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THE HUMAN SPIRIT, SPIRITUAL GROWTH & CHANGE

In the great debate between Science and Religion, let us not lose sight of the fact that Science tells us HOW God accomplishes his purposes, and the Bible tells us WHY.

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What Is "Spirit"?

Spirit is that unseen force that gives life to all things. Living things are animate - responding to their environment - because of a combination of physiological factors, a combining of biology and biochemistry. All life forms - whether animal or vegetable- - share three foundational elements: carbon, hydrogen and water (a compound made up of hydrogen and oxygen). These combine to form organic compounds (or hydrocarbon molecules) called protein, the most complex and critical of which is DNA – the blueprint of all life.

Yet just combining a batch of hydrocarbons together does not create life. There is something - what we call "spirit" – that is triggered under certain conditions, and results in the presence or absence of "life".

What Is Our Spirit?

The spirit of life in man has its origins in the same biochemical - physiological roots shared with all life. At the basic essence of our being we are animal, genus "homo sapiens". As with all forms of life, it is "spirit" that causes this combination of biology, physiology and biochemistry to be animate and responsive to our environment.

Yet Man (Male and Female) Is Unique Among All Life

The Book of Genesis makes it clear that it was God that breathed life into man and woman. We are His creation (Gen. 2:7). And, while we share certain biological features with all animal life, there are three things that set us apart:

- (1) The ability to be self-aware: conscious of our past, present and future, as well as the ability to manipulate and alter our environment; We have "Free-Will", the capacity to make choices as to where and how we live out our life: what we will believe as truths about ourselves and our world; what we will earn a living at; what we eat; what we consume; who and what we allow into our life.
- (2) The capacity to feel sympathy, empathy and compassion toward our fellow beings



(3) A Conscience: The innate knowledge of good and evil; of right and wrong. As the Apostle Paul notes (Romans 2:14), all humans have this faculty -even those who do not have the Law of Moses to guide them.



We have a highly developed brain that not only results in having self-awareness, but also the capacity to conceptualize limitless possibilities.

The Human Soul

Many of the above attributes comprise what theologians call the human soul. That is: mind, will, and emotions. These often manifest as -

Attitude, Personality and Character:

Now what we often call "spirit" or "soul" is actually a combination of Attitude, Personality, and Character (our fundamental, core beliefs in action). Life experiences and genetics -nurture and nature - combine to instill in us an outlook on life that shapes (a) how I treat others, and (b) How I treat myself.

From each life experience we are taught something; we learn, and come to assume - or conclude - certain things to be true, to be reality, and representative of all such similar situations we encounter. Hence we interact with our environment and relate to it out of those beliefs: the hurtful ones as well as the joyful and pleasant ones.

The Functions of the Human Spirit (from John Sandford's "Healing the Wounded Spirit") in shaping our "Attitudes and Beliefs" are:

- 0 The capacity to be intimate and empathetic
- 0 Our perspective and perception of life
- 0 The capacity to be creative
 - 0 A sense of time and space; past, present, and future
 - 0 Instills the will to live (or not); to embrace life (or not).

We have highly developed brains and, with that faculty, comes an awareness of self as distinct and separate from other living creatures and objects. Moreover, we can manipulate our environment as well as adapting to it because of our intelligence. These qualities and abilities make us human and make us unique amongst all of God's creatures.

What Is Being "Born-Again"?

To be "born-again" is to risk change. It is the opening our self to the possibility of the Divine. It entails the surrendering of our spiritual willpower, as well as our soul (mind, will and emotions), to a Higher Power. It is allowing our minds to first comprehend the fact that there is a Divine, All-Powerful Creator God and secondly, that He actually made Himself known to His creation through Christ - His Son in order that He might have an intimate, involved personal relationship with His creation.



This first step - the acknowledgement of this fact- is called "Salvation". It is a conscious choice - an act of surrendering of ourselves to God and embracing Him as a reality. At the very moment we do this we exit from spiritual darkness -that is, ignorance of the things pertaining to God and the existence of God - and enter true spiritual enlightenment.

As we yield to God, and to God's Spirit working within us, our own spirit is rejuvenated, it is born-again, leading to a change in inner character. We come to a new sense of love, peace, joy, self-control and a general sense of goodness and well-being (Gal.5: 22-23)

By acknowledging God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as pre-eminent authority in our life, we are then made a part of God's family by the presence of the Holy Spirit who is sent, by God, to dwell with us as a Comforter and Counselor (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7)(Gal.4: 6-7).

