

### Doctrine of the Dichotomy of Man

1. In non-technical discussions of this sort, the word "soul" is often employed much in the same sense in which we have used "[human] spirit" above.
2. Probably no concept has been responsible for greater misunderstanding of what the Bible actually has to say about the constitution of Man ("anthropology" in most systematic theological treatments) than that of the soul as a supposed *third element* in that constitution.
3. According to a proper understanding of the scriptures, Man is *not* a trichotomous being (i.e., tripartite, composed of body, soul and spirit), but rather a dichotomous one (body and spirit being the only two *discrete* elements of his nature).
4. The word "soul" is of Germanic extraction, part of our common Anglo-Saxon heritage that forms the oldest stratum of the English language.
5. All other things being equal, "soul", our word for something spiritual, immaterial and animating, would not be a bad translation for the Greek *pneuma* or the Hebrew *ruach*.
6. The problem is that while "soul" could be a synonym for the human spirit, it most definitely is *not an additional element* in Man's constitution.
7. When the Lord first breathed a human spirit into Adam's newly formed body, the result was that he became a "living *being*" (Genesis 2: 7).
8. But beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, the Hebrew word *nephesh* (properly translated "*being*") began to be translated into a very loose Greek equivalent: *psyche*.
9. The task of rendering this particular Hebrew word into Greek was, to be sure, not a simple one.
10. Ancient Greek notions of "*anthropology*" (the human constitution) were flexible, to say the least.
11. But *psyche* was a particularly unfortunate choice, because the word much more closely patterns what we should call the human spirit.
12. This initial precedent was then perpetuated throughout the *Septuagint*, by and large, and then followed by the writers of the *New Testament*, who naturally built upon the conventions of their day.
13. Understand, their words were most certainly written under divine inspiration – it is the subsequent interpretation of them with which we are here finding fault.

14. Correct interpretation is not an issue as long as one realizes that *psyche* in the New Testament means the same thing as the Hebrew word *nephesh* (i.e., "*being*", **not** soul or spirit).
15. But most English versions incorrectly identify *psyche* as "*soul*", taking their cue from Greek literature rather than from the Hebrew semantic exemplar.
16. Worse to tell, these same versions also generally impute the error backwards, taking *nephesh* to mean "*soul*" as well, because it is translated by *psyche* in the New Testament!
17. To be fair, the error is an ancient one, and the Latin Fathers who made use of Platonic and other philosophical distinctions (which have no place in biblical interpretation) often translate *psyche* as *animus* and *pneuma* as *anima*, that is, taking "*soul*" and "*spirit*" as "*immaterial person*" and "*animating principle*" respectively (which nearly **reverses** the true state of affairs).
18. No matter how such concepts may appeal to us (because of our preconceived notions about possessing both a spirit *and* a soul), it is well to remember that the Bible needs to be our guide on these matters rather than conventional wisdom, no matter how comfortable.
19. That said, we need to return briefly to Genesis 2:7 and reexamine the critical passage that divides true dichotomy from false trichotomy:
 

*Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed the man (i.e., Adam's body) from the dust of the ground, then blew into his nostrils the life-giving breath (i.e., his spirit), and [thus] the man became a living person (nephesh).*
20. Two elements are clearly present here:
  - the body, formed from the earth;
  - the spirit, breathed into the body by the Lord. The **result** of the combination of body and spirit is that the first man "*became a living nephesh*" (lit. "*being*" or "*person*").
21. Notice that the verse does **not** say that the Lord **also** created a soul/person as some third, distinct element.
22. Quite the contrary.
23. When the two true elements of Man's constitution combine, **he** (i.e., man in his entirety) becomes **a** soul/person (*nephesh*), so that beyond all argument, *nephesh* in this most critical of all anthropological passages represents the **whole person** (i.e., the combination of body and spirit into one living person, and not some third, discrete part).

