

GOD'S PROCESS FOR REDEMPTION

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Quoted scripture is New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise stated.

Having an understanding of how God has made us as human beings can help us understand God's plan for the redemption of the whole man. Man has a visible part, his physical body, and an invisible part that is itself made up of two parts; spirit and soul. There are numerous places in the Scripture where the word soul is used to encompass what we might call the inner man, but there are also enough scriptures that differentiate between the spirit and soul that we can know they are different. Knowing the difference can help us to understand how we are to grow spiritually and how God's process for the redemption of the total man; spirit, soul, and body.

Let's look at some of the scriptures that verify that we are three-part beings:

"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" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

"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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). If the soul and spirit can be divided, they cannot be the same thing.

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

God formed man's body from the dust of the earth; thus he had a physical body. He breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life; thus he had a spirit. And man became a living soul; thus in the coming together of his spirit and body, man's soul came into being.

In God's design of the hierarchy of authority in man, his spirit was to have the highest authority. His spirit would direct his soul, and his body would be in subjection to the direction of his soul. To understand this better, let us look at the functions of each of the three parts of man. It is pretty easy to see that man has a physical body so he can interact with his physical environment.

Through his body he has “world-consciousness.” In his body he has been given the five physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste to enable him to have that consciousness.

Man’s spirit is that part of him that enables him to have a consciousness of God. God communicates with man via his spirit. Man does not interact with God through his five physical senses. He senses God intuitively through his spirit.

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11). The spirit of man has knowledge, but it is different than what comes from his intellect. A person can know something in his/her spirit that he/she has no physical evidence of and which may not yet be understood intellectually. *“But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding”* (Job 32:8). *“The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart (soul)”* (Proverbs 20:27).

The soul of man is the seat of his affections. Often when the Bible speaks of the heart of man, it is speaking of his soul. It is man’s soul that encompasses his intellect, emotions (feelings), and will. Hebrews 7:25 gives evidence that God intends to save the entire man, spirit, soul, and body. *“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

After God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, for a time, how long we do not know, God had fellowship with Adam and Eve as their spirits communed with each other. However, that fellowship was broken through man’s disobedience of God’s one command. As a result, a death occurred as per God’s warning; *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Genesis 2:17). We know that Adam and Eve lived physically for several hundred years after that, so their death was not a physical one. It was their spirits that died. It is not that they no longer had a spirit but rather that their spirits had died to God. Their ability to commune with God through their spirits was gone. This problem of a spirit dead to God was passed down to all of Adam’s descendants.

After the fall of man, he was ruled by his soul. *“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes....”* (Proverbs 21:2). When man is ruled by his soulish nature he will eventually yield to the instincts of his flesh (bodily cravings). By the time of the flood, man had devolved to that condition. *“Then Jehovah said, ‘My Spirit must not forever be disgraced in man, wholly evil as he is. I will give him 120 years to mend his ways’”* (Genesis 6:3, TLB). Man fell from being spirit-ruled to being soul-ruled, and from there to being flesh-ruled. When the flesh becomes the ruling authority in man, the vilest of behaviors are produced.

However, God had a plan to restore fellowship with man. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, and through His death on the cross, to pay the penalty for Adam’s sin along with every sin that Adam’s descendants would ever commit. For every man and woman who believes in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death

and subsequent resurrection, a new birth takes place. Our spirits that were dead to God are regenerated and mingled with His Holy Spirit. When a person believes in Christ, the resurrection of his/her spirit is instantaneous. The Bible says at that point we have eternal life. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16, KJV). This is because we have the seed of the uncreated, never-dying life of God mingled with our spirits. God’s life can never die, so neither can our spirits die. This is the first step in God’s plan to redeem man to the “uttermost.” *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”* (1 Peter 1:22-23). *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness”* (Romans 8:9-10).

The Spirit Versus The Fleshly Nature

With the regeneration of our spirits, a wonderful change has taken place, but unfortunately, we are not instantaneously completely “spiritual” yet. A new Christian is often surprised that all his fleshly tendencies are not immediately gone and no longer trouble him/her. Note what Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth. *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men”* (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)?

Paul was writing to believers whose spirits had been regenerated through the new birth. However, he said they were “still fleshly.” In this case there was jealousy, strife, and sexual sin among them. They were mature in the things of the flesh but spiritual infants. Let’s look at a more complete description of the characteristics of the flesh. *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Galatians 5:19-21, NKJV). Christians should not commit these works of the flesh after they are regenerated, but sadly they often still do. Paul describes this plight in the following passage:

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:15).

People who find themselves in this condition have not fully understood what was accomplished on the cross of Christ.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing 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. For he who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:3-7).

