

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

WEEK 3 : ANTHROPOLOGY – WHAT IS MAN’S CONSTITUTION?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series, we are going to look at three systematics...man, sin, and angels.
- Our schedule for the next 7 weeks will be:
 - September 18th: Why should we study man?
 - September 25th: What is the Image of God in Man?
 - October 2nd: None...Worship Conference with Todd Murray
 - **October 9th: What makes up a man and his soul?**
 - October 16th: What is sin and where did it come from?
 - **October 23rd: None...Jeff Street here to share about work in Canada.**
 - October 30th: What are the full consequences of sin?
 - November 6th: What are angels, demons and the believer’s defense?

INTRODUCTION

- “Before setting out on a quest for the origin of souls, another question must be raised, and at least tentatively resolved, whether or not ‘soul’ is a designation of all of mankind’s non-material nature: **specifically whether the invisible inner man, director of the visible outer is one aspect or two aspects, one ‘substance,’ if we may allow the word, or two.** Is mankind body and soul-spirit (bipartite), or body, soul and spirit (tripartite)? This is the way the question has been put since the very beginning of reflection on a Christian doctrine of mankind.”¹
- **Scripture presents man as both material and immaterial and yet also presents man as whole.**
- Scripture also uses a variety of terms/words to describe man and it uses them in different ways in different contexts (body, soul, spirit, inner man, outer man, flesh, conscience, heart, mind, etc.).
- These words need to be understood in their context to rightly understand their systematic implications. The words by themselves are helpful, but without understanding their contextual usage, synthesis will be deficient at best.

¹ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2005), 268.

THREE MAIN VIEWS ON THE MAKE UP OF MAN

- Are we made of two parts (body and soul) or three parts (body, soul, and spirit)? Theologians have debated the issue for centuries, and there has never been a decisive orthodox declaration of which is true.

Anthropological Monism / Physicalism: Man is Just One Piece²

- The monism position holds that the characteristics of a human being whether they are thought, soul, consciousness, brain, or body, are all comprised of or the result of being **one single substance**. Since the one substance is the same substance of the universe, matter, etc., then the human brain is part of the one substance. Since this one substance is governed by the laws of physics, then the mind, which emanates from the physical brain, is also governed by the laws of physics. Therefore, when the physical body dies, the human mind/soul completely ceases to exist.
- **Therefore, the human being is a physical system without a separate soul. When the physical body dies, the soul ceases to exist.**
- If one holds to anthropological monism or physicalism, it must be the case that when a person dies, the human soul ceases to exist.
 - This necessitates that upon Christ's resurrection, there would have to be a re-creation of the human spirit of Jesus, which was then united with the divine nature, which would be a second incarnation. The second human soul would not be the same one as the first due to the continuity issue.
- "Monism insists that humans are not to be thought of as in any sense composed of parts or separate entities, but rather as a radical unity. In the monistic understanding, the Bible does not view a human as body, soul, and spirit, but simply as self."³
- These thoughts are heresy, against what the Bible teaches about man and subsequently about Christ. Therefore, these views should be rejected by any Christian.

Dichotomy: Two Parts to Man

- "Dichotomism holds that man is a two-part being consisting of a body and an immaterial element called either 'soul' or 'spirit.' No real distinction exists between the two terms, which are interchangeable. Dichotomism, then, affirms the human person as a combination of body and soul/spirit"⁴
- In my judgment, the rejection of substantial dichotomy rests upon a fundamental error of understanding, a fatal false assumption. Some attack substantial dichotomy because they hear in it a recapitulation of Greek

² <https://carm.org/annihilationism/conditionalism-and-the-anthropological-monism-physicalism-and-jesus-problem/>

³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 542

⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 421

dualism. The Greeks viewed man as a creature locked in a conflict between two opposing and irreconcilable substances, the body and the soul. To the Greek the soul is eternal and good, the body is temporal and intrinsically imperfect. For Plato the nonmaterial ideal realm is the realm of the good. The physical is at best an imperfect receptacle or copy of the ideal. Hence the view emerged in Greek philosophy that the body is the prison house of the soul. Redemption means the release of the soul from the body.⁵

- **For the Christian, we are not looking to get released from our bodies but to have our spirit put into a body which has been redeemed and is no longer subjected to sin and death.**
- It has been a dominant view through the history of the church; there is probably more representation in the Dichotomy view theologically than the Trichotomy view. More have held to a Dichotomist view.⁶

Trichotomy: Three Parts to Man⁷

- We are made up of three parts: body, soul and spirit. The prevailing view of this notion through the history of the church has been that all human beings are made with body, soul and spirit together, **but spirit is not oriented toward God until regeneration takes place.**
- What is the difference between the three? **The body is our physical aspect. The soul is the aspects of human nature that we have in common with the animal kingdom.** So even things like reasoning are not distinctive to humanity. We know this even better now than would have been the case hundreds of years ago. With emotions, at least dogs have emotions...look at Fido when you come home. Certainly there are appetites, longings, drives, aspirations; all of that is part of the soul according to this view. It is emotions, feelings, thoughts, drives, instincts, appetites; those kinds of things.
 - **What is spirit? Spirit, according to this view, is the center of our connection with spiritual reality.** You will never come home at the end of the day and find your animal worshipping. It is not going to happen; you find people doing that. It is this connectedness with, awareness of, and reaching out toward a spiritual reality, that marks the spirit according to this view.