24. That is why where the word *nephesh* is used in the *Old Testament*, and where *psyche* is used in the *New Testament*, almost inevitably one can substitute "*person*" or "*individual*" or "*self*" or some other personal pronoun for these words which are often misleadingly translated "soul".
25. Example of misleading translations are the following.
- *Proverbs 19:8 He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul [self or person]: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.*
  - *Isaiah 32:6 For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul [person] of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.*
  - *Acts 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls [persons].*
  - *1 Peter 3:20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls [persons] were saved by water.*
  - Any **person** (*nephesh*) who sins unintentionally ... Leviticus 4:2
26. Soul (*nephesh-psyche*) is the term used in the *Bible* to make clear that the whole person is in view.
27. We are not just body, nor are we only spirit.
28. The human spirit is, at present, limited in its capabilities because of the limitations of our present bodies - it has to work *through* the sinful body (which is constantly struggling against the human spirit's will).
29. It stands to reason that the writers of scripture would, more often than not, refer to people in terms of the whole person, in which case the word "soul" (*nephesh-psyche*) is often the term of choice, but it is critical to understand that by "soul", the entire human being, body and spirit, is meant!
30. The one thing that "soul" (*nephesh-psyche*) does **not** mean in scripture is the immaterial part of Man **exclusively**.
31. This principle actually helps to clarify passages of scripture which are often erroneously taken as supportive of the trichotomist position such as Hebrews 4:12.

- *Hebrews 4:12 For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able **to divide the spirit from its earthly life** (lit., the "soul") and the marrow from its bones; [The Word] acts as a judge of the thoughts and intentions of our heart.*

32. Just as the marrow cannot normally be separated from the bone without destroying life, so the spirit is, for all practical purposes, one with the life it enjoys in the body - only the *Word of God*, the most penetrating force in the world, could make such a distinction.

33. Here is another misleading passage. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

- *1 Thess. 5:23 And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you **in every part**, and may your **spirit, life** (lit. "soul"), **and body** be preserved **completely intact** and without blame at the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

34. In this passage "life", or "soul" is here sandwiched in between the spirit and the body, because "life" (or "soul") is the result of body and spirit being combined by the Lord (Gen.2:7).

35. Only in this union of spirit and body, complete and intact, can there be a "living soul".

36. For this reason it has also been written of the first Adam: *1 Corinthians 14:45 "The man became a living person (nephesh)"; [but] the last Adam" [Christ, became] a life-giving spirit.*

37. For Adam and for us, the body is *psychikon*, i.e., attuned to the "soul" or "physical life" we now lead, but when we follow Christ in resurrection, it will be *pneumatikon*, i.e., attuned to the human spirit and to the eternal life that we shall live with Him forever.

38. In the verses that precede and follow 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul explains this principle, and so it is worth our while to quote the passage at length:

- *1 Corinthians 15:42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised glorious. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. The body sown is **suited to physical life**, the one raised **to spiritual life**.*

If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. For, so it has also been written: "*Adam, the first man, became a **physical being** (nepesh), possessing life, but Christ, the last Adam, became a **spiritual being**, bestowing life.*"

However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form.

*For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

39. The body is a home for the spirit, and *this* body we now inhabit is more "soulish" (i.e., more attuned to the physical life we now lead), while the resurrection body will be more attuned to our spirit, giving it much greater rein than we can now even imagine for our service to and appreciation of the Lord.
  - *1 Corinthians 13:12. For at the present time our perception [of heavenly things] is like [viewing] a **dim reflection in a mirror**. But then [when we meet the Lord] we will see [Him] face to face. Now I have only partial knowledge, but then my knowledge [of Him] will be complete, just as He has always known me.*
40. The word "soul" is not the only biblical word that refers to the whole person, i.e., a spirit and a body, which together constitute a living human being.
41. The word "heart" (Hebrew: *lebhabh*, Greek. *kardia*) likewise refers to the human being as a unity, but with a special twist: scripture uses the term "heart" to refer to the whole person from an **internal** point of view, focusing on and encompassing all the facets of the inner life (e.g., mentality, volition, emotion, conscience, etc.).
  - *Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans of a man's **heart**, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.*
42. The "heart", then is the Bible's word for the **interface** between the body and the spirit. That is to say, when scripture mentions the "heart", it is referring to the inner spiritual, mental and emotional functioning of our person, of our human spirit thinking, planning, emoting, deciding, *all through the apparatus of the body* (via the brain, the mind, etc.).
43. In our present constitution, the body is a tool for our spirit's expression, but a delimiting one.
44. For example, genetic, developmental and environmental factors have a great deal to do with our current capacity for thought and memory, for emotional control and expression, in a way that will not be true of our resurrection body (which will be *pneumatikon*, i.e., designed to give our spirit full expression: 1 Corinthians 15: 45).
45. It will be recalled that a central plank in Satan's appeal to his potential followers was the promise of a body to give these angelic spirits sensual expression (cf. Luke 24: 39: "*a spirit does not have flesh and bones*").
46. What we have, they crave, and what we *shall* have (a body perfectly attuned to our spiritual life) is something that at present they marvel at as they behold the first One to possess such a magnificent "*home*" for the human spirit, the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

