

## HOW IS HUMAN NATURE CONSTITUTED?

All scriptures are quoted from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

### MAN IS NOT A TRIPARTITE ENTITY

In the intertestamental period Hellenistic Judaism synthesized much of pagan Greek thought with the Hebrew explanation of man's nature so that man was then to be understood as having an immaterial, immortal soul which separated from the body at death and continued a disembodied existence. This was especially evident in the works of the Jewish philosopher Philo. Nevertheless, the Judaism of Palestine maintained, in pure form, the thinking of the OT concerning the nature of man as an inseparable unity. This understanding is expressed in God's statement to Adam that: "*you are dust and to dust you shall return.*" (Gen. 3:19). Here there is no mention of any other part of Adam that continues a disembodied existence. So because of the production of the Greek Septuagint translation of the OT the original meaning of the terminology of the OT was maintained. From this a valuable linguistic link was made with the NT so that its teaching is the same as that of the OT, albeit expanded in some areas. Yet, in spite of the fact that the NT accurately reflects the OT teaching, many religious groups since the second century have taught that man has a tripartite nature of soul, spirit and body which separate at death so that only the body dies. This is pagan Greek thinking and is not what the Scriptures teach. So the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the Bible consistently teaches that man is a unity and that the terms soul, spirit and body/flesh are simply different but inseparable aspects of the single holistic person.

### SOUL, SPIRIT, FLESH, BODY, AND HEART ARE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE HOLISTIC HUMAN

The following terms are defined in relation to humans only and do not cover their usage in relation to God or the rest of His creation.

*HUMAN NATURE AS SOUL* (Heb. *nephesh*, Gk. *psyche*)

1. **Life** (Matt. 2:20; Acts 27:22). Generally the physical aspect of life. However, Jesus expanded the meaning to include the better and transcendent life in the coming age (Matt. 6:25; John 12:25). In this case the Greek word *zoe* is used.
2. **A person** (Gen. 46:4 26-27; Acts 2:41; 2:43; 1 Pet. 3:20). It concerns the physical inner life of a person and is basically the vitality and personality of human existence in relationship to other humans. The parallel accounts of Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4, 5 make it clear that "soul" = "you." Also "soul" in Mark 8:36 = "himself" in Luke 9:25.

*HUMAN NATURE AS SPIRIT* (Heb. *ruach*, Gk. *pneuma*)

This refers to **a person in relationship to God – as open to the divine life of the age to come**. This is man under the influence of God's spirit. It refers to what is God-centred and so concerns the spiritual inner life of a person – their disposition or dominant impulse. Negatively, the human spirit can be hostile to God (Ezek. 13:3; Prov. 25:8; Hos. 4:12). It can also be the seat of grief (Ex 6:9).

*NOTE:* The basic meaning of **spirit** is *breath or air in motion* and denotes a **dynamic** form of breathing and is compared to the natural **power** of the wind. Luke 1:35 puts holy spirit and power in parallel. Also the term *the breath of life* (Heb. *neshamah*) is almost synonymous with *ruach* in 5 passages; yet it denotes a **calm, peaceful** form of breathing.

#### HUMAN NATURE AS **FLESH** (Heb. *basher*, Gk. *sarx*)

This refers to what is human-centred and leading to death:

**The human family bond** (Gen.6:17, 19; 29:14; Judges 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1).

**The substance of the body** (Gen 2:21-24).

**The whole person** (Ps. 63:1; 84:2).

Metaphorically to represent **human character in its mortal weakness**. (Ps. 78:38-39, Isa 40:6).

Metaphorically to represent the sinful character of the whole **unregenerated person**.

So *flesh, spirit and soul*, are not different forms of existence, but are manifestations of the same person. Indeed, the terms do not always refer to what someone is made of i.e. their substance, but rather to different aspects of human nature, the whole person. The distinction is ethical rather than ontological (*essence/substance*).

