

The Nature of Man

A concise, Biblical exposition

Introduction

I have written on this matter a number of times; within other papers and also in larger works that were not widely published; indeed, I wrote a manuscript book on this subject decades ago. However, having spent many years considering this topic, I believe that I now have more clarity than before.

The key issue in view

This paper will be, in concise terms, an exposition of the Bible's teaching that man is tripartite in nature. This subject is sometimes called 'trichotomy', from the word meaning 'a division into three categories'.¹

Why write on this now?

The reasons for this present paper are these:

The first reason is because I have been asked to do it. I get asked questions on these issues from time to time and, though covered briefly elsewhere, I have not devoted a recent paper entirely to the subject. Furthermore, eminent teachers have asked me to give a detailed explanation because they are in the dark on the matter.

This subject is often ignored in Reformed systematics; indeed, many otherwise sound theologians speak derisively of it. This is a great mistake and shows the futility of following the systems of men. No school has all the answers and each generation must find the truth for itself, not rely on the strictures of men and tradition.

Most discussions of the nature of man in conservative circles feature a dichotomy ('two parts') position; that is, the teaching that man is just body and soul. The fallacy of this traditional position is that such writers constantly find themselves having to use the words 'spirit' and 'soul' as differing terms when they should be synonymous in their system.

The subject is absolutely vital in order to understand the truth about sanctification; indeed, no pastor can properly counsel others regarding sanctification issues if he does not understand this matter properly.

Teachers that do not understand trichotomy constantly find themselves writing utterly erroneous counsel and even affirm that they do not understand aspects of the nature of man. Thus famous and beloved preachers have made very erroneous statements, such as placing the believer's sin in the body, making the body evil, just like some medieval legalist Catholic.²

The conflict of sanctification for them is between the sinful material body and the spirit. This is virtually Platonic dualism: spiritual = good, material = bad. As we have just

¹ From Greek *trikha* 'threefold' from *treis* 'three', compare 'dichotomy'.

² As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans 8:5-17*, p132ff or John MacArthur Jnr, *NTC Romans 1-8*, pp. 337, 418.

explained, the body is a neutral vessel and is not the source of sin. Sin arises from temptations which can come via the body (senses, sensual lust) or from the mind, but it is the mind which chooses to sin. Adam's sin was his choice to eat for enlightenment, not his body's interest in the fruit. If sin only arises in the body, what about the majority of sins that arise in the mind which many Christians appear to suffer from (bitterness, anger, malice, jealousy, sadness, fear, hate etc.).

For this reason Paul tells us: '**For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ**' (2 Cor 10: 4-5). Our weapons are not fleshly, the strongholds are not in the body but in the mind and each thought must be taken prisoner. Peter also tells us that our warfare is in the soul not the body: '**abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul**', (1 Pt 2:11).

What about other popular works on this matter?

It is true that there are many perfectionist, Charismatic and Higher Life writings on this subject. Some of these have a glimpse of the truth but many follow poor source material (such as secular psychology, philosophy or heathen religions).

The problem with these is that most of them are very superficial and ignore very important questions. They are often less than Biblical in their investigative research and come up with superficial, populist conclusions; often these are tied to a Charismatic mindset.

Most of them fail to connect the dots, and thus do not explain how trichotomy affects other issues, such as what is the old man, where is the conscience, what is the heart and what is the flesh? If these are not explained, understanding the differentiation between spirit, soul and body will do you no good.

A concise work

Notice that this is to be a concise, layman's investigation; at least as far as that is possible. I may consider re-writing a detailed academic exposition of the matter in the future, but that is not the purpose here.

Despite this goal, I am certain that this will be a pretty detailed work occupying many pages, but I will try to be lucid and brief.

Appendix One gives a diagrammatic illustration of the structure that is explained in the text. It would be well to keep this structure in mind during reading.

I have not consulted the works of any man in the writing of this exposition but have devoted myself entirely to assessing multitudes of Scriptures and drawing my conclusions from these alone.

Technical point: 'spirit' refers to the human spirit; 'Spirit' refers to the Holy Spirit.

The reflection of the Trinity in creation

Know that the LORD, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. Ps 100:3

That now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church. Eph 3:10

Man was created to be a reflection of what God is; thus man was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). It is no surprise therefore, that the nature of man's creation is threefold.

It is really astonishing to me that otherwise good Reformed theologians insist on dichotomy when the Bible screams trichotomy. This is what happens when men follow a system. It is these same men that end up teaching law to be sanctified.

The Godhead is a Trinity

Of first importance is the nature of the Godhead. God is a Trinity of equal persons in perfect community.

We must first understand about God's nature and attributes in order to understand any doctrine; especially in the matter of man's creation.

The creation reflects the Trinity

When God created the universe, he reflected his trinitarian nature in building trichotomy into the creation. The physical universe is created as a series of trinities. Note for example:

- The main sections of the universe are three: space, time and matter.
- Space is divided into three dimensions: it is identified in the first dimension; it is seen in the second dimension and is experienced in the third dimension.
- Matter is divided into three sections: it is generated in energy; it is seen through motion and it is experienced by phenomena.
- Time is divided into three sections: it is experienced in the past; it is manifested in the present and it is set upon the future.

These are not accidents, they are the reflection of a Trinitarian God.

Man is a trinity

Is it any wonder then that man was also created as a series of trinities?

Man is divided into three main sections (there are other sub-divisions):

- The chief divisions of man are spirit, soul and body.
- The spirit contains three sections: the conscience, intuition and communion (or new man).
- The soul is divided into three sections: volition (will), emotions and intellect (mind).
- The body is commonly spoken of as being flesh, blood and bone (even though it can be further subdivided into many organs).³

We will explain these later, and also the links between them.

³ In the Bible this is usually shortened into 'flesh and blood' (Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14).

The creation of man

It is instructive to look at the act of the creation of man by God since it comprised three elements.

And the LORD God formed man *of*the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Gen 2:7

Notice the three elements:

- Man's body was made from the dust of the earth.
- God then breathed the breath of life (or 'lives' – masculine, plural, noun) into this formation of clay. This was an action of the Spirit of God upon the dust. Compare Job 33:4, 'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life'. This resulted in the spirit of man.
- As a result of these actions man became a 'living being', or rather 'a living soul' (*nephesh*).

So the creation of man includes spirit (from the breath of life), soul (a living being) and body (from dust).

God's word reaffirms this in other places:

God creates man as a soul (person, life)

The soul of my son. Gen 34:8

As her soul was departing (for she died). Gen 35:18

It *is*the blood *that*makes atonement for the soul. Lev 17:11

The soul of the people became very discouraged. Num 21:4

You will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. Deut 4:29

My soul and my body! Ps 31:9

My soul is full of troubles. Ps 88:3

God creates a spirit in man

Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it. Isa 42:5

Here (through Hebrew parallelism) the breath from God is equated as the creation of the human spirit.

The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him. Zech 12:1

This is unequivocal. God forms man with a human spirit. Man has a spirit as well as a soul. Notice also:

Then they fell on their faces, and said, 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?' Num 16:22

Remember your Creator... Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Eccles 12:6-7

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name *is*Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls *which* I have made.' Isa 57:15-16

The typology of man's tripartite nature⁴

The Tabernacle is the symbol or type of the dwelling place of God with men. Its prime antitype is therefore the person of Jesus Christ, the perfect dwelling place of God, the perfect temple of God on earth. However, in a secondary way, the Tabernacle illustrates the nature of man, who is also called to be the testimony of God and to be the dwelling place of God.

The spirit is the innermost man symbolised by the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. It is hidden away and unseen. In the spirit are the human conscience, the new man (facilitating divine communion) and the intuitive faculty for receiving spiritual things from God. God intends that the spirit should direct the man through the soul. In unbelievers this organ is dead towards God.

