

Spirit, soul, and body in God's image?

by Leon King

What do the Scriptures mean when they speak of man being created in the image of God? This is a question that has sparked a lot of study and conversation.

Little does anyone doubt that man is God's crowning creation. Man was made to have dominion over the beasts, cattle, fish, and creeping things - all things that God made on the earth. A dear old sister once said to me, "I believe that man was made in the image of God because man can plan, he can build, he can reason. Man can make magnificent structures, beautiful buildings, ships, and airplanes. Animals can't do that. Man has the ability to think and plan, so he is created in the image of God," she continued. I thought that was good food for thought. Think of it - men have built huge airplanes to carry hundreds of passengers. The Boeing Jumbo Jet and the Lockheed Tri-Star are tributes to the ingenuity of man. Great dams hold back rivers and generate electricity for millions of people in the cities. Man designed them and built them. Animals and other created beings cannot do such things.

The writer believes that man was created in the image of God in that man is a trinity. That means that man is three-in-one. He is spirit, soul, and body. *"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your **whole spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* -- 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

We note in the first chapter of Genesis that God said, "And God said, Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." -- Genesis 1:26-27. Please notice the pronouns that I have emphasized in the preceding verses. Each of them denote a plurality.

The Bible teaches us that the body is the tabernacle in which we live. A tabernacle is a dwelling place, so the body is our dwelling place. The body is not the essential self. The real self is the soul. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." -- Genesis 2:7.

Notice Paul's analysis of our tabernacle. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are **in this tabernacle do groan**, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." -- 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. We can readily see that the earthly house of this tabernacle speaks of the believer's body. At present, our body

is mortal - that is, it is subject to death. At the resurrection it will become immortal - that is, not subject to death.

What does it mean to be "*at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord?*" The human soul inhabits the body, which is its dwelling place in this life. The body is called the tabernacle. So while the soul (the essential self) is home in the body, it is not in the presence of the Lord. We do not see the Lord with our eyes, but we see Him by faith. Now what does it mean to be "*absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord?*" When a believer dies, the soul leaves the body and goes to the presence of the Lord. The body goes back to the dust from whence it came.

At this point, somebody will ask about the subject of soul sleep. We must remember that all men's souls went to hades (hell) before Jesus Christ died and paid for the sins of all. We know from the scripture that hell had two compartments so to speak. The story of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates this truth. "*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*" -- Luke 16:22-26.

In the foregoing passage, we are told that both the rich man and Lazarus were in a position to see each other after they had died. We are told that the rich man was buried, that is, his body was buried. We are also told there was a "great gulf" fixed between them and that one was comforted while the other was tormented. After the Lord Jesus Christ paid for our sins, He descended into the heart of the earth and led "captivity captive." He took His people into the presence of the Father. *"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)"* -- Ephesians 4:8-10.

Do we have Scripture showing souls before God in heaven? Yes, we do. *"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."* -- Revelation 6:9-11. When a believer dies, his soul goes to be with the Lord. These believers were clothed with white robes. This helps us to understand the expression from 2 Corinthians 5:3,4. *"If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."* The disembodied soul is a naked soul. At present we are clothed - that is, we are wrapped in our body. We do not desire to be unclothed (die a physical death), but we desire to be clothed upon. Apparently this

"clothed upon" is first with a white robe, then with a new body at the resurrection.

That is plainly seen in this passage. Those souls will not have a body until the resurrection, at which time they shall be given a new body. The living believers' bodies shall be changed. *"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. -- 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.*

What of the spirit of man? That is the part of man to which the Holy Spirit bears witness that the person is a son of God. That witness is neither soulish nor sensual. That is, the Holy Spirit neither witnesses to the soul nor the body. *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. **The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,** that we are the children of God:"* -- Romans 8:14-16. When a person dies, the spirit goes back to God who gave it. *"Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"* -- Ecclesiastes 3:21. *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* -- Ecclesiastes 12:7.

This should suffice to show that man is created in the image of the triune God. Some have alleged that the doctrine of the trinity is heresy and is a Roman Catholic invention. I believe the Bible doctrine that God is one God, but three persons is true just as all other Bible doctrines.

When the time comes, that we are clothed upon by our house - our new body from heaven, then, we will be perfect. We will awake in His likeness completely - spirit, soul, and body. The "old man" will be eliminated. We will then be capable of enjoying the very presence of God in a glorified body, a saved soul, and a spirit made perfect.