

Chapter 3

I AM NOT MY FLESH

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17 (NASB)

If you are “in Christ,” you are a completely new creation; you have a new future and a new past. You are God’s child. You have His forgiveness; therefore, you are holy and blameless. You are God’s friend so what is it that pulls you toward behaving like God’s enemy?

“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. 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.” Romans 7:15, 18 (NKJ)

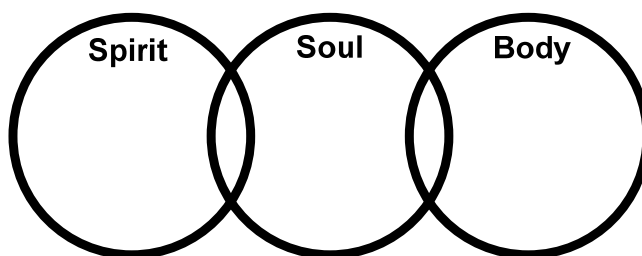
- Q1.** Have you experienced an inconsistency between what the Bible says is true about you and how you act? Describe.

Your Design

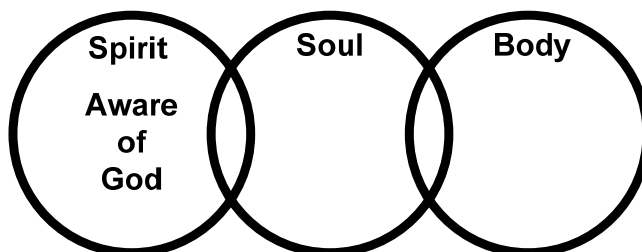
Understanding how you were designed may help your behavior line up with your new identity. The Bible describes man's design as having three parts: a spirit, a soul, and a body.

*"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole **spirit, soul, and body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* **1 Thessalonians 5:23** (NKJ)

This diagram illustrates those three parts of your being - **spirit, soul,** and **body**.



Your spirit communicates with God; it is **aware of God**.



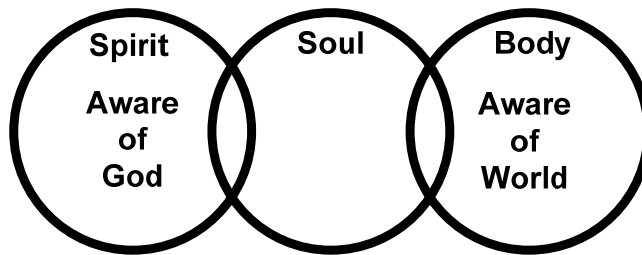
A person that has *not* been born again is dead spiritually.

Your spirit comes alive when you receive Jesus as your Savior. God puts His Spirit into your spirit.

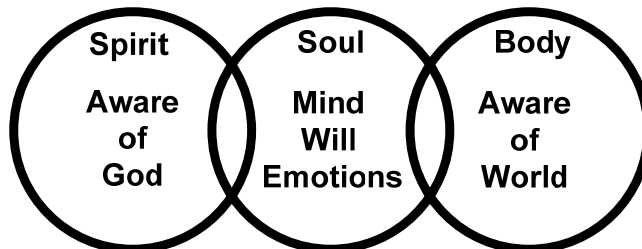
"When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive - right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven." **Colossians 2:13** (MSG)

Q2. Have you been born again? If so, when?

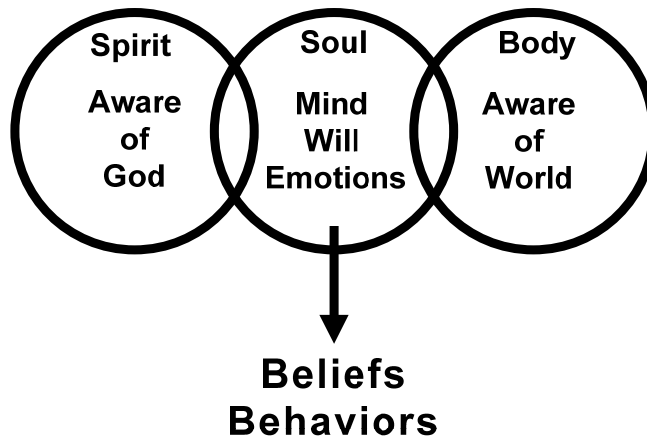
Your body is the physical part of you. It is **aware of the world** around you through your five senses – sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. You live in your body.



Your soul is made up of your **mind**, **will**, and **emotions**. Your soul thinks, decides, and has feelings.