The soul is the executive office of the personality and all decisions pass through it. It is symbolised in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, being the place where priestly ministry occurs, where light is shed, where prayers arise and where food is placed. The soul comprises of the will, feelings and mind; or volition, emotions and intellect. The soul chooses what the man expresses in the body.

The heart is the seat of the human personality and is the gateway between the spirit and the soul. It comprises the conscience and communion, which are in the spirit, and the higher mind, which is in the soul. The heart is symbolised in the Tabernacle by the Ark set in the Holy of Holies where God dwelt. In the Ark were the tables of the commandments (representing the conscience), the manna (representing God's word, spiritual feeding, communion) and Aaron's rod that budded (representing resurrection life or the new man).⁵

The body is the means of communication with the outside world and is symbolised by the court of the Tabernacle in the open air. It responds to the decisions made by the soul.

The old nature resides somewhere in the old heart but is amorphous rather than an actual organ, being the old dispositions of the flesh. When the soul is tempted to follow the old nature, the soul becomes flesh, or the life principle of the sinful Adamic life. A fleshly (carnal) Christian is a person who is dominated by the soul following the sinful desires of the old nature. Thus lust in the old nature gives birth to sinful desires in the soul which wills the body to commit sinful acts. When the old nature is put off then the heart is pure.

Sanctification has to purify and cleanse all these three organs; but more of this later.

⁴ Taken from my paper, 'A simple paper on sanctification'.

⁵ Aaron's rod yielded almond buds. Almond trees blossom before the leaves appear in winter; thus they can represent speed and something approaching, e.g. the promise of early fruit. In Jer 12:11-16 it symbolises approaching judgment. In the lampstand of the Tabernacle there were bowls shaped like almond blossoms (Ex 25:33-35). The lampstand represents the light of God's word brought by the activity of the Holy Spirit (oil). Thus the general picture, regarding almonds, is one of an early approach of fruit associated with God's word; a promise of hope; a taste of the future blessing. The main picture in the miracle of Aaron's rod is, of course, resurrection – a dead staff bore fruit and came to life. Thus the rod with almonds speaks of resurrection life, that which was dead in sin and fruitless is regenerated, it is the new man with the promise of glorification.

The Bible clearly teaches that man is tripartite

The Bible teaches this openly

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 5:23

It is impossible for commentators to avoid the simple fact that man is tripartite (though many strive to do so by eisegesis – i.e. reading something into the text that is not there).

Not only that, God's word here explains that the tripartite nature of man is somehow closely connected to the matter of sanctification. This is incredibly important.

The Bible explodes the traditional idea of dichotomy

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

Here God's word expressly tells us that there is a division between the soul and the spirit of man.

The writer compares the human soul and spirit to joints and marrow in the body. This is to show that the soul is like a skeletal joint, a faculty that is hidden inside and yet noticeable in action; but the spirit is like marrow, that is hidden even deeper inside and never seen. The marrow is vital for life, producing blood cells; physical life depends upon bone marrow; similarly the spirit is the foundation of all spiritual life.

Since God's word so clearly teaches a division of soul and spirit, it is blasphemy for theologians to deny this and teach dichotomy.

Textual support of soul and spirit

Technical information

Spirit

- Hebrew: *ruach*. Strong's 7307. Usually translated as 'spirit' but also 'wind', 'breath' and a few other words. It appears 378 times in the KJV.
- Greek: *pneuma*. Strong's 4151. Usually translated as 'spirit' (both of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit) but also of evil spirits. It appears 385 times in the KJV.

Soul

- Hebrew: *nephesh*. Strong's 5315. Usually translated as 'soul' but also as 'life', 'person' and a few other words. It appears 751 times in the KJV. It is sometimes used for an aspect of the soul (such as emotion or mind) but the main meaning is the inner life of man; the personality.
- Greek: *psyche*. Strong's 5590. Usually translated as 'soul' but also 'life' and occasionally 'mind'. It appears 105 times in the KJV. Its meaning is usually the human soul but it can also mean breath, the human vital force, a living being, the seat of the emotions, will and mind, which all imply the human soul.

The Bible, in thousands of places, reaffirms what I have already averred. I will supply only a few texts to make the point. I will not discuss the matter of the body as everyone accepts that; the issue is the distinction between soul and spirit.

Here God's word shows that he created man's spirit and soul.

Spirit

O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh. Num 16:22

The spirit will return to God who gave it. Eccles 12:7

Thus says God the LORD, ... who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it. Isa 42:5

Thus says the LORD, who ... forms the spirit of man within him. Zech 12:1

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? Heb 12:9

Soul

The souls *which* I have made.' Isa 57:16

So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, 'As the LORD lives, who made our very souls'. Jer 38:16

Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. Ezek 18:4

Many more examples will be supplied in the text, which I do not want to needlessly repeat.

The example of Jesus

Scripture teaches that Jesus had a spirit and a soul:

And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Luke 23:46

Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death'. Matt 26:38

The Bible frequently differentiates between soul and spirit in the source of actions.

Note the following examples:

And Mary said: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour'. Lk 1:46-47

'Magnifies' is a present active tense; 'rejoiced' is the aorist (past) tense. This is the divine order of testimony: the spirit (submitted to God) acted first, then the dependent soul complies and transfers the action to the outside world through the body. The spirit first rejoiced then the soul made the body magnify the Lord.

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Ps 24:4-5

The pure heart (in the spirit – see later) initiates the process. The soul is next in line and obeys the spirit (heart) then bodily action follows (not swearing deceitfully [the lips], having clean hands).

Characteristics of the human spirit

In this section, several aspects that we cover are also placed in the heart in Scripture. This is because the heart is partly in the spirit and it is the gateway to the soul. Thus some faculties are in the heart, which is in the spirit (see later).

Conscience

The conscience is the regulator of our behaviour. It is a gift from God to reveal to us what is right and wrong; thus it conveys to us the principles of God's moral law.

The work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness. Rm 2:15

The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith. 1 Tim 1:5

When we do wrong, it convicts us:

Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one. Jn 8:9

Thus our conscience works with the Holy Spirit, being guided by him in our human spirit.

My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. Rm 9:1

The conscience is in the heart and the spirit. It is a part of the heart that is set in the spirit (the other part of the heart is in the soul – see later).

Thus the believer has a pure conscience (as long as he obeys it).

Having faith and a good conscience. 1 Tim 1:19

A pure conscience. 1 Tim 3:9

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience. 2 Tim 1:3

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men. Acts 24:16

Thus one of the faculties of the human spirit is the conscience.

Communion

Access to heaven

The regenerated Christian can communicate with God and indeed can be present in heaven (in the new man) before the throne of God.

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Eph 2:18

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. Heb 4:16

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ... let us draw near with a true heart. Heb 10:19-22

This is a spiritual activity. Therefore, there is a part of the spirit that communicates with God and intuitively hears God without physical ears.

Heaven within

The Christian also has all persons of the Trinity dwelling within him. Therefore, there has to be a place of communion within the human spirit. Since the communion is spiritual, it cannot be in the soul. In fact it is in the heart, which is the gateway of the spirit to the soul (see later).

GOD DWELLS IN OUR SPIRIT / HEART

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit'. Isa 57:15

At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. Jn 14:20

Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'. Jn 14:23

That they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. Jn 17:21

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts. 2 Cor 4:6

You also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph 2:22

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 1 Jn 4:16

JESUS DWELLS IN OUR HEARTS

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. Jn 6:56

At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. Jn 14:20

Christ lives in me. Gal 2:20

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph 3:17

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:27

Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. I Jn 3:24

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 1 Jn 4:13

THE SPIRIT DWELLS IN US

The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. Jn 14:17

The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you. Rm 8:11

The Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Cor 3:16

The Holy Spirit *who is* in you. 1 Cor 6:19

The Holy Spirit who dwells in us. 2 Tim 1:15

Worship and spiritual service

The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Jn 4:23

We should serve in the newness of the spirit. Rm 7:6

Without doubt, one of the faculties of the human spirit is spiritual communion.

