

WEEK 3 | THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

It is significant that Jesus in his incarnation became fully human,
for he came to redeem the whole of what we are.

– Millard Erickson

WHAT ARE WE MADE OF?

What are humans made of? Are we made of one substance? Or do we consist of two or three different components. There are four anthropological terms that are important for a correct understanding of the human person—body, soul, spirit, and heart.

I. THE MATERIAL

A. The Body

Two Hebrew and 1 Greek terms are translated “body” in English:

- 1) *Gwiya* (body, carcass, dead body) – occurs 12 times in the Old Testament, referring to either a living body (Genesis 47:18; Nehemiah 9:37) or a dead carcass (1 Samuel 31:10, 12).
- 2) *Basar* (flesh) – occurs 226 times in the Old Testament, and can refer to:
 - a. A blood relative – Genesis 29:14; 2 Samuel 5:1
 - b. Humankind collectively – Genesis 6:12-13; Job 34:15
 - c. All living creatures – Genesis 9:15-17
 - d. The material substance of the body – Genesis 2:23; 17:14; Job 19:26
 - e. The whole person – Leviticus 17:11; Psalm 16:9
 - f. The person as weak, dependent, and transitory – Genesis 6:3; Psalm 78:39
 - g. Does not denote the seat of sin in a person
- 3) *Soma* (body) – the New Testament term for “body,” it can mean:
 - a. The physical body – Mark 5:29; Romans 8:11; Galatians 6:17
 - b. The whole person – Romans 12:1; Ephesians 5:28; Philippians 1:20
 - c. The fallen nature – Romans 6:6; 8:13; Philippians 3:21

Note: the Greek *sarx* is often used similarly to the Hebrew *basar* and translated “flesh” (Luke 24:39). However, *sarx* often refers to the sin principle that resides in every fallen human being. Paul uses it this way over 30 times, for example. This has historically led many to regard the

body, the material part of man, as inherently evil, a belief influenced by Platonic philosophy and reflected in some of the gnostic heresies that plagued the early church.

This, however, differs from the Biblical teaching about the body, which is a part of God's original good creation. The body:

- 1) Was created by God and declared good – Genesis 2:7; c.f. 1:31
- 2) Was affected by the fall and is under the curse of death – Genesis 3:19
- 3) It is described as the “body of sin” (Romans 6:6), the “body of death” (Romans 7:24), and our humble state (Philippians 3:21)
- 4) Like the rest of a person, is fallen and in need of redemption – Romans 8:23
- 5) Needs to be disciplined – 1 Corinthians 9:27; 1 Timothy 4:8
- 6) Is the residence of the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 6:19
- 7) Will experience future resurrection
 - a. All bodies will experience resurrection – John 5:28-29
 - b. Unbelievers to judgment eternal damnation – Revelation 20:11-15
 - c. Believers to eternal life – Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

II. THE IMMATERIAL

What distinguishes mankind from the rest of the creatures is that we are more than just the materials, composed of more than just a physical body. Scripture describes humanity as possessing an immaterial aspect as well:

A. The Soul

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, which occurs some 755 times in the Old Testament:

- 1) It can refer to biological life: for example, both Adam and the animals have “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7; cf. 1:30).
- 2) It can refer to a living being, the whole person – Genesis 9:5; Psalm 6:3; 63:1
- 3) It can refer to the life principle that animates the body – Leviticus 17:11; 26:16; Psalm 19:7
- 4) It can refer to the seat of the intellect, will, and emotions of a person – Genesis 3:28; 1 Samuel 2:35; Lamentations 3:20

The soul begins with divine inbreathing—the Hebrews *ruach*—into the material body (Genesis 2:7) and departs at death (Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22).

In the New Testament, the Greek word *psuche* is used 110 times to designate the human soul, translated variously as “soul,” “life,” and even “I.” It can denote:

- 1) The whole person – Acts 2:41; Romans 13:1; 2 Corinthians 12:15
- 2) The seat of personal identity, often as it relates to God and salvation – Matthew 10:28, 39; Luke 1:46; John 12:25; Hebrews 10:39
- 3) The inner life of the body – Acts 20:10; Ephesians 6:6
 - a. The seat of the intellect – Acts 14:2; Philippians 1:27
 - b. The seat of volition – Matthew 22:37; Ephesians 6:6
 - c. The seat of morality – Hebrews 6:19; 1 Peter 1:22; 3 John 2

The *psuche* is also described as returning to God at death (Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Peter 1:9; Revelation 20:4).

