

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 8, Constitution of Humanity, Trichotomy and Problems

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson and his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 8, Constitution of Humanity, Trichotomy and Problems.

We continue our study of theological anthropology by looking at the constant, continuing our study in the constitutional nature of humankind.

We started out by saying there were four views, actually three different views. Monism, we are one, and that is indivisible, so an intermediate state is denied. That's the view of modern philosophy and science, and it is erroneous because the Bible teaches an intermediate state.

Dichotomy or anthropological dualism says we are two parts, a body and an immaterial part, soul or spirit. Usually, the Bible speaks of it as in pronouns: I desire to depart and be with Christ, Philippians 1, 2 Corinthians 5. We will be absent from the body and present with the Lord like that. Trichotomy says that not only are spirit and soul sometimes distinguished in scripture, which is true, but they are also different parts and ontological constituents of human nature.

The soul is defined as the seat of affections, desires, emotions, and will and is distinguished from the spirit, which is supposedly that which knows and is capable of God's consciousness and communication with God. The fourth view, which I like better, which I have landed on, is conditional unity, psychosomatic unity or holistic dualism. It says, yes, we are two parts.

The intermediate state convinces us that there is a separable human spirit or soul or immaterial part. Nevertheless, looked at from the perspective of the Bible's whole story, this separation of body and soul is abnormal and temporary because we were made as holistic beings in the first place. We live that way now and we will live that way after the resurrection of the body.

So, really, three views, monism, dichotomy, trichotomy, and then this conditional unity, psychosomatic unity, and holistic dualism is a modern and improved version of dichotomy, which is attuned to the biblical story and emphasizes that the normal state of affairs is for body and soul to be together. We then looked at some passages that affirm the intermediate state. In Luke 23:43, Jesus told the repentant thief, today you will be with me in paradise.

That was not in their bodies, that was in their immaterial parts. Philippians 1:23, Paul desires to depart this life, to depart the body and be with Christ, which he says is better by far. Hence, to know Jesus in the body now while we're alive is good.

To die and be with Christ is better because all sin is gone, and we're in Jesus' immediate presence. But the best is yet to come, it is the resurrection of the body with God putting together body and soul once more. 2 Corinthians 5:6, and 8, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

That's the best one. And J.P. Moreland is a philosopher at Talbot Seminary. I once went to an ETS talk, and boy, did he bless me because there are all these questionable things now where evangelical theologians are making concessions, and this is one of them.

They are inclined toward monism, and I say no, that is just wrong. It's neater to be monistic, but the Bible isn't always neat. Sometimes it's messy.

And Moreland, I forget the three or four examples he gave; every one of them was exactly what I had thought doing the painstaking, slow work of exegesis over all those years. And one of those areas was this very one. He said, we are two parts.

It is unmistakable. And the bottom line proof text is 2 Corinthians 5:6, and 8. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. What is present with the Lord? Obviously, there's an immaterial part.

I did mention that usually, the intermediate state is spoken of by believers. Two places it's spoken of for unbelievers, which ends up being an intermediate hell. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is one place.

And 2 Peter 2:9 is another one. But Erikson is right. The intermediate state, which the Bible teaches, so we must too, is incomplete and abnormal.

Even pastors do this. They correctly teach to be absent from the body is present with the Lord. And then they extrapolate that eternally without realizing it, denying the resurrection of the body.

And that is a mistake in systematic theology. Trichotomous proof texts. There are two passages upon which trichotomy stands.

1 Thessalonians 5, 23 and Hebrews 4:12. I think trichotomy does not stand. So, I want to look at these texts carefully.

By the way, I'll say it again. Sometimes the Bible distinguishes soul from spirit. Aha, that proves trichotomy.

No, it doesn't. No, it doesn't. There's a whole raft of things.

Conscience, will, heart, mind, soul, spirit. Those aren't entities. They're aspects.

They're ways of viewing the interior life of man or something like that. Sometimes, the Bible actually distinguishes soul from spirit. Spirit views human beings, maybe in a vertical dimension with God.

