

# Is Man Two Parts or Three Parts?

Dichotomy versus Trichotomy | Rey Reynoso

Shorter Blog Version Here: <https://biblearchive.com/blog/man-as-body-soul-spirit-or-trichotomy/>

I don't expect most people to read this. It is exceedingly long with my original document clocking in at 29 pages and long lists of verses. I don't expect most people to interact with this trimmed down version; the Internet is fraught with shallowness. I do expect most people, especially Trichotomists, to ignore it, the verses, and the sources. But, this is my way of putting a stake in the ground and arguing why the position is wrong, where it's wrong, and when it matters. I do allow for a view of trichotomy that is holistic in its approach, but I've rarely seen that nuanced a position at the lay level.

To deal with man being three parts, I want to show first what Trichotomists say; then the Biblical Data and how the Scriptures, in both Testaments, respond to pointed questions; give some answers to the arguments and show how the Scripture corrects the incorrect teaching; and finally show a path forward for the trichotomist.

## A Definition and Short History of Trichotomy

Trichotomy just means three-parts. It is the view that man's nature consists of three parts: body, soul, and spirit.

Christianity played with trichotomy thanks to Greek Philosophy and Plato. Eventually remained part of the Eastern Church but it hasn't historically been part of the Western Church. Neo-Platonic thought was re-introduced into the Church via Aquinas when influenced by the pseudo-Christian Plotinus. As Berkhof says, dichotomy (that man is body and soul, two parts) has been the historic and dominant position of the Church. On the other hand, he says, "The tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy, which conceived of the relation of the body and the spirit of man to each other after the analogy of the mutual relation between the material universe and God. It was thought that, just as the latter could enter into communion with each other only by means of a third substance or an intermediate being, so the former could enter into mutual vital relationships only by means of a third or intermediate element, namely, the soul." (Berkhoff, Systematic Theology)

Eventually, some Protestant scholars came to hold a variation of the view but it was a mixed bag. Delitzsch, for example, seems to make it more a psychological division (like in my old Scofield bible) while Watchman Nee sounds downright Gnostic when he calls the body "the lowest" aspect of man and the spirit the highest. (Nee, *The Spiritual Man*)<sup>1</sup>

## What Trichotomy Argues

Some of their arguments are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>. W. Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1986).

- Scripture clearly teaches trichotomy: (1) 1 Thessalonians 5:23; (2) Hebrews 4:12; (3) 1 Corinthians 3:14 – 3:16; and (4) 1 Corinthians 14:14
- The body pertains to the senses (touch, smell, sight, etc), souls have passions and emotions and will: spirit does not do any of those things.
- Our spirits died at the fall and that's the aspect of man that needs regeneration to commune with God. Without it, we are lost and merely natural men.
- The tri-partite nature of man reflects the tri-partite nature of God. God is trinity therefore man is trinity.
- We must have a component that differentiates us from animals: that is our spirit.
- What's important is the soul and the spirit: the flesh is corrupt and evil.
- God is spirit and cannot commune with the physical world if it were not for the spirit and soul of humans. The teaching allows us to have a God that can deal with us fleshly beings. This is why when we die both our souls and spirits depart to be with the Lord to get a spiritual body but our fleshly bodies remain behind.
- For Jesus to remain sinless and yet human, he must have a human body and human soul but his spirit must be pure. This is why, as God, he came as a human with a body, a soul, and the Holy Spirit as his spirit.

## Dealing With The Biblical Data

First, I want to highlight words that are used in the text with a caveat that I'm not highlighting every conjugation. These are the words that trichotomists say pertain to specific things (and not others) so I wanted to highlight the usage before asking the questions to show that the text is pervasive with evidence.

- **Naphesh** (נַפְשׁ) the Hebrew word for living thing is used 754 times. *Naphesh* is Hebrew so it's not in the New Testament. Sometimes it's used of the immaterial part of man (soul), though often it is used as any living thing—including its body.
- **Ruach** (רוּחַ) is the Hebrew word for spirit or wind and is used 399 times.
- **Pneuma**, the Greek word for spirit (Trichotomists relate this to *ruach*), is used in the New Testament and the Greek Old Testament.  
LXX: (πνεῦμα) 273 + (πνεύματος) 49 + (πνεύματι) 44 + (πνεύματα) 9 = 383  
NT: (πνεῦμα) 192 + (πνεύματος) 96 + (πνεύματι) 91 + (πνεύματα) 18 = 397 (Strong's 4151: 383)
- **Psuche** (ψυχή), the Greek word for Psyche (which Trichotomists equate with the *naphesh*)  
LXX: (ψυχήν) 301 + (ψυχῆς) 135 + (ψυχὰς) 74 = 510  
NT: (ψυχήν) 41 + (ψυχῆς) 12 + (ψυχὰς) 15 = 68 (Strong's 5590: 104 Total)
- **Soma** is the Greek word for body  
LXX (σῶμα) 74 + (σώματος) 23 + (σώματα) 22 + (σώματι) 12 + (σωμάτων) 3 = 134  
NT: (σῶμα) 70 + (σώματος) 36 + (σώματα) 10 + (σώματι) 25 + (σωμάτων) 1 = 142 (Strong's 4983: 142 Total)
- **Flesh** means physical bodies—the meat, as it were. It is used to refer to living and dead animals. Paul often uses it in a specialized sense that never means “Physical matter” but rather a secular system apart from the control of the Holy Spirit.

LXX: (σάρξ) 49 + (σάρκινος) 0 + (σαρκί)17= 66

NT:(σάρξ) 54 + (σάρκινος) 1 + (σαρκί)39 = 94 (Strong's 4561. Sarx: 149 Total)

With so much data, we are forced to try to organize it. I'll approach this in the form of questions that deal directly with the trichotomist position to see how it holds up. I will not include every single passage in the answering of the questions; I will simply include enough data to show where the preponderance of the evidence lies and how the text uses the words.

## 1: What part of man, according to the Scriptures, is lost and needing salvation?

- Psalm 35:3 My **soul** needs salvation
- Psalm 49:8 **soul's** redemption/ransom is costly
- Psalm 120:2 (Deliver my **soul**, O Lord) suggesting the soul needing deliverance (in this case from lying lips and a deceitful tongue)
- Job 33:18 **soul** is rescued from the pit
- Psalm 6:4 **soul** needs delivering
- Heb 10:39 Having faith unto the saving of the **soul**
- 1 Peter 2:11 fleshly lusts wage war against the **soul**
- 1 Peter 1:9 The salvation of your **souls**
- Peter 1:22 Purified **soul**
- James 1:21 Implanted word saves **soul**
- Deut 2:30 the hardened **spirit** (needs unhardening)
- Psalm 32:2; 51:10 a sinning **spirit** (needs to stop sinning)
- Prov 16:2 a judged **spirit** (is condemned)
- Rom. 8:10 **Spirit** only made alive by regeneration
- 2 Cor 7:1 defilement of **body** and **spirit** (needs purification)
- 1 Cor. 7:34 being devoted in **body** and **spirit**

Spirit and Soul are used interchangeably to show that the immaterial needs as much saving as the material aspect of man (Romans 3; John 3). Indeed, some of the passages cited speak of the entire person as "a soul". So, when the Psalmist says in Psalm 120:2 "Deliver me, O Lord" the original text reads "Deliver my soul". When the Psalmist goes on to speak of physical things that are injurious to him (his very being) he lists lying. Therefore, the spirit doesn't stand alone as dead but rather the entire man, as a living being, is demarcated as dead and in active rebellion against God (Ephesians 2:8,9). The idea that the spirit is the only part of man that needs to be brought alive by the new birth unto salvation is therefore erroneous according to Scripture. It's not just my spirit that is born again, but my entire self. My body catches up at the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15).

## 2: What part of man, according to the Scriptures, can God interact with?

- John 3:5 Being born of the **spirit** to enter the kingdom of God
- Haggai 1:14 **Spirit** stirred up to perform work
- Ezek 1:1 **Spirit** of Cyrus (unbeliever?) stirred up
- 1 Chr 5:26 **spirit** of Pul and Tilgath (evil kings) stirred up by God

- Philemon 25 grace of Jesus be with your **spirit**
- Prov 20:27 **spirit** of man is the lamp of the Lord
- 1 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your **spirit**
- Psalm 31:5 person commits **spirit** to God
- Psalm 25:1 the **soul** lifted up to Lord
- Psalm 54:3-4 God sustains the **soul**
- Isaiah 26:9 **soul** longs for God and **spirit** seeks God diligently (parallelism)
- Psalm 63:1 **soul** thirst for God
- Psalm 94:17 Bless lord my **soul**
- Psalm 130:5 **soul** waiting for God
- Luke 10:27 Love the Lord with your entire **soul**.
- Romans 8:16 The spirit testifies to our **spirit** that we are children of God
- Colossians 3:16 What are **spiritual** songs if not things that relate to God?
- 1 Corinthians 6:20 Glorify God in your **body**
- 1 Corinthian 7:34 Unmarried are concerned to be holy to God in **body** and **spirit**.
- Luke 1:46-47: Mary uses a parallelism to show soul and spirit are the same. **Soul** exalts the Lord, **Spirit** rejoices in God my Savior. *Psuche* and *pneuma*
- Psalm 30:3 **soul** brought up from Sheol by God

Scriptures teach that man communes with God in the totality of his being and that there is no nobler aspect of man in which relationship with Him is relegated. God made flesh, and he made it good (Gen 1-2:4). God made living beings and he made them to be in relationship with him. God can interact with every aspect of man.

People have been made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), and continue to be in the image and likeness of God (1 Cor 11; James 3:9)—therefore there is no reason to relegate an aspect of man as “lower” and “higher”.

God can communicate with man in his entirety and does so. Indeed, Scripture consistently reveals God speaking to sinners (Romans 10) with the expectation that they should be able to hear (if they have ears to hear). Their damnation is due to their own active, and full, rebellion: not to an aspect of their personhood being dead.

### 3: Is thinking only an ability of the soul?

- Colossians 1:9-10 Filled with **knowledge** of will in all **spiritual** wisdom and increasing in **knowledge**
- 1 Corinthians 2:11 **Thoughts** of man known by **spirit** of man
- Deut 34:0 Joshua has a **spirit** of **wisdom**
- Ex 28:3 **spirit** of **wisdom** given so people can be skilled craftsmen
- Dan 6:3 extraordinary **spirit** identified by king in that he had **skill**
- Mark 2:8 Jesus is **aware** in **spirit** on what people are thinking
- Job 20:3 **Spirit** of my **understanding**

- Rom 7:14, 23, 25 **Spiritual** law served by Paul not in flesh but in **mind** Spirit equated with mind
- Mal 2:15-16 Take heed with your **spirit** to not **deal treacherously**
- Psalm 139:14 **Soul knows** that God's works are wonderful
- Psalm 94:19 Anxious **thoughts** combatted with consolations of **soul**.
- Deut 4:9 Keeping watch over your **soul** lest you **forget**
- Pet 4:6 **Sound mind** and **sober spirit**

There are no passages that relegate thinking solely to a thing called a soul in contradistinction to a thing called spirit. Scriptures teach that thinking is ability innate to man and this ability is seen to be occurring in the entire human. Scriptures identifies thinking occurring by "me" and that immaterial me is sometimes labeled soul and other times spirit.

#### 4: Is emotion only an ability of the soul?

- Josh. 2:11 Their **spirits (courage)** failed
- Judg. 8:3 Their **spirit** (as in an **anger**) subsided
- Matt 26:1; Mark 14:38 **Spirit** is willing but flesh is weak and **tired**
- Matt 26:38 Christ's **soul** is **grieved** to the point of death
- Job 30:25 **Soul grieves**
- Isaiah 54:6 **spirit grieves**
- Jeremiah 13:17 **soul sobs**
- Psalm 142:3 **overwhelmed spirit** (when declaring complaints and trouble)
- Psalm 143:4 David's **spirit** is **overwhelmed**
- Psalm 143:7 **Spirit fails**
- Psalm 51:10 a **steadfast spirit**
- Psalm 51:12 a **wiling spirit**
- Psalm 51:17 a **broken spirit**
- 2 Tim 1:7 not a **spirit** of **timidity** or **fear** but a **spirit** of **power**, and **love**, and discipline
- Gal 6:1 a **gentle spirit**
- 1 Pet 3:4 A quiet and **gentle spirit**
- Psalm 77:3 I sigh and my **spirit** grows **faint**
- Is 57:15 **contrite spirit** sounds like **contrite heart** (parallelism is used)
- Acts 17:16 Paul's **spirit provoked**
- Prov. 17:22 a **downcast spirit**
- Ecc 7:8 patience and **haughtiness** of **spirit** and eager in heart
- Prov 18:14 **broken spirit** is not enduring but it can handle sickness
- Prov 17:22 **broken spirit** (affects **body**)
- Job 7:11 **anguish** in **spirit**
- Psalm 34:18 **crushed** in **spirit**
- Job 15:13 person turning **spirit against God**
- Gen 41:8 **troubled spirit**
- Gen 45:27 **revived spirit**

- 1 Sam 1:15 **oppressed in spirit** (for **sorrow**)
- 1 King 21:5 **sullen spirit**
- Dan 2:1 **troubled spirit** from a bad dream
- Isaiah 28:6 **spirit of justice**
- Isaiah 65:14 **broken spirit**
- 1 sam 30:12 **revived spirit** upon eating **food**
- Psalm 78 an **unfaithful spirit**
- Gen. 26:35 An **embittered spirit** (grief)
- Deut 2:30 **hardened spirit** equated with obstinate heart
- Lam 2:11 **troubled spirit**
- Dan 7:16 **distressed spirit**
- Mark 8:12 sighing deeply in his **spirit** in **sorrow**
- John 11:33 **greatly moved in spirit** (anger)
- John 13:21 **troubled in spirit**
- Psalm 131:2 **composed** and quieted **soul**
- Psalm 86:2 **glad soul**
- Psalm 123:4 **soul** filled with **scoffing**
- John 12:27 **trouble soul**
- John 13:21 **troubled spirit**

Emotions are not ever relegated to the body of man or the soul of man. Rather soul and spirit are often used interchangeably showing the spectrum of emotions throughout the human person. A soul can be glad just as much as a spirit lifted up because it's different ways of talking about the same thing. In some cases, the spirit is presented as the totality of the person—a quality often relegated to the soul by trichotomists (Isaiah 57:15 ). What's also interesting is that in many cases, the immaterial affects the material body (when the broken spirit dries up the bones in Prov 17:22). In the end, Scripture teaches that emotions are an aspect of humans—physical or immaterial.

