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DI... OR TRI...? DO OR DIE?

The two more common models of man are the two-part view, called dichotomy, and the three-part view, called trichotomy. The dichotomous model usually holds that man has a material part, the body, and an immaterial part, the soul. Such a view is feasible in that the immaterial part may be defined in numerous ways. Some have defined the immaterial part of man as the mind, but most dichotomists call it the soul.

Those who accept the trichotomous model typically say that man consists of a spirit, soul, and body. Those of this view are, perhaps, in the minority today, as many Bible scholars believe that Biblical language is not precise concerning the immaterial part of man, making it neither possible nor practical to theorize about man's immaterial nature.

Because most Christians see no practical relevance in holding to strong conclusions about their immaterial makeup, the discussion of dichotomy and trichotomy is viewed as theological hairsplitting. But, if Christians can be shown that a clear understanding of the soul's relationship to the spirit of man can clarify and solve practical problems that face him every day, the distinction may be worth understanding.

Both those who adhere to trichotomy and to dichotomy can be faulted for the lack of concise definition of consistent terms. Because we have seen the strong interdependency of identity and acceptance in man, we need to examine both models of man to see which better accommodates an explanation of the cause and solution to these needs and which of the two is more consistent with Biblical language. In doing so, we are not dealing with mere theological abstractions.

Since man is essentially a spiritual being, even though he has a physical body, his identity must have to do with God,

the ultimate spiritual Being to Whom he relates. Such identity must be based, not upon what man has done, but upon what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for him if we are to accept what the Scriptures teach about this relationship. Since man is spirit and he has a soul, the attributes of the soul should reflect who he is in the spirit. When he is joined to the Lord, he finds acceptance; and when he is one spirit with the Lord, he has found immutable identity. But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 6:17).

Theologians past and present have grappled with the task of describing the makeup of man. Scholars produced by a host of sectarian biases are divided or polarized on the issue. Some take 1 Thessalonians 5:23 literally and hold the view that man has a spirit as well as a soul (personality) and body, which has been labeled the trichotomous view. Others, equally well schooled and firm in their belief that the Bible is the Word of God, staunchly contend that man does not have a spirit as a separate entity (though they may refer to the spirit as a function of the soul) but, rather, is comprised of soul and body, the dichotomous position.

What can we profit by laying side by side the dichotomous and trichotomous models of man to make contrasts and comparisons? Finding a scriptural model of man will aid the believer in understanding his intrapersonal functioning and his standing before God. Also, the articulation of this liberating truth through teaching or counseling is greatly enhanced. A Christ-centered counseling theory or approach must be anchored and be congruent with a model of man which leads to a scriptural definition of the spiritual life as Paul stated it:

Not I but Christ... (Galatians 2:20).

Many theological issues, such as the question of dichotomy or trichotomy, remain unsettled because theology is man's rational attempt systematically to organize the truths of the Bible. While we must accept the Bible as being absolute truth, man's ability to organize infinite wisdom is limited by his finite

mind. So Biblical theology, no matter how wise or spiritual the an who systematizes it, should never be put on a par with the Scriptures. Such studies are helpful, but not infallible.

Perhaps the strongest Biblical evidence for a three-part model for man is found in Paul's words:

I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The way these three Greek nouns were used sets them forth as three separate entities. First, they were joined by *kai*, the main coordinating conjunction: spirit and soul and body. Also, each noun, *pneuma* (spirit), *psukee* (soul), and *soma* (body) were preceded by definite articles, strong grammatical evidence that the author was talking about three distinct things.

Such a three-part constitution of man might tempt some of us to try to make a parallel between man and the Trinity. Such an analogy fails because the Trinity is constituted of three Persons in One, and man is but one person. The Biblical language of Genesis is also important: The Lord God formed man [body] of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [spirit—the word for 'breathed' and 'breath' can also be translated 'spirited' and 'spirit'] and man became a living soul [soul] (Genesis 2:7).

The dichotomists say that man is capable of spiritual relationships, that he can function spiritually, though he has no spirit as a separate entity. Many of them argue that it makes no difference which position one takes about man's immaterial part so long as it is granted that it properly explains how man relates to God. In this case they are talking about function and not entity.

Certainly there are Spirit-filled people who walk in the Spirit and are greatly used of the Lord who deny that they have a spirit. However, this denial does not preclude the possibility of their having a functioning spirit which is being described by them as a spiritual function of the personality or soul. It

is undoubtedly possible for an individual to walk in a truth of which he has little or no knowledge.

Often Christians are not concerned about their inner makeup because they haven't seen how it affects their lives. Such a tendency is sometimes a reaction to those who try to force certain Scriptures to fit a system and to analyze experience in the light of the system rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to speak directly through the Word.