What Is This Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is:

- > a spiritual being of male gender (John 14:17)
- > He has intelligence (John 14:6; Rom. 8:16)
- > He has emotions (Isa.63: 10; Ephes.4: 30)
- > He is the "Spirit of God" (Rom.8: 14)



What Are His Functions?

The Holy Spirit actually has several functions; the main ones being:

- > Our (the believer's) counsellor, instructor, and helper (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7)
- > Our sustainer of life (Gen.2: 7; 6:3)
- > Convictor of sin and righteousness - but in a positive sense, never in a condemning sense. Christ and the Spirit never lead us to feel unworthy as individuals. In Christ there is no condemnation, but rather gentle urging to simply "go and sin no more". (John 8:11-12; 16:8-9; Romans 8:1). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit leads to a proactive - not a reactive - conscience that keeps us from doing wrong.
- > Illumines our minds to the things of God and the meaning of Scripture (John 16:13)
- > Empowers us (1 Cor.12 thru 14; 1 Cor. 2:4); a discussion of Spiritual Gifts is covered in the next section.
- > Produces spiritual growth (1 Cor. 6:11); more will be said on this in later.

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

There are actually two types of 'Spiritual Gifts':

- > **The Power Gifts**
- > **The Character Transformational Gifts**

An overview of each is provided below.

The Power Gifts - are the ones that seem to garner the most attention, and are usually the ones immediately thought of in charismatic circles, (a term that comes from the word "charisma", literally meaning "Gift"). These gifts are (from 1 Cor.12 1-10; 14:1):



- > **Word of Wisdom** ..astute insights and Solomon-like wisdom

- > **Word of Knowledge** ..(1) natural gifted abilities to carry out skillful tasks with little or no training; (2) knowledge of people and events in their lives to which there was no other access than by divine revelation

- > **Faith** .. strength of courage to persevere and stand on one's belief system when others are capitulating or falling away.

- > **Healing**.. ability to accelerate the natural processes that lead to physical and emotional healing. Is not always instantaneous.

- > **Miracles**.. the ability to supernaturally heal or seemingly suspend the Natural Order and Laws that govern the workings of the universe. Is quite often instantaneous and seemingly impossible or contrary to nature's natural course -such as raising the dead or parting the Red Sea. ¹

- > **Prophecy** .. Wisdom, discernment and Knowledge gifts - as well as sometimes, the miracle and healing gifts - all combined within one individual. The person frequently has excellent insight into present political and spiritual climate as well as a personable ability to exhort action. Prophets also frequently receive divine insight into an individual's life as well as - quite often - the life of a congregation, such that they can bring correction and direction.

- > **Spiritual Discernment** ..Divine ability to "sense" what spiritual influence is at work in a situation - Good or Evil.

¹ *It is interesting to note that with the insistence by the modern Church that "miracles" be authenticated by medical and other scientific means, the number of new miracles has reduced in frequency from 100s per year to rates of only one to two per decade. [Ottawa Citizen article, Spring 2006]*

> *Speaking in Tongues (glossolalia)*

> *Interpretation of Tongues*

> *Evangelism* .. being gifted at bringing people to Christ. Often are the types that make good salesmen in the secular world. (19th & 20th Century historical examples: Dwight L. Moody; R.A.Torrey; Billy Graham)

> *Teaching/Teacher* .. gifted in making the Scriptures practical and alive; make disciples through imparting the word.

> *Pastor* .. nurturer as well a teacher; gifted in caring for people.

> *Apostle* .. Church planters and overseers; often move in the prophetic. Very much "doers".

> *Administrators* .. organizers; help get things done.

Are Spiritual Gifts Essential To Being Born-Again ?

Common thinking amongst the charismatic and Pentecostal movement is that the absence of a spiritual gift - specifically "tongues" (glossolalia)- is somehow an indication that the person is not "born-again". This is probably because in The Book of Acts, the people baptized in the Spirit at Pentecost, and later at Cornelius's home all manifested a strange tongue (ie. language) (Acts 2:4; 10:44-48).

There is much debate in theological circles on whether this meant the divine impartation of an ability to speak a real foreign language or refers to the same phenomena seen today in charismatic and Pentecostal circles where people manifest a pseudo language. Peter, and the other disciples, in Acts 2 most definitely spoke in true foreign languages because the crowd heard their own "tongues" being spoken; however, the event at Cornelius's home is open to debate.

