

THE NATURE OF MAN

Introduction

What is man? What is man made of? Who made man? Where did man come from? Did he come into being by many different particles and atoms joining together by a random process? Perhaps, a person along life's journey may ask these questions. Although, these questions presuppose man came from somewhere or from something other than himself, in seeking to answer these questions about oneself, one has to look beyond themselves for answers. In looking beyond themselves for answers it brings them to the place of Creator and creature relationship. In the Creator/creature relationship, the questions of man's nature can be defined by knowing the Creator and how He formed the creature through God's Word.

The answer to the question, "where did man come from?" or the "origin of man," can be found in the biblical data of God's Word. Scripture teaches man was and is the pinnacle of God's creation. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."¹ Not only did God create man in His image but also He did not leave man alone to fend for himself. Rather, man is the object of God's special care and attention. In God's special care for mankind, God has revealed himself, not merely in the abstract but also in the objective, the truth of His word. God's Word teaches man his relationship to the Creator. God's word also reveals the truth about His creation of man, the sin

¹ All Scriptures cited from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

of man, and the redemption of man. Through the Word of God, the answers to man's questions are answered and explained about who he is, what he is made of, and his purpose on this earth.

In the study of man's being, known as Anthropology, the subject can often become very wide in range. Louis Berkhof says, "... general Anthropology can deal with origin and history of mankind, science of mankind, physiological structure, physical characteristics of man in general, and even various races of mankind in general, with their ethnological, linguistic, and cultural and religious development, and so on."² Although general Anthropology can have its place, Theological Anthropology will give way as we seek to find what God's Word says on the matter of man, his origin, and his soul.

Man In The Beginning

God's word reveals He created everything in six days and on the seventh he rested (Genesis 1:1-2:3). Although, some would argue for two different creation accounts from Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:5-25, the writer argues for one creation account which is given in Genesis 1:1-31 and then the commentary in Genesis 2:5-25. The sixth day of God's creation work was a uniquely special day. The sixth day was the last day in which God created, and thus man was created from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). This special day was the day God created man in His image as Genesis 1:31 says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good* (emphasis mine). And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."³ God was pleased in all of His creation, especially the final works of His creation, which was man. The pinnacle of God's creation was bringing man into a relationship with Himself.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 181.

³ Genesis 1:31.

Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This verse has deep theological and anthropological truths, which may help answer, “What is man?” God created the heavens, earth, vegetation, and water; only man was created after God’s own image and likeness. Through the ‘breath of life’ (*nesamah*), God gave man the ability to comprehend who He is and the ability to comprehend His moral law. God also gave man a conscience: “The spirit (*nesamah*) of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts.”⁴ All the other animals were created after their own kind, but man was uniquely created in the image and likeness of God. The historical narrative of Genesis 1 and 2 suggests man was created differently from everything else which God created.

In the beginning, God created man and uniquely distinguished him from any other animal by forming man’s body from the dust of the earth. God’s creation up to this point had been spoken into existence from ‘ex nihilo’ or ‘out of nothing.’ Man was brought forth from materials which existed (dust of the earth), except for one part as the text tells us (Gen.2:7), “God breathed (*nesamah*) in man’s nostrils.” This Hebrew word *nesamah* means the breath of life into something. As Dr. Robert Reymond says, “God imparted to man his gift of *nesamah* (breath), causing man to be uniquely different from other animals.”⁵

God gave to man the breath of life that caused man to be different from all other creatures, for this breath was from God Himself. Berkhof says, “This was the production of a new substance.”⁶ It is through the creation of the body and the given breath that man has two different elements or substances of which he is made. The man (*adam*) and the breath (*nesamah*)

⁴ Proverbs 20:27.

⁵ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. rev. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1998), 417.

⁶ Berkhof, 183.

becomes a “living creature or soul” (Gen.2:7). As specified in the Gen 2:7 text, there are distinctly two and only two substances which were given in the formation of man. The man (which came from dust) and the soul (which came from God’s breath) are what ultimately make up the living creature or soul.

