

The Renewal of the Spirit

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Man is a being created in the image of God, after his likeness. Because of the nature of spirit (*ruach / pneuma*), this likeness cannot be empirical; the likeness must be consistent with God's identity as spirit (Hebrew *ruach* / Greek *pneuma*), (cf. **God as ruach**: Gen 1:2; 6:3; Exod 31:3; Num 24:6; Jud 3:10; 6:34; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 16:13; 2 Sam 23:10; 2 Chron 20:14; Isa 40:13; 48:16; 61:1; 63:10, 14; Ezek 11:5, 24; **God as pneuma**: Matt 3:16; 4:1; John 1:32-33; 4:24; Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:10-11; 2 Cor 3:3, 17; Heb 12:9). To relate to God, one must understand that he has identified himself as *ruach*, which means that he is a non-empirical being, which we understand as "spirit." The problem this presents for us is determining how man can be created in the image of God if God cannot be identified with an empirical image.

Reflecting God in one's existence becomes something more than looking like God in outward appearance. If God is spirit, then that which is a reflection of God in man must also be, in some way, of the spirit. This should not be a concept completely lost on us. If we remember, Jesus said something very similar in his sermon on the mount in Matt 5:14-16, when instructing his listeners to let their light so shine that people would see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven, Jesus is telling them that when people see those who believe in God living in consistency with the will of God, they will see their behavior as a result of their belief in God. Here we have an example of how God may be seen in someone who is a faithful believer. Man is a being in whom something of God can be observed. When a son evidences a mannerism identifiable with his father, the usual observation is that, "You can see his father in him,"

meaning, there can be a connection or relationship between the two that causes a person to think of the one when he sees the other.

If this is true in terms of behaviors or mannerisms, it can also be true in terms of other characteristics or attributes. This is what the apostles saw in Jesus that caused them to believe that in him they had seen God. John says in the prologue of his Gospel, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” (1:14); and in verse 18, “no one has ever seen God, the only begotten God [some manuscripts read “*monotenes huios*” – only begotten son], who is in the midst [*kolpon* – the hollow of] the Father, that one has made him known,” [*exegeomai* – to make known or reveal]. The word *exegeomai* is the Greek word from which derives the English word “exegesis” meaning, “to bring out the meaning of something.” How did Jesus reveal or “show them” the Father, as he said he had done in John 14:8-14? To attempt to see the image of God in man as an empirically discernable characteristic is futile and misplaced. This does not mean that the image of God is no longer or ever was within man. This reality is what has been lost in the modern day understanding of both God and man.

Paul’s Concept of “Spirit”

Understanding Paul’s use of the term “spirit” is critical here. As has been stated earlier, the word “spirit,” both in Hebrew and in Greek, is essentially that part of man that is a gift of God, it is not one of the several words for “life,” but it is essential to life. Both the Hebrew *ruach* and Greek *pneuma* can be translated as breath, as is the case in Ezekiel 37:5, 6, 8, 9, 10. In each of these verses the word translated “breath” is *ruach*, the word for “spirit;” so the concept of breath is intrinsic to the word spirit. They are essentially interchangeable in Hebrew and Greek, although this doesn’t always work in English. The significance of the twofold nature of the word is very important to the reader of the Hebrew and the Greek text. You can’t miss the idea of “breath” in the word “spirit,” and vice versa. Paul read this in both the Hebrew Scripture and the Greek Septuagint, and in his writings he would have known what was

being conveyed by his words. In English, the spirit of man is virtually understood as a person's "personality," the personality that transcends man's life when his earthly life ends. People like to think of "themselves" as one-and-the-same with their "personality, and this concept is not that far off the truth.

This concept is seen in the Gospels with the spirit of Jesus. In Mark we are told that when the teachers of the *Torah* were thinking to themselves that Jesus was a blasphemer for forgiving sins, we read, "And immediately when Jesus perceived (*epiginosko*) in his spirit (*pneuma*) that they so reasoned (*dialogizomai*) within themselves," (Mark 2:8). It was within his spirit that he perceived what they were thinking. In Mark 8:12, Jesus, "sighed deeply in his spirit (*pneuma*)." In Luke 10:21, we read that Jesus, "rejoiced in spirit (*to penumatē*);" and in Luke 23:46, he cried from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit (*pneuma*)." In John 6:63, Jesus says, "It is the spirit (*pneuma*) that gives life (*zoe*), the flesh (*sarx*) profits nothing: the words that I speak to you, they are spirit (*pneuma*), and are life (*zoe*); there is much revealed in these words.

In Rom 1:9, Paul speaks of serving God in his spirit (*en mou pneuma*) in the preaching of the gospel. In Romans 8:10, he reasons that, "if Christ is in you, the body (flesh) is dead because of sin, but the spirit (*pneuma*) is life (*zoe*) because of righteousness." The spirit of man is the source of man's true identity in the thinking of Paul. In 1 Cor 2:11, he reasons that, "the things that a man knows, is known by the spirit of man (*pneuma anthropos*) which is in him." In Eph 4:23, Paul speaks of one being made new (*ananeoo*) in the spirit (*pneuma*) of their mind (*nous*)."

