

The Believer and the Spirit

I. The Meaning of the Spirit

“Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mothers womb and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:4,5).

These verses are at the very heart of the Biblical revelation. When God created man, it says that he breathed into him the “breath of life” (*nishmath chayah*). This expression in the Hebrew text has to do with the special breath which was the Spirit of God. The entire Biblical revelation is the plan and process whereby God would restore His kind of life which they lost. Having lost the Spirit of God, they also lost eternal life and became mortal. The only way that humans could be restored to eternal life would be through the recovery of the Spirit of God. That is what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the rebirth. To be born again would be to receive the Spirit of God. The Pharisees who were the religious leaders of Israel failed to understand this, as Nicodemus exemplifies. Jesus remonstrated with him in the words—“Are you a teacher in Israel and do not understand these things?” Even today, there is a great blindness in Israel relative to this point. Not only so, but there is a universal blindness in the world relative to the Spirit of God.

There has been much confusion throughout the millennia of human history over this very point. Many religions have sprung up over the issue of the pursuit of spirit. But the spirit that is being pursued is not the Spirit of God to be recovered from the loss suffered in the Fall, but rather something of an inner consciousness within the human. The watchword for such ideas is—“get in touch with your spirit.” The words are not the same. It is assumed that humans have the capacity to shake loose the materialistic chains which bind them and soar into the stratosphere of spiritual vitality. But apart from the Spirit of God, all that they can ever do is to achieve something of a tenuous control of the physical by the mental. It is more like riding on a “cerebral carousel.” They are always prisoners of the human “hippodrome”—the ultimate capacities of the human mind.

“But,” you say, “the mind is a marvelous instrument, capable of great function beyond our own realization.” And so it is, but it is still human and not divine. It is also subject to a very intricate pattern of interacting neurons, which are made up of the input of data from a large number of sources. These sources include the genetic material with which one is born, as well as the data of acquired knowledge and experience entering from without and forming something of a “grid pattern” out of which all thought and action must inevitably arise. The highest achievements of the mind are still human, and subject to human inadequacies.

“But,” you say, “Why do you keep denigrating the human mind? Has it not demonstrated its incredible potentials?” And indeed it has. Humans are indeed very like gods, but they are not God. Neither are they possessed by the Spirit of God unless they have come to a new birth. Jesus told Nicodemus that he could not see God unless he had the restoration of the Spirit of God within him. However marvelous are man’s inventions, he will never achieve eternal life apart from the Spirit of God.

Both the “new age” philosophers of today, as well as the stream of philosophers from antiquity have sought to find a supreme inner consciousness with which to resolve all of their personal disharmonies. But what they ultimately come to is only something of their inner psyche which, according to the Bible, is hopelessly flawed apart from the Spirit of God. Both the human mind and the human body are classified in the Bible as “the flesh” or “the old man.” In his letter to the people of Galatia, Paul says, *“For the flesh has its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would”* (Galatians 5:17). And to the Romans he said, *“For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not”* (Romans 7:18).

But doesn't that ignore all of the good that has been done throughout the history of mankind—even by those that do not claim to be Christians? Where do these good deeds come from?

Apparently there are residuals of the image of God within man—something akin to the eclipse of the sun with its rays radiating out from behind the eclipse. But, whether or not one may do what would be regarded as “good deeds,” it does not obviate the words of Jesus that apart from the restoration of the Spirit of God within, one cannot have eternal life. Again, Paul says to the Romans—*“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). And again, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Roman 6:23).

But how does one come to this new birth or how does one receive the Spirit of God?

It is very simple John says, *“As many as received Him to them may be the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”* (John 1:12).

So how does one acquire this faith?

That is also simple—*“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works [deeds], lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8,9). And again to his co-worker Titus he says, *“But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior”* (Titus 3:4-6).

These quotations from the Bible are very simple and very basic, but they show the great difference between the human idea of spirit and the Biblical idea. The entire “new-age” movement is immersed in the search for the human inner consciousness, by which they hope to achieve a certain amount of harmony and energy. The Bible makes it very plain that the only way to achieve such inner harmony and peace is through the restoration of the Spirit of Christ within.

Of course, it is up to the individual whether or not one wants to accept the Bible as the Word of God. That is a matter of personal choice. The only way to really determine whether or not the Bible is the Word of God is to read it. If one

prefers not to read it, then one must wander in the wilderness of human speculation without compass and without guide.

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