Sometimes, the soul views human beings in the body, especially in a more horizontal aspect relating to the creation and fellow human beings. But that does not mean separate parts, constituents, entities, or ontological elements. It does not mean that.

1 Thessalonians 5:23. Read the context. Rejoice always. 5:16. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit. Do not despise prophecies. But test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirits, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us and so forth.

Paul has completed a list of practical exhortations in verse 22. He now uses two optatives.

It's a mood or mode in Greek that expresses a wish, a desire to express what has been called a wish prayer, a sub-genre of the epistolary genre. That is, a wish prayer is an expression of a wish or good intentions, which at the same time is Godward. FF Bruce Ward Biblical Commentary at this place talks about a wish prayer.

Paul uses two optatives to express a wish prayer for the Thessalonian believers. The first active, the second passive. Paul emphasizes by word order and the intensive use of autos that God alone can answer prayers and sanctify the Thessalonians.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you and so forth. The wish prayer of 5:23 and 24 can profitably be studied with the earlier one in 3:11 through 13. Now may our God and Father himself, 1 Thessalonians 3.11, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Both wish prayers, number one, begin with the intensive use of autos, which gets translated as may God himself or may God and Father, the God and Father, him, our God and Father himself. It intensifies.

Two, they follow it with a reference to God. The earlier passage includes Christ at this point, implying his equality with God.

Three, use aorist optatives to express the wish prayer.

Four, mention holiness. And five, end on an eschatological note. These two wish prayers have some great similarities, some similarities.

Paul had earlier said important things about sanctification in this letter. 3:13, 4:3 through 6. Now in 5:23, he prays that God would bring about this sanctification. He asks God to consecrate the Thessalonians, to consecrate the Thessalonians wholly, W-H-O-L-L-Y, or through and through.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of Christ. This sanctification is so important to Paul that he repeats it in another independent clause. He prays the Thessalonians would be kept blameless until the Lord Jesus comes again.

He expands on the concept of his readers being wholly, W-H-O-L-L-Y, sanctified, or ESV, completely sanctified. He prays that their whole spirit, soul, and body might be preserved blamelessly at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Your whole spirit, soul, and body is an expansion of you wholly from 5:23. They're both in 5:23 from the first part of that verse.

Paul asks that God might keep the Thessalonians in the entirety of their beings at the time Christ comes again. His emphasis is on the unity of their persons. This is communicated by the singular verb, may it be kept, as well as by the singular adjective, holakleron.

That is, may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept. That be kept is singular. May be kept blameless.

It's singular. So, the three aspects, spirit, soul, and body, are viewed as a unity. We know it because of the verb and the adjective being singular.

The verb speaks of the three elements and the adjective describing it. But the three together add but little to the sense of your hearts in 3:13. Are hearts another part of human constitution? No, they're not, and they never were intended to be. Of course, the heart in our body is, but we're not talking about that.

The pump that pumps your blood. It's talking about your insides. The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between spirit and soul, an ontological one, is forced.

Note Bruce's comparison of your hearts with the wish prayer from the wish prayer of 3:11 to 3:13 with body, soul, and spirit. In 5:23. This is a quotation. This whole thing is F.F. Bruce's comments.

It is precarious to construct. I'm sorry, I have jumped down. I'll get to the emphasis in a moment.

Paul prays God would keep the Thessalonians in the entirety of their beings until Christ returns. His emphasis is on the unity of their persons because of the singular verb and singular adjective. The emphasis is on the entirety of their beings rather than on their individual parts.

Nevertheless, their whole beings are spoken of by listing various aspects, not especially parts, but aspects of human nature. Man is body, soul, and spirit. Body refers to man's material part.