We have a statement of meaningful significance relating to this matter from the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. In chapter 12:9, the writer contrasts the fathers of men, with God as the father of our spirits. "We have had human fathers who corrected us," he writes, "and we paid them respect; shall we not much more be in subjection to the father of spirits (*pater pneuma*) and live?" A statement of Peter is also of significance as relates to the spirit. In his first letter, he speaks of the death of Christ as the suffering of the just for the unjust,

being put to death in the flesh (*sarx*), but made alive (*zoopoieo*) in the spirit (*pneuma*), (1 Peter 3:18). How is this to be understood in view of the emphasis on the bodily resurrection in the Gospels and in the letters of Paul? Further, in verse 19, Peter speaks of Jesus through the spirit preaching to the spirits in prison, and in 4:6, he identifies these spirits as “those who are dead.” Do Peter’s words imply that Jesus was in the form of spirit during the three days of his death and that those who have experienced death are spirits who abide in a *phulake*, a word meaning, “kept under watch.” This is the word used in Luke 2:18, speaking of the shepherds were keeping watch over their sheep on the night of Jesus’ birth. We have a curious set of concepts here, which are not at issue in our present study. For our purposes, the way the term “spirit” is used by the Hebrew’s writer and by Peter is consistent Paul’s use of spirit. God is spirit, he is the father of spirits, and following Jesus’ death on the cross, having committed his spirit to God, he is active as spirit, preaching to spirits who are kept somewhere under watch.

It does not appear that man’s existence can be reduced to a body of flesh filled with the breath of life (*psuche* - soul/life) and consciousness (*nous* - mind), driven by a complex of sensual appetites. There is in Scripture the constant mentions of the spirit (*ruach/pneuma*), which is not to be confused with the soul (*psuche*), but is more identified with what we call “personality,” *viz.* those essential characteristics that makes one “a person.”

The Spirit of Man and the Breath of Life

No one doubts that man has the breath of life within him or that he has a mind, even though no one can see the breath of life or the mind. The only way one can conclude that they exist is by seeing the effects resulting from the breath and the mind of man. So also is it with the biblical concept of “spirit,” whether the Spirit of God or the spirit of man. The spirit can only be discerned by its effects; the secular man who denies the existence of what the Scriptures call “spirit” can never know God, in that God is spirit. Jesus says to the woman in ancient Samaria, “God is spirit,” and those who wish to experience or worship him must do so through spirit (their spirit)

and through truth (revelation from God), (John 4:24). A number of truths are revealed in this text but what we need to see is that God in his very nature is “spirit,” (*ruach/pneuma*), and it is only through the spirit of man that he can truly experience God.

There is in Paul’s letters a special emphasis on the spirit as the means by which man experiences God. One of the most important themes in the letters of Paul is the contrast between the spirit of man and the flesh. The issue concerns the identity of the term *pneuma* as it relates to both man and God. In a number of passages it is difficult to determine the identity of the spirit (*pneuma*) to which Paul makes reference. The capitalization of the word spirit is an editorial decision made by the English translators. In the Greek manuscripts of the NT there are no capitalizations. In some manuscripts all words are written as uncial (all uppercase) or minuscule (all lower case). The Greek *pneuma*, as it appears in the oldest Greek texts of Paul’s letters, should simply read “spirit” with no indication as to its identity, unless modified by an adjective or found in a context warranting capitalization. In English the word “spirit” without capitalization is to be understood as the human spirit. When used with *hagios* (Holy) or the genitive, “of God,” however, it may be understood as “the Holy Spirit” or “the Spirit of God;” thus the capitalization of the word “Spirit,” otherwise, it should appear in the lower case.

The Spirit of Man in the Letters of Paul

The word *pneuma* is found in the NT in 129 occurrences in the NT. The translators of the KJV capitalized “spirit” in 78 of these occurrences to indicate that it is “the Holy Spirit” or “Spirit of God” that is under consideration. The remaining 51 occurrences appear in the lower case (“spirit”). However, considering each occurrence in its context it appears that only in 35 occurrences can the capitalization of spirit be justified. The translators appear to be working from the **presupposition that** the apostle intends the Holy Spirit to be understood in the majority of the occurrences of *pneuma* in his writings. However, when considered exegetically, as relates to the context and the terminology of the texts, it would appear that it is more presupposition rather than exegetical consideration that has

governed the decision of the KJV translators in at least 43 of the term's 129 occurrences.