## 5: What of man continues after death?

- Genesis 35:18 **Soul departs** at death
- Luke 23:46 **Spirit departs** at death
- James 2:26 A **body** without the **spirit** is **dead**.
- Job 26:5 the **departed spirits**
- Psalm 76:12 **cut off spirit** results in death
- Ecc 12:7 **Spirit** returns to God (who gave the spirit)
- Psalm 94:17 **Soul** dwelling in the place of silence
- Acts 7:59 Stephen sends his **spirit** to God
- 1 Cor 5:5 Destruction of **body** salvation of **Spirit**
- Phil. 1:23 being with Christ after death (soul?)
- Luke 23:43 Being in paradise after death (soul?)
- Matthew 10:28 **Soul** cannot be killed by man. It can be killed by God in hell.

- Mark 8:36,37 to lose **soul** is to lose all

Scriptures *never* say that there are multiple components that go to be with the Lord. Indeed, what Scripture repeatedly teaches is that “absent from the body, present with the Lord” (Col 2:5) even while being “absent in body; present in spirit” with other believers (1 Cor 5:3). In other words, when I die, I (not two parts of me, but me without my body) goes to be with the Lord. This Me doesn’t want to remain in this state (I want to be fully clothed: 1 Cor 5) so I am awaiting the resurrection of my body that has been planted corruptible and will be raised incorruptible (1 Cor 15), even if I would rather be with the Lord than suffering in the present. This is why Scripture can use the terms interchangeably to show that the Immaterial goes to be with the Lord while the Material remains here awaiting to be glorified at the resurrection of the dead.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the death of our savior the Lord Jesus Christ. On the cross he commends his **spirit** unto the Father gives it up his **spirit** (*pneuma* John 19:29) and yet earlier, when he talked about what he was going to do, he says he is giving up his **soul** (*psuche* John 10:15; Matt 20:28 ).

Indeed, it would be easy for Scripture to speak about our soul AND spirit departing to be with God. As Grudem says (Grudem, Systematic Theology)<sup>2</sup>, you would expect that somewhere, once, it would be mentioned to show that no aspect of our humanity would be left behind.

### 6: Doesn’t 1 Thessalonians 5:23 clearly teach the three parts of man?

No, rather, the passage teaches that God will sanctify Christians completely and keeping their entirety blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and he’s using terms, that often underscore each other, to reflect that the entirety of the person is kept blameless. Note how Mary speaks about her soul magnifying the Lord and her spirit rejoicing in God (Luk 1:46,47). She’s not saying that two aspects of her are doing different things, she’s underscoring that what she is doing in the fiber of her being (magnifying the Lord) is exemplified in her being completely satisfied in God in the entirety of her person.

Our Lord speaks in a similar way when he says (Luke 10:27) that we are to love the Lord God with all our (1) heart, (2) soul, (3) strength, and (4) mind. He is not saying that humans are actually six parts (5 spirit; 6 bodies) or nine (7 thoughts; 8 joints, 9 marrow!)—though some have argued for a multifaceted personhood. Beyond there being some semantic issues (soul and mind were often equated in ancient literature) this is really saying that we’re to love God with our entire being.

Now, I’ve read some writers say that the soul does glorify God but only when the spirit is renewed and rejoicing in the Lord. I think this facile explanation is just a way of ignoring the aspects of the text that are grounded in rules of literature: parallelism, merism, metonymy, chiasmus, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Grudem, W. A. (1994). Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine (474). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

## 7: Doesn't Hebrews 4:12 clearly teach that soul and spirit are different parts?

No, rather, the passage teaches that the message of God goes deep into our being and actively does things to us. Our words don't really cause a physical division of anything; God's word divides planets and waters (Genesis 1). In this passage the word of God isn't really dividing (by differentiating between things) but rather is going deep, into the deepest parts of who we are. We can't hide from this message (Heb 4:13). We're fully exposed.

Joints and marrow are not being listed as two Different Things but rather a deep aspect of the material man: our innards. Thoughts and Intentions are not being distinguished as two Different Things but our inner thought life. Soul and spirit aren't being distinguished as two different things but rather as the word piercing deep into the entirety of our non-physical being.

Now, perhaps the person holds to the exact interpretation I gave but say that even though the word is piercing deep, it is also piercing at an area where the Word knows the differences which we don't. I read a pretty good example somewhere (don't remember where, probably Lewis Sperry Chafer) that we say the woman who is a mom in the home and a CEO in the office is really, ontologically, two different women. Sure she might function completely differently in both of those spheres and might be called "a totally different person" when she's in the office versus when she is in the home, but no one in their right mind say that she really is one person that transforms into another like Captain Marvel (Shazam!).

The text in making these statements, this person might believe, reflects different functions to the aspect of man. Our joints function differently from the bones even if we don't know where, but they're still the physical man; the left ventricle functions differently from the arteries; our thoughts function differently from our planning; our soul functions differently than our spirit in this or that area—even if we don't know how, the Word of God can pierce deep into those crevices. In this case, I would say that the proponent is likely a dichotomist (material and immaterial) but a functional trichotomist who wants to add some psychological elements to his or her reading of the text—I'll agree to disagree, but I see no issue with *this* correlation of interpretation.

## 8: Doesn't 1 Corinthians 14:14 teach that if I pray, the spiritual part of me is praying but my mind doesn't understand it?

This question assumes that the thought-life is only part of the soul, but the large amount of passages above clearly showed that the thought-life is an aspect of man in his entirety. The point of the passage is to show that sometimes, when we groan in prayer, we might be praying in a way that we might not consciously know what we're praying.

Imagine the times that you are in serious inner turmoil and you don't have the words to pray, but you double over and cry out onto God. You don't even know the content of your prayer since you're relying on him while in pain, weeping tears, but the prayer is there. Paul can say in Romans 8 that we don't even know what we should be praying but the Spirit of God who understands the mind of God knows exactly what needs to be uttered. That is exceedingly comforting—much more comforting than thinking there is an element in me that the rest of me just can't join in communing with the lover of my soul!

## 9: Doesn't 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4 clearly teach that Christians have a revived Spirit (they are spiritual) whereas non-Christians can't relate to God because they are in a natural state?

No. As the above passages showed, the entirety of man can commune with God. In fact, I listed passages where unbelievers were stirred to communicate for God (ie: Balaam, King Saul, Pul, Cyrus, Saul of Tarsus). Indeed, Paul is speaking to believers that he says he can't speak to as spiritual but as fleshly and yet fully expects them to understand what he's saying! Rather, the passage is about people who need to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul says that he can't address them as spiritual but as merely flesh (1 Cor 3:1): infants in Christ. That is not to say that they just can't understand what he's saying but rather that he fully expects them to understand and to stop behaving as people who aren't under the supremacy and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

That's the huge difference between unbelievers and believers. Not that unbelievers are not able to understand but that unbelievers will not fall under the life-control of the Holy Spirit (without first confessing Christ as Lord 1 Cor 12:1-3). As Paul says about unbelieving Israel: the message was preached unto them, they did understand, they willingly rejected the message, but God remains merciful (Romans 9-11).

## 10: Does not the trinity of Man reflect the Trinity of God?

I think we can create countless comparisons once we assume what we're comparing. We can also say that the seven holes in our face (ears, nostrils, eyes and mouth) pertain to the seven spirits of God in Revelation, the seven Churches of the end-times, and the perfect number of God—but we'd be reflecting more an active imagination than anything in Scripture.

Even if humans were three parts, it would be a faulty illustration of the Trinity. God is three persons in one essence; humans are one person and trichotomists teach that the different aspects of man have different roles. If anything, our trinity (if we had such a thing) would be reflecting a heretical image of God!

The fact is that we as a full human have been created in, and are currently reflective of, the image and likeness of God. I know that we as a full human are being conformed to the image of Christ who fully reflects the image of God. I don't think that means that we must have parts that reflect God parts, or that God has legs or anything like that, so I don't see a need to have man consist of three parts to reflect the trinity. After all, God isn't female or male but he thought sexual reproduction was integral to the image of God (male and female made he them) and not a tri-partite marriage—and specifically says that the male and female are his image, together.

## 11: Doesn't the trichotomy of man differentiate us from animals?

Animals are flesh (obviously) and they're also often called living souls (Gen 1) scripture also says that animals have spirit. Trichotomists cite something like Isaiah 31:3 where horses (animals) are listed as flesh and not spirit but the point of the passage isn't to show that animals have no immaterial component but rather that they are impossibly overpowered when trying to combat God's forces. In the same verse Egyptians, who are men, are held up against God—who is God!

Scripture repeatedly says that living things have the *ruach* (Gen 6:17; Job 12:7–10): spirit of life! Indeed, even Balaam’s Donkey, before the Lord opened it’s mouth, was aware of a spiritual being standing in the way of the road—the thing had some sort of awareness (Num 22:22-27) even if it was later by supernatural intervention.

We know that animals (and all of nature) are in active obedience to God (Jonah 2:11; Numbers 22:28; Mark 4:41; 1 Kings 17:4-6; Gen 7:15) even if all creation is groaning under the subjection (Rom 8:20-21). We know that they act primarily by instinct (2 Peter 2:12) and without reason (Jude 10). We also know that animals will be in the Millennium (Isaiah 65:25) and even, somehow, riding with Christ and his people (Revelation 19:14) in the coming judgment.

But we also know that animals are *never* said to be made in the image of God. We know that Christ *never* came in the form of an animal to redeem them—he didn’t even do that for the angels. Humans are the ones who are said to be made a littler lower than God to rule over all of creation. We don’t need some fictional invisible component to tell us we’re different from animals; we’re different from animals by the declaration and plan of God.

We are Sons; Fido is not.

### 12: If not Trichotomy, then what?

Scriptures clearly teach that man has a physical and non-physical aspect. This automatically removes any form of monism, which teaches that man only has one nature—be it physical or spiritual (as in Hinduism).

Scripture also clearly uses soul and spirit interchangeably (see all the evidence above) which makes, as I’ve said, trichotomy exceedingly unlikely.

Scripture teaches that God made the physical, which he labeled as good, and that he redeemed the physical and intends for us to continue on in the physical at the resurrection of the dead. This removes any Platonic views that make our bodies an unimportant thing driven by our souls from the world of forms as well as any Neo-Platonic, or even Gnostic views that make material evil and the spirit good.

That being the case, I believe that man’s nature consists of two aspects in one person. I am both spirit and material all of which is labeled “Me”. If I lose my body, I am present with the Lord yet actively waiting for the return of my body. It is part of me and it is rightly good, even if currently corruptible.

This proper teaching would result in the rejection of the ancient Gnostic heresy that spirit is part of the divine and flesh is part of the corruptible, evil world.

### 13: For Jesus to be born sinless and still remain a man, he had to have a divine spirit. This is why, as God, he came as a human with a body, a soul, and the Holy Spirit as his spirit. Isn’t this the correct understanding of Christ’s sinlessness?

No, this is a heresy (381 AD) called Apollinarianism which teaches that Christ’s humanity consisted of a body and a soul but that his divine nature was the Holy Spirit of God. The one Church teaches what

Scripture revealed: Christ is fully human (every aspect of him) and fully God. Two natures, never mingled, yet undivided, in one person.

## Conclusion: A Way Forward for the Trichotomist

More can be said. I can point out passages where God speaks of his own soul (Amos 6:8) or where some can seriously argue for even more parts to a person (might, heart, kidneys, mind?), but I won't. I haven't said anything about what died at the Fall (I think death is separation from God, so we immediately died) but I think that at this point, I've made a fairly sustained case for a holistic dichotomy: one person, two aspects, and that the case is heavily against trichotomy.

Moving forward, I think that Christians need to weigh their position against Scripture and also weigh any ideas against what the Holy Spirit taught the Church over the last 2,000 years of history. Now there was surely error during those years, and major misunderstanding, but some newer ideas are so heavily grounded in ancient heresies, that it is good to see how the Church repeatedly dealt with those things.

The evidence and the history of the Church weigh heavily against some of the variations of trichotomy. If you're teaching that Jesus has a human body and soul but that his spirit is the Holy Spirit you're teaching anti-Christian early-Church heresy. If you're teaching that the material world can not be touched by God, you're teaching anti-Christian early-Church heresy. If you're teaching that unsaved humans are ontologically sub-human (over against functionally sub-human since they're acting as if they are uncreated and non-contingent) you're teaching error that is tremendously damaging to the personhood of man. This topic frankly traverses into a multitude of areas so there are enough crossover lines where I think a person can fall into real error (ie: do babies get spirits at birth or are they full persons from conception; did animals evolve as body and soul but then were given the spirit of life to become human; etc.)

