

## What is trichotomy?

This refers to the tripartite nature of man, or the division of man into body, soul and spirit. Many Reformed teachers are dichotomists and deny this threefold split, affirming a bipartite division – man as body and soul only. This is usually to avoid any danger of Platonic dualism (body evil, spirit good; although it was Aristotle that posited a higher realm of the soul) since the Greeks often used a tripartite system in philosophy; however, the danger remains even with a bipartite system. What is important is to determine what the Bible teaches. In this there is no doubt that trichotomy is scriptural.

- Scripture affirms the threefold division in 1 Thess 5:23, '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.' This is important; when Paul wants to summarise the final sanctification of man to meet God at the end, he mentions 'spirit, soul and body'; he could have just said, 'body and soul', but he did not.
- It reveals a separation between the soul and the spirit in Heb 4:12.
- It shows a difference between soul and spirit in many places, e.g. 1 Sam 1:15; Isa 26:9. This is not Hebrew parallelism. In Lk 1:46-47 there is a tense differentiation between them; the soul's action (present active tense) resulting from spirit's previous action (aorist past tense).
- If spirit and soul are the same, how could Paul's personality have been present in Corinth when he was in Ephesus? (1 Cor 5:3-4)

In the OT *nephesh* (soul) is the life in the creature while *ruach* (spirit) is the principle of life bestowed by the Creator. Both are used to refer to all animals as cause (spirit) and effect (soul), however, Hebrew did not have the vocabulary or subtlety of Greek and the NT uses the word 'mind' which Hebrew did not have. In the creation of man we see a threefold division: '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) Here we see: 1) physical life formed from dust; 2) the breath of life, a God-breathed spirit (*nashamah* – breath or spirit) and 3) the interaction of these two forming a living soul (*nephesh*).

Is this just being technical? No, it is an extremely important matter and fundamental to understanding salvation, regeneration and sanctification properly. The need to differentiate between soul and spirit is revealed even in Reformed writings since they repeatedly distinguish between the 'higher' and 'lower' properties of the soul or the 'animating (spirit) with the 'animated result' (soul). Of necessity there has to be a separation between human personality properties in the inner man, and spiritual, heavenly properties of the innermost man. Only having one name (soul) for these leads to confusion since there are two organs in man, one to commune with God in the spirit and one to commune with men on earth in the self, or personality.

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