



Conducted by
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This month I would like us to consider a question that was put to me recently on the fascinating subject of **THE NATURE OF MAN.**

Let me begin by stating that the most complete and plainest - description of the nature of Man is found in 1st Thess. 5:23, where Paul prays,

"May the God of peace Himself, sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Here, the apostle clearly reveals that man is a triune being, consisting of spirit and soul and body, and even although this is the only verse in the Bible in which the three-fold nature of Man is mentioned, these three elements, body, soul and spirit, are referred to in different combinations in other places, in both the Old and the New Testaments.

1. In the Old Testament, for instance, in his divinely given wisdom, Solomon refers to the *body* and the *spirit*. He states that at death, the *body* returns to the dust of the earth, and the *spirit* goes back to God who gave it, Eccles. 12:7.

Clearly, then, a distinction must be made between the *body* and the *spirit*.

2. In Matt. 10:28, the Lord Jesus himself speaks of those who are able to kill the *body*, but who are unable to kill the *soul*. This statement proves that *body* and the *soul* are also different.

3. Heb. 4:12 states that the Word of God is able to pierce, 'to the *division of soul and spirit*'. This means that the difference between the '*soul*' and the '*spirit*' must be recognized.

We should also recognize that the '*spirit*' referred to here is not the *Holy Spirit*, but the *human spirit*. In Romans 8:16, this distinction is made very clear, when Paul states that "*the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God*", and in 1st Cor. 5:4, he even speaks of '*my spirit*'.

And, again, in Heb. 12:23, contrasting the assembly of the Israelites at Mount Sinai with the assembly of the Hebrew Christians at Mount Zion, the writer tells them, "... you have come... to the *spirit of just men* made perfect".

Look, then, at what we have here.

Body and spirit	Ecc. 12:7
Body and soul	Matt. 10:28
Soul and spirit	Heb. 4:12

Bear in mind that, in these verses, where these three elements are mentioned they are not being offered as an exposition of Man's nature and should be considered in the context in which we find them. It is in the verse in 1st Thess. 5:23, already mentioned, that we have a definitive statement as to the nature of Man, made by the inspired Apostle.

Beginning in Genesis.

Of course, the logical place at which to begin any study of Man is with the familiar

chapter of the book of Genesis, where his creation is recorded.

Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of Man's *physical* being - his body.

God formed or fashioned or moulded, that body out of the ground, and we read that God "*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Man became a living being*".

The word '*being*' has been preferred by later translators, rather than the word '*soul*' used in the 'Authorized Version', because the original word '*nepshesh*' does not mean '*soul*' in the special *New Testament* sense. In fact, in the Old Testament, where the word '*nepshesh*' occurs 745 times, the translators of the Authorized Version have rendered it by at least 30 different words or phrases. So the difference between that Hebrew '*nepshesh*' or the Old Testament and the Greek '*psuche*' of the New Testament, is easily recognizable.

Furthermore, we should not suppose that Man was a '*dead soul*', until God breathed into him '*the breath of lives*' - (the word '*life*' is plural in the Hebrew text). It was the entrance of '*the breath of lives*' which actually constituted him '*Man*'. Notice, that the word '*became*' is emphatic. Read the verse in this way;

God '*breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives, and Man came into being - a living soul*'. That phrase, '*a living soul*', is adjectival and describes and defines Man after God breathed life into the form which He had shaped.

Here we see the difference between Man and the rest of Creation.

'*Life*' - animal life - is something which Adam shared with every other living creature by God, but the difference between the other creatures and Man - (and the Hebrew word '*adam*' means '*man*') - lies in the fact that God said '*Let us make Man after our own image, after our likeness*' (Gen. 1:26).

Only with reference to Man is this said, and it is this '*likeness to God*' which uniquely constituted Man a rational and moral being, possessing a conscience that enabled him to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience. It is in this sense that Man is a soul - a Self, having self-awareness and self-consciousness.

Furthermore, not only is he superior to all other living creatures on Earth because he possesses this moral awareness, the gulf between Man and the rest of Creation was further emphasized and endorsed when God assigned to him dominion over all other living creatures (Gen. 1:26). In fact, it is impossible to thoughtfully read the first two chapters of Genesis without recognizing the unbridgeable gulf between Man and the rest of the animal world.