Spirit and soul to his immaterial part. I thus acknowledge some difference between spirit and soul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Yet I do not think that two distinct constituents of human nature are implied here any more than by similar expressions of man's total being in Deuteronomy 6:5. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Or Matthew 22:37. You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Are those four parts distinguished from body? No. No, they're just rhetorical accumulation to mean love the Lord your God with all you have and are. Same for Luke 10:27. F. F. Bruce comments on 1. Thessalonians 5.23. Quote, it is precarious to construct a tripartite, a three-part doctrine of human nature on the juxtaposition of the three nouns pneuma, psuche, and soma, spirit, soul, and body.

The three together give further emphasis to the completeness of sanctification for which the writers pray. Exactly. But the three together add but little to the sense of your hearts in 3:13. The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between spirit and soul is forced. F. F. Bruce. Commentary on the Thessalonian epistles.

Note Bruce's comparison of your hearts from the wish prayer of 3:11-13 with body, soul, and spirit in 5:23. My question, where would heart fit in a trichotomist view of human nature? Answer: no, it's not a part of human nature. No, it's not a part of human nature any more than spirit and soul are parts. So, I suppose I would say a trichotomist reading of this passage shows a failure in understanding rhetoric, understanding language, and making entities out of that which are not intended to be entities by the writer, who in this case is Paul.

The other trichotomist proof text, without which there'd be no trichotomy, is Hebrews 4:12. We're going to see other problems of trichotomy. The definitions that I read earlier do not hold. That's the problem with it.

You might find a couple of passages you could read those definitions into, but by and large, I'll show you that it doesn't work. Hebrews 4, he's speaking about the rest of God after his creation that Joshua promised and Israel failed to obtain. Hebrews 4:11, let us therefore strive to enter that rest.

Now, it's a rest from knowing the Lord and Jesus, who said, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. But even more so, it is the final eternal rest of God's people, as in Revelation 14, where believers die in the Lord and rest from their labors. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, Hebrews 4:11, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience as the fathers showed in the wilderness.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. The writer of the epistles of the Hebrews has been warning his readers of the danger of disobedience.

In verse 12, related to the previous verses by the conjunction *gar*, or for, he speaks of God's word being able to penetrate to the depths of a person's being to disclose disobedience within. He uses five predicate adjectives, two of them participles, to describe the word in terms of this dynamic heart-searching function. He begins, for the word of God is living and active.

God's word is here spoken of as dynamic and powerful. It's able to accomplish the purposes for which God uttered it. Compare Isaiah 55:11, my word does not return to me void, and so forth.

The word of God is further described as sharper than any double-edged sword, in that it pierces man both without and within. The word is able to penetrate the human heart and disclose any disobedience lurking there. That's the point of this verse in its literary and historical context.

It pierces to the division of soul and spirit, and it penetrates to the separation of joints and marrow. Are we to understand these two pairs of nouns as designating the constituents of man's non-material parts, soul and spirit, and material parts, joints, and marrow? One may say yes and bring forth as evidence the fact that joints and marrow are indeed distinctive entities in our bodily makeup. One immediately encounters difficulty, though.

There are many other parts of our man's physical being, skin, bones, blood, muscles, sinew, etc. Joints and marrow do not exhaustively describe man's material composition. Furthermore, our text goes on to describe the word of God is able to judge the thoughts and deliberations of the heart.

Back to heart again. How do heart and cardia relate to soul and spirit? Is man composed of three non-material entities: body, soul, spirit, and heart? It is safer to regard the division of soul and spirit as, quote, rhetorical accumulation of terms, close quote, to express the whole being of man. Bruce, Commentary in Hebrews, New International Commentary on the New Testament.

The point is that, quote, no separation could be more intimate than that between soul and spirit or between joints and marrow, close quote. Philip Hughes, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. The penetrating word of God is able to judge our inmost thoughts.

It probes, quote, the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light close quote. Bruce, thoughts and deliberations are not to be construed as minute differentiations of the mental life of man. They're virtually synonymous and describe the searching qualities of God's word.

The next verse goes on to tell how all creation is open and laid bare to God's eyes. Nothing is hidden from him. In context, a writer is urging his readers to obedience by describing God's intimate knowledge of the human heart.