KEY PASSAGES

- **Genesis 2:7 “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”**
 - There are two parts here, the physical body and the spirit which God breathed into the man.
- **Matthew 10:28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-origin-of-the-soul>

⁶ <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/human-nature-soul/systematic-theology-i/bruce-ware>

⁷ Ibid.

- Once again, Jesus only talks about two actual parts of man, his soul and his body.
- John 12:27 “Now **my soul has become troubled**; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour.”
- John 13:21 “When Jesus had said this, **he became troubled in spirit**, and testified and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me.’”
 - In the first one Jesus says, "Now my soul has become troubled" and in the second one it says of him, "He became troubled in spirit." What are we to make of that? The Dichotomist will argue there really isn't a distinction that you can maintain between "pneuma" (spirit) and "psuche" (soul). They are used in functionally the same way.⁸
- 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.”
 - Paul talks of a natural man and a spiritual man. Once again, pointing to the fact that there are only two “parts” which make up a man. Until the soul of a man is made alive by the Spirit of God, he is dead to the things of God. The soul is there, just in an unregenerate state.
- 2 Corinthians 5:8 “...we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” (see also **Philippians 1:21-24**...Paul’s death was immediate presence with the Lord).
 - There is no distinction between spirit and soul. One does not stay with the body and one goes up to be with the Lord. When this body dies, our spirit will be with the Lord.
- Revelation 6:9 “When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained...”
 - We see the word souls here used again without a mention of their spirit.
- Mark 12:30 “...and 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.”
 - This is an interesting passage because in all of the Synoptics you don't find spirit in any of the renderings of them. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and strength (if you have all four present). Where is spirit? I take it that Jesus, or the person who says this to Jesus, mean love the Lord your God with all of who you are, every aspect of your nature. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The notable absence there in light of the Trichotomist view, is no mention of spirit.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/human-nature-soul/systematic-theology-i/bruce-ware>

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
 - These are the two main “proof” texts for those who hold to a three-part man. What can we say about these two texts?
 - Scripture gives the immaterial aspect of the person different terms, but not every designation means a distinguishable part.
 - The immaterial part of the person can be called “soul,” “spirit,” “heart,” or “mind,” and yet sometimes these designations can refer to the whole person. So these are overlapping concepts, not distinguishable parts. The dichotomism position, therefore, has the strongest scriptural support.¹⁰
 - Yet is there a better designation than dichotomism? Since Scripture presents a person as a unified yet complex self, the designation “**complex unity**” is preferred. The material (body) and immaterial (soul/spirit) function together in one person, embracing both unity and diversity. This complex unity is conditional, since death in a fallen world separates body and spirit (**James 2:26**). Yet this separation is temporary, since all people are headed for resurrection, a reunion of body and spirit in eternal forms.
 - Man being a complex unity will cover all aspects of a persons physical and spiritual needs.
- Both Dichotomism and Trichotomism correctly affirm that man consists of more than matter. The dividing issue centers on whether there exists a substantive distinction between soul and spirit. The biblical evidence indicates that there does not. “Soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably in Scripture, and both terms indicate similar functions in relating with God, other people, and nature. So, it is difficult to argue that they are distinct parts of a person.¹¹

PARTS OF MAN

- In this section, we will study the various parts of man, what makes a man a whole person. In other words, what is man’s constitution or his nature.
- In Scripture, we see five consistent words which refer to humans. While there are more words that are used, these five are the most common... **body, soul, spirit, heart, and conscience.**¹²

¹⁰ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 424.

¹¹ Ibid, 423.

¹² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine*, 416-421.

Body

- Man's constitution includes a physical component, the things that are material, that you can touch.
- The biblical view of the human body, however, starkly contrasts with these unbiblical philosophies. Adam's body at creation was sinless and deathless, but sin brought dramatic change to the human body. God promised death for sin, and with Adam's sin, his body experienced decay leading to death, passing its corruption to all human bodies. The current body is a "lowly body" (Phil. 3:21) and a "body of death" (Rom. 7:24). Bodily cravings and desires contribute to man's sinful state, and thus the body needs discipline (1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Tim. 4:8). It longs for redemption from corruption (Rom. 8:23). Although nonglorified bodies cannot enter God's eternal kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50), there is hope for the body. Jesus died and was raised bodily, and he is the firstfruits of the resurrection to life eternal and the guarantee that others will be raised bodily as well (1 Cor. 15:20–24).
- In this present age, death brings a temporary separation between body and spirit (James 2:26), but with God's resurrection program, all people—believers and unbelievers—will possess a body fit either for eternal life on the new earth or for eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.