Dichotomy/ Trichotomy and Church History

Throughout church history most scholars agrees man has a physical substance, known as a body. Some would even agree there is a non-visible (immaterial) substance that man has known as a soul. Although the text in Genesis 2:7 speaks of the form of man and the breath of God (two substances), there have been disagreements throughout history on whether man is made up of body and soul (known as dichotomy) or body, soul, and spirit (trichotomy). Some throughout history believed man cannot exist at all apart from his physical body and that there can be no separate existence for any “soul” after the body dies. This view of man as being one substance and that his body is the person is called “monism.” This view of man was rarely argued for because of the biblical data, which seems to contradict this theory. The common view held to in church history concerning man’s nature has been that of dichotomy or trichotomy.

Both biblically and historically, the overarching view concerning man’s nature has been linked to the dichotomist view. Dichotomy is defined as “. . . a division of two parts (Greek *dicha*, in two; *temnein*, cut), is applied in theology to that view of human nature which holds that man has two fundamental parts to his being: body and soul.”⁷ Some of the early church fathers, like Athanasius, Theodoret, and especially Augustine, were proponents of dichotomy. Even

⁷ Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. Henry, eds, *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology*, 4th printing, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 166.

during the Middle Ages the church commonly held to the dichotomist view of man. Reymond quotes from the Westminster Confession of Faith concerning man's nature:

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous...are received into the highest heavens...And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell...Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none. (XXXII/i)⁸

John Calvin also writes, "There can be no question that man consists of a body and a soul; meaning by soul, an immortal though created essence, which is the nobler part. Sometimes he is called a spirit. But though the two terms, while they are used together differ in their meaning, still, when spirit is used by itself it is equivalent to soul."⁹ The majority of the church during the Reformation argued for the dichotomist view of man's nature.

who defended the trichotomy man, prior Reformation period. "Trichotomy, this term which signifies a division into three parts (Greek *tricha*, "in three parts"; *temnein*, "cut"), is applied in theology to the tripartite division of human nature into body, soul, and spirit."¹⁰ Trichotomy had its roots, although not in its purest sense, prior to the early church and the Reformers. The view of trichotomy was developed by the Greek philosopher Plato's (424 BC- 348 BC) two-fold division of the body and soul, although he was influenced by Aristotle's dividing of soul into that of an (1) animal soul, the breathing, organic aspect of man's being and a (2) rational soul, the intellectual aspect."¹¹ Plato's view of man's substance affected other early church fathers such as Irenaeus, "who taught that whereas unbelievers have only souls and bodies, believers acquire in

⁸Reymond, 423.

⁹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Peabody, MA: Henderickson, 2008), 104-05.

¹⁰ Harrison, 530.

¹¹Ibid, 530-31.

addition spirits, which have been created by the Holy Spirit.”¹² “Another early theologian who associated himself with the trichotomist view was Apollonarius of Laodicea who lived in approximately between 310 and 390 A.D.”¹³ Berkhof writes of others who held to trichotomy in the early church: “. . . the trichotomic conception of man found considerable favor with Greek or Alexandrian Fathers of the early Christian centuries. It is found, though not always in exactly the same form, in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa.”¹⁴

Those in the early years of the church who held to the trichotomy of man paved the way for others in the 19th and 20th centuries like “Franz Delitzsch, J.B. Heard, J.T. Beck, and G.F. Oehler.”¹⁵ In the 20th century others who defended a trichotomy view were “Watchman Nee, Charles Solomon, and Bill Gothard.”¹⁶ More popular in 21st century in the teaching of the trichotomist view would come from the use of the “old and new *Scofield Reference Bible*.”¹⁷ Although the church has debated on this matter for centuries one must search the biblical data when considering the nature of man.

The Biblical Argument For Trichotomy

On the ‘surface’ there may seem some biblical data in defending the trichotomist view of man’s nature. Berhouwer states, “there is a certain ‘imprecision’ at times in the Bible’s use of the

¹²Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 205.

¹³ Hokema, 205.

¹⁴ Berkhorf, 191.

¹⁵ Hokema, 205.

¹⁶ Ibid, 205.

¹⁷ Ibid, 205.

relevant terminology.”¹⁸ Are the quotations from the New Testament concerning the body, soul, and spirit, referring to the soul and spirit as one immaterial substance used interchangeably with each other or two substances? Dr. Robert Reymond and Dr. Wayne Grudem give excellent treatment to these questions of trichotomy of man.