Passages are problematic for trichotomy. Remember the definition, and it is very hard to find a systematic theology that advocates trichotomy. I know it's a common view among people.

I've even heard some pastors do it, and they just read those verses. Hebrews 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and just assume their conclusion. But here is the Schofield reference Bible, New Schofield, which is certainly somewhat helpful as a tool.

The soul is the seat of affections, desires, emotions, and will. The soul is a source of affections, desires, emotions, and will. The spirit is the seat of God-consciousness and communication with God.

All right, I got it. Passages are problematic for trichotomy. In Luke 1:46-47, in her Magnificat, Mary prays, quote, My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, close quote.

Here soul and spirit seem to be used synonymously as capable of God consciousness and communication with God. I thought only the spirit did that and not the soul. By the way, I'm showing that what I'm doing is problematic.

But I can't even do it for every single passage, so somebody could still say, Aha, you eliminated 90% of that, but over here, I could read this in. Our goal is not to read into the Bible. It is to read out of the Bible its meaning.

In this case, it's the meaning of these words. Likewise, in John 12:27, Jesus is said to be troubled in soul, ESV, or heart, NIV. And in 13:21, the Savior is troubled in spirit.

These usages sound very much like Johannine variation to me. Compare Leon Morris' studies in the fourth gospel, chapter five, variation, a feature of the Johannine style. Both spirit and soul are used in these passages to denote the seed of affections, desires, and emotions.

Wait a minute, I thought that was the providence of soul and not spirit. You mean the biblical writers are not following these definitions? No. Compare grief, referred to the soul, 1 Samuel 1:10, Hannah.

2 Peter 2:8, Lot. And compare grief, referred to the spirit, Isaiah 54:6, Acts 17:16, Paul. It will not do to claim that the spirit survives death, as in 1 Corinthians 5:5, but not the soul.

1 Peter 1:9 and James 1:21 speak of the salvation of believers' souls. Compare Revelation 6.9, the souls under the altar cried out to God, demanding vengeance. And Hebrews 12:23, the spirits of righteous men made perfect.

Spirits, for the intermediate, the non-physical part of human beings surviving death, in Hebrews 12:23. Souls, Revelation 6:9, for the same part of man surviving death. Are they really two different parts? Man is comprehensively designated as body and soul or body and spirit. The former designation is found in Matthew 10.28. Jesus spoke, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Is Jesus omitting certain parts? The spirit? No. He's talking about all human beings.

Note that here the soul undergoes judgment. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, spirit and flesh seem to comprehensively designate human nature. "let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit. Perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

Is there another area called soul? Another aspect, constituent called soul? No, there isn't. He could have said soul and flesh, but he didn't.

And that would mean the same thing as spirit and flesh. He could have said heart and flesh. Also in 1 Corinthians 7:24, quote, an unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs.

Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in body and spirit. Is part of her left out? Oh, wait a second. I thought spirit was the part that was devoted to the, it doesn't work.

James 2:25 teaches the body without the spirit is dead. Dying is described as a departure of the soul. Genesis 35:18, 1 Kings 17:21, Matthew 10:28. It's also described as departure of the, you guessed it, spirit.

Psalms 31:5, Matthew 27:50, Luke 9:55. 50 fun, oh, it is fun. Luke 9:55, Acts 7:59. One more time, dying is described variously as departure of the soul. Luke 35:18, sheesh, sorry.

Genesis 35:18, 1 Kings 17:21, Matthew 10:28. And other times scripture describes death as departure of the spirit. Psalm 31:5, Matthew 27:50, Luke 9:55. And Acts 7:59. The dead are sometimes referred to as souls. Revelation 6.9 and sometimes as spirits, Hebrews 12.23. Conclusion on the constitutional nature of humankind.

With dichotomy, I grudgingly acknowledge the existence of man's material and immaterial parts. It's messy, but that's how it is. We don't have our theory and make the Bible conform to it.