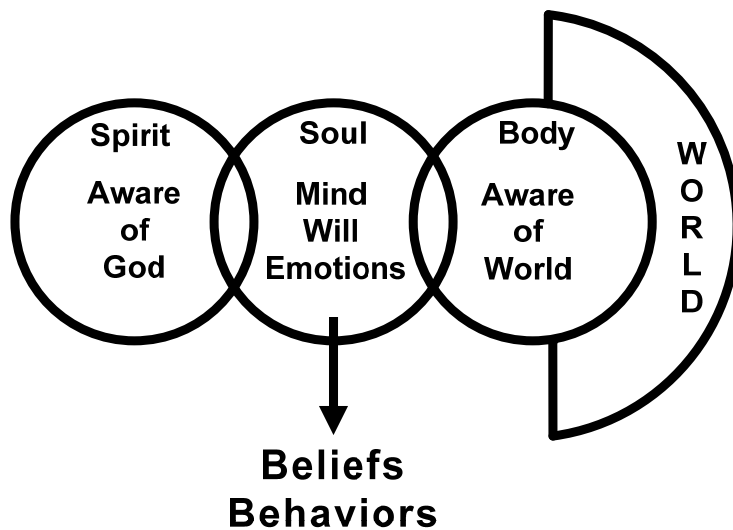


Your soul is influenced by the data it receives. It determines your **beliefs** and **behaviors**. The question is this; “Is your soul going to be defined and influenced by God or the world?”



The World

Even though you have an awareness of God, you also have an awareness of the **world**. The world and its influences are all around you, as the next diagram shows.



Satan

You receive input from the world through your five senses. The problem with the input from the world is that God's enemy, Satan, is actively influencing the world.

"You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God." **Ephesians 2:2** (NLT)

Satan wants you to think the way the world thinks and love what the world has to offer. The Bible warns against being influenced by the input from the world.

*“Don’t love the world’s ways. Don’t love the world’s goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—**wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important**—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out...” 1 John 2:15–17 (MSG)*

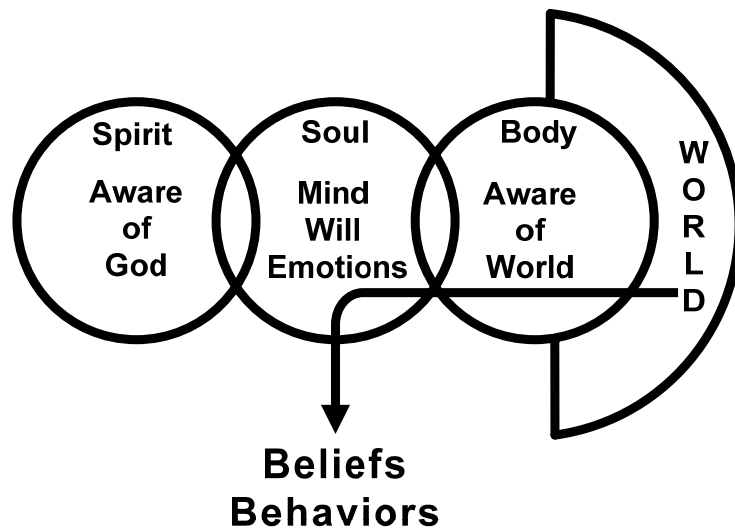
- Q3.** What is your most recent example of wanting your own way, wanting something for yourself or wanting to appear important?

Wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, and wanting to appear important are examples of competing with God.

The Flesh

Remember it was Satan who first tried to be like God. Then he tempted Adam and Eve to be like God. There’s something inside of you that wants to be like God. The Bible calls that something **the flesh**.

Don’t think of the flesh as skin and bones. The flesh is the part of you that can be enticed to sin and rebel against God. It is the selfish desire to meet your needs apart from God and to get your own way. The flesh is in everyone.



When you choose to follow your flesh your **beliefs** and **behaviors** will be influenced by the world. This produces evil results:

*“...Your lives will produce these **evil results**: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.”*

Galatians 5:19–21 (NLT)

Q4. Which of these evil results have you seen in your life?

There is absolutely nothing good about the flesh. The flesh wants its own way. It is always looking for fulfillment, but is never satisfied. It is greedy and proud. Influences from the world catch the flesh’s attention.

The message from the world is, “You need possessions to make you happy, you need success to be significant, and you should do whatever you can to make yourself feel good or be comfortable.”

The world says, “If you possess enough ‘good things,’ you will be happy.” Which things on the following list are you waiting for so you can be happy?

I Would Be Happy If Only

Family and Friends

_____ I was married (or I wasn't married).

_____ I had children (or didn't have children).

_____ I had a best friend.

_____ Other: _____

Money and Possessions

_____ I made \$ _____ or could buy whatever I wanted.

_____ Other: _____

Job and Position

_____ I had a better or different job.

_____ Other: _____

Location and Leisure

_____ I lived somewhere else or could take a vacation or get some time for myself.

_____ Other: _____

Service to the community or your church

_____ I could help enough people, be in ministry or find a good church.

_____ Other: _____

Personal appearance

_____ I could lose weight, had a new wardrobe, or looked different.

_____ Other: _____

Thinking you will be satisfied if you get one of these things is what the world tells you, and your flesh believes it.