But, if you're looking at the evidence and are convinced that man is three parts without holding to any of the errors I listed above, if you're speaking of a total human but differentiate between soul and spirit by roles and not nature—as I spoke above—I don't think you're teaching falsely. I think that you're wrong and I would want you to emphasize the holistic unity of man because ideas have real consequences. In your case, I wouldn't bother arguing with you right up until you make statements that rub up against Scripture (ie: Man doesn't have the likeness of God which is in direct contrast to James 3:9) or when you make statements that emphasize some sort of psychological fiction (ie: our souls are where our affections come from; our spirit never deals with passions) instead of the way Scripture speaks.

In other words, prepare for me to send you a link to this article if you're finding yourself constantly emphasizing the division over against the unity.

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## More Notes

spirit in the old covenant and Christians who receive the πνεῦμα as a first instalment of eternal salvation. Though the terms differ, the thought is the same as we find in the Hermetics. In the Hermetics all men have λόγος, but only some have fellowship with νοῦς; in the NT all men have νοῦς, but only Christians have πνεῦμα, or, more strictly, have a share in the one Spirit of God and of Christ. This possession of the Spirit by Christians is sometimes understood in ecstatic terms as

—Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Are the soul and the spirit distinct, or are they the same? Generally, the Eastern church believed that man was trichotomous—consisting of three parts—body, soul, and spirit. Originally, the Greek and Alexandrian church Fathers held this view, including men like Origen and Clement of Alexandria. The Western church, on the other hand, generally held to the dichotomous position: man is body and soul. Men like Augustine and Anselm held to this view.

—Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (p. 306). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

An Anthropological Illustration. Since humankind is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), it would seem reasonable that men and women bear some snapshot of the Trinity within their being. One that causes more problems than it solves is to visualize the human being as a “trichotomy” of body, soul, and spirit. Whether the trichotomist position is accurate, this is not a helpful illustration. Body and soul are not an indivisible unity. They can be (and are) separated at death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:23; Rev. 6:9). The nature and persons of the Trinity cannot be separated.

—Geisler, N. L. (1999). In *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

5:23 has been a main support for the doctrine of “trichotomy,” that humans are threefold beings, with a spirit, soul, and body. Whatever Paul may have meant, he was praying that God would thoroughly sanctify each individual believer.

—Willmington, H. L. (1997). *Willmington’s Bible handbook* (p. 725). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

operties. In the words of Karl Barth, the human person is “bodily soul, as he is also besouled body.” There is no person in body only, nor can one easily think of a bodiless spirit as a person, except in a

temporary, transitional state. The Hebrew term *nephesh*, often translated “soul,” is best rendered “person” in most contexts

—Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

But the body the believer will have after death is a spiritual body. The Greek word is *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός). Thayer defines this word as “that part of man which is akin to God, and serves as His instrument or organ.” It is that part of man which gives him God-consciousness. In this sense the animal creation does not have a *pneuma* (πνεύμα) or spirit. With the physical body, man has world-consciousness, with the soul he has self-consciousness, and with the spirit he has God-consciousness. With the spirit, man has to do with the things of God. He worships God by means of his human spirit, that is, when that spirit is energized by the Holy Spirit. He serves God in the same way.

—Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Job 10:8–12 God’s care preserves my spirit

Psalm 32:2 Spirit can lie (it knows truth and not-truth)

Amos 6:8 The Lord swears by his soul

1 Samuel 2:35 Heart and Mind

Gen 6:17 All living things have spirit (breath of life)

Prov 6:16 Things that are detestable to God’s soul

Job 41:21 Soul as Breath

Psalm 143:3 persecuted soul

1 Corinthians 5:3 Paul says that he is spiritually present with the believers as they judge *pneumati* (*psuches*)

1 Thessalonians 5:23: Spirit, soul and body be preserved complete (pneumatic, psuche, soma)

Hebrews 4:12 the division of soul and spirit vs joints and marrow vs thoughts and intentions (psuche, pneuma)

2 Co 7:1 cleansing of body and spirit (both defiled by sin)

Gen 1 Creation of living souls

Gen 2:7 Man becomes a living soul.

Ex 12:19 Soul cut off

1 Sam 1:26 Your soul lives

Isa 31:3 Horses are flesh and not spirit

John 4:23 God is spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and truth

Pro 25:27 spirit can be found to be not-controlled

Rom 12:11 fervency in spirit

Acts 18:25 fervency in spirit

John 6:63 spoken words are spirit and life

Num 14:24 Caleb has a different spirit since he follows God fully

Mat 5:3 being poor in spirit

Psalm 6:3 Soul is greatly troubled

Rev 6:9 Souls that were slain

Eccl 3:21 the spirit of beasts

Luke 10:27 soul, strength, mind, heart

John 19:30 Jesus gave up his pneuma to the Father

John 10:15 Jesus gave up his psuche for the sheep

Matth 20:28 Jesus gave his psuche as a ransom

Rom 2:9 Souls working evil

## Prooftexts for Trichotomy

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Spirit, soul and body

Heb 4:2 able to divide soul and spirit

1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4 Of the flesh vs of the spirit

1 Cor 14:14 praying in spirit

Gen 46:18 Leah had sixteen souls (children)

Job 3:20 Bitter soul

### **Physically interacting**

Job 6:7 Soul able to touch loathsome food.

Mark 9:26 Spirit throws the boy it is possessing

### **Dying Body, Soul and Spirit**

Jn 13:37 Laying down one's soul (usually translated life)

Rom 16:4 Risked their own necks for the survival of my soul

Ezek 3:20 Fear for one's soul

Matt. 2:20 Herod wants Jesus' soul

Luke 12:20 Death when God requires your soul

Acts 3:23 three thousand souls.

### **More parts of human?**

Mk 12:30; Matt 22:37, Luke 10:27 Heart, strength, mind?

Deut 6:5 Heart and might?

Deut 13:3 Heart ?

Deut 30:6 heart?

1 Pet 1:13 mind?

1 Sam 9:19 set mind?

Prov 22:17 applied mind to knowledge

Phil guarded hearts and minds?

Rom 12:2 renewed minds?

Col 3:2 minds set on things above?

Ec 1:13 setting mind to explore wisdom?

Neh 2:12 God putting thoughts or convictions in Nehemiah's mind

Rom 7:14, 23, 25 Is mind the spirit?

Psa 13:2 sorrow in heart

Ps 73:13 pure heart

Psa 131:1 proud heart

Psa 28:7 trusting heart

Psa 57:7 steadfast heart

Psa 27:3 heart can fear

Psa 25:17 troubled heart

Psa 38:8 agitated heart

Ps 61:2 fainting heart

Ps101:2 heart with integrity

Ps 108:1 steadfast heart

Psal 26:2 tested mind and heart

Ps 4:7 glad heart

Job 17:11 heart wishes

Job 23:16 faint in heart

Jer 4:19 soul equated with heart. Soul is in anguish; heart is pounding

Ps 84:2 heart sings

Ps 19:14 meditating heart

Ps 143:4 heart equated with spirit (spirit is overwhelmed; heart is appalled)

Psalm 39:3 heart is turned over; compassions are kindled

Psalm 45:1 heart overflows

Job 37:1 heart trembles

Job 19:27 fainting heart

Psalms 55:4 anguished heart

Philemon 20 refreshed heart

Ecc 8:16 heart equated with mind (I gave my heart to know wisdom)

Je 48:36 wailing heart

One's Self-Concept And Biblical Theology — Jeffrey H. Boyd\*

The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1998 (electronic edition.). Garland, TX: Galaxie Software.

In response to these passages, a trichotomist might argue that they are talking about different things, for when a person dies both his soul and his spirit do in fact go to heaven. But it should be noted that Scripture nowhere says that a person's "soul and spirit" departed or went to heaven or were yielded up to God. If soul and spirit were separate and distinct things, we would expect that such language would be affirmed somewhere, if only to assure the reader that no essential part of the person is left behind. Yet we find no such language: the biblical authors do not seem to care whether they say that the soul departs or the spirit departs at death, for both seem to mean the same thing.

Grudem, W. A. (1994). *Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine (474)*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

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*Grudem, W. A. (1994). Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine (474). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.*

dichotomy vs. trichotomy different schema for describing the constitution of man. According to dichotomy (more commonly known as dichotomy), man is a twofold being, consisting of a material element (a physical body) and an immaterial element (referred to as either soul or spirit). Trichotomy (more frequently called trichotomy) is the view that man's constitution is threefold, with soul and spirit referring to two different immaterial entities. Trichotomists explain these two immaterial entities variously. For some trichotomists, the soul includes the emotions, intellect, and will, while the spirit refers to that part of man's constitution, made alive at regeneration, that has the capacity to relate to God. Shedd is a dichotomist because he regards man as metaphysically twofold, though the soul has both lower and higher functions. According to Shedd, the "animal soul" denominates the soul's lower operations with respect to the body and includes the body's animating principle and its bodily appetites. The "rational soul" refers to the soul's higher, rational operations. Note that for Shedd these are not two separate souls but a single soul that operates on both levels. This makes Shedd a dichotomist according to the standard usage of these terms. However, Shedd sometimes uses the terms in a nonstandard way. For example, he refers (p. 870) to the schema presented in 1 Cor. 15:44, 1 Thess. 5:23, and Heb. 4:12 as "trichotomy," because these passages distinguish the function of "soul" (i.e., the animal soul) from that of "spirit" (i.e., the rational soul). Yet, in so far as the distinction is not ontological but functional only, the term trichotomy (trichotomy) would not properly apply.

*Shedd, W. G. T. (2003). Dogmatic theology. (A. W. Gomes, Ed.) (3rd ed., p. 954). Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub.*

This view of the soul and spirit as different aspects of the same spiritual principle furnishes a refutation of six important errors:

- (a) That of the Gnostics, who held that the πνεῦμα is part of the divine essence, and therefore incapable of sin.
- (b) That of the Apollinarians, who taught that Christ's humanity embraced only σῶμα and ψυχή, while his divine nature furnished the πνεῦμα.
- (c) That of the Semi-Pelagians, who excepted the human πνεῦμα from the dominion of original sin.
- (d) That of Placeus, who held that only the πνεῦμα was directly created by God (see our section on Theories of Imputation).
- (e) That of Julius Müller, who held that the ψυχή comes to us from Adam, but that our πνεῦμα was corrupted in a previous state of being (see page 490).
- (f) That of the Annihilationists, who hold that man at his creation had a divine element breathed into him, which he lost by sin, and which he recovers only in regeneration; so that only when he has this

πνεῦμα restored by virtue of his union with Christ does man become immortal, death being to the sinner a complete extinction of being.

Strong, A. H. (1907). *Systematic theology* (pp. 486–487). Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society.

The Eastern church generally held to trichotomy, and is best represented by John of Damascus (ii:12) who speaks of the soul as the sensuous life-principle which takes up the spirit—the spirit being an efflux from God. The Western church, on the other hand, generally held to dichotomy, and is best represented by Anselm: “Constat homo ex duabus naturis, ex natura animæ et ex natura carnis.”

*Strong, A. H. (1907). Systematic theology (p. 487). Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society.*

The Word of God is unique. No sword can penetrate as it can. We should not take the reference to “soul” and “spirit” as indicating a “dichotomist” over against a “trichotomist” view of man, nor the reference to “dividing” to indicate that the writer envisaged a sword as slipping between them. Nor should we think of the sword as splitting off “joints” and “marrow.” What the author is saying is that God’s Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves. There may also be the thought that the whole of man’s nature, however we divide it, physical as well as nonmaterial, is open to God. With “judges” we move to legal terminology. The Word of God passes judgment on men’s feelings (enthymēseōn) and on their thoughts (ennoioñ). Nothing evades the scope of this Word. What man holds as most secret he finds subject to its scrutiny and judgment.

*Morris, L. (1981). Hebrews. (F. E. Gaebelin, Ed.)The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.*

The dichotomist views man as consisting of two basic parts: soul and spirit on the one hand, and body on the other. The trichotomist holds that soul and spirit can be validly distinguished. In general it appears that Scripture most often speaks of the spirit as that part of a person that participates in life with God. The soul, on the other hand, seems more to connect us with the everyday aspects of life as human beings.

*Karleen, P. S. (1987). The handbook to Bible study: with a guide to the Scofield study system (p. 245). New York: Oxford University Press.*

The overall emphasis in Old Testament anthropology is on the unity of the person. There does not appear to have been a Hebrew faculty psychology that viewed the soul as a part of some larger, inner

whole. And contrary to a rigid dualism, the *nephesh* can be so identified with the body that the body of a dead person can be termed the *nephesh* (Lev. 19:28). Given this range of uses, *nephesh* is not synonymous with Plato's conception of *psyche*. Yet, most of the time the translators of the Septuagint used *psyche* to translate *nephesh*, recognizing significant semantic overlap in the two terms as they were then used. Influenced by the Septuagint, the New Testament authors also used *psyche* to refer to inner human nature.

