

The Nature of Man

Dichotomous or Tripartite?

Dicho-what?? Isn't "*tripartite*" a type of rock? These two words are used to describe whether men are comprised of just two parts: body and soul; or three parts: body, soul, and spirit. I'll abbreviate those as *2P* and *3P* for convenience. It would be easy to get side-tracked with word studies on whether our heart, soul, will, intellect, mind, spirit, conscience, character, self, etc. are separate things, or the same thing. Hebrew and Greek grammar leads us down that path, because soul and spirit are used interchangeably in the Bible. Their definitions can include those other words. And the literature of medical science, philosophy, and psychology also lead us down that path. As I began to write this, I was eight pages deep in lexicon definitions, Bible verse comparisons, excerpts from scientific literature, and anecdotal evidences when I *stopped* – it's not about any of that. There is only one issue here: is my spirit separate from my soul? And, *yes*, that comes down to how we define our terms.

It reminds me of my philosophy class in college. I found that every discipline of philosophy except epistemology reduces to a word-game. We have endless arguments over how we want to define and distinguish our terms. And like the followers of Apollos and the followers of Paul, we wrangle over whose definition is correct and whose camp we belong to. The focus is no longer on *discovering* Truth, but on *defining* Truth. We get side-tracked. The issue is quite simple:

- Those who believe our soul is simply who we are as a person, and that this soul is what ascends to heaven or descends to hell, have chosen to give "soul" the same definition as "spirit." Therefore, they believe we are two-part. They point to grammar and word usage.
- Those who believe our identity as individuals (our soul) is distinct from what gives us life and even rationality (our spirit), believe we are three-part. They point to passages in which both words are used in the same sentence, and appear to be contrasted one with the other.

And that's where the argument ensues. It tends to go down the path of an argument *absurdum*. That means, if we take one point of view or the other to its logical extreme, we wind up in absurdity and folly. It's actually a subtle *ad hominem* attack on the person espousing that view. The bottom line is inevitably, "You're an idiot for thinking that way. You should join our camp." Paul had little patience with this type of argument because it tends to be unloving; it wastes our time and energy on matters of indifference. It almost always leads to divisiveness and disunity in the Body, which is counter-productive and un-Christlike. And yet, we have to wonder why the issue comes up. Why do these camps disagree? *Does* it make a difference? If it doesn't, then the argument is over; it becomes an interesting topic of amusement. If it matters, meaning that it goes to who Christ is and what he accomplished on the cross, then we need to settle this one way or the other, and not by word-games.

Does it Matter?

When we look at the issue of the *soul* of man in science and philosophy, we generally center on what distinguishes mankind from the rest of the animal kingdom. But when we look at the *spirit* of man, we're actually centering on what distinguishes the elect from the non-elect. All men are eternal creatures and will spend eternity in heaven or hell. They're not infinite, as the Mormons would have it. They have a point in time at which they were created in the flesh, and at which point God breathed his breath into them and gave them life. All

men have a soul, but not all men are sons of God. Mankind was created in the image of God, but through Adam's sin that image was cracked and corrupted. Christ, too, had a point in time at which he was "created" in the flesh. But unlike the rest of us, he pre-existed that moment. He is not just eternal – without end, but he is infinite – without beginning. He is God and as such He is Spirit (Jn 4:24). His Spirit is the very image of the Father, uncracked and uncorrupted. And Christ's Spirit lives in the elect; at our conversion, Christ's Spirit is imparted to us to abide in us. He returns us to the image of God (Eph 4:24). What that means is exactly the issue at hand, and it is not a matter of indifference.

You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.
You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.

Job 10:11-12

Do both elect and non-elect have a soul? Yes, they do. But this isn't about having a soul; it's about having the Spirit.¹ The Bible distinguishes the sons of God or sons of the kingdom from whom we must assume are the sons of Men or the sons of the Earth; it distinguishes the seed of Eve from the seed of the serpent, and Israel from the other nations. When we come to Christ, we receive the Spirit of Christ. That's what subjectively unites us to Christ and imbues us with the attributes of Christ.² His Spirit is what identifies us as his. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." (Rom 8:9) Non-elect do not have the Spirit of Christ, by definition; and they will never receive the Spirit of Christ. They belong to God as his creatures, but they were created for common or ignoble purposes, not for redemption by the blood of Christ. Christ's Spirit is therefore distinct from our soul which all men have, whether elect or non-elect.