B. The Spirit

The Hebrew word for “spirit” is *ruach* and is used 378 times in the Old Testament denoting a variety of things:

- 1) Refers to the wind – Genesis 8:1; Amos 4:13
- 2) Refers to physical breath – Job 9:18; Psalm 135:17
- 3) Refers to the Spirit of God – Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 42:1
- 4) Refers to the life force of creatures – Genesis 6:17; Ecclesiastes 3:19, 21
- 5) Refers to human beings:
 - a. The whole person – Psalm 31:5; Ezekiel 21:7
 - b. The vivifying power of God that animates the body – Genesis 2:7; Judges 15:19; Job 27:3
 - c. The inner life or intellect – Genesis 41:8; Ezekiel 20:32
 - d. Wisdom or understanding – Job 20:3; 32:8; Exodus 28:3
 - e. The will – Daniel 5:20
 - f. The emotions – 1 Samuel 1:15; Proverbs 15:12
 - g. The openness of the soul to God – Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 26:9

The Hebrew term for the spirit is *pneuma* and, as with *ruach*, it can be used to refer to the wind, human breath, and the Holy Spirit. When used of human beings, it refers to:

- 1) The immaterial aspect of a person that animates the body and departs at death – Matthew 27:50, Acts 7:59; James 2:26; Revelation 11:11
- 2) The personal self that interacts with God and the spiritual realm – Romans 1:9; 8:16; 1 Corinthians 14:14; Revelation 21:20

In summary, the term “spirit” is used in 5 general senses throughout Scripture: 1) wind or breath, 2) an attitude or disposition, 3) the Holy Spirit, 4) good and evil spirits, and 5) the human spirit. While its meanings can vary, when having to do with human beings, “spirit” refers to the unique capacity of human beings to have a relationship with God and the means by which that relationship is established.

In this way, its meaning is largely synonymous with the “soul,” affirmed by the fact that they appear to be used interchangeably in Scripture (Psalm 31:5; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 12:23, Luke 1:46-47).

C. The Heart

Hebrew employs two words for “heart,” *leb* and *lebab*. When used in regard to human beings, both can refer to:

- 1) The whole person – Psalm 22:26
- 2) The inner life of the person (Exodus 7:3, 13; Psalm 9:1; Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 4:23) from which emerges:
 - a. Good and evil thoughts – Genesis 6:5; 1 Kings 3:12; Job 8:10
 - b. Good and evil actions – Isaiah 32:6
 - c. Memory – Psalm 31:12; Isaiah 65:17
 - d. Intention – Exodus 35:5; Daniel 5:20
 - e. Love and hate for God – Deuteronomy 6:5; Job 1:5
 - f. Emotions and passions – Deuteronomy 19:6; 1 Samuel 1:8
 - g. Courage – Daniel 11:25
 - h. Conscience – 1 Samuel 24:5; Job 27:6
 - i. Spiritual life – 1 Samuel 12:24; Psalm 9:1

The Greek *kardia* is predominantly used in two ways:

- 1) The governing center of a person – Matthew 18:35; Romans 6:17; 2 Corinthians 5:12
- 2) The seat of the intellectual life and memory – Matthew 9:4; Acts 8:22

The heart takes on great significance in Scripture in the way that it is used to describe the salvific, redemptive effects of God's work on a person. What follows is a brief Biblical theology of the heart that illustrates this:

1) The Heart is the Control Center of a Person

- a. Matthew 15:19 – “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”
- b. Luke 6:45 – “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

2) The Heart is Wicked without God

- a. Genesis 6:5 – The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
- b. Genesis 8:21 – And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.
- c. Jeremiah 17:9 – The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
- d. Matthew 15:8 – “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”
- e. Romans 1:21 – For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

