the *soul* and particularly that aspect of the soul which is the *mind*, or the *intellect*, or the *understanding* that comes through the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. Thus doctrine is viewed as less than spiritual, sometimes even deadening to true spiritual health and vitality. This view of the psychology of a human being is wrong biblically and it leads to wrong thinking and wrong practice. As another once wrote,

Biblical usage leads us to say that we have and are both souls and spirits, but it is a mistake to think that soul and spirit are two different things; a “trichotomous” view of man as body, soul, and spirit is incorrect. The common idea that the soul is an organ of this-worldly awareness only, while the spirit is a distinct organ of communion with God, brought to life in regeneration, is out of step with biblical teaching.

Moreover, such a view leads to a crippling anti-intellectualism whereby *spiritual insight and theological reflection are separated* to the impoverishment of both—theology being regarded as “soulish” and unspiritual, while spiritual perception is viewed as unrelated to the work of teaching and learning God’s revealed truth.⁶

Do you see what is assumed by someone who views a person in this threefold composition? Doctrine is something to which the *soul* gives attention, but it is seen as *less* spiritual and *less* important than *true spiritual life* which is imparted to and manifest through one’s *spirit!*”

The problem with this teaching of the distinction between soul and spirit as two separate parts of a person is that it is not biblical. For the Bible does not teach that a person is a trinity of body, soul, and spirit, but rather, the Bible teaches that God has made us a living soul that animates a physical body. A human person is a body and soul, and often times, instead of the word “soul”, the word “spirit” is used, but these two words refer to the same thing. So let me set forth the biblical and factual reasons that this *trichotomous* (meaning three parts) view of man, as it is commonly called, is not according to God’s truth, but rather a *dichotomous* (meaning two parts) view of man’s person is the teaching of Scripture.

First, it is simply wrong to assume or assert that because a person is “spiritually dead” it means that he is no longer a spiritual being. This is the understanding of those who hold to a trichotomous view of the person. They assert that God made man body, soul, and spirit, but that when Adam and Eve sinned, their spirit died, or was extinguished. And so, fallen man is born into the world as only having a soul and body. But when he is born again, God gives him a “spirit”, and now he is a whole person once again. But the fact is that even unsaved people everywhere are spiritual in nature, whether they are Christian or not. Man is a spiritual being in his very existence; he cannot cease to be, for this is one aspect of being made in the image of God. When we say that a man is spiritually dead, we are not saying that he is no longer a spiritual being, but that he is no longer spiritually alive before and unto the true God. His spirit is separated from God and therefore, severed from the life of God. But man remains a spiritual creature. A man will worship something or someone, he cannot help but do so, for this is how God constituted him as a human being; he is a spiritual being. If he is converted by God’s grace, he will worship the true God who has been revealed to him. But if he is not converted, he will still be a worshipper, but he will be as the woman at Jacob’s well, to whom the Lord said, “You worship what you do not know” (John 4:22). Although she was unsaved, she was still a worshipper; she was still a spiritually-minded person. And so, an unconverted man is a worshipper; God made him that way. He cannot cease to be a worshipper. If he is spiritually dead it means that he cannot and will not worship the true God, but he will still worship. He will either worship himself, another human person, a false god, or he may even degenerate to the worship of animals and other created things. As Paul wrote of unconverted people, that while they were...

“claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and *worshipped* and *served* the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom 1:22-25)

A fallen man is spiritually dead, so he cannot and will not worship the true God, but he will worship something, whether it is a rock or a bug. Unconverted people are very spiritual, for God made us to be spiritual people. And there are no natural born atheists; someone has to be taught or he must convince himself to be an atheist, for he was born with a capacity and propensity to be a worshipper. He can be nothing but a worshipper, for he is spiritual in nature. Therefore, to say that when Adam and Eve sinned, *they died spiritually in the sense that a spirit component of their person was extinguished*, is wrong and is simply not taught in the Scriptures.

Second, the *soul* of a person is sometimes referred to as his *spirit*. This is commonly found in the Scriptures. Why does God use two different terms? He does so to better describe what a human being is like.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *The New Reformation Study Bible* (1995), p. 10.

When God uses the term “*soul*” to describe a person, He is showing the distinctiveness of that man or woman as an individual person with an individual self-identity. When God uses the word “*spirit*” to refer to a person, He is emphasizing the fact that each of us owe our life to God who gave us life, that each of us are dependent upon Him in this life, and thirdly that our true self is distinct from the body. This is what a theological note in the New Reformation Study Bible says:

Each human being in this world consists of a material body animated by an immaterial personal self. Scripture calls this self a “soul” or “spirit.” “Soul” emphasizes the distinctness of a person’s conscious selfhood; “spirit” carries the nuances of the soul’s derivation from God, dependence on Him, and distinctness from the body as such.

