

May 4, 2014

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:37)

If the King's English means anything, this verse surely tells us that the human soul is of great worth. When considered in context, these words suggest the soul is of greater value than the whole world, because verse 36 of Mark 8 tells us: **For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**

This all being said in the greater context of following Christ, specifically **Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.** (Mark 8:34-35).

So what of this great gift from God – the human soul; what shall we say? Might we explore what the Bible has further to say on this interesting subject?

Let us first look at the names of the soul.

- Heart. The soul is often called the heart of man. **My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.** (Proverbs 23:26). **Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.** (Psalms 26:2). Yet we know the heart is often referred to as stony and hard, and is **deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?** (Jeremiah 17:9). What do we make of this dichotomy – on the one hand, the soul is of great value and on the other, it is desperately wicked?
- Spirit. **With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.** (Isaiah 26:9). **And**

Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. (Luke 1:46, 47). Here soul and spirit are put together as to the same notion. The soul is thus the spiritual or most noble part of man, and far superior to the body. The human body is but a poor, empty vessel without this soul/spirit. Indeed, **the body without the spirit (or soul) is dead.** (James 2:26).

- Life. The soul is often called the life of man. So, when the soul leaves the body, the body dies; that body ceases to act, move, think and create. **His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.** (Psalms 146:4). There is the soul of a beast, a bird, etc., but the soul of a man is another thing; it is his understanding, and reason, and conscience, etc. And this soul, when it departs, he dies.
- The whole man. At times, the term “soul” is used to designate the entire man/human. **Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.** (Romans 13:1). That is to say, let every human being be subject to those higher powers. Similarly, we find this at Acts 7:14: **Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.**
- Darling. The soul is sometimes called the good man’s darling. We are very familiar with that passage in Psalms 22:20 where David – standing in a representative capacity for Christ – pleads that his “darling” be delivered from the power of the dog. There, we are talking about the very soul of David. A similar plea goes up from David in Psalms 35:17, specifically: **Lord, how long wilt thou look on? Rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.**

Now, having taken time to look at some of the various labels affixed to the human soul in Scripture, might I suggest we survey various powers (abilities) of this thing called the human soul. They would surely include at least these –

1. Understanding; this is that by which a man conceives and apprehends things so deep and great that cannot, by mouth, or tongue, or pen, be expressed. We all know and experience this phenomenon.
2. Conscience, by which the good or evil of a matter is tried.
3. Judgment.
4. Fancy or imagination, from which the human being gets ideas and concepts.
5. Memory. Some say from this part of the soul will be fed the worm that dies not, when men are cast into hell; also, from this memory will flow that peace at the judgment day that saints shall have in their service for Christ in the world.
6. Affections. **Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.** (Colossians 3:2).
7. Will, by which the human is carried here and there.

These are the golden things of the soul, though in carnal man they are often used in service of sin and Satan. Thus you see the beauty and majesty of the All Powerful God who saves souls and sanctifies the soul to his service.

Next, let us look at some of the senses of the soul.

- A. Sight. The soul has eyes. **The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling,**

and what (are) the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18).

- B. Hearing. The soul hears and reacts to that hearing. **For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.** (Job 33:14-17). And listen to how Daniel describes this hearing of the soul: **Therefore I was left alone and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.** (Daniel 10:8, 9).
- C. Taste. The soul can taste and relish, not food for the belly, but the soul of a saint can taste and relish God's Word (Hebrews 6:5 – **I have tasted the good word of God**), and often times finds it sweeter than honey (Psalms 19:10) nourishing as milk (1 Peter 2:2 – **desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby**), and strengthening like to strong meat (Hebrews 5:12-14).
- D. Smell. The soul can smell, and brings refreshment to itself that way. **My hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh.** (Song of Solomon 5:5).
- E. Feeling. The soul has the sense of feeling, as quick and sensible as the human body. **Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness.** (Ephesians 4:19). **Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.** (1 Timothy 4:2).

The soul also possesses and displays passions, such as love, hatred, joy, fear, grief and anger.

Now, having given this description of the soul, let me return to how I started this discussion, that is, the greatness of the soul. The soul is far greater than the body. The body is a house, vessel or tabernacle for the soul and is clothing for the soul. **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.** (2 Corinthians 5:1). **Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.** (2 Peter 1:14).

And we have these other Biblical showings of the greatness of the soul:

- i. The soul is called God's breath (**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). The soul is greater than the body as the breath of God is greater than dust;
- ii. The soul is in God's image (Genesis 1:27); this is never said regarding any other creation – not even the angels. **Adam was made a living soul.** (1 Corinthians 15:45);
- iii. The soul reflects God's desire (**I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me,** Song of Solomon 7:10);
- iv. The soul is a vessel for grace; it's the soul – also called **the hidden part** (Psalms 51:6) – that God counts worthy to be a vessel to hold his grace; **The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?** (Song of Solomon 3:3);

- v. The soul is immortal; it will have a sensible, conscious being forever. No man can kill the soul. **Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.** (Matthew 10:28);
- vi. The soul activates the body; from the soul springs all actions of humans, both good and bad. **God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.** (Ecclesiastes 7:29); and,
- vii. The soul is capable of having to do with invisibles, with angels (both good and bad) and even with the only God in heaven. **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).

I close with the last verse of that classic hymn *Be Still My Soul*. This hymn was written by Katharina von Schlegel, of who little is known these days except that she lived in the early 1700s and was likely from an aristocratic family. The hymn was translated by Jane Borthwick, a Scottish poet. It is sung to the tune Finlandia which complements the stirring words wonderfully.

Be still, my soul: The hour is hast'ning on

When we shall be forever with the Lord,

When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,

Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.

Be still, my soul: When change and tears are past,

All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

I love you.

Amen!