Those who subscribe to the 2P view would agree with all of this – but they consider the Spirit of Christ to be part of him and not part of us. The presence of the Spirit "in us" does not change our fundamental nature, they would assert. It merely provides the means of submitting our corrupted nature to the control of the Spirit. *Here comes that fine line.* Then what is it in us that submits our "soul" to the leading of the Spirit? And why, if that is part of our corrupt nature, does it want to do so? Why then are not all men capable of seeking God and receiving Christ and His Spirit? An Arminian would say they are. But for the 2P reformed theologian, this presents a challenge. He must explain where this motivation to submit to God arises from if our soul is the same as the soul of those who are not saved and not elect.

Those who subscribe to the 3P view would say that it is our spirit, which all men also have, that has been fundamentally altered in the sons of God. We are not Christ, and His Spirit is

¹ The Greeks used different words for the body (*soma*) and for its desires (*sarx*). They used different words for the soul (*psuche*) and the spirit which moved it (*pneuma*). They distinguished life (*zao*) from living things (*zoon*). The Jews distinguished them the same way, calling that which gives life *ru'ach* (meaning breath or wind), and that which contains life *cha'y* (meaning a living soul). And yet, when it applies to a man, his living soul is called *nephesh*. Why the difference? What makes men different from other living beings? Or again, what makes the elect of God different from the non-elect? In a cursory examination of the 263 instances of the word *nephesh* in the OT, it seems to be applied only to God's people, whether wicked or not; but it never applies to the people of other nations. Even in Hab 2:4 (*the righteous shall live by faith*), *nephesh* refers to the soul of those who take pride in themselves instead of living by faith; and it is solely addressed the nation of Israel.

² We were united with Christ or chosen in Christ before the foundations of the earth. That doesn't mean we pre-existed our own incarnations. It means that, at Creation, God issued an eternal decree which called the elect from time immemorial to come to him. This is what we call our "objective" uniting with Christ. After our birth, and at our conversion, we actually receive the effect of that eternal decree; the benefits of the cross are then applied to us. At that moment in time, we are "subjectively" united with Christ – we experience it as we receive his Spirit. He applies the benefits of the cross to us so that we are accounted righteous, and we begin the process of sanctification. In Christ, *positionally*, we are perfectly cleansed by his blood. But we must be made in reality what we are positionally, so that we increasingly reflect the truth of our union with Christ and are recognized as his.

distinct from our spirit, but His Spirit directs our spirit in a cooperative venture called sanctification. “The Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are sons of God.” (Rom 8:16) Our soul and our flesh remain corrupted – or as Paul puts it, sin still lives in me; it uses the desires of my flesh against me (Rom 7:17-20). It takes the normal desires of my flesh and converts them into lust; it changes the object of my desires from what is acceptable, to what is forbidden. But our spirit is illumined by the Spirit of Christ living in us. He defines and identifies what is acceptable from what is forbidden. He has freed us from our bondage to such fleshly lusts. He provides us with the power to exercise free choice in regard to these sinful attractions. And so the struggle begins at our conversion to conform our soul to the image of Christ, *by our renewed spirit*, and under the guidance and power of the Spirit of Christ. If I do not have a spirit distinct from my soul, from my corrupted mind and passions, then what is it that submits to the Spirit of God? What is it that has been freed from bondage? What is it that is no longer completely debilitated by the Fall? What is it that comprises the “new self,” or “new man,” or “new soul”?