Third, oftentimes, the biblical expressions of “soul” and ‘spirit’ are used interchangeably, for they refer to the same constituent part of a person.

1. When **the person of man** is used in Scripture. Sometimes the Word of God describes a man as “body and soul”, such as in

Matthew 6:25 -- “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your *life* (Greek word for “soul”), what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

Matthew 10:28 – “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the *soul*. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both *soul* and body in hell.”

1 Corinthians 7:33f. “But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife,³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in *body* and *spirit*. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.”

2 Corinthians 7:1. “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of *body* and *spirit*, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

James 2:26. “For as the *body* without the *spirit* is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

2. **The seat of spiritual exercise.** When we examine spiritual experiences being described in the Scriptures, they are often times described as occurring in the “soul.” This again supports the idea that a man’s spirit and a man’s soul, are one and the same.

(1) **We read of spiritual sorrow on the part of our Lord:**

John 12:27. “Now is My soul troubled.”

Matthew 26:38. “Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’”

(2) **We read of spiritual desire and spiritual joy manifested in one’s soul.** “*The highest spiritual exercises are ascribed to the soul as well as the spirit.*”⁷

Psalm 42:1-6

⁷ I am indebted to the chapter on “Trichotomy” by John Murray for these arguments and the many Scripture references used for support of what I asserted in this message. See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp. 23-33.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
²My *soul* thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
³My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
“Where is your God?”
⁴When I remember these things,
I pour out my *soul* within me.
For I used to go with the multitude;
I went with them to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and praise,
With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my *soul*?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.

⁶O my God, my *soul* is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon,
From the Hill Mizar.

Numerous passages could be cited like these. For the use of soul see Psalm 63:5; 103:1, 2; 116:7; 130:6; Isa. 26:9; for the use of spirit for similar kinds of experiences see Psalm 32:2; 34:18; Prov. 11:13; 16:19; Isa. 57:15; Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26. For an example of the use of “spirit” consider:

Psalm 51:10-17

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast *spirit* within me.
¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me with a willing spirit.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken *spirit*,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

(3) We read of spiritual devotion to be manifested in one’s soul.

Here I will cite the words of Reformed scholar **John Murray**:

In Mark 12:30, for example [which reads, “And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”], we have a statement of the sum of devotion to God. The four terms used as heart, soul, mind, and strength. If the spirit is the organ of God-consciousness, it must surely be enlisted in the highest reaches of devotion to God. It would not be consistent with this alleged primacy to omit the spirit in such an enumeration of the aspects of personality.

In like manner various passages refer to community of interest and purpose in the kingdom of God to wholehearted dedication in the fulfillment of the demands of the Christian vocation. This devotion is expressed in the terms of the soul as well as of the spirit (cf. Acts 4:32; 14:2, 22; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 19, 20). ‘One spirit’ and ‘one soul’ are, at least, parallel if not synonymous (Phil. 1:27). To do anything wholeheartedly is to do it from the ‘soul’ (Eph 6:6). One soul is equivalent to one heart (Acts 4:32).

The conclusion is inescapable that the centre of devotion and the seat of the most characteristic exercises of the regenerate person is the soul as well as the heart and the spirit. The evidence cannot be adjusted to the supposition that the soul is the outer chamber, and that it is the spirit that is the organ of God-consciousness and the centre of spiritual mindedness.⁸

We could show many other reasons why this idea that a man is comprised of spirit, soul, and body is not biblical. And the notion that the spirit of man is the locus of God’s greatest interaction with, revelation to, and fellowship with a human being is patently unbiblical.

God has made you to be a body and soul, and often times your soul is identified as your spirit in the Holy Scriptures. The main point I wish to stress is this. God has made you to be a spirit, and your spirit is comprised of a mind with which to think and reason, affections with which you can experience your emotions, and a body through which your spirit lives. God communicates to your spirit, that is your soul, through His written Word, the Holy Bible, which the Holy Spirit enables your mind to comprehend, your heart to respond in a devotional manner, and a will to conform your actions to that revealed Word.

Now there are two passages of Scripture that are often cited to assert and defend a *trichotomous* understanding of a Christian, that he is a spirit, a body, and a soul. The first is **Hebrews 4:12ff**.

“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.”