The term *psyche* is used 101 times in the New Testament, mostly in the synoptic gospels. As with *nephesh*, the New Testament *psyche* could refer to life: Joseph is told he can return to Israel "for those who sought the Child's *psyche* are dead" (Matt. 2:20). *Psyche* also referred to one's inner life, self, or personality. Christ was once asked, "How long will you keep our *psyche* in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24). Christ's *psyche* was "deeply grieved" in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38), and Mary's *psyche* exalted the Lord (Luke 1:46). As it does in the Septuagint, *psyche* seems to signify the inner person, the part of us that feels and thinks and is the source of our activity. Interestingly, even God's *psyche* can be well-pleased (Matt. 12:18). However, as is the case with the Old Testament, a faculty psychology cannot be constructed from the New. The terms *pneuma* (spirit), *kardia* (heart), and *nous* (mind) are used interchangeably with *psyche* (Harder, 1978; Hoekema, 1979; Ladd, 1974; Murray, 1977a).<sup>4</sup>

3

## I. Six Theories Of Human Nature

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<sup>4</sup>Some evangelicals have suggested that humans are actually made of three things: body, soul, and spirit, with soul referring to our personality and spirit referring to the "religious" part of us that relates to God. A few verses do seem to imply a distinction between soul and spirit (e.g., 1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). However, other verses use the terms interchangeably (Luke 1:46, 47; Matt. 6:25, 10:28, and 1 Cor. 5:3, 5; Acts 15:26 and Luke 23:46), leaving many to conclude that the case for a strict, ontological separation between spirit and soul cannot be made solely on the basis of Scripture (Berkouwer, 1962; Cooper, 1989; Hoekema, 1979; Murray, 1977b). However, there is a pernicious effect of trichotomy. It sometimes seems to flow from a conceptual distinction between matters theological and psychological, but in turn then legitimizes a separation of the two through the labeling of the two types of immaterial substance within humans: soul and spirit (corresponding to psychology and religion/theology). Once this semantic distinction is made (a distinction also hard to make phenomenologically), the Christian psychologist's responsibility becomes integrating the two spheres rather than presupposing the fundamental unity of the inner life in God's creating word and studying the entire inner life as it exists before God.

<sup>3</sup>Pike, P. L., editor, Rosemead Graduate School of Professional Psychology, & Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology. (1998). *Journal of Psychology and Theology : Volume 26* (electronic ed.). La Mirada, CA: Rosemead Graduate School of Professional Psychology.

The traditional Christian view, from Justin Martyr in the second century through Franz Delitzsch at the end of the nineteenth, was a dichotomy of soul and body.<sup>8</sup> Six proposals concerning the relationship of soul and body are live options for some today.

4

6. *A small minority of theologians hold a trichotomy viewpoint* (1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12).<sup>34</sup> We hold that they are dichotomists in disguise, for the distinction between soul and spirit is based on functional rather than ontological distinctions. Many women have two full-time jobs: in the home and outside. If one thought of the inner person as having two full-time jobs (as soul and as spirit), one would approach Nee's view of a three-person marriage: body, soul and spirit. That is a functional view. But at death we discover the marriage involves only two, for the body dies and there is only one survivor.

In summary, there are six mutually incompatible interpretations of Biblical anthropology: Platonic dualism, Aquinas' view, physical monism, holistic dualism, spiritual monism, and a trichotomy view. We could say that four of the positions are holistic and two are not. Neither Platonism nor the trichotomy view is holistic. They do not see humans as unified.

5

The ordinary concept of the constitution of human beings is dualistic-soul and body. According to this concept soul is the invisible inner spiritual part, while body is the visible outer corporal part. Though there is some truth to this, it is nevertheless inaccurate. Such an opinion comes from fallen man, not from God; apart from God's revelation, no concept is dependable. That the body is man's outward sheath is undoubtedly correct, but the Bible never confuses spirit and soul as though they are the same. Not only are they different in terms; their very natures differ from each other. The Word of God does not divide man into the two parts of soul and body. It treats man, rather, as tripartite-spirit, soul and body. I Thessalonians 5.23 reads: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This verse precisely shows that the whole man is divided into three parts. The Apostle Paul refers here to the complete sanctification of believers, "sanctify you wholly." According to the Apostle, how is a person wholly sanctified? By his spirit and soul and body being kept. From this we can easily understand that the whole person comprises these three parts. This verse also makes a distinction between spirit and soul; otherwise, Paul would have said simply "your soul." Since God has distinguished the human spirit

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<sup>8</sup> Justin Martyr, "Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection," ANF 1.294-299; F. Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Grand Rapids; Baker, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>*The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1998 (electronic edition.). Garland, TX: Galaxie Software. Jets 40/2 Six Theories of human Nature

<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. W. Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1986).

<sup>5</sup>*The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1998 (electronic edition.). Garland, TX: Galaxie Software.

from the human soul, we conclude that man is composed of not two, but three, parts; spirit, soul and body.<sup>6</sup>

It is through the corporal body that man comes into contact with the material world. Hence we may label the body as that part which gives us world-consciousness. The soul comprises the intellect, which aids us in the present state of existence, and the emotions, which proceed from the senses. Since the soul belongs to man's own self and reveals his personality, it is termed the part of self-consciousness. The spirit is that part by which we commune with God and by which alone we are able to apprehend and worship Him. Because it tells us of our relationship with God, the spirit is called the element of God-consciousness. God dwells in the spirit, self dwells in the soul, while senses dwell in the body.

As we have mentioned already, the soul is the meeting point of spirit and body, for there they are merged. By his spirit man holds intercourse with the spiritual world and with the Spirit of God, both receiving and expressing the power and life of the spiritual realm. Through his body man is in contact with the outside sensuous world, affecting it and being affected by it. The soul stands between these two worlds, yet belongs to both. It is linked with the spiritual world through the spirit and with the material world through the body. It also possesses the power of free will, hence is able to choose from among its environments. The spirit cannot act directly upon the body. It needs a medium, and that medium is the soul produced by the touching of the spirit with the body. The soul therefore stands between the spirit and the body, binding these two together. The spirit can subdue the body through the medium of the soul, so that it will obey God; likewise the body through the soul can draw the spirit into loving the world.

Of these three elements the spirit is the noblest for it joins with God. The body is the lowest for it contacts with matter. The soul lying between them joins the two together and also takes their character to be its own.

The soul makes it possible for the spirit and the body to communicate and to cooperate. The work of the soul is to keep these two in their proper order so that they may not lose their right relationship --- namely, that the lowest, the body, may be subjected to the spirit, and that the highest, the spirit, may govern the body through the soul. Man's prime factor is definitely the soul. It looks to the spirit to give what the latter has received from the Holy Spirit in order that the soul, after it has been perfected, may transmit what it has obtained to the body; then the body too may share in the perfection of the Holy Spirit and so become a spiritual body.<sup>7</sup>

It is of more consequence to remark that the Scriptural doctrine is opposed to Trichotomy, or the doctrine that man consists of three distinct substances, body, soul, and spirit; σῶμα, ψυχή, and πνεῦμα, *corpus*, *anima*, and *animus*. This view of the nature of man is of the more importance to the theologian because it has not only been held to a greater or less extent in the Church, but also because it has greatly influenced the form in which other doctrines have been presented; and because it has some

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<sup>6</sup> W. Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> W. Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1986).

semblance of support from the Scriptures themselves. The doctrine has been held in different forms. The simplest, the most intelligible, and the one most commonly adopted is, that the body is the material part of our constitution; the soul, or ψυχή, is the principle of animal life; and the mind, or πνεῦμα, the principle of our rational and immortal life. When a plant dies its material organization is dissolved and the principle of vegetable life which it contained disappears. When a brute dies its body returns to dust, and the ψυχή, or principle of animal life by which it was animated, passes away. When a man dies his body returns to the earth, his ψυχή ceases to exist, his πνεῦμα, alone remains until reunited with the body at the resurrection. To the πνεῦμα, which is peculiar to man, belong reason, will, and conscience. To the ψυχή which we have in common with the brutes, belong understanding, feeling, and sensibility, or, the power of sense-perceptions. To the σῶμα belongs what is purely material.<sup>1</sup> According to another view of the subject, the soul is neither the body nor the mind; nor is it a distinct subsistence, but it is the resultant of the union of the πνεῦμα and σῶμα.<sup>2</sup> Or according to Delitzsch,<sup>3</sup> there is a dualism of being in man, but a trichotomy of substance. He distinguishes between being and substance, and maintains, (1.) that spirit and soul (πνεῦμα and ψυχή) are not verschiedene Wesen, but that they are verschiedene Substanzen. He says that the נְפֶשׁ הַיְהוּדָה, mentioned in the history of the creation, is not the compositum resulting from the union of the spirit and body, so that the two constituted man; but it is a *tertium quid*, a third substance which belongs to the constitution of his nature. (2.) But secondly, this third principle does not pertain to the body; it is not the higher attributes or functions of the body, but it pertains to the spirit and is produced by it. It sustains the same relation to it that breath does to the body, or effulgence does to light. He says that the ψυχή (*soul*) is the ἀπαύγασμα of the πνεῦμα and the bond of its union with the body.

#### *Trichotomy anti-Scriptural.*

In opposition to all the forms of trichotomy, or the doctrine of a threefold substance in the constitution of man, it may be remarked, (1.) That it is opposed to the account of the creation of man as given in Gen. ii. 7. According to that account God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life, and he became נְפֶשׁ הַיְהוּדָה *i. e.*, a being (אֱשֶׁר-כֹּחַ נְפֶשׁ הַיְהוּדָה) in whom is a living soul. There is in this account no intimation of anything more than the material body formed of the earth and the living principle derived from God. (2.) This doctrine (trichotomy) is opposed to the uniform usage of Scripture. So far from the נְפֶשׁ הַיְהוּדָה, *anima*, or soul, being distinguished from the רִרָה, πνεῦμα, *animus*, or mind as either originally different or as derived from it, these words all designate one and the same thing. They are constantly interchanged. The one is substituted for the other, and all that is, or can be predicated of the one, is predicated of the other. The Hebrew נְפֶשׁ, and the Greek ψυχή mean breath, life, the living principle; that in which life and the whole life of the subject spoken of resides. The same is true of רִרָה and πνεῦμα, they also mean breath, life, and living principle. The Scriptures therefore speak of the נְפֶשׁ אוֹר שֶׁהַשֵּׁן not only as that which lives or is the principle of life to the body, but as that which thinks and feels, which may be saved or lost, which survives the body and is immortal. The soul is the man himself, that in which his identity and personality reside. It is the Ego. Higher than the soul there is nothing in man. Therefore it is so often used as a synonym for self. Every soul is every man; my soul is I; his soul is he. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul. It is the soul that sins (Lev. iv. 2), it is the soul that loves God. We are commanded to love God, ἐν ὄλῃ τῆ ψυχῆ. Hope is said to be the anchor of the soul, and the word of God is able to save the soul. The end of our faith is said to be (1 Peter i. 9), the salvation of our souls; and John (Rev. vi. 9, 4), saw in heaven the souls of them that were slain for the word of God. From all this it is evident that the word ψυχή, or soul, does not designate the mere animal part of our nature, and is not a substance different from the πνεῦμα, or spirit. (3.) A third remark on this subject is that all the words above mentioned, נְפֶשׁ, רִרָה, and נְשָׁמָה in Hebrew, and πνεῦμα in Greek, and soul and spirit in English, are used in the Scriptures indiscriminately of men and of irrational animals. If the Bible ascribed only a ψυχή to brutes, and both ψυχή and πνεῦμα to man, there would be some

ground for assuming that the two are essentially distinct. But such is not the case. The living principle in the brute is called both נַפְשׁ and רִרָה, ψυχή and πνεῦμα. That principle in the brute creation is irrational and mortal; in man it is rational and immortal. "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" Eccles. iii. 21. The soul of the brute is the immaterial principle which constitutes its life, and which is endowed with sensibility, and that measure of intelligence which experience shows the lower animals to possess. The soul in man is a created spirit of a higher order, which has not only the attributes of sensibility, memory, and instinct, but also the higher powers which pertain to our intellectual, moral, and religious life. As in the brutes it is not one substance that feels and another that remembers; so it is not one substance in man that is the subject of sensations, and another substance which has intuitions of necessary truths, and which is endowed with conscience and with the knowledge of God. Philosophers speak of world-consciousness, or the immediate cognizance which we have of what is without us; of self-consciousness, or the knowledge of what is within us; and of God-consciousness, or our knowledge and sense of God. These all belong to one and the same immaterial, rational substance. (4.) It is fair to appeal to the testimony of consciousness on this subject. We are conscious of our bodies and we are conscious of our souls, *i. e.*, of the exercises and states of each; but no man is conscious of the ψυχή as distinct from the πνεῦμα, of the soul as different from the spirit. In other words consciousness reveals the existence of two substances in the constitution of our nature; but it does not reveal the existence of three substances, and therefore the existence of more than two cannot rationally be assumed.

*Doubtful Passages Explained.*

(5.) The passages of Scriptures which are cited as favouring the opposite doctrine may all be explained in consistency with the current representations of Scripture on the subject. When Paul says to the Thessalonians, "I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians v. 23), he only uses a periphrasis for the whole man. As when in Luke i. 46, 47, the virgin says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour," soul and spirit in this passage do not mean different things. And when we are commanded "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke x. 27), we have not an enumeration of so many distinct substances. Nor do we distinguish between the mind and heart as separate entities when we pray that both may be enlightened and sanctified; we mean simply the soul in all its aspects or faculties. Again, when in Heb. iv. 12, the Apostle says that the word of God pierces so as to penetrate soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, he does not assume that soul and spirit are different substances. The joints and marrow are not different substances. They are both material; they are different forms of the same substance; and so soul and spirit are one and the same substance under different aspects or relations. We can say that the word of God reaches not only to the feelings, but also to the conscience, without assuming that the heart and conscience are distinct entities. Much less is any such distinction implied in Philippians i. 27, "Stand fast in one spirit (έν ένι πνεύματι), with one mind (μὲ ψυχή)." There is more difficulty in explaining 1 Cor. xv. 44. The Apostle there distinguishes between the σώμα ψυχικόν and the σώμα πνευματικόν; the former is that in which the ψυχή is the animating principle; and the latter that in which the πνεῦμα is the principle of life. The one we have here, the other we are to have hereafter. This seems to imply that the ψυχή exists in this life, but is not to exist hereafter, and therefore that the two are separable and distinct. In this explanation we might acquiesce if it did not contradict the general representations of the Scriptures. We are constrained, therefore, to seek another explanation which will harmonize with other portions of the word of God. The general meaning of the Apostle is plain. We have now gross, perishable, and dishonorable, or unsightly bodies. Hereafter we are to have glorious bodies, adapted to a higher state of existence. The only question is, why does he call the one psychical, and the other pneumatic? Because the word ψυχή, although often used for the soul as rational and immortal, is

also used for the lower form of life which belongs to irrational animals. Our future bodies are not to be adapted to those principles of our nature which we have in common with the brutes, but to those which are peculiar to us as men, created in the image of God. The same individual human soul has certain susceptibilities and powers which adapt it to the present state of existence, and to the earthly house in which it now dwells. It has animal appetites and necessities. It can hunger and thirst. It needs sleep and rest. But the same soul has higher powers. The earthly body is suited to its earthly state; the heavenly body to its heavenly state. There are not two substances ψυχή and πνεῦμα, there is but one and the same substance with different susceptibilities and powers. In this same connection Paul says, Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Yet our bodies are to inherit that kingdom, and our bodies are flesh and blood. The same material substance now constituted as flesh and blood is to be so changed as to be like Christ's glorious body. As this representation does not prove a substantial difference between the body which now is and that which is to be hereafter, so neither does what the Apostle says of the σῶμα ψυχικόν and the σῶμα πνευματικόν prove that the ψυχή and πνεῦμα are distinct substances.

