

Ministering to the Human Spirit -

A New Paradigm

I grew up with a vague sense that my spirit dealt with the God stuff in my life while my soul handled generic daily experiences. I was told my spirit was good and my soul was the source of most of my inner conflicts. I read somewhere that my soul consists of my mind, will and emotions. I gave my spirit very little thought.

For the last two decades I have been deeply vested in the inner healing movement, thus becoming quite familiar with the various tools for dealing with the soul and its wounds.

The first time God tricked me into ministering to someone's spirit instead of their soul, I was shocked and struggled for a frame of reference for what had just happened (quite powerfully, I might add).

I am a Biblicist, so I scrolled through my memory to find my theology of the human

spirit and was stunned to come up with a nearly empty file. I knew the spirit had to be reborn (1 Corinthians 2:6-16) and I knew that at death the spirit went to the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

And that was all I knew!

As I frantically searched the Scripture in my memory again and again, I could not construct a viable theology of the human spirit. I had a theology of the human soul from all the inner healing work I had done. I had a theology of unclean spirits from deliverance work. I had a theology of the Holy Spirit. I had only a two-verse file on the human spirit.

I was shocked and horrified. How could I have been in church for half a century, drinking from many different streams in the Body of Christ and be so profoundly ignorant about such a key piece of theology?

In the years since that experience, our team has sought truth from the Word in order to build a sound theological understanding of the human spirit. While that is still a work in process, we are beginning to have some clarity on the foundational truths concerning the human spirit.

A Key Distinction

One piece of language that is now solid for us is an understanding of the difference between spirit and soul. Simply put, the

soul necessitates a functional body in order to express itself. The human spirit has an existence that transcends the body, although it is deeply interrelated with the body.

Take the simple illustration of surgery. When the body is given general anesthesia, it absolutely precludes the soul from expressing itself. The soul cannot comment on being cold, on hurting, on not liking the background music, or on wishing the two nurses would stop their petty feud until after the surgery. The soul, broadly speaking, is not even able to record most of the events of the surgery in order to recall them later and comment on them.

By contrast, we know from many death experiences that the spirit is quite unaffected by the condition of the body. While the stories vary, the common pattern of return-from-death stories is as follows.

The spirit leaves the body and goes to an upper corner of the room. It looks down at the agitated activity around the body with benign amusement. The spirit then goes through a tunnel and comes out in a field of grass and flowers which are extraordinary in their clarity, beauty and fragrance. In the

distance he or she can see The City in all its beauty.

Someone meets the spirit, usually a relative or Jesus, and says their work is not done and they need to go back. There is a short argument, but eventually the spirit defers to the superior perspective of the other person.

The spirit returns through the tunnel, watches the commotion around the body, reenters the body and the physical systems start working again.

Eventually, the spirit reports on the experience.

The New Model

The old concept of the soul containing the mind, will, and emotions no longer works. The spirit clearly had memories of the out-of-the-body experience. The spirit displayed will in that it wanted to go toward the city, but opted eventually to obey the directive. And the spirit expressed a wide range of emotions, from appreciation of the passive beauty of the meeting place, to wild excitement over reconnecting with the person meeting them.

So our current model simply says that the human spirit is that part of our being that is capable of complete functionality without the help of the body. Humans have two sets of memory/thinking ability, as well as will and emotions. One is resident in the spirit and the other in the soul.

And, yes, at times the two sets of emotions are diametrically opposed to each other, resulting in a battle of wills internally.

Brain Deficits

Much research has been done on the connection between the soul and the organic. The functionality or dysfunctionality of the brain massively affects our emotional state, our ability to use our will, and our ability to reason from the past in order to understand the present.

When you have a healing model that majors on the organic component, it removes human responsibility, and often removes hope. When certain areas of your brain are not functioning up to par, it is impossible for your soul to make wise choices. Truly impossible. There are some pretty serious limits to how much your soul can transcend the dynamics of the organic structure.

Thus, a whole industry has arisen which justifies hopelessness and aberrant behavior, proclaiming that the person should not be held responsible for their actions, since they cannot override the dysfunctional brain.

We have to revisit that paradigm in light of the emerging body of evidence that the spirit not only has an existence apart from the body, but that the spirit can

transcend and at times, even control, a biological function that the soul cannot. One of the most startling examples of this is two reported cases of grand mal seizures being arrested at mid point when the human spirit was commanded to take charge of the body and it did. The soul cannot choose to make the brain stop a seizure.

What to Expect

We are obviously just inches inside an unexplored piece of territory. Judging from past learning curves, I suspect we are two to five decades out from having a well-rounded theology of the human spirit. While this is an embryonic study, the initial results are absolutely thrilling and I invite all trailblazers to dig in and explore this new frontier.

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