Those who subscribe to the 2P view would say that it is indeed our *soul* that has been reborn, not a separate *spirit*. That soul has not been reborn in the non-elect; it remains dead in its trespasses and sins; it cannot know the things of God because they are spiritually discerned and they lack *the* Spirit, not *a* spirit. So do we find ourselves back to the definition of terms, and arguments that go back and forth? To this point, both views appear to offer a viable explanation as to what happens in sanctification. Yet there is this nagging question for me: If my *soul* has been reborn and “Behold! All things have become new!”, then what is this remaining corruption in me, this obvious problem of sin living in me? Why is there a struggle in my *soul*? Is it just my flesh that is still corrupted by the Fall, and not my will or my thoughts? Or perhaps do my thoughts and my will belong to my body rather than my soul? As I understand Romans 6-8, what changed after my conversion, as far as my condition goes, is that my *bondage to sin* has been broken, but not my *corruption* or my *tendencies*. So I ask again, “What are all these things that have become new, giving me a new heart, or a new *soul*?” Is this just referring to my *attitude* towards all things? Have I become an advocate of Bob Schuller’s school of PMA, *Positive Mental Attitude*?

Again, if it is my inmost desire to seek after God, to submit to him, to no longer conform myself to the world, but to allow myself to be transformed by the renewing of my mind, and nothing good lives in me – that is, in my flesh (Rom 7:18), then what is driving me toward God? What is causing my desire to have my mind renewed? The “flesh” in Rom 7:18, is *sarx* – not the body itself, which would be *soma* – but the desires or lusts of the flesh which have been placed on what is forbidden. Eve’s *physical* desire for food was not evil. Her heart-felt desire for the forbidden food is what was evil. When we talk about the *soul*, we’re talking about the heart, about motivations, not physical needs. If nothing good lives in our *soul*, in our *sarx*, in that thing which defines us as unique persons, in our heart, then where is this desire for God to be found?

Some have tried to explain it by saying that Romans 7 is Paul in his unregenerate state, while Romans 8 speaks to his regenerate state, his condition after conversion.

Two-parters charge them with thinking that if the spirit departs from the body, the soul is left behind; two-parters fall into the trap of thinking that the soul belongs to the body, and not to the spirit. What difference does it make? It makes a difference in how Christians cooperate with the Spirit in their sanctification. If we don’t understand how sin living in us uses the desires of our flesh against us, or how the Spirit speaks to our spirit to overcome the flesh, or how that differs from willfully exercising self-control over our flesh, then we’ve

got a problem. There any number of terms to describe who we are as persons, how we function and feel, and what causes us to act in specific ways. For example, we speak of the self, soul, spirit, will, conscience, mind, intellect, reason, heart, and desire. What exactly do we mean by these terms? Are they really different things, or are they just different ways to describe one thing? We want to know how God talks to us in our innermost parts so that we can hear his voice, and respond to him in a way that pleases him.

God speaks to us primarily through his Word, the Bible. Yet non-believers read it and don't react to it the same way that believers do. I suppose we could say we read it by faith, and they don't, but is that all there is to it? Is it just a matter of wanting to believe what it says? If that were true, then what does it mean when God says that he will illumine our minds? What does it mean to have eyes to see and ears to hear, so we might understand with our hearts and turn to God and be healed (Isa 6:10)? My physical body and my intellect are no different from those of non-believers. Why then is God's Word precious to me, but foolishness to them (1Co 2:14)? How does it warm my heart and satisfy my soul, but not theirs (Ps 63:5)? And if my heart and soul are the same thing, then what does it mean to love God with all my heart, and all my soul (Dt 13:3)?

What is it that in me that cannot be found in the non-believer? What does it mean to have God's Spirit in me (Eze 36:27)? Did I not have a spirit before my conversion? Do only believers have a spirit? What does it mean that his Spirit testifies to my spirit that I'm his child (Rom 8:16)? Do I then have two spirits? Why doesn't it just say that his Spirit testifies to *me*, to my *soul*? Paul writes, "May your whole **spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless" (1Th 5:23). Was he only emphasizing the one seat of my being, or was he distinguishing the various faculties of my understanding? And that's the question we want to address in this brief paper.

The Grammatical Argument

I am of the opinion that man is tripartite in nature, having a physical body to experience the world, plus a soul or identity that distinctively makes us who we are, and finally a rational spirit that animates our flesh and that draws its life and its authority over the flesh from God. Yet, by putting it in these terms, I am making a distinction that Hebrew and Greek scholars tell me is not supported by biblical language. They tell us that the meanings of heart, mind, soul, and spirit are melded, and they all reference the same thing. That grammatical understanding is the primary support for the dichotomous (2-part) view of man's nature. Unfortunately, it tends to ignore the context, descriptions, and instructions that accompany the use of the distinctive words "soul" and "spirit." Language scholars are undoubtedly correct in their understanding of the parts, but it seems to me that they ignore the framework within which those parts are employed.

