

No.4. The Nature of Man – The Soul

With regard to his *nature* or his *essence* man was created and constituted a unique and separate being, completely distinct from all other earthly creatures. Last week in our initial consideration of the nature of man it was stated that man “is comprised or constituted of both body and soul”. This is the position that is adopted in the creeds of the Reformation. WCF ch. 32 sect. 1 – “*The bodies of man, 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.*” While this statement from the Confession is specifically dealing with the issue of the state of men after death, yet its language indicates that with regard to nature man is a being with a body and a soul.

HUMAN PERSONALITY INCLUDES THE SOUL AS WELL AS THE BODY

In our last study we focused primarily on the body of man. One of the points made was that the body is an integral part of human personality. One of the striking proofs of this point is drawn from the teaching of Scripture with regard to the burial of the body of the deceased. Scripture essentially speaks of *persons being buried* when it describes the burial of various individuals. Therefore, the body laid in the grave is just not a mere body without identity: it is the body of the *person* who has departed this world, thus what is laid in the grave is still integral to the person who died. For example, the Biblical data frequently uses proper names when recording the burial of the bodies of various individuals proving that the body is an integral part of human personality. However, by the same token the same Biblical data proves that man has a soul. Take again the words of Acts 8: 2 – “*Devout men carried Stephen to his burial.*” What they carried was, of course, Stephen’s body – a lifeless corpse. And, as we have noted, Stephen as a person is identified with that body – it is his body though lifeless; it is an integral part of his personality.

But here is the vital point in this Biblical record that proves in a simple but clear way that man has a soul: since a person – in this case Stephen – continues to be identified with that which is lifeless, then there must be another aspect to that person that is not subject to the decease that has befallen the body. The clear fact is that Acts 8: 2 reveals that Stephen as a person survived death. In other words the Scripture shows that there is an entity in man on the basis of which personality survives. There is an aspect of man’s personality distinguished from the body and possessing qualities by virtue of which it does not experience the decease or the dissolution that befalls the body in death. And this other entity in man’s personality is what Scripture designates *spirit* or *soul*.

OTHER SCRIPTURAL PROOF FOR THE TWO PARTS OF HUMAN PERSONALITY

1. Matt 10: 28 – in this verse Christ speaks of the soul as being distinct from the body and as being untouchable in contrast with the body. It is appropriate at this point to note a few details about the word for “soul.” The original word for soul is *psuche* and has various usages in the N.T.

(a) It is sometimes translated *life* and in such places it refers to a person’s life as lived in a body in this world; and in many of these instances it refers to that life being laid down in death, John 15: 13. In this verse the word for “life” is *psuche* the standard word for “soul” being rendered “soul” 40 times in the N.T. But it is translated “life” in John 15: 13 for it is used with regard to a person’s whole earthly life and existence being laid down in death. It is Christ who speaks here and He is essentially speaking of His own death when He laid down His life. He uses the same word in other verses when referring to laying down His life for sinners – Matt 20: 28, John 10: 11 etc. However, Christ does not mean that His actual human soul was killed or ceased to be, for on the cross He commended His actual spirit or soul to the Father.

(b) The word *psuche* also is used of the whole person. Acts 2: 41 – “*There were added unto them about three thousand souls.*” 1 Pet 3: 20 – “*eight souls were saved by water.*” In both cases it is obvious that the word “souls” is used of whole persons – 3000 people converted at Pentecost; and 8 people saved within the ark.

(c) Then the word *psuche* is employed in what might be termed a theological or philosophical sense as it is here in Matt 10: 28. In this verse and its context Christ is seeking to encourage & console the disciples with regard to their earthly ministry in the face of all their trials. In v.28 He warns them of the real potential of experiencing martyrdom. But He encourages them by teaching them that while men could kill the body they could not kill the soul. In other words, Christ reveals that the soul is not subject to the destructive force or power to which the body is subject. Therefore, in the personality of man there is a duality. Man is not pure matter alone or pure spirit alone but has two constituent parts, namely “body” and “soul.”

2. 1 Cor 7: 34 & 2 Cor 7: 1 – we take these two verses together because they deal with the same subject, namely sanctification. The point made is that sanctification encompasses the whole person. But in both verses in the terms used the distinction between the body and the spirit is implied.

3. Acts 7: 59 & James 2: 26. In the first instance, Stephen calls on the Lord to receive his spirit even as “they stoned” him. In the words “*they stoned Stephen...*” the whole person of Stephen is in view. The stones rained down on his body undoubtedly causing tremendous pain. But at the same time he commended his spirit to the Lord and Christ received it. Thus, clearly in view in this verse is the fact that in the one person, Stephen, there are the two parts of human personality and while they belong to the one person, they are distinct from each other. In the second verse James 2: 26 the distinction between body & soul is clearly enunciated. This verse also asserts that it is the soul or spirit that is what is called *the animating principle* – there can be no life or animation without the spirit.

4. Phil 1: 23 & 2 Cor 5: 8 – in these verses Paul refers to his disembodied state and that of all believers brought about by death. His words clearly show the distinction between body & soul. He speaks of being absent from the body and departing (from the body obviously) to be with Christ. Thus, in both verses the body & the soul are in view, but so also is the distinction between the two. Paul speaks of his leaving his body behind but he himself being with Christ, the reference being to the spirit.

Thus, we may rightly conclude that man is spirit or soul as well as body. Man possesses an entity totally different from his body, endowed with qualities of such a nature that it is not subject to the dissolution that the body suffers at death – this is his soul or spirit.