Intuition

Intuition is spiritual perception; it is not rational but is supra-rational. Spiritual perception is not intellectual but is conveyed by revelation from God's Spirit. Thus even very simple

and uneducated people can know God well (notice Jesus' choice of disciples). Thinking that God can be known and spiritual things understood by mere mental activity is a great (but common) mistake.

Hearing the Spirit

As well as communicating with God, the believer hears the words of the Holy Spirit who is his guide into all truth and the counsellor in his sanctification. The Christian must have a faculty to intuitively hear this counsel and revelation.

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Jn 14:26

When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you. Jn 16:13-15

But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'. But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. 1 Cor 2:9-10

You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. 1 Jn 2:20

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. 1 Jn 2:27

Spiritual knowledge

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Eph 4:23

Part of putting on the new man, the spiritual man, is the renewing of the mind. This has a spiritual application, 'the spirit of your mind'. There is a part of the mind that functions in the heart, the higher mind (*nous*), which is different to the lower mind, which functions to direct the body. We will examine this further in looking at the heart. This mind is informed with spiritual knowledge received by the intuition – hence renewed mind (not the old way of thinking).

We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 1 Cor 2:12

Without doubt, part of the faculties of the human spirit is spiritual intuition.

Characteristics of the human soul

Mind (intellect)

Intellect; the ability to think, ponder, evaluate.

My soul knows. Ps 139:14

Knowledge is pleasant to your soul. Prov 2:10

It is not good for a soul to be without knowledge. Prov 19:2

So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* to your soul. Prov 24:14

My soul still remembers. Lam 3:20

Clearly the mind is not part of the body, it is not a material organ. But if it is not spirit either, it must be part of the soul and this clarity is needed to live righteously. [This means

that we must control our soul before we can keep the body in subjection. Victory in life is about the submission of the soul to God.]

There are many Greek words translated as 'mind', 'minds', 'mindful' etc. The mind is chiefly separated into the higher mind (see later) and the lower mind, which directs the body in a rational way. The higher mind (*nous*) is also in the heart as well as the soul.

Will (volition)

The ability to choose and determine.

My soul refuses to touch them. Job 6:7

Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD. I Chron 22:19

My soul chooses. Job 7:15

My soul keeps Your testimonies. Ps 119:167

The soul is not satisfied. Eccles 6:7

The labour of his soul. Isa 53:11

He poured out his soul. Isa 53:12

Emotions

The ability to feel; the affections.

Fear, alarm, vexation

My soul also is greatly troubled. Ps 6:3

You have known my soul in adversities. Ps 31:7

Why are you cast down, O my soul? and *why* are you disquieted within me? Ps 42:5

Sorrow

The sorrow of my soul. Ps 35:12

My soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Matt 26:38

Grief

Has not my soul grieved for the poor? Job 30:25

My eye wastes away with grief, *yes*, my soul and my body! Ps 31:9

Joy

My soul shall be joyful in the LORD; it shall rejoice in His salvation. Ps 35:9

Your comforts delight my soul. Ps 94:19

He will give delight to your soul. Prov 29:17

Desire

His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah. Gen 34:3

His soul desires. Job 23:13

The desire of your soul. 1 Sam 23:20

Love

The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 1 Sam 18:1

The heart - a gateway

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. Prov 4:23

While the chief divisions of man are three, a fourth organ is also very important due to its position in being the communication between spirit and soul. The heart is thus a springboard for human action, 'out of it *spring* the issues of life'.

The heart is like a valve; it is the channel through which things in the spirit flow to the soul to be executed in life. Thus the heart is partly in the spirit (the conscience & communion) and partly in the soul (the higher mind or *nous*).

Very often the Bible uses the word 'heart' as a précis term for the source of human life since it is the channel of the spirit to the soul.

The heart: part spirit, part soul

The heart contains the conscience and communion that is in the spirit and the higher mind of the soul:

Conscience

The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith. 1 Tim 1:5

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Heb 10:22

David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. 2 Sam 24:10 [It is the conscience that convicts us of sin; thus the conscience is in the heart.]

Communion

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'. Isa 57:15

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph 3:17

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts. 2 Cor 4:6

Mind

My heart and in My mind. 1 Sam 2:35

Serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. 1 Chron 28:9

My words come from my upright heart; my lips utter pure knowledge. Job 33:3

Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart? Job 38:36

My mind and my heart. Ps 26:2

My heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. Ps 73:21

Testing the mind and the heart. Jer 11:20

I, the LORD, search the heart, /test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways. Jer 17:10

O LORD of hosts, You who test the righteous, *and* see the mind and heart. Jer 20:12

The thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12

I am He who searches the minds and hearts. Rev 2:23

Examples of the higher mind (nous)

Nous means: the mind, including the faculties of perceiving and understanding and those of feeling, judging, determining; intellectual faculty, the understanding; the capacity for spiritual truth, the higher powers of the soul, the faculty of perceiving divine things, of recognising goodness and of hating evil; the power of considering and judging soberly, calmly and impartially.

There are a number of Greek words that are translated as ‘mind’ in the NT; but these are the places where the word *nous* is used. The sinner’s *nous* is debased and set on vanity, futility and sin since the heart has sunk into the soul; but the believer’s mind is set on heaven.

God gave them over to a debased mind. Rm 1:28

The law of my mind. Rm 7:23

With the mind I myself serve the law of God. Rm 7:25

The mind of the Lord. Rm 11:34

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Rm 12:2

Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. Rm 14:5

Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1 Cor 1:10

We have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:16

The futility of their mind. Eph 4:17

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Eph 4:23

Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Col 2:18

Not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled. 2 Thess 2:2

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. Titus 1:15

Here *is* the mind which has wisdom. Rev 17:9

Notice that the mind that is renewed, transformed, convinced, that is of Christ, that serves God’s law, that has wisdom – is the *nous*. The mind of the Lord is also the *nous*.

The wisdom gained in the heart from the new man is passed to the mind of the soul for action.

When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul. Prov 2:10

The renewed heart has spiritual knowledge of God

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ. Col 2:2

Good and bad hearts

Unregenerate hearts

The heart of sinners has sunk from its position in the spirit, the spirit is dead to God, and the heart is dominated by sensual (soulish) lusts, which then commissions sins in the body.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. Gen 6:5

The imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth. Gen 8:21

Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. Eccles 9:3

Each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me. Jer 16:12

The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked. Jer 17:9

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Matt 15:19

Carnal Christians

Carnal (fleshly) Christians (see appendix) are those who are dominated by the flesh. They have let the old nature reign (have failed to put it off) and so the heart is ruled by evil desire; the mind has been deceived by temptation. They temporarily become like the unregenerate.

I am carnal, sold under sin. Rm 7:14 [Paul is speaking as a believer.]

The carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God. Rm 8:7

I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ... for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul', and another, 'I *am* of Apollos', are you not carnal? 1 Cor 3:1-4 [Note that Paul is addressing 'brethren'.]

The recovery from this position is conviction of sin; confession of sin and repentance (changed thinking to walk correctly). This is explained in 1 Jn 1:8-9.

If this temporary condition becomes permanent, then the person committing sin can no longer be considered a Christian at all. Evil roots produce evil fruits.

