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# The Christian and the Spirit

**How does God's Spirit interact with the human mind?**

**Let's unravel a puzzling mystery.**

by James McBride

The nature of the Spirit of God and the interaction between God's Spirit and the human spirit has given rise to a multitude of explanations - of what he or it is, how it works, who has it. Much of the confusion rises from a wrong perspective. The difficulties are removed when we step back to look at the plan and purpose of God.

God's focus at the creation of human kind was to make a being *"in the image and likeness of God"*. It's not wrong, therefore, to draw some 'anthropomorphic' conclusions. Thus, according to the Bible man looks physically as God appears in His spirit form. And man has intellectual capacities comparable to the divine - though clearly far inferior in power and scope.

When man was created his total being pleased his Creator - he was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). All his physical and intellectual and emotional faculties fitted him for stewardship over the remainder of creation. He was, though, on a par with the rest of creation in regard to his make-up - indeed sharing the bulk of his genetic form with every other creature. Like them, Adam - man was *"of the earth, made from dust"* (I Corinthians 15:47, Genesis 2:7). He was, with them, not immortal - a quality of life possessed only by God (I Timothy 6:16).

But there are obviously significant differences between man and beast. One of these lies in what the Bible terms "the spirit". It is a faculty shared with other living creatures. As Solomon pointed out: *"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?"* (Ecclesiastes 3: 21).

Numerous Bible texts confirm there is *"a spirit in man"* - and in the lower creation.

## Spirit in Man

Whatever this spirit may be it is not immortal. There is no possible way of proving from Scripture that any aspect of man survives death - apart from a resurrection. But that is a different matter.

Some anatomy is useful here. The most obvious difference between man and beast is our brain function. Our capabilities - between kind and kind - are directly related to the brain structure. The brain is made up of nerve cells - neurons - each

with a varying number of branches which inter-connect with other nerve cells. A worm has about nine neurons. A bee has several thousand. A cat about one hundred million. But a human being has some ten billion - and the inter-connections run in to astronomical figures. The human brain has been described as "the most complex machine in the universe".

It's this quantum leap in capacity that enables man to fulfill his stewardship function. It enables us to appreciate beauty, to craft complex machines, to create civilizations. The intricacy of the human spirit gives us capacity to dream - to envisage, to plan, to execute marvels. And to grasp the notion of the divine. God has *"put eternity into man's mind"*, wrote Solomon (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

All this is achieved through the activity of the human spirit. Wrote the apostle Paul, *"...for what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of man which is in him?"* (I Corinthians 2: 11).

## Some History

Fresh from the hand of God, the first man Adam had a mind that reflected that of his Creator. He had, if you like, 'God's neurons' just as he had other more overtly physical characteristics of God. (God, of course, is "spirit" - John 4: 24.)

Tradition has it that Adam perfectly expressed the will of God for all of seven years - though Scripture does not specify a time. He carried out his God-given functions faultlessly, having dominion over all of the material creation around him. Adam and Eve also functioned perfectly in that they never during this time transgressed the "operating manual" for which they were designed. In Bible terms, Adam did not sin. Their human spirit, until this point, was in fact the mind-set of God.

## Choice

One key point in Adam's creation - while in perfect harmony with God yet he had the faculty of choice. Likely, time and again he and his wife were tempted to go contrary to the way of holiness - but resisted.

To use an analogy from the world of personal computers, Adam's operating system (the spirit in man) was perfectly tailored to run on only the "program" designed for it. That

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program was the divine Law. When a “bug” entered the system - when he transgressed that Law - the system crashed! Since then the human spirit has been distorted - and of a mind-set that the Bible describes as “*enmity with God*” (Romans 8:7).

The result is the chaos, the misery, the pain that swamps our world today.

### Four Ages of Man

Before we go to how God’s Spirit “*bears witness with our spirit*” (Romans 8:16), let’s summarize what could be called “the four ages of man”.

*First* is man newly formed by the Creator. In Eden he lives in perfect harmony with God. He carries out the will of God, enjoying all the fruits of that harmony (Galatians 5: 22, 23).

*Next* is man having broken that perfect relationship and as a result being ejected from his Paradise. His spirit is now at war with God. It is “re-wired” and has become hostile to God’s Operating Manual, with all the ensuing devastating consequences we see around us.

*Third* - we come to the implementation of God’s safety-net - redemption.

The loving God provides mankind a way to eventually be restored to his pristine state. We will return to this in a moment.

And *finally* there is the stage, yet future, when man will put off entirely “*the old man*” and be restored to the divine image by means of a resurrection to unending life. [You are invited to request the article *After The Resurrection*]

### Recovery Mode

Let’s look more closely at that third stage. It is the time - extending from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - in which we now live - until the end of this present era.

Thanks to the sin of Adam and Eve we are saddled at birth with our crashed operating system. Through our parents we have inherited a flawed spirit that is hostile to God, that has been blinded by the devil to the perfect ways of the Creator (II Corinthians 4:4). Our natural mind or spirit rejects the way of life revealed by Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments. It’s a spirit that will be with us till the day we die.

For the vast majority of mankind this is all that we know. We are born. We live a life of time and chance that can be pleasant or can be hell - usually a mixture. Then we die.

But God has a plan. He has by no means abandoned His intention of making us “*in his image*” (Genesis 1: 26, 27). We were created for the very purpose, as the apostle Peter tells us,

of being “*partakers of the divine nature*” (II Peter 1: 3-4). God’s plan for man is to share with us the magnificence of His Universe. We are destined as God’s children to be “heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8: 17).

Through the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of His own Son - the very Word of God (John 1: 1-3, 14) - God has provided a way for mankind to be restored to the original model. But this time the end result ensures we forever after will always make the right choices.

### A New Spirit

The apostle Peter made clear how God will achieve this. Addressing those gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost he said, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). This was a promise long foretold in the Scriptures (Joel 2:28-29). In modern language what Peter says is, “Turn yourself away from breaking my laws and be baptized. I will freely forgive all that has been wrong with you - and I will restore to you My mind-set, My operating system”.

Note that this new Spirit does not replace our human spirit, but works along side of it. It is God’s way of directly communicating with us (I Corinthians 2: 9-13).

Indeed, as Paul’s own experience highlights - there will as long as a Christian lives be an unending *battle between our spirit “in the flesh”* and the Spirit of God “*in our mind*” (Romans 7:21-24). They oppose one another.

Those who have received the Spirit of God have, like Adam, the power of choice. Christians can indeed choose to grieve (distress, cause pain) to the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). We may even quench or put out the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5:19). This frightening thought is further explained in Hebrews: (6: 4): “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them to repentance*”.

Alternatively, we may choose, with the help of God’s indwelling Spirit, to suppress those human desires that emerge from our faulty human spirit - a spirit that obeys the flesh with all its seeking after satisfaction. Do this, and the influence of God’s Spirit - nourished by the written Word of God - gains ascendancy. We increasingly become like our Father in heaven, as we strive towards Christ-like maturity (Matthew 5:48). We become truly ‘*sons and daughters of the Almighty*’ - His children shaped in His likeness (II Corinthians 6:18).

The divine Spirit acting with our human spirit will ultimately restore to us the lost divine image.

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