

Sermon 1 – The Spirit, Soul & The Flesh - Part 1

Introduction

Tonight we're beginning a 2 part sermon on our way of life that is central to our discipleship in Christ, and to entering the Kingdom of God: *“What is Spirit? And how does it differ from the soul, the mind, the ego, and the flesh?”*

These are not just academic questions. They are the very heart of humanities purpose and life. Because if we don't know what Spirit is, how can we truly live by it?

So tonight, in Part 1, we're going to define **Spirit** and **Flesh**, see how Scripture distinguishes them, and why awakening the spirit within us is essential. Next time, we'll explore **how** to live by the Spirit daily, with God's Holy Spirit teaching and guiding us.

1. Defining Our Words

Before we dive into Scripture, let's look at the original words the Bible uses.

- **Spirit (πνεῦμα – pneuma)** — means *breath, wind, spirit*. Something invisible but life-giving. Used for God's Spirit, the human spirit (God within us), and even spiritual beings.
- **Flesh (σάρξ – sarx)** — means *flesh, human nature*. Sometimes neutral (the body), sometimes negative (fallen desires).
- **Soul (ψυχή – psuchē)** — the mind, will, emotions. Our psychological self, what we often think of as “me.” (Includes all life experience)
- **Body (σῶμα – sōma)** — the physical vessel, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

When the Bible speaks of “flesh” and “spirit,” it's not just poetry. It's describing two realities inside us — one temporary, one eternal.

2. God Is Spirit

John 4:24

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Context: Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan woman, who asked where the right place to worship was — on the Samaritan mountain or in Jerusalem. Jesus replies that true worship isn't about geography. It's about God's nature. Because God is Spirit — *pneuma* — worship must be spiritual, rooted in truth, not ritual.

Point: If God is Spirit, and we are made in His image, then understanding Spirit is essential to knowing Him. Our Human will is an image of God's spirit?

3. The Flesh Defined

John 3:6

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Context: Jesus is teaching Nicodemus about being “born again.” The flesh produces physical life, but only the Spirit produces spiritual life.

Romans 7:18

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

Context: Paul confesses the war inside him. He longs to do good, but the flesh — the fallen human nature — constantly pulls him toward sin.

Point: The flesh is not evil in itself — God made our bodies good. But when the flesh rules us, it enslaves us. It reacts by instinct, desire, or pride, and cannot produce true righteousness.

4. The Spirit Defined

Job 32:8

“But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand.”

Context: Elihu, the youngest friend of Job, speaks up after all the elders have failed to explain Job’s suffering. He says wisdom is not about age, but about the spirit God breathed into man.

Proverbs 20:27

“The spirit in man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts.”

Context: A proverb showing that the spirit in humans is God’s light inside us — the part He searches and speaks to.

Point: The spirit is not the same as the mind or emotions. It is the God-breathed essence within us — the “observer” that can step back from thoughts and desires, and unite with God.

5. Body, Soul, and Spirit — Distinct Yet United

1 Thessalonians 5:23

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Context: Paul prays that every part of us — spirit, soul, body — be made holy until Christ returns. He treats them as distinct.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Context: The writer shows how God’s Word can divide what seems indivisible — even soul and spirit.

Point: Scripture recognizes three dimensions of humanity:

- **Body (sōma):** our vessel.
- **Soul (psuchē):** our self — mind, emotions, will.
- **Spirit (pneuma):** our God-breathed essence, eternal and discerning.

The soul can side with flesh or Spirit. The spirit, when awakened, chooses life.

6. The Need for Spirit Awakening

Romans 7:19

“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”

Context: Paul illustrates the frustration of living bound to the flesh. The will desires good, but without Spirit, the flesh overpowers.

1 Corinthians 2:14

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

Context: Paul contrasts natural wisdom with spiritual wisdom. Without Spirit, divine truth seems like foolishness.

Point: Without awakening, our “observer (ie God’s Spirit within)” remains dormant. We think we are wise, but really we are just reacting — slaves to desire, instinct, and ego.

7. The Spirit Awakened by God

Romans 8:16

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit (in us) that we are children of God.”

Paul explains how we know we belong to God — the Holy Spirit joins with the life, the spirit of God within us. (Sometimes called the human spirit)

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

In Christ, the veil is removed. The Spirit brings freedom from law, sin, and flesh.

Point: Awakening happens when God’s Spirit unites with the spirit within us. This is the new birth. This is freedom.

8. Jesus — The Perfect Example of Spirit-Led Life

Before we close, let’s remember that Jesus Himself showed us what it means to live by the Spirit.

Matthew 3:16

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.”

Context: At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus, marking the start of His ministry. His life from this point is entirely Spirit-led.

Luke 4:1

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.”

Context: Immediately after baptism, Jesus faces temptation. But notice: He goes into the wilderness *full of the Spirit, led by the Spirit*. Every response He gives Satan is Spirit-guided, rooted in the Word.

Point: Jesus didn’t live by flesh, even though He shared our human body. He lived by the Spirit, modeling for us what a Spirit-filled life looks like.

Reflection Questions for Sermon 1 – What is Spirit? What is Flesh?

1. When you think of the word *spirit*, do you normally picture your mind, your emotions, or something deeper? How does the Bible's definition of *pneuma* change that perspective?
2. In what ways do you notice the *flesh* (instinct, desire, pride) pulling you in daily life? Can you see how it reacts automatically without the Holy Spirit's guidance?
3. Have you ever experienced your "*observer*" *self* — that quiet awareness that can step back from thoughts and feelings? How might this be the voice of God's?
4. What does it mean for you personally that "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit (within) that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16)? How does that bring you assurance?
5. Why does it matter that we awaken our spirit now, rather than just trying to live by intellect or willpower? How does this prepare you to walk by the Spirit in practical ways (to be explored in Part 2)?

Transition to Part 2: Next time, we'll see how to actually *walk* in this Spirit — how to live by it daily, producing fruit instead of works of the flesh.

8. Why It Matters

- Without Spirit, we remain flesh-bound — reacting, sinning, enslaved.
- With Spirit, we are awakened, able to discern truth and choose life.
- This is why Paul says in **Galatians 5:25**:
"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Closing Prayer Thought

“Lord, awaken our spirit. Teach us to see the difference between flesh and Spirit. Unite Your Spirit with ours, so that we may walk in truth and freedom.”