By way of contrast to the linguists' opinion as to the shared meaning of these words, it should be noted that the Greeks used different words for the body (*soma*) and for its desires (*sarx*). They used different words for the soul (*psuche*) and the spirit which moved it (*pneuma*). They distinguished life (*zao*) from living things (*zoon*). The Jews distinguished them the same way, calling that which gives life *ru'ach* (meaning breath or wind), and that which contains life *cha'y* (meaning a living soul). And yet, when it applies to a man, his living soul is called *nephesh*. Why the difference? What makes men different from other living beings? Or again, what makes the elect of God different from the non-elect? In a cursory examination of the 263 instances of the word *nephesh* in the OT, it seems to be applied only to God's people, whether wicked or not; but it never applies to the people of other nations. Even in Hab 2:4 (*the righteous shall live by faith*), *nephesh* refers to the soul

of those who take pride in themselves instead of living by faith; and it is solely addressed the nation of Israel. *Curious*. Let's take some time to look closely at the meaning of these words so we get a feel for what we're talking about.

The Heart - The Greek word "kardia" is our English word "heart." But does it mean the organ in my chest cavity, or the center of my being, or my inmost desire? Yes; all of those, and more. The heart is regarded as the center of physical and spiritual life. It is the soul or mind, the source and seat of our thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, and endeavors. It's the source and seat of our understanding, or the faculty and seat of the intelligence, will, and character. It presents the soul as it is affected and stirred whether in a good or a bad way (i.e. the conscience). OK. So did the Jews and Greeks understand a concept of the spirit or soul that does not use the word *kardia*? As a matter of fact they did.

The Soul - In **Hebrew**, the word *nephesh* is closest to our understanding of soul. It means our self or our life. It refers to a creature, a person, a living being. It is someone with an appetite, a mind, desires, emotions, and passion. Graphically, it means someone who breathes, but it also means the inner being of a man, the man himself, the person or individual. And like the heart, it can also refer to the source and seat of our appetites, emotions, passions. In **Greek**, the corresponding word for soul is *psuche*, from which we get "psyche". The definition is going to look pretty familiar: breath, life, or soul. The *psuche* is the breath of life, the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing, whether we're talking about animals or men. It's also the living being itself. And of course it is the seat of the feelings, desires, both affections and aversions (i.e. our heart). It also carries the idea of the human soul as that part of us which can secure eternal blessedness, the moral being that has been designed by God for everlasting life. The *psuche* is the soul as an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death. So when we say our soul ascends to heaven, it's the *psuche* that we're talking about. What then did Jews and Greeks consider to be the spirit?

The Spirit - In Hebrew, it's *ru'ach*. In Greek it's *pneuma*, from which we get *pneumatic*. It means "air" or "breath," without which there is no life. It's what animates us; it makes or keeps us alive as opposed to identifying us (i.e. it is not our "self"). And yet, if we are "of the spirit of Elijah" as Christ said of John the Baptist, then we have the same character or essence as Elijah. It's not reincarnation or possession, but we are of the same mind or functionality as Elijah - in idiomatic English we'd say we were "two peas in a pod", or "cut from the same cloth".

Here's the formal definition for *pneuma* from the Greek Lexicon: the vital principal by which the body is animated. It is the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, and decides. It is the soul, or it is the disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul. It is not material, but it is possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting. It can be a living-giving spirit, or the soul that leaves the body at death, just like *psuche*. Isn't that helpful to our understanding? It can also indicate an angel or a demon. Or, it's just the wind or a breath.

So, as you can see, the word *kardia* refers to the heart, mind, soul, will, character, spirit, and intellect. The word *pneuma* refers to what causes the heart to beat, the mind to exist, the soul to have an identity, the will to act, and the intellect to think. And the word *psuche* refers to... uh, either *kardia* or *pneuma*... Confused? Yeah, so is everyone else. Because of the grammatical understandings of the words, the linguists have concluded that they're all essentially the same. And that's why they say we only have a body and a soul. That's a short, sweet, simple way to look at it, at least from their point of view. But language is more than

just words. We're after the ideas and concepts behind these words and how they're used in Scripture. So let's walk through those biblical concepts to discover reality as the Bible describes it.