In any event, speech pathologists and linguists have studied glossolalia and the "tongues" of today fail to meet the criteria of "language"(Erickson[1992]: Christian Doctrine, p271-273). Whatever it is, it can only be best described as a "pseudo-language", which seems to have an uplifting spiritual affect when used in personal worship (this author's own personal experience).

However, failure to manifest a particular "power" gift DOES NOT imply that a person is not born-again. To imply that it does is faulty theology. Each of us was "born-again" when we accepted Christ into our life; we become a new person born again out of the word of God living in us (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:23). As to the gift of supernatural powers, it is God - through the His grace and His choosing - that decides when (timing), where (place), what (specific type of spiritual gift) and to whom (individual person) He will impart such gifts (Rom.12: 6; 1 Cor. 12:11).

NOW AS FOR CHARACTER TRANSFORMATION that is another matter. Scripture clearly states that if I profess to believe in God, then my thoughts and actions should reflect that belief. (Jesus to the Pharisees - Matt.23: 1-36; the majority of Paul's Epistles -particularly Gal.5: 14-26). If there is no evidence of love, peace, joy, gentleness or change toward those traits in a person who claims to be Christian, then one must question the sincerity of their conversion experience or adherence to the Christian faith. The "Fruits of the Spirit" (Gal.5: 22-23) are the results of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit over time, the process of "Transformation" that occurs through "Spiritual Growth", our next topic.



What Is Spiritual Growth?

To grow "spiritually" and become "spiritually mature", does not mean to become a puritan, abstaining from certain foods or beverages. Nor does it mean to become overtly pious, shunning certain TV shows or other forms of entertainment and past-time pursuits. Neither does it mean to be stern, sexless, stoic, shunning society to retreat into a cave or cloister so that one can concentrate on the pursuit of things religious. Rather a mature person is secure in who they are. They have a sense of self –identity that is manifested in a balanced approach to life and -hopefully – a measure of moral integrity as well as responsibility for their behavior.

It is also inappropriate to confuse being spiritual with fixating on things mystical - with being "in-touch" with nature, mother-earth or spiritual ancestors or spiritual forces. Giving one's self over to rituals that attempt to appease, honor, and otherwise reach those spiritual forces is occultism and superstitious. One must be careful not to confuse spirituality, religion, and superstition. The latter two are often confused - even by well meaning people of Faith. Spirituality and superstition become easily confused and intertwined whenever we attempt to manipulate God through ritual and prayer. We tend to forget that we are here to serve Him, not the reverse. The Apostle Paul makes the same point in the New Testament Epistles, stressing that it is what is in our inner most heart - our character - that speaks of the Divine and how we express our faith. Holding on to traditions, practicing annual religious rituals or festivals, and paying lip-service to God while still holding on to grudges against some relative or neighbor, is not a mark of healthy faith or a progressive belief system (ref. 1 Cor.8 and Galatians 6:12). Worse still is actually trying to tap into God or some supernatural power in order to get even with someone who has offended you. Such practices put one's mental health at risk, along with risks to one's physical health (harboring bitterness and anger over a prolonged period of time leads to higher risks of heart disease, cancer, ulcers, and arthritis as well as back problems, depression and sleep deprivation).

True spirituality - and spiritual maturity- is perhaps best defined by George Vaillant, a Harvard psychologist who studied the affects of spirituality and faith on the mental aspects of aging. Based on what he observed in the truly healthy person, mature spirituality embraces a faith that reaches out to people; it embraces people, is non-judgmental, and is not bound up in legalistic rules and rituals. Rather it is a faith that exemplifies unconditional love in action, seeing the positive in people and open to including all peoples into one's circle of life, regardless of how different they may be from us. It is a faith that finds - and enjoys - the positive in life, even amongst disaster and misery. It is always learning, and open to learn, from new experiences.



This is perhaps the ultimate extension - or application – of Dr. Larry Crabb's view of Spiritual Maturity, which he basically defines as doing what is right in the eyes of God in each and every situation. (Crabb [1977] : Effective Biblical Counseling, Zondervan Publishing, pages 22 to 30). The "right" thing to do in the eyes of God is to love people as He loved us, and that is simply: to love people without exception. We must not forget that while we were yet still sinners, Christ died for us that we might have everlasting life in

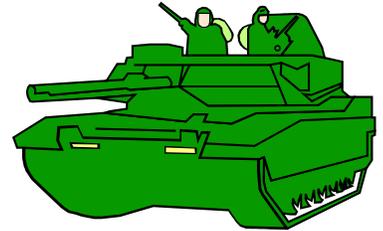
the presence of the Father (Rom.5: 8).