47. When that great day of our resurrection arrives, we shall no longer be subject to the limitations and the temptations of the home we now inhabit. But as things stand now, here in this present body of corruption, the limitations are severe, and the temptations intense. *"It has not yet appeared what we shall be[come]" (1 John 3:2)*, but what we are now, *who* we really are now deep inside is best summed up by the "heart" in its scriptural usage, for "heart" is the essence of our inner selves, where only God can know our true thoughts, our true motives:
- *Jeremiah 17:9 For the **heart** is more inscrutable than anything else and beyond curing [of its duplicity]. Who [among men] can [really] know [what] it [is thinking]? "I am the Lord, the One who probes the **heart** and tests [a man's] motives, to repay everyone according to the path he [walks], in fitting recompense for [all] he does".*
48. As to the term heart, in Hebrew, Greek and English, it does refer in secular usage to the physical organ that pumps life-sustaining blood throughout our physical bodies.
49. Its selection as the "*pith*" of who and what we are as individuals is, therefore, no accident. As the queen among our bodily organs, at the center of our physical being, and inextricably bound up with the circulation of the blood, a fluid recognized from earliest times as essential to our continued physical existence, the "*heart*" was a natural choice for this prime designation.
50. "*Blood is the [symbol of] the life-soul*" after all (Deut.12: 23) - *physical life*, that is, and it is in the heart that for literary (if not medical) purposes that we imagine this to be concentrated.
51. This is why *Old Testament* scriptures connect the blood with the *nephesh*, the "soul" (Gen.9: 4): when the blood flows out, so does the physical part of life, just as when the breath-spirit departs, so does the spiritual part of life.
52. We see the end of physical life, the blood upon the ground, but the spirit departs we know not where: *Who knows whether a man's spirit rises upward or whether the breath of the beasts goes down to the earth below? Ecclesiastes 3:21*
53. In spite of its corrupted sin nature (Romans 7: 18), God has demonstrated very clearly through His superintendence of its development (Job 10:8-12; Psalm 119:73; 139:13-16; Is.44:2, 21, 24) and His loving provision for it (Matthew 5:25-34) that He is "*for*" this body we now possess (1 Corinthians 6:13).
54. We are the human spirit, not the body (2Cor.10:2-6), but we live in the body, and the battle we fight for the Lord, we fight out on the battleground of the heart, endeavoring to make our entire life, inner and outer, well-pleasing and acceptable to Him:
- *2 Corinthians 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful for God, for the destruction of strongholds, destroying sophistries and every presumption that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought prisoner so as to obey Christ.*

- *Romans 7:23 But I perceive another law in my bodily members, waging war against the law in my mind and taking me prisoner - [a prisoner to] this law of sin that dwells in my body.*
- *1 John 3:20 By this we know that we are of the truth, and before Him we persuade our heart, that if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows everything.*

55. Finally, it is necessary to point out that there are times when instead of "heart", the center of the "living being" we now are (thanks to the union of our spirit and our body), writers of scripture employ "soul" as a synonymous term.

56. This development is common enough in literature.

57. The specific literary figure involved is called *synecdoche*, the whole being substituted for the part.

58. In the case of the use of "soul" for "heart", the whole of our "living person" is substituted for the nucleus of that person (where all thoughts, emotions, decisions and pangs of conscience occur).

59. This substitution is very similar to "*my very being (longs for, craves, desires, etc.)*".

60. Problems of interpretation only arise if one mistakenly takes this common literary use to mean that somehow the "soul" is a separate entity of our makeup (rather than the entire "being" we have seen it to be, encompassing our body and spirit in a living union):

- *Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** (i.e., your whole person) and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5*
- *Proverbs 23:7 As a man thinks in his **soul** (i.e., his "heart"; cf. KJV), so he is.*