The Interpretational Argument

If our soul and spirit are the same, as the linguists claim, then how are we to understand those verses which combine them in the same verse?

^{ESV} **1Sam 1:15** But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.

^{ESV} **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.

^{ESV} **Isa 26:9** My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

^{ESV} **Isa 42:1** Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Of course, these are OT verses, and the Jews love their poetic couplets in which the same thing is said twice with a twist. So we might grant that each word was intended to reflect the same idea for emphasis. But Isa 42:1 is quoted in the NT in Greek, and the words are kept distinct:

^{ESV} **Mat 12:18** "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

Then again, Matthew is simply quoting the OT, so perhaps the one who translated his Aramaic into Greek wanted to preserve the couplet as it was, since all Jews (his intended audience) were already familiar with it. Granted. But what about the following verses?

^{ESV} **1Cor 15:45** Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living soul" [*zao psuche*]; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit [*zoopoieo pneuma*].

Does this intend to say that Jesus of Nazareth was not a living soul, and did not have the nature of Adam? Or does it mean to say that Adam did not have God's Spirit breathed into him? And why did they not just use *psuche*, which means a living soul all on its own? *Still curious*. Here's that earlier verse from 1Thessalonians:

^{ESV} **1Th 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.

This again, might be interpreted to mean "everything about you" rather than to distinguish any of the parts – it was simply a linguistic way of emphasizing that no part of us will be uncleansed at the coming of our Lord Jesus. It's simply an exaggeration, a hyperbole. Granted. What about this next verse which has not only soul and spirit, but also heart?

^{ESV} **Heb 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.

I suppose the same might be said of it as was said of the other verses. It sets up an implied dichotomy between things that are not really different, simply to express in visual terms how piercing God's word really is. The writer of Hebrews wanted to use descriptive parallelism; and so he selected a series of tightly related pairs. He then separated these things which ordinarily cannot be separated. He was demonstrating that God's word has the

power and authority to separate them. That sounds really good and logical. But joints and marrow are distinct (outer and inner); and thoughts and intentions are distinct (ideas and motivations). Why then are soul and spirit not distinct? If he wanted parallelism, then it must continue for each pair.

One rule of interpretation is that when we have a series of general passages, or a series of non-specific passages, and we have even one clear and specific passage, the clear and specific passage controls or qualifies all of the other ones. Heb 4:12 is such a passage. Whatever doubts we might have entertained about the others, we cannot entertain them about this one.

As we saw in the section on the grammatical issues, any one of the words can refer to multiple things, but when any two of those words are combined in the same verse or passage, they are not referring to the same thing but to different things. One of the words is referring to one of the other possible meanings of the second word. And this is what using definitions alone cannot yield, and where the shortcomings of grammatical analysis become obvious. The linguist knows that any given word can suggest a number of meanings; it can represent multiple things. So can another word. But both those words will not represent exactly the same thing when they are both used in the same sentence.

Let me give you an example. I can say that “boss” refers to the foreman in Sales, or to the foreman in Marketing. And I can say that “Bob” refers to the boss in Sales or to the boss in Marketing. “Boss” and “Bob” have multiple meanings, and can even refer to the same person. But I cannot say that Bob got into an argument with the boss, and intend “boss” to refer to Bob. At this point, we might go further and say that the conscience, will, intellect, heart, soul, and spirit are all separate entities, each of which might be referred to by any one of those terms. In that case, we are neither dichotomous nor tripartite, but *multi-faceted*. And that may well be true. I could say that my will is my own – it is *me*. Or is it? What happens when I’m hypnotized, or brain-washed? Is my will still my own, or is it so dominated that I am no longer in control of myself or my choices? (Defense attorneys love to use that one). My point is that my will is *not* me; it is not my soul; it is my will, my intentionality, my purposefulness – and it can be lost. And that brings us to the last argument I’m going to present