However, I would emphasize as most important, our unity. The union of body and soul is normal. Scripture does teach the existence of an intermediate state in which man's immaterial part lives on lives an incorporeal existence.

It's because of that enemy death that we know about that. And death is the last enemy to be destroyed, 1 Corinthians 15 tells us. However, this state, the intermediate state, is temporary and incomplete.

Our final state will be eternal life as unified persons with glorified bodies on a new earth underneath a new heaven. John Cooper in *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* speaks of man as a holistic dualism. I therefore criticize Hoekema, one of my heroes, for rejecting dichotomy.

He thinks he can reject it and still believe in psychosomatic unity. He can't really because he affirms an intermediate state. There is actually a theological inconsistency.

He's a great man. I used his books for my whole teaching career as solid, biblical, reformed, evangelical, fair, entreating others with a good Christian spirit, and clear as a bell. Excursus.

We conclude this lecture with a brief excursus on the origin of the soul. And I'll just skip to the end. We don't know.

The Bible doesn't tell us where the soul originates in the human being. Two Christian positions, nevertheless, and that's why I'm talking about this, on this issue are tradutionism and creationism. Tradutionism, T-R-A-D-U-C-I-A-M-I-S-M.

Tradutionism and creationism. Charles Hodge defines tradutionists as those, quote, who deny that the soul is created. They affirm it is produced by the law of generation, being as truly derived from one's parents as the body.

Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, Volume 2, page 68. I'll date myself. Back in the late Middle Ages when I went to seminary, we read Charles Hodge's three volumes.

That's when men were men in those days, and we rode uphill on our horse. That's enough of that. Hodge defines creationism as the view that, quote, the soul of the child is not generated or derived from the parents but is created by an immediate agency of God.

Hodge, Volume 2, page 70. Hodge's conclusions to his discussion of these positions deserve quotation. In other words, I'm chickening out, quoting Charles Hodge.

Systematic Theology, Volume 2, pages 75 and 76. Just doesn't seem to be something the Bible would address. Yes, we have souls, but as to whether we get them from our parents or God infuses us at the time of conception, I can't say.

The object of this discussion, Hodge wrote, is not to arrive at a certainty as to what is not clearly revealed in Scripture, nor to explain what is on all sides admitted to be inscrutable. Oh, I like this, but to guard against the adoption of principles that are in opposition to plain and important doctrines of the word of God. Amen to that.

If traditionalism teaches that the soul admits of abscission or division, or that the human race is constituted of numerically the same substance, or that the son of God assumed into personal union with himself the same numerical substance which sinned and fell in Adam, then it is to be rejected as both false and dangerous. What he's doing is not making an affirmation, but he's guarding things by rejecting errors. I agree.

I couldn't even think up some of these errors. No doubt they have appeared in church history. But if without pretending to explain everything, amen, it simply

asserts, this is tradutionism , but if without pretending to explain everything, tradutionism simply asserts that the human race is propagated in accordance with the general laws which secures that like begets like, that the child derives its nature from its parents through the operation of physical laws, attended and controlled by the agency of God, whether directive or creative, as in all other cases of the propagation of living creatures, it may be regarded as an open question or matter of indifference.

I agree. Creationism does not necessarily suppose that there is any other exercise of the immediate power of God in the production of the human soul than such as takes place in the production of life in other cases. It only denies that the soul is capable of division, that all humankind is composed of numerically the same essence, and that Christ assumed numerically the same essence that sinned in Adam.

The problem with creationism is, does God create a sinful soul, or does God create a pure soul, and when it enters the human fetus, it then becomes sinful? That's a mess. So, I agree with Hodge. The Bible doesn't teach either tradutionism , we get our souls from our parents or creationism, God especially creates them for each baby in the womb, I suppose at conception.

But we should certainly reject errors, and I'm happy to say the Bible doesn't say, so we don't need to take a position either. Thank you for your good attention. Lord willing, in our next lecture, we'll take up the second main part of our course, which is the doctrine of sin. Thank you.

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