A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead. Prov 21:16

Many church people fall into this category; in my experience, very many. Many habitual sins are just accepted by supposed Christians and treated as minor issues (such as losing one's temper continually, jealousy, backbiting, and slander). In Charismatic churches it is common to see even more obvious sins, such as swearing, adultery, abuse, fornication, blaspheming, unrighteousness etc.). More commonly, otherwise good people feel no qualms about schism – separating from friends, not loving the brethren, sectarianism,

splitting churches and suchlike, when these are very great sins (as Paul highlights above). The apostle John tells us that those who do this cannot be true Christians.⁶

So does Paul,

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. 1 Tim 4:1-2

Here the seared conscience is an indication of an evil heart (the conscience is in the heart). Those church people who defy their conscience and sin in their heart have succumbed to demonic ideas. These demonic doctrines perverted their thinking (the higher mind is in the heart). They then fall away from the faith (apostatise).

Here are examples of carnal behaviour:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Heb 3:12

Note that brethren can have an evil heart that is not believing in grace at that time.⁷

And David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. *There is* nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines'. 1 Samuel 27:1

David was undoubtedly elect, but here his heart was temporarily darkened, he lost faith and made an alliance with the enemies of God. This is carnal behaviour.

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God. 1 Kg 11:4

No one would deny that Solomon was elect, yet his heart was deceived to commit idolatry. This is carnal behaviour.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Heb 10:22

Hebrews is one long exhortation to press on in the true Gospel of Christ. Here the writer exhorts believers to draw near to God with a true heart. Since this is an exhortation, it must mean that Christians can fail to draw near and not have a true heart – in other words, are carnal. If failing were not possible, there would be no need for an exhortation like this.

Faithful Christians

Only Christians have a pure heart and this results from regeneration, justification and legal sanctification. Yet Christians can darken their hearts and sin if they let the old nature dominate the heart (affect their thinking in the higher mind).

My words come from my upright heart; my lips utter pure knowledge. Job 33:3

He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Ps 24:4

Truly God *is* good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. Ps 73:1

⁶ 1 Jn 2:9, 'He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now'. 1 Jn 2:11, 'He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness'. 1 Jn 3:14, 'He who does not love his brother abides in death'. 1 Jn 4:20, 'If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?'.

⁷ Maintaining the position of being in the new nature begins with faith in Christ's finished work day by day (not once only). It begins by claiming the promise in faith that I am in the new nature and then actively putting off the old nature (denying myself, taking up my cross).

Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matt 5:8

The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith. 1 Tim 1:5

Those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Tim 2:22

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Heb 10:22

Notice that those who are pure in heart are those who see God. In other words, when a person is living in the new man (has a pure heart) then communion (a faculty of the spirit) is enabled.

For there to be any holiness in the life, the first matter is having the heart pure, living in the new man; living by faith.

The chief organs of the nature of man are not evil

Of course, man has many vital organs (heart, lungs, brain, pancreas etc.) and many organic systems (vascular, skeletal, nervous etc.), but these are all subdivisions of his physiology, of his body. The Bible teaches that man's nature is composed of three chief organs, spirit, soul and body.

It is important to understand that man was created with these organs as vehicles for the divine will; these organs are not evil in themselves, as created, but they are vessels to be used to serve God. Thus, for example, the soul is not evil even though it contains a mind that has evil thoughts. The soul is the vessel that is the executive of the person. The body is the vehicle for walking on the earth to express God's character physically, but it can also be used to express sin. In the new world, after the general resurrection, saints will still have a spirit, a soul and a body.

Sanctification does not eradicate these organs but makes them holy. It does this in different ways, as we will reveal in due course.

This is important to understand. The soul is not evil; the body is not evil. Just as we do not punish the body to become holy (that is the error of asceticism) neither do we punish the soul (by abnegating the personality in submission to some spiritual power).⁸

The soul is an organ to be won and used to serve the purposes of God; indeed the NT talks about the process of progressive sanctification as 'the salvation of the soul', which we will explain later.

The purpose of the organs of man's nature: manifesting God

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. Jm 1:17-18

⁸ Many mystical cults demolish the personality (soul). As a result of submission to a demonic force, a non-Christian person subjugates his soul to that demonic force. Thus we see the glazed expressions of people trapped in mystical cults where the eyes have lost all their sparkle and the emotions, will and mind are dulled.

We who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:12

That now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church. Eph 3:10

God's purpose in the creation of man was testimony. Man is to be the reflection of God's glory and a witness to his word and character. Thus the organs of man's nature were created to be a divine channel from heaven to earth: communicated by God's Holy Spirit, to man's spirit, then to his soul for executive action and finally the body for physical expression.

Spirit

The human spirit is the organ for communication with God. Its function is spiritual perception.

Jesus perceived in his spirit Mk 2:8

My spirit makes diligent search. Ps 77:6

The soul

The soul is the organ to know oneself and for communication with other souls. It is the organ for sensual or psychic⁹ perception.

The body

The body is the organ used to communicate what is in the soul to the external world. It is physical perception.

We can illustrate the divine purpose as follows:



The damage done by sin to this purpose

The spirit

For all sinners after the Fall, the spirit has been corrupted and communication with God terminated. The spirit becomes dead to all spiritual things and is subservient to the soul.

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world. Eph 2:1-2

When we were dead in trespasses. Eph 2:5

She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. 1 Tim 5:6

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. 1 Jn 3:14

The body clearly isn't dead since it is alive and active; the soul also is not dead as it is fully functioning (thinking, feeling, and choosing). It is the human spirit that died at the Fall.

This deadness also affects the heart, even though it still functions regarding the world and the personality. The heart becomes blind to spiritual things, is separated from God and cannot know him, and the understanding is darkened and futile:

⁹ From the Greek word for 'soul'.

The futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. Eph 4:17

The spirit sinks

The reason why the heart is affected is that the spirit sinks from its unique place of communication with God and the soul and falls into the soul. The entire higher life of man is corrupted and saturated with selfishness.

Thus what should be spiritual is now sensual. The heart, which should be partly in the spirit, is now fully sunk into the soul and identified with the soul. The heart is no longer spiritual but fully sensual; the conscience becomes evil, defiled and unwise, or even numb (seared). Instead of being the messenger of God it becomes the promulgator of desire.

See:

To those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. Titus 1:15

‘Mind and conscience’ is a euphemism for ‘heart’.

Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Col 2:18

Here the mind has been dominated by the flesh.

Note also:

A deceived heart. Isa 44:20

Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Matt 15:18-19

Having their own conscience seared. 1 Tim 4:2

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. Titus 1:15

Cleanse your conscience from dead works. Heb 9:14

An evil conscience. Heb 10:22

The soul

Selfishness

The soul is corrupted to being self-focused instead of being a servant of God.

This self-focus is centred upon desire, which is usually based in the emotions or the volition but arising from the heart:

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Jm 1:14-15

The mind became iniquitous

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. Gen 6:5

The imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth. Gen 8:21

All their thoughts *are* against me for evil. Ps 56:5

Their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity. Isa 59:7

How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? Jer 4:14

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?' Matt 9:4

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts. Matt 15:19

Judges with evil thoughts? Jm 2:4

The emotions became iniquitous and selfish

The wicked boasts of his heart's desire. Ps 10:3

The desire of the wicked. Ps 112:10

The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no favour in his eyes. Prov 21:10

His evil desire. Mic 7:3

In me all *manner of evil* desire. Rm 7:8

Evil desire. Col 3:5

The will became self-centred and iniquitous

All sin in the body first has to be chosen by the will. The decision to sin is in the volition.

The wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me. Deut 28:20

Wickedness proceeds from the wicked. 1 Sam 24:13

There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness. 1 Kg 21:25

He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way *that is not good*. Ps 36:4

Your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Lk 11:39

The body

The body is corrupted to satisfy sensual desires. The corruption of the soul requires the body to commission sin. The body is also a gateway for lust.

Instead of the testimony being a downward progression from heaven to earth, it is now an upward progression of the world (and thus Satan) to corrupt the spirit.

We can illustrate this as follows:



The need of sanctification

Since all three organs have been corrupted to satisfy sensual desires, all three require cleansing. This is achieved as a result of the cross but it is applied in three ways and three tenses.

A simple summary of sanctification

I will endeavour here to keep this section as simple and brief as possible. This is not a paper on sanctification.

The triple work of God in sanctification

The Father

Chooses to sanctify his chosen people in his decrees of predestination, election and redemption.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Eph 1:4

To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Jude 1:1

The Son

Accomplishes righteousness for God's people in justification and secures a perfect standard of holiness in sanctification in himself.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 1 Cor 1:18, 30

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Heb 10:14

Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Heb 13:12

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. Col 1:21-22

The Holy Spirit

Imparts the merits of Christ and applies the work of Christ to the elect to actually secure sanctification in their persons.

By the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body. Rm 8:13

Sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Rm 15:16

God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit. 2 Thess 2:13

Sanctification of the Spirit. 1 Pt 1:2

The three forms of sanctification: definitive, progressive, final

While different theologians specify all sorts of types of sanctification, the simplest way to understand it is to break it down into the three ways it is applied by God to saints. We could also say that there are five types of sanctification if we include sanctification by the decree and election of God the Father in eternity and sanctification actually accomplished by Christ on the cross.

Definitive sanctification

The first expression of sanctification has many names: definitive, legal, positional, judicial, heavenly, and so on. I will use the term 'definitive' here.

This is the corollary of justification and adoption in heaven whereby the elect person is made to stand righteous in heaven. Not only is he declared not guilty by justification, not only is he a legal heir with Christ by adoption but he is also washed clean.

Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. 1 Cor 1:2

You were washed, but you were sanctified. 1 Cor 6:11

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. Heb 10:10

As far as the believer is concerned this affects his spirit. The new man is in the image of Christ in the human spirit and thus the believer has been definitively sanctified. The spirit is resurrected by regeneration and the contents sanctified to enable God to dwell within and for the believer to commune with heaven.

[He] raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus. Eph 2:6

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us. Heb 10:19-20

Progressive sanctification

Also called 'practical sanctification'. This is the ongoing process of sanctification that occurs in the soul of man. It involves first taking a faith position in the finished work of Christ but then involves actual effort and discipline to put that into effect. Thus it involves putting on the new man by faith and denying oneself in practice. The NT occasionally calls this the 'salvation of the soul', which results from our work.

This process of faith-work is never completed in this life and perfection is not attainable until the old nature is removed from man at the end.

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Cor 7:1.

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself ... he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 2 Tim 2:21

Those who are being sanctified.' Heb 2:11

You have purified your souls in obeying the truth. 1 Pt 2:22

Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself. 1 Jn 3:3

The end [goal] of your faith -- the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9

Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. 1 Pet 4:19

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. Jm 1:21

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Rm 12:2

We all ... are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Cor 3:18

Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Col 1:10

Your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. 2 Thess 1:3

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Pt 3:18

Final sanctification.

This also has various names, such as absolute sanctification.

This is when the believer's body is transformed into a spiritual body like that of Christ, fit for glory. It also includes the finalising of progressive sanctification so that the person is perfected at once.

1. The believer is given a body which is like that of Christ (Phil 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). Though human, it is also spiritual and thus has special properties (1 Cor 15:44).
2. Sanctification is finalised and completed (1 Thess 5:23).
3. The old nature is removed and the sentence of death (separation) is completed (Rm 6:4-6; Col 2:11-13).

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him. 1 Jn 3:1-2

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 5:23

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Phil 1:6

The three tenses of sanctification: past, present, future

The past tense is the definitive sanctification of the believer, which occurred at the cross.

The present tense is the work of progressive sanctification.

The future tense of sanctification is the physical changing of the believer when Christ returns.

The three areas of sanctification: spirit, soul, body

Definitive sanctification occurs in the spirit.

Progressive sanctification is occurring in the soul.

Final sanctification will resurrect the body.

The final purpose of sanctification – glory

The purpose of sanctification is cleansing so that we become a vessel of glory, suitable to manifest the character of God fully.

Sanctification enables a believer to be glorified; that is to share the glory of God in a physical way. Until the finalisation of sanctification, a believer knows the glory of God potentially in his spirit but cannot manifest that glory physically or in his soul (e.g. in mental capacities without sin). At the end, the sanctified believer knows the fulness of the glory of God (but is not God, is not infinite and expresses God's glory with limitations). The glorified believer shares God's glory, but only within the capacity of the spiritual body. The capacity of God's glory is infinite.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Rm 8:18

A partaker of the glory that will be revealed. ... you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Pt 5:1, 4

Afterward receive me *to* glory. Ps 73:24

Counselling

While all agree that man is a unified person, it helps us to resolve sanctification problems if we hold a Biblical view of man's constitution; just as a doctor needs to understand the respiratory system to help a man's breathing difficulties or his skeletal system if he has a fracture. No one states that a man is just a skeleton or just a pair of lungs, but knowing how man's physiology fits together assists diagnosis and repair. The same is true of the immaterial realm of man. If we ignore the soul as the seat of self-consciousness we will fail to understand sanctification.

[For a simple but detailed summary of the doctrine of sanctification, including revealing how theologians completely misunderstand and confuse it, see my paper, '*A simple paper on sanctification*'.]

The new man, the old man and the flesh

The new man (nature)

The new man is the likeness of Christ.

Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Eph 4:24

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh. Rm 13:14

For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. Gal 3:27

And have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Col 3:10

When we were regenerated we became a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); this creation was in the likeness of Christ. The new man is the believer in Christ.

Since the new man is spiritual and holy, it must be situated in the human spirit. Indeed this is where Christ dwells within the believer.

The communion in the human spirit is the place where Christ dwells. It is also part of the heart as well as the spirit.

The old man (nature)

The old man is what we were in Adam before being regenerated. It is our Adamic life; all the old dispositions of our sinful life, and our strengths that do not rest in God.

It is too simplistic just to say that this is our sinful nature, since the Adamic nature is all that we are outside of Christ; that means all our seemingly good and strong points that are not dependent upon Christ. Our good deeds that rely on human strength have to die just as much as our sinful characteristics.

The old dispositions lie in the old heart and particularly the mind. The old man is the seat of sin and human strength of character – all we were in Adam. All of this has to die.

When the mind is renewed and the new nature put on, the heart is pure. When the old nature is put on and the old ways of the mind expressed, then the heart is an evil heart of unbelief: 'Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God', (Heb 3:12). When we go wrong, we go astray in our hearts (Heb 3:10); that is where sin comes from (Jer 3:17, 7:24).

The old nature is expressed in the person when the soul chooses to put it on. The neutral vessel of the soul becomes identified with the old nature when it chooses to express it.

The soul dominated by the old nature then makes the body sin in external expression – thus ‘the body of sin’.

The soul has to choose every day to put off the old man and put on the new. That is the fundamental essence of the process of progressive sanctification. Each day is a new battle of choice.

The overwhelming battle is for the mind. This is why the devil’s main choice of weapon is deception. If the mind in the soul can be perverted in its thinking, then wrong choices will be made continually.

This is why a renewed mind (thinking according to God’s law) is closely associated with holiness.

The flesh

This word (that has several meanings) is used here to refer to the flesh as opposed to God; it is the state of humanity in sin that is opposed to God. It is the opposite of the Spirit.