This is not to be construed as an appeal to ignorance or any assault on the study of systematic theology. However, some excellent proponents of systematic theology are often unfruitful when it comes to living the concepts or in transferring such concepts in life-transforming ways to others.

Theology that produces no transformed lives, nor solves any human problems becomes an exercise in futility. The same can be said of Bible knowledge without the system; such knowledge without application to the life by the Holy Spirit may lead only to intellectual pride instead of spirituality.

Though it isn't absolutely necessary to have perfect intellectual understanding of some scriptural truths to appreciate the results by faith, it is difficult to convey such truth accurately to others while having a faulty understanding of it. For example, some people who walk in victory in Christ hold a dichotomous view of man, while others who walk in victory hold a trichotomous view of man. There are also those who walk in victory in Christ who do not know the difference! Thinking the distinction has no practical relevance, they haven't ever taken the time to develop a working definition of the soul or the spirit of man, the functions of one or each—much less the interface between the two.

To point up the issue and expose the ignorance in psychological as well as spiritual circles, the preface of a recent psychology textbook stated that the psychologist does not work in the realm of the soul. If not, one might well ask, pray tell, where then does he work?

Many pastors who would argue for a trichotomous view of man frequently confuse the terms in the pulpit, using them

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inappropriately. When we speak of the soul being *saved*, as in 1 Peter 1:9, the hearer frequently infers that the primary work of regeneration occurs in the soul. It is clear that the spiritual rebirth is the subject under consideration, so it is the spirit which is made new. The word *psukee* in Greek is frequently translated 'life' when it is clear from the context that the writer is using soul to refer to the whole person or the life principle.

Many of those holding a trichotomous position would agree that the spirit has been regenerated. Those holding a dichotomous view might say that the soul or personality is reborn. Others of them might incorrectly use Romans 8:11 as a proof text to assert that the body is reborn as well, though it is clear from Christ's word to Nicodemus that the new birth did not mean a physical rebirth. The redeemed will receive glorified bodies, but not until Christ returns and the saints, alive and resurrected, are glorified (1 Corinthians 15).

Is this a soulish or psychological rebirth that we are discussing? The way one answers this question hinges on the nature of Adam's death at the Fall. Did Adam die psychologically or spiritually, or did he die at all?

ADAM'S DEATH

Adam was commanded not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:17).

If we conclude that Adam died in some sense, we must determine what died that day. Since Adam continued to walk, think, talk, and make decisions, he obviously wasn't physically dead. Likewise, he could reason that he needed to fashion some kind of covering for himself, so his personality or soul continued to function in a logical manner, although in different directions.

A dichotomous view of man must allow for a spiritual function or facet within the personality since, in this view, spirit doesn't exist as a separate entity. Therefore, this view seems to

argue that what died in Adam was a function, which would seem a contradiction in terms. A function can cease; but it doesn't seem reasonable to say a function *dies*, or is separated from God, as some would define death. Some part of the personality had to die which would have left Adam a psychological cripple, a theory that would be difficult to support from Scripture.

God decreed Adam's death the very day he ate of the tree, and since God doesn't lie, some kind of death took place. Some would make Adam's death a positional death. If this death were positional only, and not experiential, it would seem that Adam could relate to either God or Satan until his actual physical death took place. Also, such a positional death could be considered spiritual in nature; or it could encompass soul and body as well. It would then have to be determined whether man after the Fall were really deprived in practice or only in position. If the spirit (or whatever died), in actuality, were no more dead than the body, it would continue to function much the same as before. Likewise, the soul or personality would be contaminated by sin only positionally, but not actually.

Judicially, man would be dead, or have death and separation from God imputed to him; but practically speaking, he could still relate to God, even though he had deliberately transgressed in responding to Satan. Seemingly, he would have the best of both worlds!

If this were true, Adam would only seem to be dead to God positionally, and alive to Satan in the same way, positionally. Jeremiah wrote:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

If Adam died positionally only, then he and his progeny were positionally related to Satan. Then the heart Jeremiah spoke of is only positionally, and not actually, deceitful. But Jeremiah's comment sounds very much as if man is fallen in experience as well as in position. Man after the Fall is either deprived or he isn't. He either died in the Garden of Eden or he didn't.

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If Adam actually died that day, it must have been his spirit that died. If this is true, Adam either had no spirit after his death; or he had an unregenerate spirit that could relate to Satan, but no longer to God. Since Jesus could say that Satan was the father of certain people (John 8:44), some part of fallen man must be of the same essential nature as Satan for the kinship to be actual, not positional. When Paul was describing what Christ had done for us, he began by saying that something in us that was dead had been quickened, made alive (Ephesians 2:1-6). Paul also must have been talking about something that occurred in regard to man's spirit.