Some popular passages for the defense of trichotomy comes from the New Testament, quoting from the Old Testament as in Deuteronomy 6:5. In Luke 10:27, Jesus says, “that you should love the Lord your God with all our heart (*kardia*), and soul (*psyche*), and strength (*ischys*), and mind (*dianoia*).” Matthew 22:37 reads, we should love God with all our heart and soul and mind, but it omits strength; whereas, Mark reports in 12:30 that we should love God with all our heart, soul and soul, mind and strength (reversing the order of the last two words), and in 12:33 that we should love God with all heart and understanding and strength, using another word for “mind” and omitting “soul” altogether. These passages are often referred to as views on how man is to love God. But, are the gospel writers telling their readers they are to love God using several different faculties of their being? Reymond says, “Surely, no one would insist, on the basis of these series of words connected by “and” that each of these words refers to an immaterial, ontologically distinct entity, and that therefore Luke was a quintchotomist, Matthew was a quadchotomist, and Mark was a sexchotomist.”¹⁹ These passages which are quoted by Jesus are referring to the “Shema” of Deut.6:5 and are simply stating God’s people are to love Him with our entire being.

Another verse of Scripture which is often used in defending the trichotomist view is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,

¹⁸ Reymond, 420.

¹⁹ Ibid, 420.

and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Does this verse along with a few others found in the scriptures give us a definitive answer for the trichotomist’s argument? Again, on the surface it would appear this would close the case for the trichotomist’s argument. Grudem states, “Or could Paul be simply piling up synonyms for emphasis, as is sometimes done elsewhere in scriptures²⁰ Paul could be using these words and building up synonyms like that of the gospel writers when they say, love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. What Paul is saying in 1 Thess. 5:23 is that whatever our makeup is (body and soul/spirit), he (Paul) desires for the Thessalonians to be sanctified until the day of Christ and His return.

Another verse which is used by the trichotomists in their defense is 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 intensions of the heart.” Does this verse teach that the Word of God separates the soul and spirit into two different parts of substances? The trichotomist would argue yes! Or could it be that the writer of Hebrews is simply stating that God’s Word has penetrating power in that person? Anthony Hoekema says, “The author of Hebrews does not intend to say that the word of God causes a division between a “part” of human nature called the soul and another “part” called the “spirit,” anymore than he intends to say that the word causes division between joints of the body and the marrow found in these bones. The language is figurative.”²¹

Scriptures, which are commonly used by the trichotomist in their defense, can mistakenly be taken out of their context. As Berkhof says, “It is always the sound rule of exegesis that

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan, 1994), 478.

²¹ Hoekema, 208.

exceptional statements should be interpreted in the light of the *analogia Scriptura*, the usual representation of Scripture.”²² He also states as well, “the mere mention of spirit and soul alongside of each other does not prove that, according to Scripture, they are two distinct substances, any more than Matt. 22:37 proves that Jesus regarded heart and soul and mind as three distinct substances.”²³ These verses on the “surface” seem to argue for the trichotomy of man’s nature and can be quite difficult to defend against.

The Biblical Argument For Dichotomy

The dichotomist view argues the scripture teaches man’s nature is made up of two distinct substances. The substance which man is made of is the body (material) and the soul (immaterial). As Reymond puts it, “these are two ontologically distinct entities – which are in a mysterious, vital union and interact in what Berkhof calls the “union of life.”²⁴ In other words man is both a material and nonmaterial being while remaining as a unified being. Berkhof also believes that “the prevailing representation of the nature of man in Scripture is clearly dichotomic.”²⁵

In arguing for the dichotomist view or any other view, the Scriptures must be at the forefront. The primary text which is used is Genesis 2:7: “then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” In this verse you have God forming man from the dust of the ground

²² Berkhof, 194.

²³ Ibid, 194.

²⁴ Reymond, 422.

²⁵ Berkhof, 192.

(body/material) but then breathing life into his body (soul/ immaterial). God gave man life, causing him to be a living creature or a living soul. The use of this Scripture along with, Ecclesiastes 12:7 “and the dust (body) returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit (soul) returns to God who gave it” and 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,” there is an interchangeableness of the words “spirit and soul.” The texts given here along with a number of others (1 Cor.5:1-10; Philippians 1:21-24) would argue for the dichotomist view of man’s nature.