How, then, do these three constituent parts of Man relate to each other?

The question is sometimes '*Does the body have a soul?*', but I suggest that it would be truer to say, '*The soul has a body*', because, as I have just stated, the '*soul*' is Man's unique self. It is the part of his being which, because it is rational and moral, determines the actions performed by his body, and which, therefore, renders him personally accountable for what he does. Thus, it is Man's '*soul*' which will ultimately be either saved or lost, depending on his response to the offer of the salvation which was made possible by the coming of the Christ into the world. (See Heb. 10:39, 1st Peter 1:9 and 1:22).

1. The Body is of the earth and for the earth.

We might describe the body as '*Earth-conscious*', since it is the physical tool or instrument, by means of which his '*soul*' or '*self*' - by its very nature is invisible - is able to function in a physical world.

Even when the Lord Jesus came into the world, although He existed *'in the beginning with God'*, it was necessary that *'the Word'* should *'become flesh'* and *'tabernacle'* among us, John 1:14. The Lord *needed* a physical body. Without the human form that he took on Himself, (Phil. 2:6-8), it would have been impossible for Him to fulfil the unique purpose for which He came.

He needed a body:-

- 1) to be able to *communicate with mankind* in a personal and unmistakable and uncomplicated manner;
- 2) to *present the 'signs'* which were to be the authentication and endorsement of His Messiah-ship;
- 3) to set the human race *the perfect example of obedience* to the will of the Father;
- 4) and, above all, by means of that perfect life, *to demonstrate His worthiness to become the perfect offering* for the sin of the world.

The Word, *must* become flesh. This was the divine plan, and it is why we find the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, in ch. 10:5, placing the words of the Psalmist into the Lord's mouth, *'a body hast Thou prepared for me'* (Psa. 40:6-8).

(You will notice, I am sure, that the *'body'* was *prepared* for the *'me'*).

Peter, also, in 2nd Peter 1:14, wrote of *'putting off my tent'*.

Man, therefore, is not merely an animated construction of flesh and bones; he is a soul, a *'self'*, housed in a physical body; and, since his body is designed for earthly life, at death, the body returns to the earth. God told Adam, *"in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to the dust you shall return"* (Gen. 3:19).

2. At death the believer's soul leaves the body and goes to "be with Christ".

In Phil. 2:20-24, Paul, a prisoner of Rome contemplating the possibility of martyrdom, declares that so far as he is personally concerned, *'to die is gain'*.

Nevertheless, he admits that he faces a dilemma. He recognizes that even though his *personal* desire is to *'depart and be with Christ which is far better'*, the Philippian Christians need his presence.

In a similar strain, he tells the Corinthians, (2nd Cor. 5:1 ff), that even *'if his 'earthly tent', his body, is destroyed, he has a house 'not made with (human) hands, eternal in the heavens', and he longs to 'put on' his heavenly dwelling. He says, "We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord". We are of good courage and we would rather be away from the body, and at home with the Lord'*.

3. What of the 'spirit' of Man?

There is an interesting statement in the Book of Job, ch. 34:8, which tell us that *"it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding"*.

If we consider the Body to be *Earth-conscious*, and the Soul to be *Self-conscious*, we may think of the spirit as being *'God-conscious'*. In other words, it is that part of Man's nature which enables him to reach out to, and communicate with, God.

It is the *spiritual* dimension in Man's character, and, here again, we see the difference between Man and other creatures.

Only Man says, *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God"* Psalm 42:2.

Only Man is encouraged to *"seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him"*, and only Man is given the assurance that *"He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17: 27-28).

According to Eccles. 12:7, at death, *"the spirit returns to God Who gave it"*.

Let me use a simple illustration - the limitations of which I readily recognize!

When I am away from home, I use the telephone as a means of communication with my wife. When I am at home we talk face to face. I do not need the telephone.

In a somewhat similar way, God has endowed us with the ability to contact and communicate with Him, whilst we are here on earth. When we are 'at home with the Lord' we no longer need the telephone!

I conclude with Paul's prayer for the Church in Thessalonica.

"May the God of peace himself, sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ".

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