#### HUMAN NATURE AS **HEART**

In the Hebrew Scriptures there is no word for *mind*. Instead, the word *heart* is used to refer to the mind. In the greatest number of cases the heart is used to refer to the centre of the intellect i.e. the brain and therefore one's **rational being**. Human emotions are described metaphorically as coming from the heart as well as the kidneys and the bowels. Hence, Jesus was not splitting human nature into four parts when he said: "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**" (Mark 12:30), but was emphasizing that we should love God with our whole person.

### HUMANS DO NOT HAVE AN INHERENTLY IMMORTAL SOUL

#### MAN BECAME A LIVING SOUL

- ❖ "And the LORD God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man **became a living soul** (Heb. *nephesh*)" (*Gen. 2:7 KJV*). or "man became a living creature." *Most versions translate as "living being."*
- ❖ "The first man, Adam, **became a living soul** (Gk. *psykhe*)" (*1 Cor. 15:45*).  
*Therefore the word 'soul' in both the Hebrew and Greek means the whole person.*

#### MAN IS ESSENTIALLY THE SAME IN PHYSICALITY AS OTHER CREATURES

- ❖ "For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beast is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and **man has no advantage over the beasts**, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return" (*Eccl. 3:19, 20*).
- ❖ "Let the earth swarm with an abundance of **living soul**...And God created the great sea-monsters and every **living soul** that moveth" (*Gen. 1:20, 21 Rotherham*). *Also see Darby's translation.*

*Although mankind is the only kind of creature that is made in God's image (Gen. 1:27, 27; 9:26; 1Cor:11:7) and hence superior to all other creatures the Scriptures make it plain that man is naturally mortal in his totality.*

#### THE HUMAN SOUL IS NOT IMMORTAL

- ❖ "The **soul** who sins shall **die**" (*Ezek. 18:4*).
- ❖ "...be afraid of the one who can **destroy both soul** and body in Gehenna" (*Matt. 10:28*).

#### MAN MUST SEEK IMMORTALITY

- ❖ "...the appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and *brought* life and **immortality** to light through the gospel" (*2 Tim. 1:10*).
- ❖ "...those who by patience in well-doing **seek for** glory and honour and **immortality**..." (*Rom. 2:7*).

- ❖ "...the one who raised Christ from the dead **will give life to your mortal bodies** also, through his Spirit that dwells in you" (*Rom. 8:11 NAB*).

*Romans 8:11 refers to the "transcendent life in the age to come" (Mark 10:30) which is later shown by Paul to involve immortality (1Cor. 15:53, 54).*

#### ONLY GOD HAS UNDERIVED IMMORTALITY

- ❖ "The blessed and only sovereign, who **alone has immortality**, who dwells in unapproachable light...." (*1Tim. 6:15, 16*).
- ❖ "To the King of ages, **immortal**, invisible, the only God...." (*1Tim. 1:17*).
- ❖ "...exchanged the glory of **the immortal God** for images resembling mortal man..." (*Rom. 1:23*).

These texts show that no angel or human has immortality automatically or naturally. Any immortality which angels and the one human (Jesus) currently have has been granted to them by "the immortal God" the One "who alone has immortality." Christians will also have immortality, but it will be granted to them at the time of Christ's return.

#### JESUS DID NOT HAVE UNDERIVED IMMORTALITY

- ❖ "...[Jesus] had to be made **like** his brothers **in every respect**" (*Heb. 2:17*) and therefore he was mortal.
- ❖ "...Adam, who is **a type of the one** who was to come" (*Rom. 5:14*).

*Because the mortal Adam was a type of Jesus then Jesus also must have been mortal.*

- ❖ "I live because of the Father" (*John 6:57*).
- ❖ "For as the father has life in himself, so he **has granted the Son** also to have life in himself"

*(John 5:26).*

*Not only was Jesus' mortal life given to him by the Father, but his transcendent immortal life was also granted him by the Father, and so indicating that Jesus never had some immortal, immaterial soul – he was just the same as all humans in this regard until he was rewarded with immortality.*

#### PASSAGES THOUGHT TO INDICATE A SEPARATION OF THE SOUL FROM THE BODY AT DEATH?

*Genesis 35:18:*

"And as her [*Rachel's*] **soul was departing** (for she was dying)..."