Jesus not only bore the judgment of our sin on the cross, He took us, our fleshly nature, to the cross with Him. There was a co-crucifixion, us with Him. As Christians it seems we can more easily believe in the forgiveness of our individual sins through the shed blood of Christ on the cross than we can believe that the power of sin in our lives was also killed in that same crucifixion. You see, the flesh can never be re-educated, refined, transformed or rehabilitated. Its sentence from God is death by crucifixion. Blessedly this has already been accomplished by our identification with Christ's death on the cross. This is not mind over matter as some might say. It is rather miracle over matter. In the mind of God, our co-crucifixion with Christ is a **fact**. *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

Notice that Paul testifies to the fact that he has been crucified with Christ. He has identified himself in the death of Christ. It is reality to him. The life he now lives he does so by the faith of the Son of God. Notice what Paul says in Romans 6:11, *“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* To reckon is to do a calculation and thereby determine the factual result. Paul is telling us to do the calculation, so to speak, and it will verify the absolute truth that we have been crucified with Christ. To reckon this means to accept by faith that it is true. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1, KJV). The thing that links “a fact in God” to our “actual experience in life” is faith in and of Christ. Faith is merely acting on what we actually believe is true before we actually have the experience of it in our lives. If we wait to believe that we are free from the power of sin until we actually experience the freedom from the power of sin, it will likely never happen in our lifetime. **Faith** follows **fact**, and **experience** follows **faith**. It is the key principle of the entire Christian walk. *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7, KJV).

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and ^[b]neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians. 2:20-23). Paul is saying that self-determination is of no value against the

indulgence of the flesh. Sure, having a sincere desire to be free is both good and necessary, but it is only faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross that will bring deliverance.

The Spirit Versus the Soulsh Nature

Now comes the matter of the soul, the second step in God's process of redemption. When God breathed into the man the breath of life man became a “living” soul. The soul has a life of its own. It is not a bad thing for it to have a life because the soul must carry out the directions of the spirit. The problem is that it too has been corrupted by the fall and has a very well developed desire to govern the person. Remember that the soul is composed of one's intellect, emotions, and will. For example, if a person could be described as intellectual, he/she might naturally tend to depend on their ability to reason through things with their natural mind and depend upon their mental acuity to govern their actions. A person who has strong emotions will tend to allow his/her feelings to govern their actions.

“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. 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” (Romans 12:1-2). Notice in Paul's instruction for dealing with the soulsh nature, in this case the mind and will, he does not speak of the annihilation of the mind or will as he did for the flesh, but rather a total transformation or renewal of the mind that we might know the will of God. We are to offer a living sacrifice. It is as if the spirit is encapsulated by the soulsh nature. The soul must be broken rather than executed such that the spirit can come forth and have rulership over it and thereby the whole being. The following scripture passage is a type of this breaking: *“And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head”* (Mark 14:3). The precious ointment in the alabaster box is a type of the relationship of the soul and spirit of the man whose has overcome the lusts of the flesh but is still soulsh in his nature. His spirit is strong, but his soul-life is still stronger and dominant such that his spirit is subdued in relation to his soul-life. Just as the fragrance of the spikenard filled the whole room, so when the spirit of man mingled with the Holy Spirit of God is released from us into the world, the eternal life of God flows forth to give life to others. However, that outer man or soul-life must be broken such that the spirit can come forth and life flow to others. *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing”* (John 6:63a).

It is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which is the tool of the Holy Spirit by which God transforms us from within. It is what enables us to tell the difference in whether it is the soul or the spirit that is governing us. *“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). *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”* (James 1:21).

In our city we have a gym that is called the Wellness Center and which is operated by the hospital system. My wife and I try to go a few times a week to use the equipment in a climate-controlled environment. I go just to keep from dying prematurely, but there are a lot of people there who are putting major effort into perfecting the outer man, the alabaster box, so to speak.

“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). Applying ourselves to education and the development of our natural talents as well as taking care of our bodies is a good thing. I think God expects us to develop what He has given us. However, we must be careful that in doing so we do not neglect the growth and development of the inner man. For it is to the inner man, his spirit, that life flows from God to him/her, and it is from the inner man, if unrestricted by the soulish nature, that life flows to others.

Again there is the cross. It is the instrument for breaking the outward man. It must break down all that belongs to our outward man; our opinions, our self-dependence, our cleverness, etc. and bring them under submission to the spirit. *“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:38-39).*

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:25-27).

One reason the breaking process takes so long is that we do not see God's hand in it. We just see people opposing us, interfering with our agenda. We blame others, the circumstances, even the church for the disruptions and difficulties that come into our lives. All along we fail to see that God is working in our lives to break down the outer man so that the spirit mingled with God's Spirit can come forth. May we be constantly aware that God is in everything that happens to His saints and yield to the working of His Spirit to transform our souls.

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

“Whatever the revelation-light exposes, it will also correct, and everything that reveals truth is light to the soul” (Ephesians 5:13, The Passion Translation).

Redemption of the Body

I will let the following scripture speak for itself.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:52-54) †

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