

Study 3

Topic: Made as both body and spirit

Sub-theme: Made in the image of God (1)

Sunday date: May 12

Key ideas: Inescapably both flesh and spiritual, bodies and physicality is good

Key texts: Gen 1-2, Ps 139, 1 Cor 15

Further reading/resources:

i am your true shepherd
i will lead you there
beside still waters
come and meet me in the middle of the air
i will meet you in the middle of the air
i will lay you down
in pastures green and fair
every soul shall be restored
i will meet them in the middle of the air
come and meet me in the middle of the air
Paul Kelly

“The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the middle of the air”

Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

Were you to have asked any Christian clergy or layperson what happens at death, up through the mid-twentieth century the initial answer would have been very predictable: the soul separates from the body and leaves it behind. Death was a transition, but not a loss, and in the dying of Christians, it was to be a smooth and hopeful transition into a new mode of being. Again and again, Christians stressed the hopeful quality of death, although by our standards the messages and atmosphere sound gloomy. Preachers who presided at funerals where the death had been expected, and the life of the deceased unproblematic in his or her faith, could rely on this smooth transition model and elaborate by intense use of certain imageries. For example, the separation of soul from body was, in reality, a homecoming. Pictures of peace, protective maternal presence, and simple piety bound this image into sermons at funerals. For the dead, the soul was Home at last, for “Heaven is a HOME and death a Homegoing.” Jesus, whose original home was Heaven, could have been homesick most of his life on earth; he was eager to return to his Father’s house.

What does it mean to be human? If we are just atoms (physicalism), then we are nothing but what we do in our bodies - can we truly have free will? If we are an immortal soul, temporarily housed in a mortal and decaying body (dualism), then what we do in our bodies doesn't really matter.

The bible doesn't seem all that concerned with offering a theoretically rigorous account of human nature.

Trichotomy- Humans have three parts – body, soul, spirit

Dichotomy – Humans have two parts – body and soul/spirit – material and immaterial

Monism – Humans are persons – soul and spirit are just expressions of our personhood

These kinds of conversations seem arcane and uninteresting for most of us until someone we love dies. Then we instantly become interested in the question: what is the nature of our existence? Is there life after death? My loved one is clearly dead, but are they still alive in spirit?

What do these passages tell us about being human?

Job 19:25-27	
Mt 10:26	
Mt 22:37	
Lk 1:46	
1Co 14:13-16	
2Co 5:1-10	
1Thess 5:23	

Read John 12:27 alongside John 13:21. What conclusions do you draw from the use of 'soul' and 'spirit' these passages?

The Bible contains a number of descriptions of what happens at death. For example:

- As she breathed her last (lit. 'as her soul/*nephesh* was departing')—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. (Gen. 35:18)
- [T]he dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:7)
- "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life (lit. 'soul/*psyche*') will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (Luke 12:20)
- Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46)

What does this suggest about soul and spirit?

Read Luke 23:43, Phil 1:23-24, and 2 Cor 5:8. What do these passages suggest about conscious existence apart from the body?

Read 1 Cor 15:42-54. What does this suggest about the ultimate Christian hope? Is it spiritual life apart from the body, or something else?

'Recent scholarship has recognized that such terms as body, soul, and spirit are not different, separable faculties of man but different ways of viewing the whole man.'

George Eldon Ladd

What do you think of this claim?

With all this as background, read Gen 2:7 in NIV and compare with the KJV below, which translates the Hebrew *nephesh* as 'soul' rather than being'.

Gen 2:7 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 soul.

What are we made of? What does it mean that we 'are' a living soul, rather than we 'have' a living soul?

If we are a unified embodied soul, or soulish body, was does this mean for the Incarnation?

Believing that the spirit of Christ merely invaded the body of a Galilean man, walked around in it, eventually dying in that body on a cross, before departing to the heavenlies, denies a core Christian belief — that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human.

The baffling miracle of the Incarnation is this: not that Christ's spirit entered a human body, but that God was human in the initial mitosis, with the fusion of gametes, the splitting of cells, the condensing and compacting of chromosomes within the uterus. Christ was fully human from the beginning so that his death was the death of God, not the death of the body he had invaded or used for such a purpose.

Mike Frost

If we are inescapably bodily, but can have some kind of true personhood apart from the body, what hope does this offer for the Resurrection?