*1Kings 17:21-22:*

"Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's **life (soul) come into him** again." "And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived."

*Clearly there is no reference in these texts to a separate soul but simply the fading or reviving of life.*

*Isaiah 10:18:*

"The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both **soul and body**, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away."

*This does not present a bipartite view of man but rather the 'body' is the 'life' in its outward form. There is no hint of separation.*

*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 (Gehenna)."

However, this is presented from God's point of view which concerns a Christian's future life which no human can take from him; so that even if the Christian is killed God will resurrect him. Just as with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob God views the Christian as still alive because of the certainty of the resurrection. So it is clear that this passage does not teach that the human soul is intrinsically immortal, but rather that it is dependent on God for future life. Also please note the parallel passage in Luke 12:4-5 where Jesus says:

- ❖ "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that **can do no more**. But I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one **who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna...**" (NAB).

### *Revelation 6:9-11:*

"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar **the souls** of those who had been *slain* because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. <sup>10</sup> *They called out in a loud voice*, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" <sup>11</sup> Then each of them was *given a white robe*, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were *killed* just as they had been."

In this passage these martyred holy ones are being represented as sacrificial victims whose **blood** ('souls', Lev. 17:14) was poured out at the base of the altar. This is just as when Jesus "poured out his soul to the death" (Isa. 53:12). Please note that these whole people were "*slain*" and "*called out in a loud voice*" just as Abel's blood calls out for vengeance (Gen. 4:10); and were proleptically "*given a white robe*" and so requiring physical bodies. All these phrases indicate that whole people are being referred to, but as represented by their sacrificed blood.

Concerning Philippians 1:2-24 and 2Corinthians 5:6-10 please see STUDY 6, 'DO CHRISTIANS LITERALLY GO TO HEAVEN,'

## PASSAGES THOUGHT TO INDICATE AN IMMORTAL SOUL

### *Mark 9:47-48:*

"And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where **their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.**'"

*The phrase "their worm" simply indicates the rotting away process of decay and putrefaction. The fact that the fire is never quenched means that it continues until it has completed its destructive work.*

### *2 Peter 2:9:*

"...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to **keep the unrighteous under punishment** until the day of judgment."

*This is not an eternal punishing as a process, but a punishment of destruction, the result of which lasts through the age to come. This is similar to Matthew 25:41, 46 which speaks of aionian punishment i.e. punishment of the age to come - it is an abiding state of death. This state ceases when they are brought forth in the second resurrection as mortals to face the Day of Judgment.*

Concerning Matthew 25:41, 46 and Revelation 14:9-11 please see STUDY 7, 'THE FINAL DESTINY OF THE INCORRIGIBLY WICKED.'

## SUMMARY

‘Soul’ and ‘spirit,’ along with other Hebrew concepts, simply describe metaphorically different aspects of human life, relationships, and character. These terms do not refer to any immaterial part of a person — humans are a unity. They are described in the Bible primarily as ‘being souls’ rather than ‘having a soul;’ so that nothing separates from a person at death. The concept of an immaterial part of a person — a soul or spirit — that can escape the body at death and to live on forever is of pagan Greek origin and is not the teaching of the Bible.

Only God has underived immortality which he has granted to and will grant to those who are worthy. So humans have to “**seek for** glory and honour and **immortality...**” (*Rom. 2:7*), they do not have it inherently.

## SUGGESTED READING

*What Happens When We Die?* - Anthony Buzzard

*The Life and Soul of Mortal man* - Charles Ozanne (Open Bible Trust)

*Immortality or Resurrection?* - Samuele Bacchiochi

*Life, Death and Destiny* - Warren Prestige (also please view his website [www.afterlife.co.nz](http://www.afterlife.co.nz)).

*By Raymond C. Faircloth*  
www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk

§