In the biblical argument for dichotomy, the words translated for “soul” are the Greek word *psuche* and the word for “spirit” is *pneuma*. These words seem to be used interchangeably in other verses of Scriptures as well. In John 12:27, Jesus says, “Now is my *soul* troubled,” whereas in John 13:21 Jesus was “troubled in *spirit*. There is Hebrew parallelism in the verses of Scriptures like that of Luke 1:46-47, when Mary states, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”²⁶ The use of the words *psuche* and *pneuma* explains why those who have died can be referred to as “souls or spirits” (ref. Heb.12:23, 1 Peter 3:19).

In other Scriptures defending the dichotomy of man, when one dies, the “spirit” or the “soul” leaves the body. It is an inescapable fact at death, the “spirit” or “soul” departs from the body to return to heaven or the place of torment. Paul says, “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”²⁷ To be in the body is to “away” from the Lord but, to be out of the body is

²⁶ Grudem, 473-74.

²⁷ 2 Cor.5:6-8.

to be at “home” with the Lord. The spirit or soul is with the Lord when it is no longer in the body and the body returns to the dust (Eccl.12:7).

The distinction of body/soul, which is given in the creation account of Genesis 2:7 is given in other text throughout the Scriptures. One other text which argues for dichotomy is when Peter reminds those he is writing to, “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.”²⁸ Peter makes a distinction for the nature of man, telling his readers he would soon be laying aside his body. His body was the tent or tabernacle, which housed the soul while he was alive. Hodge says, “It is the common belief of mankind, the clearly revealed doctrine of the Bible, and part of the faith of the Church universal that the soul can be and does exist and act after death.”²⁹ Those Scriptures, which teach the nature of man as a body and spirit/soul, would conclude then, when the body is no more, the spirit/soul departs for its place of rest or torment.

My Position On the Nature of Man

In stating my theological position on the view of dichotomy verses trichotomy, I would make my case from Genesis 2:7 and work through the biblical data. Man’s nature or substance is made up of body (material) and soul (immaterial), yet is still one in unity and function. Without the soul, the body ceases to function, and without the body there is no place for the soul to dwell. Each one, the body and the soul, should compliment each other in unity to function.

²⁸ 2 Peter 1:13-14

²⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, ab. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: 1988), 248-49.

A problem I find in the trichotomist view of man is the issue with sin. When a believer sins, is it his spirit which sins or his soul or his body? The trichotomist would view man's soul is that which sins, rather than his spirit. Trichotomists would argue the spirit has been renewed and is free from sin and responsive to the Holy Spirit. But, is it really the soul that sins? What about if one commits a sin with my mind, or my tongue would that be a sin with the body? Throughout Scripture, the Bible teaches the spirit and soul are used interchangeably.

I stand in agreement with Calvin, Berkhof, and Hoekema in their historical position of the two-fold nature of man and the biblical position which was given by Moses in Genesis 2:7, "man (body) became a living soul (spirit)." This is the creation account of man, whereby the dust of the earth and the breath of God brought him to life. The spirit/soul of man was given as God placed His breath inside man's body. I am in agreement with Laidlaw in his book, *The Bible Doctrine of Man*: "The antithesis is clearly that of lower and higher, earthly and heavenly, animal and divine. It is not so much two elements, as two factors uniting in a single and harmonious result, - 'man became a living soul.'³⁰

Consider the words of H.D. McDonald on the nature of man,

However used, both terms refer to man's inner nature over against flesh or body, which refers to the outer aspect of man as existing in space and time. In reference, then, to man's physical nature, "spirit" denotes life as having its origin in God and "soul" denotes that same life as constituted in man. Spirit is the inner depth of man's being, the higher aspect of his personality. Soul expresses man's own special and distinctive individuality. The pneuma is man's nonmaterial nature looking Godward; the psyche is that same nature of man looking earthward and touching the things of sense.³¹

³⁰ Berkhof, 193.

³¹ Reymond, 423-24.

My position is that man's nature is two-fold, body and soul, which are packaged into one. One cannot have one without the other. This view of man's nature is both been proven biblically and historically throughout the ages.

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