This doctrine of a threefold constitution of man being adopted by Plato, was introduced partially into the early Church, but soon came to be regarded as dangerous, if not heretical. Its being held by the Gnostics that the πνεῦμα in man was a part of the divine essence, and incapable of sin; and by the Apollinarians that Christ had only a human σῶμα and ψυχή, but not a human πνεῦμα, the Church rejected the doctrine that the ψυχή and πνεῦμα were distinct substances, since upon it those heresies were founded. In later times the Semi-Pelagians taught that the soul and body, but not the spirit in man were the subjects of original sin. All Protestants, Lutheran and Reformed, were, therefore, the more zealous in maintaining that the soul and spirit, ψυχή and πνεῦμα are one and the same substance and essence. And this, as before remarked, has been the common doctrine of the Church<sup>8</sup>

A question arises at this point which has engaged and divided theologians in all generations, namely, Is man a *dichotomous* being—two parts, material and immaterial, with the supposition that soul and spirit are the same—or is he *trichotomous*—body, soul, and spirit? It would be readily conceded by all that, under any consideration, there is not the same breadth of distinction observable between *soul* and *spirit* as between *soul* and *body*, or *spirit* and *body*. Distinction—far-reaching indeed—is implied between *soul* and *spirit*, yet these terms are used synonymously. Thus the controversy is between those who are impressed with the distinctions and those who are impressed with the similarities. It would be well to recognize that, when so required, the Bible assigns to these two terms a distinctive meaning and that when no specific distinction is in view the Bible uses them as interchangeable. In other words, the Bible supports both dichotomy and trichotomy. The distinction between soul and spirit is as incomprehensible as life itself, and the efforts of men to frame definitions must always be unsatisfactory.<sup>9</sup>

Man has a two-fold nature,—on the one hand material, on the other hand immaterial. He consists of body, and of spirit, or soul. That there are two, and only two, elements in man's being, is a fact to which

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<sup>8</sup>Hodge, C. (1997). *Systematic theology*. Originally published 1872. (2:47-51). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>9</sup>Chafer, L. S. (1993). *Systematic theology*. Originally published: Dallas, Tex. : Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-1948. (2:180-181). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

consciousness testifies. This testimony is confirmed by Scripture, in which the prevailing representation of man's constitution is that of dichotomy.<sup>10</sup>

Man's nature is not a three-storied house, but a two-storied house, with windows in the upper story looking in two directions—toward earth and toward heaven. The lower story is the physical part of us—the body. But man's "upper story" has two aspects; there is an outlook toward things below, and a skylight through which to see the stars. "Soul," says Hovey, "is spirit as modified by union with the body."<sup>11</sup>

## B. Not Trichotomy ("Cut in Three Parts")

Aristotle further developed Plato's twofold division by dividing the soul into (a) an animal soul (the breathing aspect) and (b) the rational soul (the intellectual aspect). This distinction was further developed in Roman Catholic doctrine through Thomas Aquinas. Early Christian writers, influenced by the Greeks, thought they found support for trichotomy in certain New Testament passages, as do some modern writers.

Popular trichotomy (man is composed of body, soul, and spirit) makes the spirit superior to the soul, and the spirit and soul superior to the body. Body relates to self, soul to the world, but spirit to God. Spirit and the spiritual are to be cultivated, while souliness and body are deprecated. This prioritizing is incompatible with popular trichotomy's attempt to draw an analogy between the tripartite nature of God and man. Certainly the persons of the Trinity are equal, though the parts of man are not. To which person of the Trinity would the body correspond? Trichotomy, popular or formal, cannot be substantiated logically, analogically, or scripturally.

But what about the passages commonly cited to support trichotomy?

Hebrews 4:12 seems to separate soul from spirit, thus supporting the trichotomy view. However, the verse does not say that the Word severs soul from spirit but that it pierces through *to divide* soul and spirit, thus exposing the innermost aspects of man. The point is simply that the Word of God leaves nothing hidden.

First Thessalonians 5:23 seems to indicate that the immaterial aspect of man is composed of soul and spirit. Trichotomists understand spirit, soul, and body in this verse as defining the parts of man; dichotomists say they represent the whole man. If these three terms are inclusive of all the aspects of man, then what place do heart, mind, will, and conscience have? Why did not Paul also include them in the list? The emphasis of the verse is on the completeness of sanctification.

First Corinthians 15:44 appears to teach a difference between the present body (a soul body) and the resurrection body (a spiritual body). But that does not mean that the spirit is superior to the soul. Also John saw people in heaven as "souls" (Rev. 6:9; 20:4).

The spirit can partake of pollution along with the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1). Trichotomy ought to have pollution affecting the flesh and soul, not the spirit. Fleshly lusts war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11).

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<sup>10</sup>Strong, A. H. (2004). *Systematic theology*. "The present work is a revision and enlargement of my 'Systematic Theology,' first published in 1886."--Pref. (483). Bellingham, Wa.: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>11</sup>Strong, A. H. (2004). *Systematic theology*. "The present work is a revision and enlargement of my 'Systematic Theology,' first published in 1886."--Pref. (486). Bellingham, Wa.: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Trichotomy ought to have flesh warring against the spirit, or soul against spirit. How can the Lord command us to love Him with all our souls if the soul is world-conscious, not God-conscious? (Mark 12:30). Trichotomy ought to have the command read "with all your spirit," but spirit is not mentioned at all in the command. In Hebrews 10:38 soul is used of God.

Man is made up of two substances, material and immaterial. Each consists of a variety within. The many facets of the material and the many facets of the immaterial join together to make up the whole of each person. Man is rich diversity in unity.

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## 1. THE DIFFERENT VIEWS THAT WERE CURRENT IN HISTORY: DICHOTOMY AND TRICHOTOMY.

It is customary, especially in Christian circles, to conceive of man as consisting of two, and only two, distinct parts, namely, body and soul. This view is technically called dichotomy. Alongside of it, however, another made its appearance, to the effect that human nature consists of three parts, body, soul, and spirit. It is designated by the term trichotomy. The tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy, which conceived of the relation of the body and the spirit of man to each other after the analogy of the mutual relation between the material universe and God. It was thought that, just as the latter could enter into communion with each other only by means of a third substance or an intermediate being, so the former could enter into mutual vital relationships only by means of a third or intermediate element, namely, the soul. The soul was regarded as, on the one hand, immaterial, and on the other, adapted to the body. In so far as it appropriated the nous or pneuma, it was regarded as immortal, but in so far as it was related to the body, as carnal and mortal. The most familiar but also the crudest form of trichotomy is that which takes the body for the material part of man's nature, the soul as the principle of animal life, and the spirit as the God-related rational and immortal element in man. The trichotomic conception of man found considerable favor with the Greek or Alexandrian Church Fathers of the early Christian centuries. It is found, though not always in exactly the same form, in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. But after Apollinaris employed it in a manner impinging on the perfect humanity of Jesus, it was gradually discredited. Some of the Greek Fathers still adhered to it, though Athanasius and Theodoret explicitly repudiated it. In the Latin Church the leading theologians distinctly favored the twofold division of human nature. It was especially the psychology of Augustine that gave prominence to this view. During the Middle Ages it had become a matter of common belief. The

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<sup>12</sup>Ryrie, C. C. (1999). *Basic theology : A popular systemic guide to understanding biblical truth* (223). Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press.

Reformation brought no change in this respect, though a few lesser lights defended the trichotomic theory. The Roman Catholic Church adhered to the verdict of Scholasticism, but in the circles of Protestantism other voices were heard. During the nineteenth century trichotomy was revived in some form or other by certain German and English theologians, as Roos, Olshausen, Beck, Delitzsch, Auberlen, Oehler, White, and Heard; but it did not meet with great favor in the theological world. The recent advocates of this theory do not agree as to the nature of the psuche, nor as to the relation in which it stands to the other elements in man's nature. Delitzsch conceives of it as an efflux of the pneuma, while Beck, Oehler, and Heard, regard it as the point of union between the body and the spirit. Delitzsch is not altogether consistent and occasionally seems to waver, and Beck and Oehler admit that the Biblical representation of man is fundamentally dichotomic. Their defense of a Biblical trichotomy can hardly be said to imply the existence of three distinct elements in man. Besides these two theological views there were, especially in the last century and a half, also the philosophical views of absolute Materialism and of absolute Idealism, the former sacrificing the soul to the body, and the latter, the body to the soul.

**2. THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE AS TO THE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF HUMAN NATURE.** The prevailing representation of the nature of man in Scripture is clearly dichotomic. On the one hand the Bible teaches us to view the nature of man as a unity, and not as a duality, consisting of two different elements, each of which move along parallel lines but do not really unite to form a single organism. The idea of a mere parallelism between the two elements of human nature, found in Greek philosophy and also in the works of some later philosophers, is entirely foreign to Scripture. While recognizing the complex nature of man, it never represents this as resulting in a twofold subject in man. Every act of man is seen as an act of the whole man. It is not the soul but man that sins; it is not the body but man that dies; and it is not merely the soul, but man, body and soul, that is redeemed in Christ. This unity already finds expression in the classical passage of the Old Testament — the first passage to indicate the complex nature of man — namely, Gen. 2: 7: “And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” The whole passage deals with man: “God formed man . . . and man became a living soul.” This work of God should not be interpreted as a mechanical process, as if He first formed a body of clay and then put a soul into it. When God formed the body, He formed it so that by the breath of His Spirit man at once became a living soul. Job 33: 4; 32: 8. The word “soul” in this passage does not have the meaning which we usually

ascribe to it — a meaning rather foreign to the Old Testament — but denotes an animated being, and is a description of man as a whole. The very same Hebrew term, *nephesh chayyah* (living soul or being) is also applied to the animals in Gen. 1: 21, 24, 30. So this passage, while indicating that there are two elements in man, yet stresses the organic unity of man. And this is recognized throughout the Bible.

At the same time it also contains evidences of the dual composition of man's nature. We should be careful, however, not to expect the later distinction between the body as the material element, and the soul as the spiritual element, of human nature, in the Old Testament. This distinction came into use later on under the influence of Greek philosophy. The antithesis — soul and body — even in its New Testament sense, is not yet found in the Old Testament. In fact, the Hebrew has no word for the body as an organism. The Old Testament distinction of the two elements of human nature is of a different kind. Says Laidlaw in his work on *The Bible Doctrine of Man*: 1 The antithesis is clearly that of lower and higher, earthly and heavenly, animal and divine. It is not so much two elements, as two factors uniting in a single and harmonious result, — 'man became a living soul.' ” It is quite evident that this is the distinction in Gen. 2: 7. Cf. also Job 27: 3; 32: 8; 33: 4; Eccl. 12: 7. A variety of words is used in the Old Testament to denote the lower element in man or parts of it, such as “flesh,” “dust,” “bones,” “bowels,” “kidneys,” and also the metaphorical expression “house of clay,” Job 4: 19. And there are also several words to denote the higher element, such as “spirit;” “soul,” “heart,” and “mind.” As soon as we pass from the Old to the New Testament, we meet with the antithetic expressions that are most familiar to us, as “body and soul,” “flesh and spirit.” The corresponding Greek words were undoubtedly moulded by Greek philosophical thought, but passed through the Septuagint into the New Testament, and therefore retained their Old Testament force. At the same time the antithetic idea of the material and the immaterial is now also connected with them.