Practical Argument from Experience

When God says, “I will cause you to act and to will according to my purposes,” does that mean I don’t have a will with which to exercise discretion, or that I’m somehow not responsible for my own actions? Hardly. But why doesn’t it mean that? What remains of me, *me*, if God has control of my will? Do I still have my soul? If all I have is a body and a soul, and God is controlling what moves me to act, and my soul is what identifies and motivates me, the how do I continue to exist as a man, as *me*? How can I be transformed by the renewing of my mind if my mind is part of my soul, and my soul is no longer mine to control? How do I know right from wrong? That capacity to reason one from the other also characterizes who I am as a person. If that’s within my soul, just as my will is within my soul, then how do I employ my knowledge of right and wrong to lead a righteous life in the sight of God? Won’t he do that for me?

- Either I am a free agent, or I am an automaton.
- Either I am a free agent, or God is sovereign.
- Either I am a free agent, or I cannot be held accountable.

If I am a free agent, what is it that makes me free, if it is not my ability to make real choices? Making those choices is part of what defines me as person. If I have only a body and a soul, and my soul is what animates my body and contains my identity, then what happens with amnesia victims, or those suffering from the debilitations of Alzheimer's disease or dementia? Their bodies are animated and living, but the very thing which makes them who they are and gives them a personality and identity, is gone. If we only have a body and a soul, have such persons lost their soul? I believe so – no, not their eternal soul, but their temporal identity. What then keeps their flesh alive? If there is only soul and body, and the soul is gone, then all we are left with is an empty carcass. Where does the breath of life come from in that carcass? What makes the cells process their food and continue their functionality in the absence of what supposedly makes the flesh alive? Is the body self-sustaining? If it was, then why did God breath into Adam's flesh the breath of life, the spirit?

The one part of me, I am told, is my soul; it's my eternal identity, the thing that gives me life. The other part of me is my physical body. I can lose my limbs, and a number of my organs, and still be alive, without losing my life-force, or my identity. Even in a coma, I am who I am. These two things, body and soul, are separate. I get that. So let me ask, in which part of me do my emotions reside? If I'm angry, my adrenalin rushes throughout my body and gives my muscles incredible power. If I'm afraid, my heart races, my sweat glands are activated, and I get weak in the knees. Yet both of these physical reactions require an object for those emotions. In other words, my mind has to recognize and respond to the object which causes my infuriation, or the object which causes my fear, and that has to take place before my body can respond to that same object with rage or terror. So is the rage in my soul, or in my body? Is the terror in my soul, or in my body? That depends on how I want to define "rage" or "terror". If I describe it as a cognitive function, then it's in my soul. If I define it as the physical manifestation, then it's in my body.

What about my lusts? Are they at work in my body, or in my soul? My body can tell me that I'm hungry, but what is it that tells me meat is better for me than cake? I can lust after my own spouse, but I can also lust after my neighbor's spouse. One is right; one is wrong. Is it my soul that makes the distinction, or my conscience? Or is my conscience the same as my soul? Where does my conscience reside? And where did it get its sense of right and wrong? Does my soul inform it? Or is my conscience itself my sense of right and wrong? We say that some men have no conscience, or that their conscience is seared. But they haven't lost their eternal soul, have they? Can they regain a lost conscience? What do we mean by that?

What we're concerned with here is self-control and the conscience. The conscience needs to recognize right and wrong, and it needs standards by which to assess my desires. If I'm hungry, it should be OK to eat. But if I'm hungry for something that's forbidden, like the fruit that Adam was not permitted to eat, what keeps me from satisfying my hunger with *that* fruit as opposed to another fruit? My body heard God's command (his law) not to eat of that particular fruit. My brain processed the verbal data, understood what was required, and also why it was important: "On the day you eat of it you will surely die." And so, out of my fear of death and my linked fear of violating the law, my intellect identifies and stores the information; that way I will be able to recognize both the tree and the fruit in the future. It records the specific action that will violate the law, and it works out the logic of the circumstances under which I might fall afoul of the law. My conscience then instills in me a sense of guilt should I violate the law – this is not fear of the penalty, but an acknowledgement that the penalty would be just if I were to violate the law. Now my hunger arises within me. What keeps me from taking the forbidden fruit? Is it my intellect, or my conscience? Neither; it is my will. I must choose whether to uphold the law or take the fruit.