The thought is that the Word of God is able to separate the soul and spirit. “Clearly they are two different things which are separate from one another.” But the Greek words translated “Piercing to the division” is never used to describe separating two different things from one another, but rather dividing a single thing into two parts. The Word of God is able to distinguish the soul as it manifests one’s self-identity and at the same time the Word is able to show that soul, or spirit, rather, is life having been given by God. This verse does not teach they are two separate components to a human being.

The second is **1 Thessalonians 5:13**. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here Paul was not describing the nature of a person, but he was expressing his desire for sanctification to take place in the whole person of a Christian. “It is in accord with the usage of Scripture to employ an accumulation of terms to express completeness...and it would be unwarranted to assume that it is intended to provide us with a definition of the component elements of human nature.”⁹

Why is this important? The evangelical scene is rife with the idea that *God communicates directly with your spirit*, which is believed to be a heavenly, spiritual self that is distinct from your soul, and that this kind of communication or revelation from God’s Spirit supposedly to your spirit is a higher and more desirable and

⁸ Murray, vol. 2, p. 27.

⁹ Murray, vol. 2, p. 31.

purser kind of knowledge and experience with God that your soul could never contemplate or encounter. Their thinking is like this:

“And so doctrine, what use is it? For God has spoken to my spirit! That is what is really important. Scripture says? So what? What is most important is what God has said to my spirit.”

This is not biblical. I would argue it is not even Christian. It is pure mysticism in Christian dress, yet many, many, are deceived with this silly and foolish idea of spirituality. What matters to many people is not the Word of God, but they are looking for an “impression”, a “feeling”, that God “spoke to their spirit.” May God deliver us from this error. May we look to the written, authoritative, inerrant Word of God in the Scriptures, for it is through the Scriptures alone that the Lord speaks to His people.

We will close with citing an important verse in Romans that underscores all of what we have said today of the primary role of the mind of understanding truth as the divine means of sanctifying God’s people. **Romans 12:1 and 2** read,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Here we see that Paul appeals to the need for Christian to experience transformation, in other words, the believer’s sanctification. How is this experienced by the believer? The “mind” needs renewed through acquiring truth. The believer is then to order his life according to that truth that his mind has acquired. This is the way of sanctification, through the hegemony (domination) of the mind.

Below is a copy of a bulletin insert from several years ago that addresses the biblical view of the personhood of man.

Our Christian Faith

*And so were the churches established in **the faith**,
and increased in number daily. (Act 16:5)*

#18 Body & Soul, Male & Female¹⁰

Each human being in this world consists of a material body animated by an immaterial personal self. Scripture calls this self a “soul” or “spirit.” “Soul” emphasizes the distinctness of a person’s conscious selfhood; “spirit” carries the nuances of the soul’s derivation from God, dependence on Him, and distinctness from the body as such.

Biblical usage leads us to say that we have and are both souls and spirits, but it is a mistake to think that soul and spirit are two different things; a “trichotomous” view of man as body, soul, and spirit is incorrect. The common idea that the soul is an organ of this-worldly awareness only, while the spirit is a distinct organ of communion with God, brought to life in regeneration, is out of step with biblical teaching. Moreover, such a view leads to a crippling anti-intellectualism whereby spiritual insight and theological reflection are separated to

¹⁰ This “theological note” is from **The Reformation Study Bible**, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers

the impoverishment of both—theology being regarded as “soulish” and unspiritual, while spiritual perception is viewed as unrelated to the work of teaching and learning God’s revealed truth.

The embodiment of the soul is integral to God’s design for humanity. Through the body we experience our environment, enjoy and control things around us, and relate to other people. There was nothing evil or corruptible about the body as God first made it. If sin had not occurred, the physical aging and decline that leads to death as we know it would have been no part of human experience (Gen. 2:17; 3:19, 22; Rom. 5:12). Now, however, all people are corrupt throughout their psycho-physical being, as the disordered desires of mind and body, warring against each other as well as against the rules of wisdom and righteousness, clearly show.

At death the soul leaves the body behind, but this is not the happy release the Greek philosophers and some cults have imagined. The Christian hope is not redemption *from* the body but redemption *of* the body. We look forward to having a part of Christ’s resurrection in and through the resurrection of our bodies. Though the actual composition of our future glorified bodies is presently unknown, we know that there will be a continuity with our present bodies (1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:20, 21; Col. 3:4).

The two genders, male and female, belong to the creation pattern. Men and women are equally image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:27), and their dignity is equal in consequence. The complementary nature of the genders is meant to lead to enriching cooperation (see Gen. 2:18-23), not only in marriage, procreation, and family life, but in life’s wider activities also. Perception of the difference between a person of the other gender and oneself is meant to be a school for learning the practice and joy of appreciation, openness, honor, service, and fidelity.