The flesh is opposed to the Spirit and strives against his work. The NT gives lists of the works of the flesh, which help us identify it in operation.

When the soul chooses to sin, it becomes flesh. The soul is not flesh, but it puts on flesh when it chooses to sin.

The flesh is not exactly the same as the old man. The flesh is all that is opposed to God in man. My old nature only expresses the sins that I have developed. However, when the old nature dominates the soul (and thus the body) then it becomes flesh.

The natural expression of the regenerated believer should be spirit; the believer walking in the Spirit, abiding in Christ, putting on the new man, does spiritual things and bears spiritual fruit (the character of Christ). When the believer puts on the old nature and sins, he becomes flesh.

Characteristics of the flesh

We are given examples of the flesh in action so that we can see for certain when we have failed and fallen into sin. It is unnerving to see some that claim to be perfectly sanctified (impossible in this life) exhibit some of these sins, even as they claim holiness. Also notice that some sins considered minor (and committed by Christians) are forbidden. Here is the longest list:

The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal 5:19-21

Thus the flesh is the opposite of the character traits of Christ.

Conclusion

The Biblical teaching is that a believer's spirit is the realm of God/spiritual consciousness. It is where the Lord dwells by his Spirit. It is where the new nature is situated. As God reveals his will to a man's spirit by intuition, it is then up to the man to apply that knowledge. This area is dead to God in unbelievers.

The knowledge is passed through the heart to the mind in the soul where choices are made. It is at this stage that a man can obey God or yield to sin and rebel. The soul is the executive of the man, the realm of will, intellect and emotion. If he obeys God, the body then applies the decision of the soul and righteousness results in the world; if he refuses God, the body is led into sin and the testimony is marred.

A balanced Christian is one whose spirit is led by God, which dominates the soul, which chooses the good and leads the body to express it. The constituents of the soul that make up man's personality (volition, emotions, mind) are balanced and operate interdependently together. This is a man with poise, peace and a vibrant testimony.

An unbalanced man is one whose soul is in turmoil with one feature dominating the others, such as emotions - an over excited or melancholy person, or intellect - a person whose life is mainly theoretical and unreal, or volition - a stubborn, wilful or domineering person. This person usually has the soul overriding the spirit so that the man is in control and not God. Where sensual lusts dominate the soul through the senses of the body, the person is dominated totally by sinful, base passions.

The old nature/man, the sinful nature or the flesh are terms for the situation when the body and soul are united in sin and opposing God. The old man is not the soul or the body - these are merely vehicles to be saved - but the soul/body in sin. The new nature, created in the likeness of Christ, is seated in man's spirit. As this is the highest part of man, the Christian is said to be a new creature in Christ. Adamic man does not have a spirit that is alive to God; does not have a new nature.

It is my opinion that understanding what is put forth in this paper is absolutely vital to understanding and applying the doctrine of sanctification. Indeed, I would say that teachers in the church that do not understand this are completely unable to teach God's children how to be mature.

This is why there is so much misunderstanding about sanctification and where there are so many theories and schools about it. It is also why most people in the church (as far as I can see) utterly fail to express holiness (the observable result of sanctification) and lead such poor lives with shoddy testimonies.

Objections

These are some of the usual objections put forward by theologians against the position taken in this paper.

Dichotomy

Objection: The Bible teaches a bipartite division in the nature of man into soul and body; trichotomy is unbiblical.

The simple answer to this is that the charge is false, for these reasons:

- The Bible clearly teaches a tripartite division in the nature of man and expressly states this in a single verse (1 Thess 5:23). The usual interpretations to avoid this do not hold water.
- The Bible clearly teaches a division between the soul of man and the spirit of man and expressly states this in a single verse (Heb 4:12). The usual interpretations to avoid this do not hold water.
- The Bible teaches, in multitudes of places, that God created man as a living soul; man is a soul. It also teaches that the soul has the faculties of mind, emotions and will.
- The Bible also teaches, in very many places that God also created man to have a spirit.
- Jesus is clearly stated to have both soul and spirit.
- If the human soul is the seat of the human personality or psyche, then where is the spiritual faculty in a bipartite situation?
- If there is no separate spirit from the soul then the mind that thinks evil thoughts is part of the spirit. This means that God (who actually dwells in the human spirit) is in fellowship with sin within man.
- If there is no separate spirit from the soul then where does prayer occur in man?¹⁰ Where does man commune with God? Where does God dwell within man? Where does worship take place?
- Reformed teachers who hold a bipartite position are frequently forced to make a distinction in their writings between soul and spirit in man. Some use the term 'higher soul'.
- Reformed teachers who hold a bipartite position are stymied when it comes to understanding what the heart is, how it functions and how it relates to the soul.
- Reformed teachers who hold a bipartite position are mystified as to where sin exists in the believer and do not really know what the flesh is. Some place sin in the body as a last resort, which is nonsense and gives grounds for asceticism. Others even deny that man has an old nature at all.

The job of the exegete and the theologian is to discover what the Bible actually teaches and expound that faithfully. Far too many Reformed people are more faithful to a prior, historical, theological agenda and twist Scripture to comply with that. This is sin.

Multiple divisions

Objection: The Bible speaks of multiple divisions in the nature of man, such as strength, mind, soul, spirit, body, heart etc. These are not analytically important but are used to elucidate the text.

The determining factor has to be what the Bible itself specifies. It is clear that the Bible specifies a chief threefold division in the nature of man of spirit, soul and body, though there are other features also.

In some verses, especially in poetic Scriptures, the divisions are not analytical and forensic, such as:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Deut 6:5 (etc.)

¹⁰ Prayer is the linking of soul and spirit in the heart and thus a joining of man and God for a certain end. True prayer comes from (is inspired by) the Holy Spirit in our intuition (in our spirit) which passes through the heart into the mind (in the soul). After consideration and being turned into a petition, the mind then passes a request through the heart into the spirit to commune with God and plead a cause. Thus true prayer starts with God and ends with God but passes through man. This subject is worth of paper on its own and is something few understand at all.

Here the point being made is intensity and inclusivity. It is saying that you shall love the Lord with all that you are, with everything you have.

What is important regarding a forensic investigation of the properties of something is to establish the primary divisions, the secondary divisions and so on.

In tuning your television you will be requested to determine the primary connections (what country, i.e. Wales, England, Scotland) the secondary connections (what region of the country) and what tertiary connections (any other). Now the UK can be divided into many more sub-divisions (counties, cities, towns, villages, suburbs, hamlets, boroughs, streets and so on). But what are most important are the primary divisions.

In the same way the nature of man can be variously subdivided but what is most important is the chief divisions affirmed by Scripture.

If Scripture constantly refers to the primary subdivisions, then so should we and we should learn why they are important.

Dichotomy

Objection: the Bible only speaks about body and soul. Teaching trichotomy leads Christians into the dangers of Platonism, Neoplatonism and dualism.

I have never understood this argument as it is self-defeating.

Platonism, Neoplatonism and dualism refer to the dangers of averring that what is spiritual is good and what is physical / material is evil. Many religions and cults have this dualism as their bedrock but it is far from Christianity.

Many Reformed teachers claim that trichotomy stems from Greek philosophy and this leads to Greek dualism, such as expounded by Plato.¹¹ They then teach dichotomy, which is actually closer to dualism than trichotomy. Go figure!

Academics often see something after the historical fact and claim some kind of causality when none exists.

For example: academics examine the prologue of John's Gospel and note certain parallels with the Greek / Hebrew philosopher Philo, especially regarding the concept of the 'Word'.¹² They then state (with no authority) that John was influenced by Philo in developing the theology of Christ as the Word of God, and then say that John is influenced by Greek philosophy.