Trichotomists seek support in the fact that the Bible, as they see it, recognizes two constituent parts of human nature in addition to the lower or material element, namely, the soul (Heb., *nephesh*; Greek, *psuche*) and the spirit (Heb., *ruach*; Greek, *pneuma*). But the fact that these terms are used with great frequency in Scripture does not warrant the conclusion that they designate component parts rather than different aspects of human nature. A careful study of Scripture clearly shows that it uses the words interchangeably. Both terms denote the higher or spiritual element in man, but contemplate it from different points of view. It should be pointed out at once, however,

that the Scriptural distinction of the two does not agree with that which is rather common in philosophy, that the soul is the spiritual element in man, as it is related to the animal world, while the spirit is that same element in its relation to the higher spiritual world and to God. The following facts militate against this philosophical distinction: Ruach-pneuma, as well as nephesh-psuche, is used of the brute creation, Eccl. 3: 21; Rev. 16: 3. The word psuche is even used with reference to Jehovah, Isa. 42: 1; Jer. 9: 9; Amos 6: 8 (Heb.); Heb 10: 38. The disembodied dead are called psuchai, Rev. 6: 9; 20: 4. The highest exercises of religion are ascribed to the psuche, Mark 12: 30; Luke 1: 46; Heb. 6: 18,19; Jas. 1: 21. To lose the psuche is to lose all. It is perfectly evident that the Bible uses the two words interchangeably. Notice the parallelism in Luke 1: 46, 47: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." The Scriptural formula for man is in some passages "body and soul," Matt. 6: 25; 10: 28; and in others, "body and spirit," Eccl. 12: 7; I Cor. 5: 3, 5. Death is sometimes described as the giving up of the soul, Gen. 35: 18; I Kings 17: 21; Acts 15: 26; and then again as the giving up of the spirit, Ps. 31: 5; Luke 23: 46; Acts 7: 59. Moreover both "soul" and "spirit" are used to designate the immaterial element of the dead, I Pet. 3: 19; Heb. 12: 23; Rev. 6: 9; 20: 4. The main Scriptural distinction is as follows: the word "spirit" designates the spiritual element in man as the principle of life and action which controls the body; while the word "soul" denominates the same element as the subject of action in man, and is therefore often used for the personal pronoun in the Old Testament, Ps. 10: 1,2; 104: 1; 146: 1; Is. 42: 1; cf. also Luke 12: 19. In several instances it, more specifically, designates the inner life as the seat of the affections. All this is quite in harmony with Gen. 2: 7, "And Jehovah God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Thus it may be said that man has spirit, but is soul. The Bible therefore points to two, and only two, constitutional elements in the nature of man, namely, body and spirit or soul. This Scriptural representation is also in harmony with the self-consciousness of man. While man is conscious of the fact that he consists of a material and a spiritual element, no one is conscious of possessing a soul in distinction from a spirit.

There are two passages, however, that seem to conflict with the usual dichotomic representation of Scripture, namely, I Thess. 5: 23, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and Heb. 4: 12, "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts

and intents of the heart.” But it should be noted that: (a) It is a sound rule in exegesis that exceptional statements should be interpreted in the light of the analogia Scriptura, the usual representation of Scripture. In view of this fact some of the defenders of trichotomy admit that these passages do not necessarily prove their point. (b) The mere mention of spirit and soul alongside of each other does not prove that, according to Scripture, they are two distinct sub-stances, any more than Matt. 22: 37 proves that Jesus regarded heart and soul and mind as three distinct substances, (c) In I Thess. 5: 23 the apostle simply desires to strengthen the statement, “And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly,” by an epexegetical statement, in which the different aspects of man’s existence are summed up, and in which he feels perfectly free to mention soul and spirit alongside of each other, because the Bible distinguishes between the two. He cannot very well have thought of them as two different substances here, because he speaks elsewhere of man as consisting of two parts, Rom. 8: 10; I Cor. 5: 5; 7: 34; II Cor. 7: 1; Eph. 2: 3; Col. 2: 5. (d) Heb. 4: 12 should not be taken to mean that the word of God, penetrating to the inner man, makes a separation between his soul and his spirit, which would naturally imply that these two are different substances; but simply as declaring that it brings about a separation in both between the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Berkhoff 1932 as *Reformed Dogmatics*, it was later re-titled [\*Systematic Theology\*](#)

## Chapter 23

# The Essential Nature of Man

*What does Scripture mean by “soul” and “spirit”? Are they the same thing?*

### EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

#### A. Introduction: Trichotomy, Dichotomy, and Monism

How many parts are there to man? Everyone agrees that we have physical bodies. Most people (both Christians and non-Christians) sense that they also have an immaterial part—a “soul” that will live on after their bodies die.

But here the agreement ends. Some people believe that in addition to “body” and “soul” we have a third part, a “spirit” that most directly relates to God. The view that man is made of three parts (*body, soul, and spirit*) is called *trichotomy*.<sup>1</sup> Though this has been a common view in popular evangelical Bible teaching, there are few scholarly defenses of it today. According to many trichotomists, man’s *soul* includes his intellect, his emotions, and his will. They maintain that all people have such a soul, and that the different elements of the soul can either serve God or be yielded to sin. They argue that man’s *spirit* is a higher faculty in man that comes alive when a person becomes a Christian (see Rom. 8:10: “If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, *your spirits are alive* because of righteousness”). The spirit of a person then would be that part of him or her that most directly worships and prays to God (see John 4:24; Phil. 3:3).

Others have said that “spirit” is not a separate part of man, but simply another term for “soul,” and that both terms are used interchangeably in Scripture to talk about the immaterial part of man, the part that lives on after our bodies die. The view that man is made up of *two parts* (body and soul/spirit) is called *dichotomy*. Those who hold this view often agree that Scripture uses the word *spirit* (Heb. רוּחַ, H8120, and Gk. πνεῦμα, G4460) more frequently when referring to our relationship to God, but such usage (they say) is not uniform, and the word *soul* is also used in all the ways that *spirit* can be used.

Outside the realm of evangelical thought we find yet another view, the idea that man cannot exist at all apart from a physical body, and therefore there can be no separate existence for any “soul” after the body dies (although this view can allow for the resurrection of the whole person at some future time). The view that man is only one element, and that his body is the person, is called *monism*.<sup>2</sup> According to monism, the scriptural terms *soul* and *spirit* are just other expressions for the “person” himself, or for the person’s “life.” This view has not generally been adopted by evangelical theologians because so many scriptural texts seem clearly to affirm that our souls or spirits live on after our bodies die (see Gen. 35:18; Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:43, 46; Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23–24; 2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9; 20:4; and chapter 42, on the intermediate state, below).

But the other two views continue to be held in the Christian world today. Although dichotomy has been held more commonly through the history of the church and is far more common among evangelical scholars today, trichotomy has also had many supporters.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will support the dichotomist view that man is two parts, body and soul (or spirit), but we shall also examine the arguments for trichotomy.

## **B. Biblical Data**

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<sup>1</sup> 1. For a defense of trichotomy, see Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* trans. R.E. Wallis, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> 2. For further information, see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* pp. 524–27, and his notes regarding the view of J.A.T. Robinson.

<sup>3</sup> 3. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* pp. 191–92, for a survey of views held in the history of the church.

Before asking whether Scripture views “soul” and “spirit” as distinct parts of man, we must at the outset make it clear that the emphasis of Scripture is on the overall unity of man as created by God. When God made man he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Here Adam is a unified person with body and soul living and acting together. This original harmonious and unified state of man will occur again when Christ returns and we are fully redeemed in our bodies as well as our souls to live with him forever (see 1 Cor. 15:51–54). Moreover, we are to grow in holiness and love for God in every aspect of our lives, in our bodies as well as in our spirits or souls (cf. 1 Cor. 7:34). We are to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of *body and spirit* and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

But once we have emphasized the fact that God created us to have a unity between body and soul, and that every action we take in this life is an act of our whole person, involving to some extent both body and soul, then we can go on to point out that Scripture quite clearly teaches that there is an immaterial part of man’s nature. And we can investigate what that part is like.

**1. Scripture Uses “Soul” and “Spirit” Interchangeably.** When we look at the usage of the biblical words translated “soul” (Heb. נְפֹשׁ, H5883, and Gk. ψυχή, G6034) and “spirit” (Heb. רוּחַ, H8120, and Gk. πνεῦμα, G4460),<sup>4</sup> it appears that they are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, in John 12:27, Jesus says, “Now is my *soul* troubled,” whereas in a very similar context in the next chapter John says that Jesus was “troubled in *spirit*” (John 13:21). Similarly, we read Mary’s words in Luke 1:46–47: “My *soul* magnifies the Lord, and my *spirit* rejoices in God my Savior.” This seems to be quite an evident example of Hebrew parallelism, the poetic device in which the same idea is repeated using different but synonymous words. This interchangeability of terms also explains why people who have died and gone to heaven or hell can be called either “spirits” (Heb. 12:23, “the *spirits* of just men made perfect”; also 1 Peter 3:19, “*spirits* in prison”) or “souls” (Rev. 6:9, “the *souls* of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”; 20:4, “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus”).

**2. At Death, Scripture Says Either That the “Soul” Departs or the “Spirit” Departs.** When Rachel died, Scripture says, “Her *soul* was departing (for she died)” (Gen. 35:18). Elijah prays that the dead child’s “soul” would come into him again (1 Kings 17:21), and Isaiah predicts that the Servant of the Lord would “pour out his *soul* [Heb. נְפֹשׁ, H5883] to death” (Isa. 53:12). In the

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cf cf.—compare

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4. Throughout this chapter it is important to keep in mind that several recent Bible translations (especially the NIV) do not consistently translate the Hebrew and Greek terms noted above as “soul” and “spirit,” but sometimes substitute other terms such as “life,” “mind,” “heart,” or “person.” The RSV, which I quote unless another version is specified, tends to be more literal in translating these words in most cases.

In certain contexts these terms can of course be used to refer to the person’s life or to the whole person, but they are also used many times to refer to a distinct part of a person’s nature (see BDB, pp. 659–61, 924–25; and BAGD, pp. 674–75, 893–94, for many examples).

New Testament God tells the rich fool, “This night your soul [Gk. ψυχή, G6034] is required of you” (Luke 12:20). On the other hand, sometimes death is viewed as the returning of the spirit to God. So David can pray, in words later quoted by Jesus on the cross, “Into your hand I commit my *spirit*” (Ps. 31:5; cf. Luke 23:46). At death, “the *spirit* returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7).<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament, when Jesus was dying, “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30), and likewise Stephen before dying prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

In response to these passages, a trichotomist might argue that they are talking about different things, for when a person dies both his soul and his spirit do in fact go to heaven. But it should be noted that Scripture nowhere says that a person’s “soul and spirit” departed or went to heaven or were yielded up to God. If soul and spirit were separate and distinct things, we would expect that such language would be affirmed somewhere, if only to assure the reader that no essential part of the person is left behind. Yet we find no such language: the biblical authors do not seem to care whether they say that the soul departs or the spirit departs at death, for both seem to mean the same thing.

We should also note that these Old Testament verses quoted above indicate that it is not correct, as some have claimed, to say that the Old Testament so emphasizes the unity of man that it has no conception of the existence of the soul apart from the body. Certainly several of these Old Testament passages imply that the authors recognize that a person continues to exist after his or her body dies.

**3. Man Is Said to Be Either “Body and Soul” or “Body and Spirit.”** Jesus tells us not to fear those who “kill the body but cannot kill the soul,” but that we should rather “fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Here the word “soul” clearly must refer to the part of a person that exists after death. It cannot mean “person” or “life,” for it would not make sense to speak of those who “kill the body but cannot kill the person,” or who “kill the body but cannot kill the life,” unless there is some aspect of the person that lives on after the body is dead. Moreover, when Jesus talks about “soul and body” he seems quite clearly to be talking about the entire person even though he does not mention “spirit” as a separate component. The word “soul” seems to stand for the entire nonphysical part of man.

On the other hand, man is sometimes said to be “body and spirit.” Paul wants the Corinthian church to deliver an erring brother to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). It is not that Paul has forgotten the salvation of the man’s soul as well; he simply uses the word “spirit” to refer to the whole of the person’s immaterial existence. Similarly, James says that “the body apart from the spirit is dead” (James

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<sup>5</sup> 5. George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), says that in the Old Testament neither soul nor spirit “is conceived of as a part of man capable of surviving the death of בָּשָׂר [H1414, flesh]” (p. 459). This statement is not accurate in the light of the Old Testament verses just cited in this paragraph. Ladd’s analysis in this section is heavily dependent on the work of W.D. Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (London: Macmillan, 1956), whom Ladd cites fourteen times on pp. 458–59. Yet Stacey himself thinks that death means extinction for human beings (Ladd, p. 463). Ladd also notes that Rudolf Bultmann vigorously denied that man has an invisible soul or spirit, but Ladd himself rejects Bultmann’s view when dealing with the New Testament data (see p. 460, n. 17, and p. 464).

2:26), but mentions nothing about a separate soul. Moreover, when Paul speaks of growth in personal holiness, he approves the woman who is concerned with “how to be holy in body and spirit” (1 Cor. 7:34), and he suggests that this covers the whole of the person’s life. Even more explicit is 2 Corinthians 7:1, where he says, “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.”<sup>6</sup> Cleansing ourselves from defilement of the “soul” or of the “spirit” covers the whole immaterial side of our existence (see also Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 5:3; Col. 2:5).

**4. The “Soul” Can Sin or the “Spirit” Can Sin.** Those who hold to trichotomy will usually agree that the “soul” can sin since they think that the soul includes the intellect, the emotions, and the will. (We see the fact that our souls can sin implied in verses such as 1 Peter 1:22; Rev. 18:14.)

The trichotomist, however, generally thinks of the “spirit” as purer than the soul, and, when renewed, as free from sin and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This understanding (which sometimes finds its way into popular Christian preaching and writing) is not really supported by the biblical text. When Paul encourages the Corinthians to cleanse themselves “from every defilement of body and *spirit*” (2 Cor. 7:1), he clearly implies that there can be defilement (or sin) in our spirits. Similarly, he speaks of the unmarried woman who is concerned with how to be holy “in body and *spirit*” (1 Cor. 7:34). Other verses speak in similar ways. For example, the Lord hardened the “spirit” of Sihon the king of Heshbon (Deut. 2:30). Psalm 78 speaks of the rebellious people of Israel “whose *spirit* was not faithful to God” (Ps. 78:8). A “haughty *spirit*” goes before a fall (Prov. 16:18), and it is possible for sinful people to be “proud in spirit” (Eccl. 7:8). Isaiah speaks of those “who err in spirit” (Isa. 29:24). Nebuchadnezzar’s “spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly” (Dan. 5:20). The fact that “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit” (Prov. 16:2) implies that it is possible for our spirits to be wrong in God’s sight. Other verses imply a possibility of sin in our spirits (see Ps. 32:2; 51:10). Finally, the fact that Scripture approves of one “who *rules his spirit*” (Prov. 16:32) implies that our spirits are not simply the spiritually pure parts of our lives that are to be followed in all cases, but that they can have sinful desires or directions as well.