Just because I know right from wrong, and just because I am able to identify the fruit, and just because I remember what the penalty is, none of this will keep me from taking the fruit. The sin that lives in me is beckoning to my flesh to satisfy its hunger with this forbidden fruit, even though the tree from which it hangs is surrounded by other authorized trees with nourishing fruit.

Which shall I obey? My flesh is neutral. It's just hungry. It doesn't really care what will satisfy that hunger. My conscience isn't neutral at all. It calls out to my flesh, "Stop! Don't take that fruit!" But it is powerless to stop it. My mind races, and recalls for me the law that prohibits me from eating the fruit. But the hunger in me is changed, and converted into lust, into a wrongful hunger, into a craving for what is forbidden and not just a craving to satisfy my hunger. Paul describes this very thing in Romans 6 and 7. But then in Romans 8, he says that I am no longer a slave to my lust, having to satisfy its every desire. Instead of being led by the flesh, I am to be led by the Spirit living in me.

OK. Here we go. How can I be led by something I can't identify? If my spirit, or the Spirit living in me, is the same as my soul, mind, body, heart, intellect, etc. and any or all of these are "me", then what keeps "me" from satisfying "me"? Perhaps now you're beginning to see the cause of the debate between theologians as to whether we have a two-part or three-part human nature.

I am of the opinion that man is tripartite in nature, having a physical body, a soul or identity that distinctively makes us who we are, and a spirit that animates our flesh and draws its life and its authority over the flesh from God. A.W. Pink commenting on 1Th 5:23-24 writes,

We shall consider the *design* of the apostle's prayer. "Your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved blameless." It is difficult (and perhaps not necessary) for us to determine the precise relation of this clause to the previous one—whether it is an additional request, an explanatory amplification of the word *wholly*, or an expression of the apostle's aim in making that request. Personally, we consider it includes the last two. The American Standard Version gives it thus:

"And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Whatever rendition is preferred, it is clear the verse as a whole teaches that sanctification extends to our entire persons. Equally clear is it that man is a tripartite being, consisting of an intelligent spirit, a sensual or sensitive soul, and a material body. Man, with his customary perversity, reverses this order and speaks of "body, soul, and spirit," putting the body first because it occupies most of his care.

Pink continues,

Man a Tripart Being

Since the tripart nature of man has been so widely denied we will make some brief observations. That man is a threefold (and not merely twofold) entity is definitely established by the fact that he was created in the image of the triune God (Gen. 1:26). It is intimated in the account of the Fall. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food"—it appealed to her bodily appetites. Second, she saw that it was "pleasant [margin, a desire] to the eyes"—it appealed to her sensitive soul. She thought it was "a tree to be desired to make one wise"—it appealed to her intelligent spirit (Gen. 3:6). It is a serious error to say that when man fell, his spirit ceased to be, and that only at regeneration is his spirit "communicated" to him.

Fallen man is possessed equally of "spirit and soul" (Heb. 4:12). God "forms the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1), and at death the "spirit shall return unto God who gave it"

(Ecclesiastes 12:7). We agree with the Reformer Zanchius that "the spirit includes the superior faculties of the mind, such as reason and understanding; the soul, the inferior faculties such as will, affections, and desires." By means of the "soul" we feel; by the "spirit" we know (Dan. 2:3 ff.). "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with [1] all thine heart [spirit], and [2] with all thy soul, and [3] with all thy might" [physical energy] (Deut. 6:5). This corresponds with Paul's threefold distinction in our text. The constitution of man *as man* was once for all demonstrated when the Son of God became incarnate and assumed both human "spirit" (Luke 23:46) and "soul" (Matthew 26:38). Yet in saying that unregenerate man possesses a spirit, we do not affirm that he has a *spiritual nature*, for his spirit has been defiled by the Fall, though it was not annihilated and therefore is capable of being washed and renewed (Titus 3:5).