This can be demonstrated in the letter to the Romans. Of the 28 occurrences of the term *pneuma*, the KJV translation has capitalized the term in 19 of its 28 occurrences. Only 9 of these capitalizations, however, are certain. In the critical text of the Greek NT (Aland/Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece*), all occurrences of *pneuma* are in the lower case. When translating Romans 8, one is struck by how differently the text reads when *pneuma* is read in the lower case (indicating the human spirit), rather than upper case (indicating the Spirit of God). *Pneuma* (spirit) is set in contrast to *sarx* (flesh) throughout the chapter. When translated with this exegetical consideration in mind, the intent of Paul becomes clear; it is the human spirit as set as over against the human flesh that is the intent of Paul, as may be seen in the following:

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after **the flesh**, but after **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man]. 2 For the law/rule of the spirit [the regenerated spirit of man] of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law/rule of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after **the flesh**, but after **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man]. 5 For they that are after **the flesh** do mind the things of **the flesh**; but they that are after **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man] the things of **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man]. 6 For to be **fleshly minded** is death; but to be **spiritually minded** is life and peace. 7 Because **the fleshly mind** is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be. 8 So then they that are of **the flesh** cannot please God. 9 But you are not **in the flesh**, but **in the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man], if so be that **the Spirit of God** dwells in you. Now if any man has not **the Spirit of Christ**, he is none of his. 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man] **is life** because of righteousness. 11 But **if the Spirit** of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall*

*also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to **the flesh**, to live after **the flesh**. 13 For if you live after **the flesh**, you will die: but if you through **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man] put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by **the Spirit of God**, they are the sons of God (Rom 8:1-14).*

This scenario is also present in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, where he addresses the man who has committed incest with his father's wife (step-mother), and instructs the congregation to, "hand this man over to Satan, so that **the flesh** may be destroyed and **his spirit** saved on the day of the Lord," (1 Cor 5:5).

In Paul's letter to the Galatians we see this same contrast:

*I say then: walk in **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man], and you shall not fulfill the lust of **the flesh** [the passions of the flesh].¹⁷For **the flesh** lusts against **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man], and **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man] against **the flesh** [the passions of the flesh] and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.¹⁸But if you are led by **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit], you are not under the law [that which was given to control Israel as a slave culture in the wilderness], (Gal 5:16-18).*

Following a list of the behaviors associated with man's desire as a being of flesh, Paul then cites a list of moral attributes intrinsic to the nature of God. If man is to behave as a being created in the image of God, it is the rule of his regenerated spirit that must control him. The behavior Paul cites as, "the fruit of the spirit" is the behavior of one under the influence of the renewed spirit identified with new creation existence in Christ.

*But the **fruit of the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.²⁴And those who are Christ's have crucified **the flesh** with its passions and desires.²⁵If we live **in the spirit** [those with a renewed spirit], let*

us also walk in the spirit [under the influence of the spirit created anew] (Gal 5:22-26).

In closing the Galatian letter, Paul reminds his readers that their choices, especially their moral choices, will result in consequences, "The one who sows to please **his flesh**, from **the flesh** will reap destruction; the one who sows to please **the spirit** [the regenerated spirit of man], from **the spirit** [regenerated spirit] will reap eternal life (Gal 6:8). It is the spirit of man that returns to God at the time of the body's return to the earth, indicating Paul's knowledge of Eccl 12:7. This is a point of no little significance in consideration of the fact that it is the spirit of man that is the recipient of new creation.

Paul's understanding is that the human spirit is that the point of contact between God and man. Glimpses of this motif can be seen in the following: in Gal 6:18, he writes, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be with your spirit** brothers," (Gal 6:18); in Phil 4:23, he encourages the brethren with the words, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ **be with your spirit.**" So also in Philemon 1:25, he writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ **be with your spirit.**"

Conclusion

As a descendent of Adam, man is "of the flesh," he is a physical or empirical being. But, he also is "spirit" (*ruach, pneuma*), which is that part of man wherein abides his sense of god-consciousness, his sense of moral oughtness, and the realization that he is more than an evolved humanoid. There are myriads of men and women who have chosen to fulfill themselves as beings of flesh and deny that there is within them a spirit that was given by God when he breathed life into man. Through man's suppression of that part of himself he becomes a virtual carnal being.

Paul went to great lengths in his letter to make man aware of the fact that he is a being created in the image of God and that the spirit within him was his means of access to God. Through what has been revealed to man by God over the centuries of man's existence

every man can learn who he is, why he is here, and what he is to do while here in this vale of soul-making. He is a being created in the image of God, he is here to fit himself for eternity, and the one who has made that possible is the one in whose image man is to be transformed in order to be restored to who he was created to be.

The journey through this vale of soul-making called earthly existence begins with “new birth” (to use the words of Jesus recorded in John 3), “new creation” and “regeneration” (to use the words of Paul). In John 3, Jesus says that in order to see the rule of God he had come to initiate one must experience a new existence, new creation, become a part of another realm of existence or, in Jesus’ world “be born again” (John 3:3). In response to the misunderstanding of this Jewish teacher, Jesus explained that the birth of which he spoke was a birth or renewal of spirit, man’s spirit; as with the wind, no one could see it, but it can be detected by its effects; so was it with those born of the spirit.

Although Paul does use the new birth terminology; i.e. “regeneration” (*palingenesi’as* – Titus 3:5), his term choice is “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10, 4:24; Col 3:10). In Romans 6:1-6, Paul speaks of being baptized into Christ, wherein one reenacts the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. One’s body is immersed or buried in water, simulating the burial of a person who is dead, and is then raised up out of the water in simulation of a resurrection. In this, one sees the imagery of new creation (i.e., new birth), wherein one dies to his old existence and is raised out of the old existence into a new existence, a renewal of the human spirit with a promise of moral empowerment, all of which is actualized by the belief that it is so.

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