**5. Everything That the Soul Is Said to Do, the Spirit Is Also Said to Do, and Everything That the Spirit Is Said to Do the Soul Is Also Said to Do.** Those who advocate trichotomy face a difficult problem defining clearly just what the difference is between the soul and the spirit (from their perspective). If Scripture gave clear support to the idea that our spirit is the part of us that directly relates to God in worship and prayer, while our soul includes our intellect (thinking), our emotions (feeling), and our will (deciding), then trichotomists would have a strong case. However, Scripture appears not to allow such a distinction to be made.

On the one hand, the activities of thinking, feeling, and deciding things are not said to be done by our souls only. Our spirits can also experience emotions, for example, as when Paul’s “spirit was provoked within him” (Acts 17:16), or when Jesus was “troubled in spirit” (John

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<sup>6</sup> 6. The verse is perhaps better translated, “making holiness perfect in the view of God,” since the present participle ἐπίσκοπος (G2176) (from ἐπιτέλλω, G2200) suggests actions simultaneous with the main verb “cleanse,” and the verse thus gives the idea that the way in which we make holiness perfect is by cleansing ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit (grammatically this would then be a modal participle).

13:21). It is also possible to have a “downcast spirit,” which is the opposite of a “cheerful heart” (Prov. 17:22).

Moreover, the functions of knowing, perceiving, and thinking are also said to be done by our spirits. For instance, Mark speaks of Jesus “perceiving [Gk. ἐπιγινώσκω, G2105, “knowing’] in his spirit” (Mark 2:8). When the Holy Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16), our spirits receive and understand that witness, which is certainly a function of knowing something. In fact, our spirits seem to know our thoughts quite deeply, for Paul asks, “What person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2:11). (Cf. Isa. 29:24, speaking of those who now “err in spirit” but “will come to understanding.”)

The point of these verses is not to say that it is the spirit rather than the soul that feels and thinks things, but rather that “soul” and “spirit” are both terms used of the immaterial side of people generally, and it is difficult to see any real distinction between the use of the terms.

In fact, we should not slip into the mistake of thinking that certain activities (such as thinking, feeling, or deciding things) are done by only one part of us. Rather, these activities are done by the whole person. When we think or feel things, certainly our physical bodies are involved at every point as well. Whenever we think we use the physical brain God has given us. Similarly, our brain and our entire nervous system are involved when we feel emotion, and sometimes those emotions are involved in physical sensations in other parts of our bodies. This is just to reemphasize what was said at the beginning of our discussion, that the overall focus of Scripture is primarily on man as a unity, with our physical bodies and the nonphysical part of our persons functioning together as a unity.

On the other hand, the trichotomist claim that our spirit is that element of us that relates most directly to God in worship and in prayer does not seem to be borne out by Scripture. We often read about our *soul* worshiping God and relating to him in other kinds of spiritual activity. “To you, O LORD, I lift up my *soul*” (Ps. 25:1). “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (Ps. 62:1). “Bless the LORD, O my *soul*; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” (Ps. 103:1). “Praise the LORD, O my soul!” (Ps. 146:1). “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46).

These passages indicate that our souls can worship God, praise him, and give thanks to him. Our souls can pray to God, as Hannah implies when she says, “I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD” (1 Sam. 1:15). In fact, the great commandment is to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5; cf. Mark 12:30). Our souls can long for God and thirst for him (Ps. 42:1, 2), and can “hope in God” (Ps. 42:5). Our souls can rejoice and delight in God, for David says, “My soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance” (Ps. 35:9; cf. Isa. 61:10). The psalmist says, “My soul is consumed with longing for your ordinances at all times” (Ps. 119:20), and, “My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly” (Ps. 119:167). There seems to be no area of life or relationship to God in which Scripture says our spirits are active rather than our souls. Both terms are used to speak of all of the aspects of our relationship to God.

However, it would be wrong, in the light of these passages, to suggest that only our souls (or spirits) worship God, for our bodies are involved in worship as well. We are a unity of body and soul/spirit. Our physical brains think about God when we worship and when we love him with all of our “minds” (Mark 12:30). David, longing to be in God’s presence, can say, “My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is” (Ps. 63:1). Again, we read, “My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Ps. 84:2). It is obvious that when we pray aloud or sing praise to God, our lips and our vocal cords are involved, and sometimes worship and prayer in

Scripture involves clapping of hands (Ps. 47:1) or lifting of hands to God (Pss. 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 143:6; 1 Tim. 2:8). Moreover, the playing of musical instruments in praise to God is an act that involves our physical bodies as well as the physical materials of which the musical instruments are made (see Ps. 150:3–5). We worship him as whole persons.

In conclusion, Scripture does not seem to support any distinction between soul and spirit. There does not seem to be a satisfactory answer to the questions that we may address to a trichotomist, “What can the spirit do that the soul cannot do? What can the soul do that the spirit cannot do?”

### C. Arguments for Trichotomy

Those who adopt the trichotomist position have appealed to a number of Scripture passages in support of it. We list here the ones that are most commonly used.

**1. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.** “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your *spirit and soul and body* be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). Does not this verse clearly speak of three parts to man?

**2. Hebrews 4:12.** “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the *division of soul and spirit* of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). If the sword of Scripture divides soul and spirit, then are these not two separate parts of man?

**3. 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4.** This passage speaks of different kinds of people, those who are “of the flesh” (Gk. σάρκινος, G4921, 1 Cor. 3:1); those who are “unspiritual” (Gk. ψυχικός, G6035, lit. “soul-ish,” 1 Cor. 2:14); and those who are “spiritual” (Gk. πνευματικός, G4461, 1 Cor. 2:15). Do not these categories suggest that there are different sorts of people, the non-Christians who are “of the flesh,” “unspiritual” Christians who follow the desires of their souls, and more mature Christians who follow the desires of their spirits? Would this not suggest that soul and spirit are different elements of our nature?

**4. 1 Corinthians 14:14.** When Paul says, “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14), is he not implying that his mind does something different from his spirit, and would not this support the trichotomist’s argument that our mind and our thinking are to be assigned to our souls, not to our spirit?

**5. The Argument From Personal Experience.** Many trichotomists say that they have a spiritual perception, a spiritual awareness of God’s presence which affects them in a way that they know to be different from their ordinary thinking processes and different from their emotional experiences. They ask, “If I do not have a spirit that is distinct from my thoughts and my emotions, then what exactly is it that I feel that is different from my thoughts and my emotions, something that I can only describe as worshiping God in my spirit and sensing his presence in my spirit? Isn’t there something in me that is more than just my intellect and my emotions and my will, and shouldn’t this be called my spirit?”

**6. Our Spirit Is What Makes Us Different From Animals.** Some trichotomists argue that both humans and animals have souls, but maintain that it is the presence of a spirit that makes us different from animals.

**7. Our Spirit Is What Comes Alive at Regeneration.** Trichotomists also argue that when we become Christians our spirits come alive: “But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10).

Now we can consider the seven points given above:

### D. Responses to Arguments for Trichotomy

**1. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.** The phrase “your spirit and soul and body” is by itself inconclusive. Paul could be simply piling up synonyms for emphasis, as is sometimes done elsewhere in Scripture. For example, Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind*” (Matt. 22:37). Does this mean that the soul is different from the mind or from the heart?<sup>7</sup> The problem is even greater in Mark 12:30: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength*.” If we go on the principle that such lists of terms tell us about more parts to man, then if we also add spirit to this list (and perhaps body as well), we would have five or six parts to man! But that is certainly a false conclusion. It is far better to understand Jesus as simply piling up roughly synonymous terms for emphasis to demonstrate that we must love God with all of our being.

Likewise, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul is not saying that soul and spirit are distinct entities, but simply that, whatever our immaterial part is called, he wants God to continue to sanctify us wholly to the day of Christ.

**2. Hebrews 4:12.** This verse, which talks about the Word of God “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow,” is best understood in a way similar to 1 Thessalonians 5:23. The author is not saying that the Word of God can divide “soul *from* spirit,” but he is using a number of terms (soul, spirit, joints, marrow, thoughts and intentions of the heart) that speak of the deep inward parts of our being that are not hidden from the penetrating power of the Word of God. If we wish to call these our “soul,” then Scripture pierces into the midst of it and divides it and discovers its inmost intentions. If we wish to call this inmost nonphysical side of our being our “spirit,” then Scripture penetrates into the midst of it and divides it and knows its deepest intentions and thoughts. Or if we wish to think metaphorically of our inmost being as hidden in our joints and in the marrow, then we can think of Scripture being like a sword that divides our joints or that pierces deeply into our bones and even divides the marrow in the midst of the bones.<sup>8</sup> In all of these cases the Word of God is so powerful that it will search out and expose all disobedience and lack of submission to God. In any case, soul and spirit are not thought of as separate parts; they are simply additional terms for our inmost being.

**3. 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4.** Paul certainly distinguishes a person who is “natural” (ψυχικός, G6035, “soul-ish”) from one that is “spiritual” (πνευματικός, G4461, “spiritual”) in 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4. But in this context “spiritual” seems to mean “influenced by the Holy Spirit,” since the entire passage is talking about the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing truth to believers. In this context, “spiritual” might almost be translated “Spiritual.” But the passage does not imply that Christians have a spirit whereas non-Christians do not, or that the spirit of a Christian is alive while the spirit of a non-Christian is not. Paul is not talking about different parts of man at all, but about coming under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>7</sup> The “heart” in Scripture is an expression for the deepest, inmost thoughts and feelings of a person (see Gen. 6:5, 6; Lev. 19:17; Pss. 14:1; 15:2; 37:4; 119:10; Prov. 3:5; Acts 2:37; Rom. 2:5; 10:9; 1 Cor. 4:5; 14:25; Heb. 4:12; 1 Peter 3:4; Rev. 2:23; et al.).

<sup>8</sup> Note that we do not divide joints from marrow, for joints are the places where bones meet, not the places where joints meet marrow.

**4. 1 Corinthians 14:14.** When Paul says, “My *spirit* prays but my mind is unfruitful,” he means he does not understand the content of what he is praying. He does imply that there is a nonphysical component to his being, a “spirit” within him that can pray to God. But nothing in this verse suggests that he regards his spirit as different from his soul. Such a misunderstanding results only if it is assumed that “mind” is part of the soul—a trichotomist claim that, as we noted above, is very difficult to substantiate from Scripture. Paul probably could equally have said, “My soul prays but my mind is unfruitful.”<sup>9</sup> The point is simply that there is a nonphysical element to our existence that can at times function apart from our conscious awareness of how it is functioning.

**5. The Argument From Personal Experience.** Christians have a “spiritual perception,” an inner awareness of the presence of God experienced in worship and in prayer. At this deep inward level we can also at times feel spiritually troubled, or depressed, or perhaps have a sense of the presence of hostile demonic forces. Often this perception is distinct from our conscious, rational thought processes. Paul realizes that at times his spirit prays but his mind does not understand (1 Cor. 14:14). But does inward spiritual perception occur in something other than what the Bible calls our “soul”? If we were using the vocabulary of Mary, we would be happy to say, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46). David would say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (Ps. 103:1). Jesus would tell us to love God with all our soul (Mark 12:30). The apostle Paul uses the word *spirit* but it is simply a difference in terminology and does not point to a different part of man. There is a “spirit” within us that can perceive things in the spiritual realm (note Rom. 8:16; also Acts 17:16), but we could just as well speak of it as our “soul” and mean the same thing, for Scripture uses both terms.

**6. What Makes Us Different From Animals?** It is true that we have spiritual abilities that make us different from animals:<sup>10</sup> we are able to relate to God in worship and prayer, and we enjoy spiritual life in fellowship with God who is spirit. But we should not assume that we have a distinct element called “spirit” that allows us to do this, for with our minds we can love God, read and understand his words, and believe his Word to be true. Our souls can worship God and rejoice in him (see above). Our bodies will also be resurrected and live with God forever. Therefore we do not have to say that we have a part distinct from our souls and bodies that makes us different from animals, for our souls and bodies (including our minds) relate to God in ways animals never can. Rather, what makes us different from animals is the spiritual abilities that God has given to both our bodies and souls (or spirits).

The question of whether an animal has a “soul” simply depends on how we define soul. If we define “soul” to mean “the intellect, emotions, and will,” then we will have to conclude that at least the higher animals have a soul. But if we define our “soul” as we have in this chapter, to

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<sup>9</sup> 9. However, it is much more characteristic of Paul’s terminology to use the word “spirit” to talk about our relationship to God in worship and in prayer. Paul does not use the word “soul” (Gk. ψυχή, G6034) very frequently (14 times, compared with 101 occurrences in the New Testament as a whole), and when he does, he often uses it simply to refer a person’s “life,” or as a synonym or a person himself, as in Rom. 9:3; 13:1; 16:4; Phil. 2:30. Use of the word “soul” to refer to the non-physical side of man is more characteristic of the gospels, and of many passages in the Old Testament.