The flesh leads you to try to find satisfaction in having good looks, things or relationships. The truth is: your flesh will *never* be satisfied, no matter how good you look, no matter how much you have or how enjoyable your relationships.

King Solomon, the richest and most successful man in the world, wrote these words:

*“...I had everything a man could desire! But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, **it was all so meaningless.** It was like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. It’s all vanity.”*
Ecclesiastes 2:8, 11 (NLT)

Dealing with Disappointment

Like Solomon, when you follow your flesh and go after the things of this world, you will end up disappointed. That disappointment leads to doing things to cope with your unhappiness and pain.

Which of the following things do you do when life disappoints you?

- ☐ Eat food to fill the emptiness.
- ☐ Use drugs or alcohol to relieve the anxiety or depression.
- ☐ Try to figure it out with your mind.
- ☐ Get angry to get results.
- ☐ Call a friend for advice.
- ☐ Buy something to distract you from the pain.
- ☐ Get educated to solve problems.
- ☐ Work harder to overcome.
- ☐ Get overly busy to forget.
- ☐ Get divorced or get a new relationship.
- ☐ Escape into sleep.

Q5. Have the results you were looking for been achieved by doing these things?

These things only create more problems and you are *still* following your flesh. Over time, following the flesh leaves you feeling exhausted, disappointed, and disillusioned.

Even when you attempt to do “good” things while following your flesh, they are not pleasing to God because your flesh is really only trying to please itself.

“...When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are but filthy rags...” **Isaiah 64:6** (NLT)

- Q6.** Have you been doing good things so God or the people around you will give you praise? Give an example.

You Are Not Your Flesh

The good news is YOU ARE NOT YOUR FLESH. As a believer, your new identity doesn't want to sin and try to take God's place. You are *not* a sinner; you are a child of God. The flesh is in you, but it is not who you are and you don't have to follow it.

God has made a way out for you. Jesus has set you free from the power of the flesh.

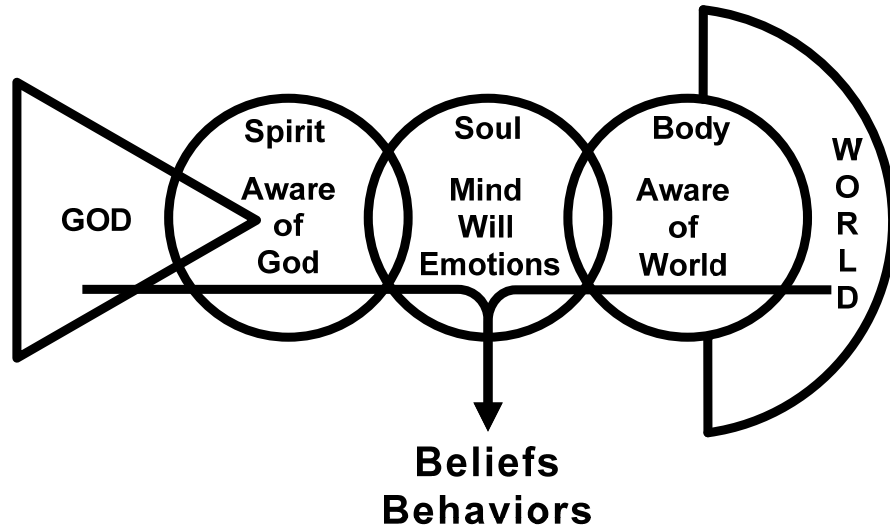
“Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.”

Romans 7:24–25, 8:1 (NLT)

The only way the world and Satan can influence you now is when you make a *choice* to follow your flesh. If you choose to follow your flesh, your behavior will be the same as the world.

God is in You

The following diagram illustrates that the world *surrounds* you; however, **God is *in* you!** He wants your beliefs and behaviors to be influenced by Him.



You receive input from God when you are “in Christ.” God’s Holy Spirit lives inside of you and He is speaking to you. You can make decisions based on what He says instead of what the world says.

*“And I will put my Spirit in you so you will obey my laws and do whatever I command.” **Ezekiel 36:27** (NLT)*

- Q7.** Have you ever been aware of God communicating with you? Describe.

God's Message

God's message to you is completely different from that of the world. He doesn't say, "You need possessions to make you happy." Instead He says, "Let Me give you what you need."

*"And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus." **Philippians 4:19** (NLT)*

- Q8.** Has it been hard for you to trust God to give you everything you need? Explain.

God does not say you need to do anything to be important to Him. Instead He says you are already important to Him. He loves you and even rejoices over you.