HOWEVER, we must never confuse unconditional love with accepting and condoning immoral or evil behavior. We must never compromise the Word of God for the sake of relationships to the point where we are enabling and perpetuating self-destructive behavior in the other person. True friendship and true love means we should desire the best for the other person, which sometimes means confronting habit patterns and lifestyles that the other person must give up for their own good, such as: drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, reckless abandonment, and a disorganized or unfocused life.

Facing and confronting immorality and evil brings one directly into

Spiritual Warfare

It is not my intention to debate the matter whether the Devil or Satan is real or merely a name we attach to the concept of evil. For the moment, let us agree that, philosophically and theologically, Satan is the personification of all that is evil.



But what is "evil"? Evil is any act that intentionally does malevolent harm to any aspect of God's creation: be it human, animal, flora or fauna. Note that it is "intentional" willful destruction or harm. It is knowingly doing harm, not in self-defense, not for a greater good, it is self-preservation, or self-serving acts of malevolence. Natural disasters -while being very destructive -are not in and of themselves "evil". Knowingly selling a house, over an active fault line, or knowingly failing to do necessary maintenance on an airliner, leading to the death of innocent people are truly evil acts; they are every bit as evil as flying two passenger jets into the World Trade Center.

Moral darkness, lack of compassion, and a deadened or hardened conscience, are the direct result of the absence of any concept of God and a total corruption of the meaning or purpose of life. Continued abuse of my fellow human beings for the furtherance of my own selfish gain and hedonistic lifestyle, perverts why we are here. We are here to make this a better world and to explore the infinite possibilities that the universe -and life - has to disclose. Life is an adventure to be lived, but not at the expense of someone else's freedom, happiness and right to life.

Many books have been published on the "how do's" of spiritual warfare, therefore I will not even attempt to summarize or duplicate what they cover in this short treatise. It is suffice to say - and to caution- that many approaches verge on superstition, prey on charismatic religious fervor, and - while written by educated people - often target the lesser educated, the gullible and the naive.

Spiritual Warfare can best be summarized as a battle for the mind - for the soul (mind, will and emotions). It is the ongoing perpetual struggle of good versus evil; morality versus immorality; individual rights and freedoms versus dogma and authoritarian dictatorship. It is a struggle for mental well being versus unhealthy depression, oppression, phobias and anxiety.

Humanity, as we discussed, has the capacity to differentiate between that which is good and beneficial, versus that which is harmful to his or her well-being. However, in the process of deciding what is - and is not -beneficial we enter into areas of moral gray. Nothing is truly black or white. Selfish motives, ego protective anger, hedonistic love of pleasure, and the tendency to avoid pain, even when it is for our long-term good (who would not avoid the doctor or the dentist if they had choices) causes us to engage in self-preserving behavior. This is not necessarily wrong, so long as my actions respect the rights of others and so long as I respect the right of others to have opinions different from my own.

The Apostle Paul was stating an age-old truth when he said that we battle not against flesh and blood (Eph.6: 12). We fight a battle of ideologies. One values human life and personal freedoms - for all peoples, while the other seeks after its own self-edification, at the expense of the rights of others. Charismatics

often get caught up with the concept of demons and fixate on the struggle between the Forces of Darkness against the Forces of Light. While this makes for entertaining TV and fascinating literature, it does not address the real problems of the world in a way that garners intellectual credibility. While it is true that this is a timeless battle, it will nonetheless rage until this planet meets its ultimate end. Why, because each of us holds a differing view as to what is morally right and wrong, and each of us holds diverse opinions as to what is wrong in the world. Also, each of us holds a differing position as to how to correct what is wrong. However, trying to stop the world from progressing by adhering to age worn dogma, or by saying we are right and others are wrong, will not solve the world's difficulties, nor will it prevent people from doing evil. The solution is 2000 years old; it is simply this: " *Love one another* " (John 13:34). Such love is not self-serving but is other serving. It leads by doing for others, by setting an example of accepting people unconditionally. This is how real spiritual warfare is done - acts of kindness and being a willing, available ear with an open heart.

It Comes Back To:

Attitude, Behavior, Personality and Character -

So we come back full circle, for spiritual warfare begins and ends in how I choose to act, react and interact.

How will I respond when I think I have been wronged? What set of criteria do I use to define my rights as an individual? How do I conduct myself as a parent? As a leader? In my trade or profession?

