

towards a powerful inner life

soul versus spirit

We are beings at war with ourselves. Inside each of us are two parts in conflict: a soul – otherwise known as the outer man – and a spirit – also known as the inner man. These two pieces of the whole strive for complete control of who you are. Each desperately wants to run the show, but only one can. In Romans 7:14–25, the Apostle Paul wrote about the battle of these two halves, using the word “spiritual” to describe the inner man, and the word “carnal” to describe the outer man:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 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. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 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. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

God has called us to be ruled by our spirit, to submit our outer man (our soul) to that inner man. As Paul wrote, we must begin “warring” against ourselves, subjecting our soul – our mind, emotions, and will – to our spirit – that part of us which connects with God. Before we were Christians, we did what we wanted, we went where we pleased, we ruled our own life. But with salvation came a call from a different king: our soul must bow its knee to the reign of God.

This can be quite a battle. The spirit, which hears the whisper of God, exerts pressure on the soulish will to

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change its behavior. The soul, conversely, is more in love with the *idea* of God than with God *Himself*. The soul drags its heels, trying desperately to avoid surrendering to the spirit. It manifests itself in willful displays, deluded thinking, and odd emotional behavior. Our soul refuses to surrender easily to our spirit because it wants to be number one. It will rule us to the point of ruining us. For example, the soul believes in self-gratification: it resists God. The spirit, on the other hand, knows the power and satisfaction of God.

Our soul is quite the creation. It does not, because of our finiteness, understand the ways of God. It cannot fathom why He does what He does. Our minds are just too limited by time and space to see the richness of the Lord's activities. When we find ourselves in trouble, our soul knows what it wants from God: "Get me out of here! Lift me up out of this mess!" It tries its best to avoid entering the process of submitting to the spirit.

Souls hate being weak; they would much rather flex their intellectual, willful, or emotional muscles to prove their strength. Our soul does not want to surrender control because it seems illogical to.

Yet soul power must be broken or we cannot serve God effectively. Our soul needs to recognize that it will only be truly happy when we have no authority, but have taken the attitude of serving what God has placed

"To be taken with love for a soul, God does not look upon its greatness, but the greatness of its humility."
St. John of the Cross

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within us: our spirit. The soul will only find peace and fulfillment and full expression when it is a vehicle for our spirit to operate.

Left unconquered, the soul keeps us open and vulnerable to external pressures and attacks. Learning how to live in the spirit gives us the opportunity, because of our devotion and submission to God, to reverse all of the activity of the enemy and render his schemes useless. With the soul in control, the enemy is free to buffet us and leave us in the grip of the very pain we were called to put on him. If we can learn to submit our outer man to our inner man, nothing from the outside world will be able to shake who we are in Christ.

The story of sisters Mary and Martha, found in Luke 10:38–42, is a perfect example of one person living under the power of her soul, and one living under the power of her spirit. Mary, whose spirit was drawn and electrified by the Spirit of God, sat at Jesus' feet and listened as He spoke and taught. "*Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her,*" Jesus said. Martha, on the other hand, had too many preparations on her mind and fell into an emotional outburst to try and get Mary to serve her agenda. "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things,*" Jesus said. "*But one thing is needed.*" The issue here is primacy. Martha's concerns were, in fact, legitimate. However, in the context of placing soul under spirit, she had made *doing* more important than

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