Understanding Biblical Terminoligy

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Includes work from Watchman Nee

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We know that the terms that we use are often different from those used in the Bible. For example, we use the word "redemption" with reference to the whole of the Lord Jesus' work on the cross. But the biblical meaning of the word "redemption" is only limited to the covering of sin.

Hence, there are many terms which sound right to us but are not accurate if judged by the Bible. For example, we all know the expressions "the overcoming of sins," "the crucifying of the self on the cross," and "the crucifixion of the soul-life" and what they refer to. But these expressions are not found in the Bible. The Bible does not have these things.

The Bible does not speak of "the overcoming of sins," but "the deliverance from sin" and "being freed from sin." God's way of salvation is not for us to overcome sin, but to crucify our old man so that we are delivered from sin and the power of sin. (The expression "overcoming sins," is merely making reference to one's experience.)

Again, the Bible does not say that we should "die to the self," but that we should "deny the self." One does not "crucify the self"; the self is dealt with by "taking up the cross." This is because the self is our own personality and can never be crucified. Once the self dies, our own person dies. The self is the person. Hence, we can only deny the self and take up the cross to deal with it.

The meaning of bearing the cross is not to die, but to be willing to die. In the same way, the Bible never says to "crucify the soul-life"; it only says to "lose the soul-life," for if our natural life is crucified, our physical life will be gone as well.

This is very important because an inaccurate term can lead to inaccurate truths, in the same way a lack of understanding the correct meaning of a term can also lead us down the garden path.

Here are a couple of examples:
1. It would be well if we remember God's way of redemption.

   God's goal is to deliver us, through the new life which He gives to us at the time of our regeneration, from (1) sin, (2) natural things (our nature), and (3) supernatural things (the sinful aspects). All three steps of deliverance are indispensable.

   If a believer limits God's way of salvation and is satisfied only with victory over sin, he is short of God's will. The natural good nature must be overcome, and the supernatural enemy must also be overcome. It is good to overcome sin, but unless one overcomes the natural narrowness
of our human nature and the supernatural evil, he is not perfect. Such victory can only come from the cross.

2. Knowledge of the distinction between the spirit, the soul and the different functions of the spirit and the soul is indispensable to spiritually-seeking believers. Only after one knows what the spirit is and what it is to be spiritual can he truly walk according to the spirit. Hence the importance of studying the Word of God. Remember the Hungry and thirsty soul will be satisfied.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you through and through [separate you from profane things, make you pure and wholly consecrated to God]; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and complete [and found] blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah).

Not only does 1 Thessalonians 5:23 divide man into three parts; other passages in the Scripture do the same.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

(The soul and the mind are often confused as is the spirit and the soul). Here the apostle divided the non-physical elements of man into two parts: the soul and the spirit. And he considered the physical part of man to include the joints and the marrow, which correspond to the mind and will. Just as a priest divided up a whole sacrifice and cut it apart with a knife so that nothing remained hidden, in the same way the Lord Jesus divides those who belong to Him, through the word of God; He pierces and divides every part, whether it be the spiritual, the soulish, or the physical.

Since the soul and the spirit can be divided, the two must not be the same thing. Hence, this portion of the Word also considers man to be composed of three elements: the spirit, the soul, and the body.

Because the versions of the Bible we ordinarily use do not follow a literal translation of the words "spirit" and "soul" in a strict way, readers find it difficult to differentiate between the two just by looking at the translated words. (Hence the confusion).

In translating the Bible, we should translate these words literally. When men in the world translate books, they invent many new terms. Why cannot the translation of the most widely circulated Book do the same? Since God has used two different terms for the spirit and the soul, we should not confuse them.

1 Corinthians 2:11-16
For what person perceives (knows and understands) what passes through a man’s thoughts except the man’s own spirit within him? Just so no one discerns (comes to know and comprehend) the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit [that belongs to] the world, but the [Holy] Spirit Who is from God, [given to us] that we might realize and comprehend and appreciate the gifts [of divine favor and blessing so freely and lavishly] bestowed on us by God. And we are setting these truths forth in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the [Holy] Spirit [of God], combining and interpreting spiritual truths with spiritual language [to those who possess the Holy Spirit]. But the natural, nonspiritual man does not accept or welcome or admit into his heart the gifts and teachings and revelations of the Spirit of God, for they are folly (meaningless nonsense) to him; and he is incapable of knowing them [of progressively recognizing, understanding, and becoming better acquainted with them] because they are spiritually discerned and estimated and appreciated. But the spiritual man tries all things [he examines, investigates, inquires into, questions, and discerns all things], yet is himself to be put on trial and judged by no one [he can read the meaning of everything, but no one can properly discern or appraise or get an insight into him]. For who has known or understood the mind (the counsels and purposes) of the Lord so as to guide and instruct Him and give Him knowledge? But we have the mind of Christ (the Messiah) and do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart.

Romans 8:5

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you through and through [separate you from profane things, make you pure and wholly consecrated to God]; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and complete [and found] blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah). Faithful is He Who is calling you [to Himself] and utterly trustworthy, and He will also do it [fulfill His call by hallowing and keeping you].

So in Conclusion it is best to be like a Berean and search the word of God. To study to show oneself approved so we can rightly divide the word of Truth.

In the Words of Watchman Nee: “We must let the word of God dwell richly in our hearts before we can hear His speaking today and before He can make us ministers of His word.” To do this “the person must be right” i.e. “prepare the person” by learning the “right methods” as he is “receiving training”. This means proper training with the “right methods,” most methods also “do not pay enough attention to the person who is studying the Bible. They give the impression that anyone who uses these methods will achieve good results. Many have tried these methods but have not found any profit to their study. Those who have written books on the study of the Scripture have studied the Scripture well, but those who try to imitate them by approaching the Bible with the same methods do not necessarily fare as well. This is because the imitators have forgot-
ten who they are. The study of the Bible is not only a matter of methods but a matter of the person. Some study the Bible well because they—the persons—have learned the proper lessons from God. When they find the right methods to assist in their study, they reap rich results. It is wrong to pass on methods without considering the kind of person one has to be. Even when some have the right methods, they can never study the Bible well because they are wrong in their very person. This is a very important point. The study of the Bible is not merely a matter of right methods but a matter of right persons. A person must be right before he can adopt the right method to study the Bible. Methods are important because without good methods, one cannot study the Bible well. But the person must also be properly calibrated before he can study the Bible well.” [In other words washing of the word / daily reading to envelope self in the Word of God]. “Some people have a misguided concept that very few people can study the Bible. Others have a mistaken notion that anyone can study the Bible. Both are wrong. It is wrong to think that very few people can study the Bible, and it is equally wrong to think that everyone can study the Bible. Only one kind of person can study the Bible, and we have to be that kind of person before we can study the Bible well. We have to see that the person is first; the methods second. If the person is wrong, nothing will work even if one has all the right methods. If the person is right, the right methods can be put to good use. Some people pay much attention to good methods. Even though we also pay proper attention to good methods, we should never make methods our first priority. The methods do not come first; the person does. First, we have to be right in our person, and then we can speak about the best methods of Bible study.”

For much further indepth information on this very important subject please Study “How to Study the Bible” by Watchman Nee

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HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE
by Watchman Nee circa 1942-1951

THE BREAKING OF THE OUTER MAN
AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT
by Watchman Nee circa 1942-1951

Other publications by Watchman Nee that are also extremely helpful are:

The Latent Power of the Soul
by Watchman Nee circa 1942-1951

THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S WORD
by Watchman Nee circa 1942-1951