*"For the LORD your God has arrived to live among you. He is a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with great gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will exult over you by singing a happy song."
Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)*

Walk After the Spirit

If you allow the input from the world to define what you believe and how you behave, you will believe lies and behave badly. This is called "walking after the flesh."

If you allow the input from God to define what you believe and how you behave, you will believe truth and behave like Jesus. This is called "walking after the Spirit."

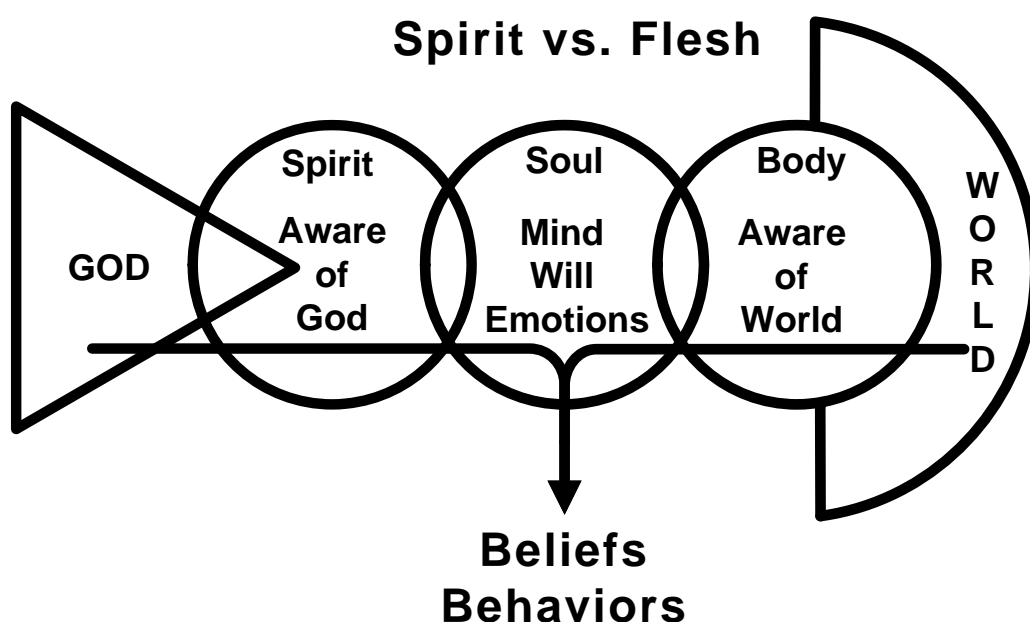
*"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is." **Romans 12:2** (NLT)*

- Q9.** What input from this world is affecting your beliefs and behaviors?

- Q10.** What input are you receiving from God that will transform how you behave?

The Battle

As long as you are in this world, as a believer, you will have two opposing sources of input, **Spirit and flesh**. For this reason you have a battle inside your soul as these two sources of input compete for your attention.



*“So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature [flesh] craves. The old sinful nature [flesh] loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature [flesh] desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.**”*

Galatians 5:16–17 (NLT)

Walking after the Spirit doesn't mean you won't be tempted to follow your flesh; it means you choose not to give in to temptation. Being tempted doesn't mean you aren't holy. Being tempted means you have flesh. You will have flesh until you die.

Walking after the Spirit also means your life is about following Christ. It means choosing to believe God is all you need for true fulfillment instead of thinking you would be satisfied if only you had something in the world. It means choosing to seek His way and what He desires not your way and what your flesh desires.

Satan wants you to put your mind on the things of this world, which aren't going to last. God wants you to put your mind on things like Him, heaven, and His Word, because those are the things that are going to last forever.

*"While we **do not look** at the things which are **seen** [the world], but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

2 Corinthians 4:18 (NKJ)

- Q11.** Has God shown you an area where you have been walking after the flesh? Explain.

The "Real You"

Your flesh wants to believe the world. The "real you" wants to believe God.

Your flesh wants to get praise. The "real you" wants to praise God.

Your flesh wants to be in control. The "real you" wants to trust God's control.

Your flesh wants to rebel against God. The "real you" wants to obey God.

You are not your flesh!

Q12. Are you ready to stop listening to the world and listen to what God says?

If so, perhaps the following steps would be helpful to you.

Repentance

Agree with God that you have been wrong for walking after the flesh in the area you listed in Q11. Share with Him the ways your motives have been for your own selfish interest. Repent of trying to play God.

Thank God that you are not your flesh. Choose to believe you have a new identity “in Christ” and that the “real you” wants to follow God.

Tell God you are going to listen to His voice and obey what He says.

Ask God to speak to you now. Write what He shows you.

Spirit vs. Flesh

Diagram

Notes

S.A.L.T. – Spiritual Area