<sup>10</sup> 10. See chapter 21, pp. 445–49, on the numerous differences between human beings and animals.

mean the immaterial element of our nature that relates to God (Ps. 103:1; Luke 1:46; et al.) and lives forever (Rev. 6:9), then animals do not have a soul. The fact that the Hebrew word שֵׁנֶה, H5883, “soul,” is sometimes used of animals (Gen. 1:21; 9:4) shows that the word can sometimes simply mean “life”; it does not mean that animals have the same kind of soul as man.<sup>11</sup>

**7. Does Our Spirit Come Alive at Regeneration?** The human spirit is not something that is dead in an unbeliever but comes to life when someone trusts in Christ, because the Bible talks about unbelievers having a spirit that is obviously alive but is in rebellion against God—whether Sihon, King of Heshbon (Deut. 2:30: the Lord “hardened his spirit”), or Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 5:20: “his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly”), or the unfaithful people of Israel (Ps. 78:8: their “spirit was not faithful to God”). When Paul says, “Your spirits are alive because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10), he apparently means “alive to God,” but he does not imply that our spirits were completely “dead” before, only that they were living out of fellowship with God and were dead in that sense.<sup>12</sup> In the same way, we as whole persons were “dead” in “trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), but we were made alive to God, and we now must consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God” (Rom. 6:11). It is not just that one part of us (called the spirit) has been made alive; we as whole persons are a “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

**8. Conclusion.** Although the arguments for trichotomy do have some force, none of them provides conclusive evidence that would overcome the wide testimony of Scripture showing that the terms *soul* and *spirit* are frequently interchangeable and are in many cases synonymous.

We might also note the observation of Louis Berkhof on the origin of trichotomy:

The tripartite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy, which conceived of the relation of the body and the spirit of man to each other after the analogy of the mutual relation between the material universe and God. It was thought that, just as the latter could enter into communion with each other only by means of a third substance or an intermediate being, so the former could enter into mutual vital relationships only by means of a third or intermediate element, namely, the soul.<sup>13</sup>

Some trichotomists today have a tendency to adopt a related error that also was found in Greek philosophy—the idea that the material world, including our bodies, is essentially evil and something to be escaped from. The danger is to say that the realm of the “spirit” is the only thing that is really important, with a resultant depreciation of the value of our physical bodies as

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<sup>11</sup> 11. In fact, one passage even speculates about “the spirit of the beast” in contrast with “the spirit of man,” (Eccl. 3:21), but the context (vv. 18–22) is one expressing a worldly, cynical perspective that shows the vanity of life and argues that man is but a beast (v. 18): in the overall context of the book it is not clear that this is something the author is encouraging his readers to believe.

<sup>12</sup> 12. Another common view of Rom. 8:10 is that Paul is not referring to our human spirits at all but that πνεῦμα (G4460) here means the Holy Spirit, as in vv. 9 and 11, so that the phrase means, “The Spirit is life [for you] because of righteousness”: see Douglas Moo, *Romans 1–8, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), p. 525; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* NIC, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 1:289–91.

<sup>13</sup> 13. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* p. 191.

created by God and “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and therefore as something to be presented to God in service for him (Rom. 12:1).

Trichotomy can also have an anti-intellectual tendency. If we think of the spirit as that element of us that relates most directly to God, and if we think that the spirit is something distinct from our intellect, emotions, and will, we can easily fall into an anti-intellectual kind of Christianity that thinks that vigorous academic work is somehow “unspiritual”—a view that contradicts Jesus’ command to love God with all our “mind” (Mark 12:30) and Paul’s desire to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Such a separation of the realm of the “spirit” from the realm of the intellect can too easily lead to a neglect of sound doctrine or of the need for extensive teaching and knowledge of the Word of God—in contradiction to Paul’s goal that he would work among God’s people to further both their “faith” and their “knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness” (Titus 1:1; cf. v. 9). Similarly, if we think of our spirits as a distinct part of us that relates most directly to God, we can easily begin to neglect the role of Bible study and mature wisdom in making decisions, and place too much reliance on “spiritual” discernment in the realm of guidance, an emphasis that has, through the history of the church, led many zealous Christians astray into false teaching and unwise practices. Finally, trichotomy can subtly influence us to think that our emotions are not important or not really spiritual, since they are thought to be part of our soul, not part of our spirit.

By contrast, if we hold to a view of dichotomy that upholds the overall unity of man, it will be much easier to avoid the error of depreciating the value of our intellects, emotions, or physical bodies. We will not think of our bodies as inherently evil or unimportant. Such a view of dichotomy within unity will also help us to remember that, in this life, there is a continual interaction between our body and our spirit, and that they affect each other: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22).<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, a healthy emphasis on dichotomy within an overall unity reminds us that Christian growth must include all aspects of our lives. We are continually to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). We are to be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10), and our emotions and desires are to conform increasingly to the “desires of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17), including an increase in godly emotions such as peace, joy, love,<sup>15</sup> and so forth (Gal. 5:22).

### **E. Scripture Does Speak of an Immaterial Part of Man That Can Exist Without His Body**

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<sup>14</sup> 14. Although many passages of Scripture remind us that our bodies and our spirits do interact with each other and affect one another, Scripture does not tell us very much about how they interact. Berkhof wisely says, “Body and soul are distinct substances, which do interact, though their mode of interaction escapes human scrutiny and remains a mystery for us” (*Systematic Theology* p. 195).

<sup>15</sup> 15. Some people will object that love is not merely an emotion, because it shows itself in actions and often we can will to perform loving actions toward others even when we do not feel love toward them. I agree with this, but there certainly is an emotional component to love—we can feel love toward others—and we would lose much of the richness of our relationship to God and others if we tried to deny this.

A number of non-Christian philosophers have vigorously challenged the idea that man has any immaterial part at all such as a soul or spirit.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps partially in response to such criticism, some evangelical theologians have seemed hesitant to affirm dichotomy in human existence.<sup>17</sup> They have instead affirmed repeatedly that the Bible views man as a unity—a fact which is true but should not be used to deny that Scripture also views man’s unified nature as made up of two distinct elements. Of course, philosophers who assume that there is no spiritual realm beyond the reach of our sense perception, and who then go from that assumption to argue on the basis of our sense perception that there is no God, or heaven, or angels, or demons, will use similar arguments to deny the existence of a distinct soul within human beings. The perception that we have a spirit or soul belongs to the invisible, spiritual realm, and is, even in Christians, generally only a faint, subjective perception. Therefore, our knowledge of the existence of the human soul must be primarily based on Scripture, in which God clearly testifies to the existence of this immaterial aspect of our beings. The fact that this truth about our existence cannot be clearly known apart from the testimony of Scripture should not cause us to shrink from affirming it.

Scripture is very clear that we do have a soul that is distinct from our physical bodies, which not only can function somewhat independently of our ordinary thought processes (1 Cor. 14:14; Rom. 8:16), but also, when we die, is able to go on consciously acting and relating to God apart from our physical bodies. Jesus told the dying thief, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43), even though, for both of them, their physical bodies were soon to die. When Stephen was dying, he knew he would immediately pass into the presence of the Lord, for he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my *spirit*” (Acts 7:59). Paul does not fear death, for he says, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23). He contrasts that with remaining in this life, which he calls “to remain in the flesh” (Phil. 1:24). In fact, he says, “We would rather be *away from the body* and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), indicating a confidence that if he were to die physically his spirit would go into the Lord’s presence and there enjoy fellowship with the Lord at once. The book of Revelation reminds us that “the *souls* of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne” (Rev. 6:9) are in heaven and are able to cry out to God to bring justice on the earth (Rev. 6:10; cf. also 20:4).

Therefore, although we must agree that, in this life, Scripture views us as a unity in which body and spirit act together as one person, nonetheless, there will be a time between our death and the day Christ returns when our spirits will temporarily exist apart from our physical bodies.<sup>18</sup>

## F. Where Do Our Souls Come From?

What is the origin of our individual souls? Two views have been common in the history of the church.

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<sup>16</sup> 16. See the discussion in Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* pp. 530–36, with notes to some literature.

<sup>17</sup> 17. See, for example, G.C. Berkouwer, *Man, the Image of God* pp. 194–233.

<sup>18</sup> 18. See further discussion of “the intermediate state” between death and Christ’s return in chapter 41, pp. 816–24.

*Creationism* is the view that God creates a new soul for each person and sends it to that person's body sometime between conception and birth. *Traducianism* on the other hand, holds that the soul as well as the body of a child are inherited from the baby's mother and father at the time of conception. Both views have had numerous defenders in the history of the church, with creationism eventually becoming the prevailing view in the Roman Catholic Church. Luther was in favor of traducianism, while Calvin favored creationism. On the other hand, there are some later Calvinist theologians such as Jonathan Edwards and A.H. Strong who favored traducianism (as do most Lutherans today). Creationism has had many modern evangelical advocates as well.<sup>19</sup>

There is one other popular view called *pre-existentism* namely, that the souls of people exist in heaven long before their bodies are conceived in the wombs of their mothers, and that God then brings the soul to earth to be joined with the baby's body as he or she grows in the womb. But this view is not held by either Roman Catholic or Protestant theologians and is dangerously akin to ideas of reincarnation found in Eastern religions. Moreover, there is no support for this view in Scripture. Before we were conceived in the wombs of our mothers, we simply did not exist. We were not. Of course, God looked forward into the future and knew that we would exist, but that is far removed from saying that we actually did exist at some previous time. Such an idea would tend to make us view this present life as transitional or unimportant and make us think of life in the body as less desirable and the bearing and raising of children as less important.

In favor of traducianism it may be argued that God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:27), and this includes a likeness to God in the amazing ability to "create" other human beings like ourselves. Therefore, just as the rest of the animal and plant world bears descendants "according to their kinds" (Gen. 1:24), so Adam and Eve also were able to bear children who were like themselves, with a spiritual nature as well as a physical body. This would imply that the spirits or souls of Adam and Eve's children were derived from Adam and Eve themselves. Moreover, Scripture sometimes can speak of descendants being somehow present in the body of someone in the previous generation, as when the author of Hebrews says that when Melchizedek met Abraham, "Levi...was still in the loins of his ancestor" (Heb. 7:10). Finally, traducianism could explain how the sins of the parents can be passed on to the children without making God directly responsible for the creation of a soul that is sinful or has a disposition that would tend toward sin.

However, the biblical arguments in favor of creationism seem to speak more directly to the issue and give quite strong support for this view. First, Psalm 127 says that "sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Ps. 127:3). This indicates that not only the soul, but also the entire person of the child, including his or her body, is a gift from God. From this standpoint, it seems strange to think of the mother and father as being responsible by themselves for any aspect of the child's existence. Was it not the Lord who, David says, "knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps. 139:13)? Isaiah says that God gives breath to the people on the earth and "spirit to those who walk in it" (Isa. 42:5).<sup>20</sup> Zechariah talks of God as the one "who forms

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<sup>19</sup> 19. See, for example, Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* pp. 196–201.

<sup>20</sup> 20. Instead of "spirit" the NIV translates "life," but the word is רוּחַ, H8120, the common Hebrew word for "spirit."

the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1 NIV). The author of Hebrews speaks of God as “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). It is hard to escape the conclusion from these passages that God is the one who creates our spirits or souls.

Yet we must be cautious in drawing conclusions from this data. Our discussion of the doctrine of God’s providence in chapter 16 demonstrated that God usually acts through secondary causes. God often brings about the results he seeks through the actions of human beings. Certainly this is so in the conception and bearing of children. Even if we say that God does create individual souls for human beings before they are born, and that he is the one who allows children to be conceived and born, we must also recognize that apart from the physical union of man and woman in the conception of a child, no children are born! So we must not make the mistake of saying that the father and mother have no role in the creation of the child. Even if we say that God is the “Father of spirits” and the Creator of every human soul, just as he is the Maker and Creator of each of us, we must still also affirm that God carries out this creative activity through the amazing process of human procreation. Whether God involves the human mother and father to some degree in the process of the creation of a soul as well as of a physical body, is impossible for us to say. It is something that occurs in the invisible realm of the spirit, which we do not have information about except from Scripture. And on this point Scripture simply does not give us enough information to decide.

However, the arguments listed above in favor of traducianism must be said not to be very compelling ones. The fact that Adam and Eve bear children in their own image (see Gen. 5:3) could suggest that children somehow inherit a soul from their parents, but it might also indicate that God gives an individually created soul to the child and that that soul is consistent with the hereditary traits and personality characteristics that God allowed the child to have through its descent from its parents. The idea that Levi was still in the body of Abraham (Heb. 7:10) is best understood in a representative, or figurative, sense, not in a literal sense. Moreover, it is not simply Levi’s soul that is talked about in any case, but Levi himself, as a whole person, including body and soul—yet Levi’s body was certainly not physically present in any meaningful sense in Abraham’s body, for there was no distinct combination of genes at that time that could be said to be Levi and no one else. Finally, since God brings about events in the physical world that are consistent with the voluntary activities of human beings, there does not seem to be any real theological difficulty in saying that God gives each child a human soul that has tendencies to sin that are similar to the tendencies found in the parents. In fact, we read in the Ten Commandments of God “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate [him]” (Ex. 20:5), and, quite apart from the question of the human soul, we know from human experience that children do in fact tend to imitate both the good and bad traits in their parents’ lives, not only as a result of imitation but also because of hereditary disposition. For God to give each child a human soul that accords with the imitation of parents that we see in the lives of children would simply be an indication that God, in creating a human soul, acts consistently with the way he acts in relation to the human race in other matters as well.

In conclusion, it seems hard to avoid the testimony of Scripture to the effect that God actively creates each human soul, just as he is active in all the events of his creation. But the degree to which he allows the use of intermediate or secondary causes (that is, inheritance from

parents) is simply not explained for us in Scripture. Therefore, it does not seem profitable for us to spend any more time speculating on this question.

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<sup>13</sup>Grudem, W. A. (1994). *Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine* (472). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.