Soul

- The Greek New Testament word for "soul" is *psychē* and occurs around 110 times. It is translated as "soul," "life," and "I." This term denotes (1) the whole person (Acts 2:41; Rom. 13:1; 2 Cor. 12:15); (2) the essential being or seat of personal identity, often in relation to God and salvation (Matt. 10:28, 39; Luke 1:46; John 12:25); (3) the inner life of the body (Acts 20:10; Eph. 6:6); (4) the intellect (Acts 14:2; Phil. 1:27); (5) the will (Matt. 22:37; Eph. 6:6); (6) the emotions (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34); and (7) the moral and spiritual life (Heb. 6:19; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3 John 2).
- At physical death, the soul survives and is immediately in God's presence. In the parable of the rich man, God told the foolish rich man, "This night your soul is required of you" (Luke 12:20). This rich man would die, but his soul would be in God's presence for an accounting. Similarly, in Revelation 6:9, saints killed on earth find their souls in heaven: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (Rev. 6:9). Thus, the soul returns to God at physical death.

Spirit

- In sum, *ruakh* (Hebrew) and *pneuma* (Greek) are used in Scripture to refer to (1) wind or breath (Gen. 8:1; John 3:8), (2) an attitude or disposition (Matt. 5:3), (3) the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Matt. 1:18, 20), (4) angelic spirits (1 Sam. 16:14; Matt. 8:16; Luke 7:21), and (5) the human spirit (Gen. 41:8; Acts 17:16). The most common sense of *ruakh* in the Old Testament is "wind," while in the New Testament *pneuma* most often

refers to the Holy Spirit. Concerning human beings, “spirit” often signifies the capacity of humans to be in relationship with God, and “spirit” is sometimes used interchangeably with “soul” (Ps. 31:5; Eccles. 12:7; Heb. 12:23; Luke 1:46–47).

Heart

- **The Bible says much about the heart—not the physical organ but the control center of a person and the seat for thoughts, attitudes, motivations, and actions**
- All people are born with a dark and evil heart. God’s evaluation of mankind at the global flood was this: “Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). God also said, “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). Jeremiah 17:9 similarly declared, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick: Who can understand it?” (NASB). Concerning unbelieving people, Paul observed, “Their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21).
- God changes evil hearts by replacing them with new ones.

Conscience

- God has created everyone with a conscience, the faculty of moral evaluation concerning right and wrong, good and evil. Connected with self-awareness and rational capacity, the conscience alerts a person concerning the morality of his or her actions. The conscience functions like a divine moral referee. Failure to heed the conscience often leads to guilt and shame (Titus 1:15; 1 Tim. 4:2).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- This doctrine of a threefold constitution of man being adopted by Plato, was introduced partially into the early Church, but soon was regarded as dangerous, if not heretical. It 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.**¹³
- **There are churches that teach it is possible for Christians to be demon-possessed.** These groups hold the trichotomous position. They maintain that it is possible for one part of a person to be possessed but not the other. For example, they might claim that the spirit of a person can be possessed, but the soul cannot. Others reverse it and state that the soul of a person can be possessed but not the spirit. This is problematic

¹³ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology2.iii.ii.ii.html>

because there are no accounts in Scripture of Christians having demons cast out of them. Besides, how can a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit also be indwelt by a demon?¹⁴

- The dichotomist has a better way of relating soul and spirit to one another consistent with biblical interpretation. The soul animates the body and is the center of consciousness and personality, including the intellect, affections, and will. The spirit refers to the same immaterial faculties in relation to God. A spiritually dead person is one in whom the capacities of the soul are not rightly related to God. **In regeneration, the Spirit reorients the faculties of the soul in a Godward direction so that the soul is made spiritually alive.**¹⁵
- **Biblical counseling:** The Bible depicts the soul as that which motivates the physical body to action. These constituent aspects are separable only at death. The great hope of Christians is the restoration of body and soul in a glorified existence in the new heavens and new earth. Man is by design a dependent creature standing in need of divine counsel to serve God and to be conformed into the image of Christ.¹⁶
 - This is so important when it comes to our sanctification, our soul/mind/heart/spirit is what motivates our actions. If we think there are two separate intangible parts to man, then we will not have to take responsibility for what we do, if it was not part of the soul.
 - **If it is in our minds, then we are off the hook and can blame something else.**

¹⁴ <https://carm.org/the-bible/man/?highlight=%22dichotomy%22>

¹⁵ <https://lcbcc.org/faqs>

¹⁶ <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-doctrine/#man>