In short, it is highly unlikely that a Galilean fisherman ever read any Philo, even though his father was a wealthy man from Bethsaida. In fact John was far more influenced by John the Baptist.

As the disciple that Jesus loved John had access to a deeper knowledge of Christ, hence the spiritual nature of his Gospel. It is the gift of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit that developed John's theology, not a reading of Philo. The Lord God gave Philo some interesting and innovative ideas as part of his plan to help certain Jews become more accessible to the Gospel, which came later.

¹¹ Plato taught a higher spiritual world of perfect forms, which must inform earthly morals, not earthly experience. Thus the body is inferior to the soul, which is immortal. This is dualism.

¹² Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. He lived during the time of Christ and blended OT monotheism with Greek philosophy and thus anticipated some aspects of NT teaching.

Whether or not Greek philosophy taught trichotomy is irrelevant (some Greek philosophers did, others did not).¹³ Just because some did does not mean that the Bible cannot teach it also. Many Biblical concepts are found in earlier religions and philosophies;¹⁴ so what?

Averting trichotomy does not lead you automatically into Greek philosophy; that is just folly. Also, we do not set our teaching matter according to the problems caused by the world; we teach what Scripture teaches and nothing else.

The important matter is, what does God's word teach? I have shown that it overwhelmingly teaches trichotomy.

Mystics

Objection: the writers that teach trichotomy are all mystics and lead people into needless subjectivity.

Firstly, this is a gross overstatement.

There are some popular Christian writers that have taught something similar in the past that had some tendencies to subjectivity and some that were very rational. So what?¹⁵

I have not drawn from any of these writers in this paper, none at all; my purpose here has been to be driven entirely by God's word, as the multiple references demonstrate.

Seeking to criticise my thesis by attacking the perceived problems of others is folly. Critics must demonstrate where my errors are by reference to Scripture and by proper deduction from those texts.

A secular idea

Objection: this is just an adaptation from the secular world where the division of man into spirit, soul and body (or mind, body, spirit) is very common. It is New Age teaching.

The previous answer applies to this objection also.

There are many Biblical doctrines which the world seeks to mimic and some concepts which have been universal for millennia. So what?

The question is, 'What does the Bible teach?' I have shown that Scripture clearly teaches that man has a tripartite nature and that this is vital to understanding the application of sanctification.

The usual New Age type of teaching is an affirmation of mysticism that, they say, is above physical reality (the body) and is supra rationality (above the mind, i.e. above the soul). It is a seeking of supposed spiritual entities (channelling angels, aeons, spirit guides) and truths that are not rationally perceived by deduction but rather by inner revelation.

What they fail to understand is that the human spirit is dead to God and cannot perceive heavenly things. Since the spirit is sunk into the soul, what happens is that such mystics allow themselves to be deceived by Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light, giving

¹³ It was, in fact, Aristotle that taught a higher realm of the soul.

¹⁴ E.g. sacrificial offering for atonement; ransom; law; monotheism; self-sacrifice etc.

¹⁵ Trichotomy has been taught by some Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic and Higher Life teachers. However, many forms of these that I am familiar with are unlike what is presented here. Few, if any, explain what the heart is and where it is; few understand the connection to sanctification and identification; few give so many Scriptural references. Some use a tripartite division of man to teach outright errors, such as the necessity of a second blessing experience.

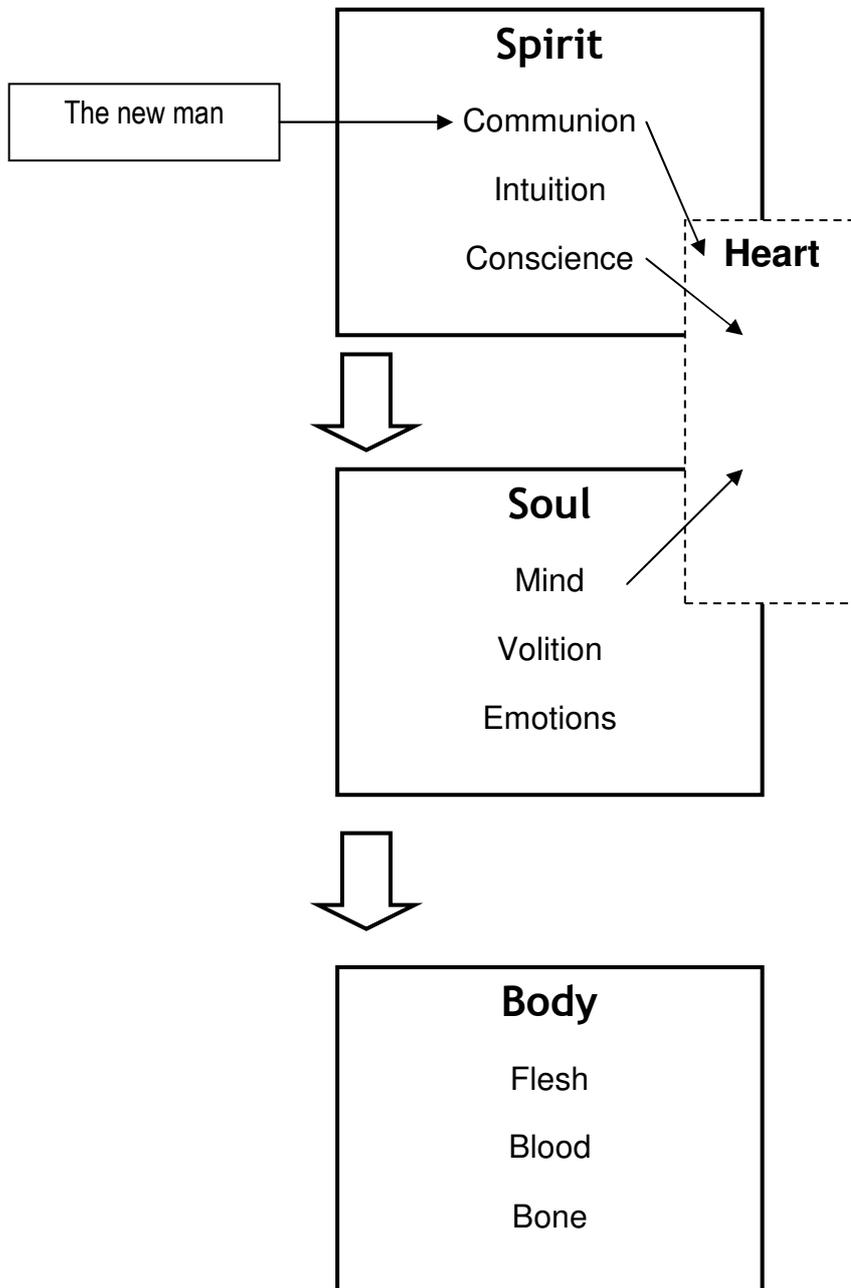
revelations and experiences to the dead spirit sunk in the soul. The stirrings of deep, unearthed emotions are a pretence of spiritual revelation.

The same thing happens when drugs are used to initiate extra-sensory revelation. LSD never gave anyone an understanding of heaven or the Godhead but just gave people very odd sensory experiences and hallucinations. Such severe mental experiences may have prompted imaginative ideas¹⁶ but they never communicated any truth about God.

¹⁶ Such as when flashing, vibrant, colourful visions prompted similar types of artwork.

Appendix One

Diagram of body, soul and spirit



Appendix Two

Additional material

Lack of understanding about identification - ‘one nature-ism’¹⁷

‘Identification’ is the doctrine set out by Paul in Romans 6. It teaches that the believer has died with Christ by being identified with him in his death on the cross. The Greek terms used include being ‘co-crucified’ or ‘crucified together with’ (*sustaurow sustauroo*). The believer has definitely and legally died with Christ on the cross. But here the problem begins; indeed few Reformed theologians even acknowledge the term ‘identification’.

