
HUMAN CONSTITUTION

Doctrine of Man
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THE “COMPONENTS” OF HUMAN BEINGS

- Scripture doesn't answer this question *directly*. It does, however speak to the issue.
 - Scripture uses several different words to describe aspects of human nature. For example, flesh, body, soul, spirit, mind, heart, life, conscience, understanding, bowels, and skin.¹
 - Scripture often speaks of man as body and soul.
 - Matthew 10:28—And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
 - Compare together: Job 27:3; 32:8; 33:4; Eccl 12:7; 1 Pet 3:19–20; Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9–11.
 - Yet some passages of Scripture use terminology of three aspects: body, soul, and spirit.
 - 1 Thess 5:23—Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Hebrews 4:12—For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- Theologians have presented two main views regarding the nature of human constitution.
 - Dichotomy holds that man is body and soul.
 - Trichotomy holds that man is body, soul, and spirit.
 - So, which is the case, and why does it matter?
- The creation accounts speak of two aspects.
 - For example, Genesis 2:7 speaks of man being formed from the dust of the ground and then God breathing life into him. Some people correlate that divine breath with the human spirit/soul.
 - Moreover, spirit and soul are used interchangeably (cf. Gen 41:8; Ps 42:6, Jn 12:27; 13:21; Mt 20:28; 27:50; Heb 12:23; Rev 6:9).
- The Reformed confessions support the view of dichotomy.
 - Belgic Confession, Article XXXVII
 - Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day I, Question 1
 - Lord's Day XXII, Question 57
 - Westminster Confession of Faith 32.1
 - Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 17, 87, 89, 90
 - Shorter Catechism, Questions 37–38

¹ Vern S. Poythress, “Body and Soul: The Metaphysical Composition of the Human Individual” (unpublished notes), 2. Referenced in Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 797.

- Some theologians advocate a doctrine of *wholism* that stresses the whole person rather than focuses on different parts or components. In different terms, we could consider the position of dichotomy as *holistic dualism*.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL

- Two main theories exist as to the immediate origin of the soul: creationism and traducianism.
 - Traducianists deny that the soul is created, but see it as something derived from one's parents.
 - This view assumes that God only works through means.
 - As a man and woman procreate, the soul is produced according to a law of generation in a way similar to how the body is formed.
 - While God is sovereign and created all things, he is not immediately involved in the origination of a soul any more than he is with the body.
 - Traducianists do not appeal to Scripture, since no passage explicitly teaches on this point.
 - Creationists maintain that God creates the soul immediately and directly at the time of conception. They deny that the soul is generated or otherwise derived from the parents.
 - Body and soul are represented as different substances.
 - Man's body was formed from the dust. But his soul was breathed into him by God. His soul is from God immediately, underived.
- Scripture maintains that the soul is immaterial and indivisible.
 - The traducian view requires some way of passing the soul onto to one's progeny.
 - Furthermore, traducianism calls into question the impeccability of Christ, who would seem to have a corrupt body and soul in their view.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

- What are some problems the church has encountered from different views of man's body, soul, and spirit?
- What does Scripture's teaching about man's composition say about the relationship between body and soul? How might this inform our approach to counseling and neurology?
- What bioethics issues might arise with different views of the origin of the soul?