What standards do I use to judge right or wrong, good and evil?



Attitudes have their beginnings in "feelings". **Feelings** tell us something about our environment and ourselves. They are physical sensations. Attitude is the thought that I attach to the feeling. So attitude is linked to "perception" and "interpretation". And many of our thoughts, opinions and hence attitudes, are ours only because we have no other way of thinking. We have never contemplated another possibility.

Behavior is my response to my attitude. It is what I elect - - or tell myself - to do. I have a number of choices when I feel threatened or when I feel angry. I can withdraw; I can confront; or I can elect to try and see the other person's perspective and at least attempt to open a channel of communication. Likewise, when I am unemployed and in need of basic necessities, I can either seek employment, or apply for welfare or I can take up a life of crime. The options are mine, but the choices I make will have life-long repercussions and consequences.

Personality is part "nature" and part "nurture" and to a sizeable extent will affect my behavioral responses. Personality is our consistent, relatively stable, pattern of thoughts and ways of behaving that persists across time and circumstance.² It is those internal qualities that define personhood and those external characteristics that make for individual differences.³ If I am a generally happy, outgoing, likeable person, and nurtured in an environment that fostered certain moral standards - crime not being one of them - then I am likely to react to the above unemployment scenario by remaining positive and pursuing government help while also job seeking. In contrast, someone who is predisposed to negative thinking (negative temperament), and given to low self-esteem, may elect to simply withdraw into him or herself, and may need considerable social welfare support and even counseling.⁴

Nurture - and nature - goes to core beliefs about ourselves, about those around us, and about life in general. Beliefs and assumptions about life, and how we are to interact with the world around us, shape our fundamental behaviors.

² Moorhead & Griffin. *Organizational Behavior*. Houghton Mifflin, 1998, Chapter 4 Foundations of Individual Behavior, p.92

³ *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Baker Book House, 1985, David Benner, ed.

⁴ Krueger & Tackett. *Personality and Psychopathology*. The Guilford Press, 2006

It is this basic seat of knowledge and experience that is the site of the ideological battle within. It is where - as Paul advised - we must take captive each thought and make it obedient to God - or at least to those things that we hold to be moral good and in the best interest of humankind. (2 Cor.10: 5)

The end product is **Character**: our personality and core beliefs, acting in a way that is consistent with what we hold to be moral truths. Character goes to integrity: trustworthiness and principles. What do I value most: legalism? Being forever "right" (justified in my judgments and pronouncements)? Or, do I value "doing" what is right, laying aside legalism in order to let others into my live my life, especially those who need to be - and desire to see - God's love in action?

Our actions and our attitudes can put up invisible, emotional, mental walls in our lives that come to be...

Life Boundaries

Each of us has an invisible boundary around our lives. We control who and what we let in, and we control the extent to which we give out. Some give out too much and let in people who constantly drain and constantly take. Others, though, are too closed. They let no one in, and they give nothing of themselves. True spirituality, and true spiritual warfare, opens a controlled floodgate, letting life giving water flow into areas of our life that need watering.

It does so, however, in a wise and controlled manner. Mature spirituality and a seasoned spiritual warrior, engages others in healthy, reciprocal relationships. Love and support flow in two directions - or even multiple directions - ensuring mutual benefit. Relationships become healthy two-sided affairs, in which both parties know they are growing mentally and emotionally. Each is encouraged to aspire to their full potential as a human being. Healthy spirituality allows people to attain to greatness, not to play the subservient compliant in someone else's ego trip of control and manipulation.

Spiritual Warfare begins and ends in the mind. How I know I'm winning is when I sense joy at living, contentment within myself, a sense of fulfillment at having done something worthwhile. This is not complacency, for complacency is content with mediocrity. Rather, I am speaking about engaging life, living life, and feeling that one has contributed to the betterment of mankind, not merely abided by a set of religious rules of do's and don'ts.

In Closing

I have attempted to present a somewhat differing perspective on the subject of spirituality and spiritual warfare. My contention is that much of what we call "spirit" is really attitude, our zeal and zest for life, or the absence thereof.

Secondly, spiritual warfare is very much a battle of ideologies, a struggle for mental concepts of what are right or wrong ways to live. We can either live in a way that fosters a fulfilling life in others, and ourselves or we can live -and preach - an ideology that kills initiative, stifles growth and eventually destroys the will to live.

It is hoped that this brief treatise has done the former for you - fostered a desire to learn, experience, and ultimately grow.

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