3) The New Covenant Promises the Heart Will Change

- a. Jeremiah 31:33 – For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- b. Ezekiel 36:26 – And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

4) The Heart is Changed with New Life in Christ

- a. Matthew 5:8 – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
- b. Luke 8:15 – As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.
- c. 2 Timothy 2:22 – So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
- d. Hebrews 10:22 – . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

VIEWS OF THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION

I. TRICHOTOMISM

The term “trichotomy” comes from the Greek *tricha* meaning “three” and *temno* which means “to cut.” Under this view, a human person is composed of three parts—body, soul, and spirit:

- 1) Body – the material aspect of a person, the physical body.
- 2) Soul – the psychological aspect of a person, the seat of reason, emotion, and social interaction. The soul is what distinguishes a human being from plants and the animals.
- 3) Spirit – the religious aspect of a person. It is the spirit that allows man to perceive and respond to spiritual matters. Many trichotomists argue that personality traits reside in the soul, why spiritual qualities reside in the spirit. This, along with the soul, separates human beings from other creatures.

For Biblical support, trichotomists point to the following passages:

- 1) 1 Thessalonians 5:23 – Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) Hebrews 4:12 – For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

II. DICHOTOMISM

Dichotomism views man as being composed of two parts—the material and the immaterial, the body and the soul/spirit. Under this view, the terms “spirit,” “soul,” and “heart” are largely synonymous, referring to the same aspect of man in different ways.

For this view, the following arguments are put forth as support:

- 1) Genesis 2:7 affirms that man is composed of two parts, the material and the immaterial. God created man’s material aspect from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7) and breathed into him “the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7), the immaterial aspect of man.
- 2) The words “soul” and “spirit” appear to be used interchangeably in Scripture:
 - a. Compare Genesis 41:8 with Psalm 42:6
 - i. Genesis 41:8 – So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

- ii. Psalm 42:6 – My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.
 - b. Compare Hebrews 12:23 with Revelation 6:9
 - i. Hebrews 12:23 – . . . and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect. . .
 - ii. Revelation 6:9 – When he opened the fifth seal, 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.
 - c. Compare John 12:27 with John 13:21
 - i. John 12:27 – “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.”
 - ii. John 13:21 – After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”
 - d. Luke 1:46-47 – And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior”
 - e. Job 7:11 – “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”
 - f. Isaiah 26:9a – My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.
- 3) The body and the soul or spirit are often mentioned as constituting an entire person, without reference to a further immaterial aspect:
- a. Matthew 6:25 – “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”
 - b. Matthew 10:28 – “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
 - c. 1 Corinthians 5:3 – For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.
 - d. 3 John 2 – Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

III. MONISM

Monism is the view that a human person is a unity and not composed of separable parts. There have historically been two predominant variations of this view:

- 1) Materialistic – the human person is, like everything else, composed solely of matter, a tenet drawn from a naturalistic worldview. There is no immaterial aspect to man; our inner life is only the result of chemical and physical processes in our brain. Matter, this view argues, produces the “mind.”

- 2) Idealistic – the human person is, like everything else, composed of ideas, mind, or spirit. This is the belief that “reality” is only our perception, and that we have no real way of accessing reality as it actually is. Thus, mind produces matter.

IV. CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. First, both materialistic and idealistic monism should be rejected. The Bible clearly teaches that man is made up of more than just matter or mind/spirit. The Bible teaches that, at death, soul and body will be separated as we await the resurrection of our physical bodies. This assumes that there is more than only the physical universe. Further, physical matter does exist; reality is not simply a product of the mind/spirit. God created a physical universe with physical creatures in it.

Second, a human being is composed of material and immaterial aspects as a unified whole. This is why the various components of man discussed above—body, soul, spirit, and heart—can all be used to refer to the whole person.

Third, there does not appear to be enough biblical warrant for distinguishing between the soul and the spirit, as in trichotomy. As shown above, these terms are often used interchangeably to refer to the entirety of the immaterial aspect of man. Thus, dichotomy seems to be the view that best fits the Biblical data. At the same time, we should recognize that the normal state of man is a union of body and spirit, with death being a limited interruption of this union.