Understanding this concept is vital for the believer; without it he will never fully comprehend what God has done or how to live righteously. The purpose in this death is to undercut the power of the old nature, the nature that produces sin. When a believer believes God’s word, applies it and reckons himself to be dead (Rm 6:11) the Holy Spirit is released to apply grace and power to live a righteous life. Far too many Reformed people do not live like this but rather try to patch up their old life by asking the Spirit to help them do well in the flesh.

There are two problems here in some Reformed circles. The first is that they teach that ‘destroy’ in Romans 6 means ‘annihilation’, thus there is no fight against the old nature. This means that any stirrings of sin must found in the body, which remains untouched by grace at this time. This causes all sorts of problems (see later). The second is that the believer, consequently, has only one nature not two (‘one-naturism’), the old man being dead and eradicated. This gives no explanation for remaining sin.

Reformed teachers also emphasise that salvation is a radical renovation of the whole man. They frequently state that man’s will and personality has been completely changed and made submissive to God. The problem is that this isn’t stated in scripture in these terms, it ignores the sins that Reformed believers commit all too often (especially ‘smaller’ sins), and it is much like the putting new wine into old wineskins, or putting a new patch on old material.

In truth, the application of salvation is even more radical - the old nature is given a deathblow, there is no renovation of it. There is a new heart and spirit given to converts (a new nature), but not a new soul, or a new body yet (see next item). If the will really has been changed, why do believers ever choose to sin? If believers sin, the will has not been changed at all or not sufficiently changed. The true position is that the whole man is actually changed as he is submissive to the new nature by the Spirit. Then, and only then, the whole man is governed by God. If a believer fails to put on the new man, fails to walk in the Spirit, he will manifest the temptations of sin that the old nature is susceptible to.

Sound words ignored

- The problem of failing to see that man has two natures (Eph 4:22-24), and that sanctification is the fight to learn which to live in, arises from believing that the old nature was eradicated at conversion. This is a failure to see that Rm 6 is legal, spiritual and positional not experiential; what has occurred is a legal fact in heaven, but has not been fully consummated on earth yet. This is why we have to reckon ourselves as dead; it’s a faith work, a belief in something we do not see. This is a crucial doctrine to get right.

¹⁷ Taken from my paper, ‘A Friendly Criticism of Certain Presuppositions of Reformed Theology’.

- The old nature/man is not annihilated. *Katargeo* means to render idle, unemployed, and inoperative; to deprive of force or power. 'Destroyed' in the NT usually means to separate not to annihilate. Paul's point in Rm 6:6 is that the source of power of the flesh is cut off and the believer who has been co-crucified with Christ can live a resurrected life since the strength of sin in the man is defeated. For those who walk in faith, the source, dominion and power of sin has been overcome; thus the believer can walk in righteousness by the Spirit - putting on the new man.
- The body is neutral and not the seat of sin. When it follows the flesh, it is 'a body of sin' (Rm 6:6). When it follows the new nature, 'Christ is magnified in my body' (Phil 1:20). The body is a vessel and it is meant to be a temple for the presence of God (1 Cor 6:13,15,19,20).
- The source of sin is the lustful mind of the old nature not the body (Jm 1:14,21; Col 3:9).
- The old nature continues to be corrupted through the life. It is only stopped at physical death when the legal sentence already given by God is fully applied, ('the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts', Eph 4:22); then a new physical/spiritual body is given (1 Jn 3:2).
- Identification ensures that the power of sin in the old Adamic life (the old nature) is cut off as the believer lives in faith that it is dead: 'Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin'. (Rm 6:6-7) 'Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.' (Eph 4:22-24)
- Self denial is not meant to be a fleshly/legalistic means of striving for righteousness, trying to be good in our own strength and praying for help on our fleshly efforts (as it is with many Reformed believers) but is meant to be a struggle to believe the truth and live by faith (Rm 1:17). It is a struggle to apply identification (the death of the old nature) and live in the good of truth. The beginning of righteousness is to believe we are dead and then walk in the Spirit, obeying his directions. 'For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.' (Rm 8:5-6) This is the true meaning of Jesus' repeated assertion that we must take up our cross (i.e. die) and deny ourselves (Matt 16:24-25; 10:38-9; Mk 8:34-35, 10:21; Lk 9:23-24,14:27; Jn 12:24-25.) We do not patch up old wineskins but believe God that our old man is dead (though we do not see the old life dead yet) and refuse to let the old life live. As we do this we live in resurrection life (Phil 3:10; Eph 1:18-20).

The carnal Christian

All agree that the Bible mentions carnal people; the problem is to identify who these people are. Reformed theologians universally identify fleshly people as unbelievers, insisting that there cannot be two types of Christian: spiritual and fleshly. Passages where the two are contrasted are thus speaking of the differences between believers and the wicked. But does this hold water. [The reason for this is the reaction to the American Lordship Controversy, which denies that Christians must submit to Christ as Lord, usually held by Dispensationalists.]

If all believers are spiritual and never carnal, what about when they sin - can they still properly be called spiritual? Can sin be attributed to the new nature created in righteousness (Eph 4:24)?

Firstly, if professing believers continue to live in a carnal way and habitually sin, it must be considered that they are in fact, unregenerate. Genuine believers progress in grace and righteousness because the Spirit is leading them on. There is no excusing sin in believers

and certainly not by conjuring up a status of ‘carnal Christian’ as if this type of Christian never progressed in sanctification.

Despite this proviso, it is very clear that scripture identifies immature believers who sin as carnal or fleshly. Thus cannot be gainsaid. Passages that compare the fleshly with the spiritual (such as Gal 5:17-24 and Rm 8:1-9) are a contrast between what is Adamic and what is of Christ; what is according to the sinful old nature and what is of the righteous new; what is of the human flesh and what is of the Spirit of God. When believers sin, they do so out of their old nature and live according to the flesh. The lists Paul mentions help believers to identify what is of the flesh and help them judge their own behaviour. For instance: lying, jealousy or bitterness is always of the flesh and can never be excused as serving righteousness.

Sound words ignored

- If Christians cannot be fleshly, why does Paul mention this while addressing believers in the midst of sections of doctrine on sanctification and distant from sections on the wicked (e.g. in Rm 8, the unregenerate are dealt with in c1-3)?
- Paul addresses believers (sanctified saints, *brethren* - 1 Cor 1:2) when he called them carnal: ‘I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal [sarkinois]¹⁸, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal [sarkikos]. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal [sarkikos]?’ (1 Cor 3:1-4). Here a carnal person is a babe in Christ who should have moved on by now but instead is: immature, unskilled, untaught and dominated by fleshly appetites. He is not talking to unbelievers but fleshly Christians who are acting like ‘mere men’.
- ‘Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.’ (Rm 8:12-13). Here is a clear obligation to live in the Spirit not the flesh.
- Paul tells us to ‘walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish’ (Gal 5:16-17). This warning is meaningless if we cannot walk in the flesh.

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¹⁸ Carnal is from the Latin word (‘carneus’) for the Greek *sarkikos* (1 Cor 3:3 - ‘in the manner of flesh’); and *sarkinois* (a stronger term: 1 Cor 3:1; Rm 7:14 ‘made of flesh’). Different manuscript sources have slight differences between *sarkinois* and *sarkikos*. E.g. in Rm 7:14 the Scrivener/Beza text has *sarkikos* while the UBS GNT has *sarkinos*. In 1 Cor 3:4 the UBS GNT even has *anthropos* (man) where the Scrivener/Beza has *sarkikos*.