

Chapter 23: The Essential Nature of Man:

What does Scripture say about “soul” and “spirit”? Are they the same thing? Where do our souls come from?

A. Introduction: Trichotomy, Dichotomy, and Monism

1. Most people (Christian/non-) sense that they also have an immaterial part (soul)
2. Three Views
 - a. Trichotomy—man is made of three parts (*body, soul, and spirit*). Man’s *spirit* is a higher faculty made alive when a person becomes a Christian. (Rom. 8:10; Jos 4:24; Php 3:3)
 - b. Dichotomy—The “spirit” is not a separate part of man but another term for “soul” and that man is made up of *two parts* (body and soul/spirit).
 - c. Monism—Man is only one element and that his body is the person. (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 (E.g., Php 1:23-24)

B. Biblical Data

- The emphasis of Scripture is on the overall unity of man
 - We are to grow in holiness and love for God in our bodies as well as spirits or souls (1 Cor. 7:1)
- 1) Scripture Uses “Soul” and “Spirit” Interchangeably. The biblical words translated “soul” (Heb. *נַפְשׁ*, and Gk. *ψυχή*) and “spirit” (Heb. *רוּחַ*, and Gk. *πνεῦμα*) are sometimes used interchangeably (John 12:27; John 13:21; Luke 1:46–47; Heb. 12:23; 1 Peter 3:19; Rev. 6:9; Rev. 20:4).
 - 2) At death, Scripture says either that the “soul” departs or the “spirit” departs. (Gen 35:18; 1 Ki 17:21; Is 53:12; Luke 12:20)
 - a) Scripture nowhere says that a person’s “soul and spirit” departed or went to heaven or were yielded up to God.
 - b) Old Testament authors recognized that a person exists after his body dies (contrary to those who claim Old Testament authors saw only the unity of man).
 - 3) Man Is Said to Be Either “Body and Soul” or “Body and Spirit.” (Mt 10:28; 1 Co 5:5)
 - a) => “Spirit” or “soul” can refer to the person’s entire immaterial existence.
 - b) => Cleansing body and spirit = holy living. (2 Co 7:1)
 - 4) The “soul” or the “spirit” can sin --> *contra* trichotomists who believe only the soul can sin due to a high view of the spirit (1 Peter 1:22; Rev. 18:14.)
 - a) Paul encourages cleansing “from every defilement of body and *spirit*” (2 Cor. 7:1)
=> there can be defilement (or sin) in our spirits. (Ps 78:8; Is 29:24; Prov. 16:2; E.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 5:20).
 - 5) The soul and spirit share the same functions.
 - a) Experiencing emotions: not done by our souls only. (Ac 17:16; Prov. 17:22; Jn 13:21)
 - b) Knowing things Mk 2:8; Ro 8:16
--> Not that the spirit vs. soul feels and thinks things, but rather both do.
=> These activities are done by the whole person, including the body (brain, etc.) (Ps 63:1)
 - c) The soul relates to God as well. (Ps 25:1; Ps 103:1; Lk 1:46; Mk 12:30)
 - d) Therefore the dichotomist view seems best: “spirit” and “soul” are just different words for the same thing, the non-material part of our existence

C. Arguments for Trichotomy

- 1) Trichotomist Scriptures (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb 4:12; 1 Cor. 2:14–3:4; 1 Cor 14:14)
- 2) Personal Experience: sense of spiritual awareness and function in immaterial world different and deeper than mental, volitional, or emotional experiences.
- 3) Spirit is what makes us different from animals.
- 4) The spirit is what comes alive at regeneration. (Rom 8:10)

D. Responses to Arguments for Trichotomy (1 Thes. 5:23; note Matt. 22:37; 4; Heb 4:12 =>

Not dividing into different parts penetrating deeply into all parts of our being)

- 1) 1 Cor. 14:14: Means he does not understand the content of what he is praying.
- 2) Personal Experience □ spiritual perception not limited to “spirit,” though it may be outside rational thought processes. (1 Cor. 14:14). (see Luke 1:46; Ps. 103:1; Mark 12:30)
- 3) Does Our Spirit Come Alive at Regeneration?

a) The spirit does not come to life at salvation, as unbelievers have spirits that act. (Dt 2:30; Dan. 5:20; Ps 78:8)

b) We as whole persons are a “new creation” in Christ, not just our spirits spirit. (2 Co 5:17)

4) Conclusion: Although they have some force, no argument for trichotomy provides conclusive evidence to overcome the Scriptural usage of *soul* and *spirit*

a) Follows Greek philosophy—material world is essentially evil. (Ge 1:31; Ro 12:1)

b) Anti-intellectual tendency of elevating spirit as aspect that relates most closely with God --> vigorous academic work can be seen as somehow “unspiritual.” (Mark 12:30; 2 Co 10:5; Tit 1:1)

c) May lead to an emphasis on “spiritual” discernment apart from truth.

d) Dichotomy Benefits: 1) Upholds overall unity of man, 2) Maintains value of human body, 3) Promotes healthy unity between body and spirit. (Pr. 17:22), 4) Encourages Christian Growth (2 Co 7:1; Col 1:10; Ga 5:22)

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

1) Denial of an immaterial part of man and the spiritual realm often connected with denial of God, heaven, hell, angels, or demons.

2) What little we know of the spiritual realm through perception must be informed by Scripture.

3) Scripture declares that we have a soul that is distinct from our physical bodies, which can function somewhat independently of our ordinary thought processes. (1 Co 14:14; Ro 8:16)

4) At death, our spirits will temporarily depart from our bodies until the Return of Christ. (Ac 7:59; 2 Co 5:8)

F. Where Do Our Souls Come From?

1) 2 Common Views: 1) Creationism: God creates a new soul for each person and sends it to that person's body sometime between conception and birth and 2) Traducianism: a child's body and spirit are inherited from his mother and father at the time of conception.

2) Another View: *Pre-existentism*: that souls of people exist in heaven long before their bodies are conceived □ God unites the soul with the baby's body in the womb.

(This view is dangerously akin to ideas of reincarnation found in Eastern religions.)

3) Scriptural support for traducianism: Ge 1:27, Ge 1:24; Heb 7:10.

4) Scriptural support for creationism seems stronger: Ps 127:3, Ps 139:13, Is 42:5, Heb 12:9

5) Whether God involves a father or mother in the creation of the spirit is a fact that lies outside the scope of human observation or Scripture.