The whole nature of man is the subject of the Spirit's work in regeneration and sanctification. This fact is to be manifested by the Christian in a practical way, by every disposition and resource of his spirit, each faculty and affection of his soul, all the members of his body. His body has been made a member of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15) and is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Since the Christian's body is an integral part of his person, and since its inclinations and appetites seek to usurp the functions of his spirit and soul and dominate his actions, he is required to bring his body under the control of the higher parts of his being, so that it is regulated by a scripturally enlightened reason and not by its carnal passions. "Every one . . . should know how to possess his vessel [his body] in sanctification and honor" (1 Thess. 4:4). As in unregeneracy we yielded our members to sin, now we are to yield them as servants to righteousness unto holiness (Rom. 6:19). Someone has said, "Perfect holiness is to be the *aim* of saints on earth, as it will be the *reward* of the saints in heaven." ³

ADDENDUM: Comments from a discussion on the Puritan Board (Feb. 2009)

Guilt by Association

I've held to the bipartite view ever since I joined a reformed church in the mid 90's. It was explained to me by the pastor that the tripartite view is inconsistent with reformed theology and is typically taken by Semi-Pelagians who believe that while the spirit of man is dead in trespasses and sins because of Adam, the soul is still reachable because it is the center of the intellect and the emotions.

I've always associated tripartism (?) with pop psychology-infused evangelicalism *a la* Minirth and Meyer, Larry Crab, James Dobson, etc. I've also heard it compared with the Trinity and our being made (tripartite) in God's Image - **very dangerous ground**.

However, what's interesting is, we are acquainted with a brother (a Five Point Calvinist) who is not sure whether or not we are bipartite or tripartite and doesn't think we can know for sure this side of heaven. And I know for a fact that he does not hold to any of the things I elaborated on. Just a side note - another thing that scared me away from tripartism is Benny Hinn's using it to explain his (later recanted I believe) 9 persons in the Trinity doctrine.

RC Sproul favors bipartite.

AW Pink favors tripartite.

Trichotomy has been suspect (and rightly so) since the Apollinarian controversy.⁴

I thought that only fringe Dispensational's held to the tri- view.

³ A.W. Pink, *Gleanings from Paul*, "26. Prayer for Sanctification of the Young Saints."

⁴ Apollinaris, Bishop of Laodicea in the fourth century, denied that Christ had a human spirit.

Appeal to Various Authorities

"The majority of modern evangelical scholars prefer the dichotomous view of the human person . . . That is, . . . no real ontological distinction between soul and spirit." — **R.E. Olson**, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, p. 205. It's a very interesting question, so there is only a difference in perception, is it a synonym?

I know both words *soul* and *spirit* are often interchangeable, but these passages always make me wonder about it.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1The 5:23

Any thoughts on these?

"Moreover, there can be no question that man consists of a body and a soul; meaning by soul, an immortal though created essence, which is his 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, as when Solomon speaking of death says, that the spirit returns to God who gave it, (Ecc 12: 7) And Christ, in commending his spirit to the Father, and Stephen his to Christ, simply mean, that when the soul is freed from the prison-house of the body, God becomes its perpetual keeper." — **Calvin**: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I:XV.2

Cesar, you give the primary proof text for those who hold to a Trichotomous view of man in biblical anthropology, which can be found in Tertullian for example. However, I believe the dichotomous view has carried the day.

Discussion of the Trichotomous vs Dichotomous views of man's constitutional nature is addressed in Robert Reymond, Chas. Hodge, Louis Berkhof, and any decent Systematic Theology. I like Louis Berkhof's discussion (Sys. Theol. p. 191-196). It gives a good historical overview with pros and cons. **Reymond** contends that the Reformation Creeds all adopt a dichotomous view of man. He references the WCF 32.1 in support.

In the *Collected Writings of John Murray* vol II, chapter 2, The Nature of Man, he affirms man is dichotomy (bipartite). In chapter 3, Trichotomy he traces out this view from history up to the present. He even provides hybrid examples but concludes they can still be classified in one of the two camps. It is well worth the read. (book 2)

RC **Sproul** put me into the Bipartite camp!!!

If Sproul is Bipartite that settles it for me, I was going that way, but that settled it.

Glad to help Martin, but really, what [Sproul] wrote just made a LOT of sense! ⁵

<https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/tripartite-or-bipartite.44280/>

⁵; May be referring to Sproul, R. C. "[The Origin of the Soul](#)". Ligonier Ministries. Retrieved 6 September 2019.