

SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

“May God himself the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

In 1938 B. F. Skinner coined the term “operant conditioning”. It refers to changing behavior by “reinforcement” until you achieve the desired response. He demonstrated positive reinforcement by placing a hungry rat in a “Skinner box”. The box contained a lever on the side and as the rat moved around and bumped the lever, a food pellet would drop out. The rat quickly learned to bump that lever to get food. He demonstrated negative reinforcement by placing a rat in a “Skinner box” and subjecting it to an unpleasant electrical shock. This time, when the rat bumped the lever the electricity went off. Soon the rat learned to bump the lever and avoid the pain.

The book of Revelation describes a time when a third of mankind will be killed by plagues, but then informs us: **“The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear to walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts” (Rev. 9:20, 21).**

A similar situation is described in Rev. 16:9 when the people of earth were seared by intense heat, but still cursed God and refused to repent. This same scenario is repeated in Rev. 16:11 reminding us that even though men were gnawing their tongues in agony, they still cursed God because of their pain and sores, but refused to repent.

How is it possible for a rat to be more rational than a man? The lowly rat has enough sense to adjust his conduct to get food and avoid pain while often man does not.

The answer involves the obvious. Man is different from a rat. Man is created in the image of God and a rat is not. Rats have a body and physical life, but do not have a spirit. Man is a three fold being with “spirit, soul, and body”. While lower creatures migrate to avoid the cold of winter, man can build a house and light a fire. While lower creatures slavishly obey their instincts, man has been empowered by God with the ability to override those instincts. Man is therefore superior and God expects him to subdue and rule over every other creature on earth (Gen. 1:28). Sadly, however, man often finds it easier to rule over others than to rule over himself.

Have you noticed in Scripture that animals, birds, and fish always obey God? All the animals God called came on the ark, but only 8 people did. The great fish swallowed Jonah and then spit him out. The birds fed Elijah, and the bears killed the young men who jeered at Elisha, The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel didn’t know or understand (Is. 1:3).

It is the spirit of man that causes him to rebel against God. This is why lower creatures can be “conformed” by outward pressure and man cannot. While man cannot be “conformed” he can be “transformed”. This transformation, however, cannot take place unless a change takes place in his spirit. That’s why Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that their spirit, soul, and body would all be blameless.

Transformation occurs when someone is “born again” of a “spiritual seed” (Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). This happens because the Word of God divides the “soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12). This enables us to become “one spirit” with God (1 Cor. 6:17). This also enables us to be “made new in the spirit of our minds” (Eph. 4:23 KJV). Man, of course, cannot save himself that’s why God promised “I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Ez. 36:27).

Therefore: **“May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”.**