The presence of a spirit in fallen man makes it possible to have spiritual union and communion with Satan, the god of this world. Assuming the presence of a spirit, Adam died a spiritual death and could no longer relate to God. However, he became intimately related to Satan.

This corrupt spirit, which I believe is identified in Romans 6:6 as the old man, is Satan's agent in fallen or natural man to enslave him to sin. Were it only the power of sin in the soul, man would have the choice to yield and obey sin or refuse to yield and be righteous. Slavery indicates ownership or possession. A choice did not remove a slave from the ownership of his master. Redemption through purchase was the only method of changing owners. When the sinner is redeemed from slavery to Satan, his basic nature is changed. The old man is crucified and put off, while the new man that came into being through rebirth is put on. A death and a birth take place; the crucifixion of the old man signals death out of Satan's family and regeneration signals entry into God's family. The unbeliever, through the old man, is identified with Adam. The believer, through the new man, is identified with Christ.

While those who hold the dichotomous position agree that a new birth is necessary, the dichotomous model would be more logically support a theory which would contend that man's essential nature could and should be improved. According to this view, the 'old man' is viewed variously as an entity or all that we were in Adam, or a function of the personality. It

would be as difficult, however, to explain the birth of a function as the death of one.

The Bible, however, clearly teaches that Adam, as a result of the fall, experienced a death with spiritual ramifications, and became a child of Satan. He became a slave to sin, which was authored by Satan; and man became responsive to Satan rather than to God. Similarly, the believer has died a death and has had a simultaneous birth (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20; John 1:13; Titus 3:5; John 3:5,6).

It is here that the dichotomous view must resort to a judicial or positional death because it allows for no part of man which can die without losing the man. Since the spirit is construed to be a function rather than an entity, the 'old man' of Romans 6:6 can not literally be crucified as the Scripture states. To be consistent with this rationale, the dichotomous view must hold that there is no literal rebirth but a judicial or positional one that is imputed to the personality. However, most dichotomists would say that man has a literal rebirth but a positional crucifixion with Christ.

If we generalize from the dichotomist view, and allow that the person is born again, we yet have the problem of dealing with the power of sin, which didn't die. How will we instruct him so that he might live a victorious life? Again, we encounter a problem similar to the one encountered before, of whether or not the Cross became a reality in a person's life. The dichotomous view contends that the old man is not the sin nature or the corrupt spirit, so it is inconsistent to say that it could be crucified or replaced by a regenerated spirit. Similarly, it would be impossible for the believer to reckon or count continuously upon his death to sin as the basis for freedom from sin's reign, if he contends that nothing in the believer is, or was, crucified.

If the believer is provided no means of effectively and experientially dealing with the flesh, his only recourse is to walk after the flesh and attempt to obey scriptural injunctions, and ask God to help and strengthen him. The result is a life of strife and struggle for victory over the flesh, while walking after the flesh—an impossibility according to Romans 7. Such a life

must, by definition, be a life of doing instead of dying, since the model admits no provision for the application of the Cross to the self-life or flesh.

On the other hand, if we allow that the old man is a spiritual entity which was put to the Cross of Christ, the believer also has a regenerate spirit [new man] which restricts the power of sin to the soul and the body. Not only can sin not touch the spirit, but the spirit is also indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This means that the self-same power that God used in raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is available within the spirit of the believer (Ephesians 1:19, 20; Romans 8:11). The sin nature [old man] having been crucified, the believer's will is the agency that swings the balance of power, by choosing the power which is to control the personality—either the power of indwelling sin or the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the ...law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus or ...the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

Satan, the enemy of souls, has made another critical deception in blinding the minds of believers to the truth that the old man or sin nature no longer exists in the Christian. Thus, he has influenced many believers into expending vital energy in fighting a supposed battle within their spirits between the old and new natures, a battle the Holy Spirit won quite decisively at the new birth. Thus, the believer fights a battle that is non-existent and constantly loses a battle that is very real—the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). The Holy Spirit has established a permanent residence within the regenerated spirit of the believer. When sins in the believer's life are imputed to the old man or old nature, the flesh, a condition of the soul, which actually causes the sins in a believer, is merely provided a decoy which camouflages its operations. Whether or not a believer sins is a decision of the will of the believer; either he has yielded his members to sin or he has yielded himself to God (Romans 6:13). Victory is not attained but obtained, or appropriated, by counting oneself to be dead to sin and alive to God, as commanded by Romans 6:11. However, if a believer doesn't know he died to sin in Christ, he is rather unlikely to

have confidence in a recurrent application of the Cross to the power of sin as the sole path of victory.

The believer's only other recourse would be to espouse a works orientation and try to live a life pleasing to God by self-effort. This, of course, is an attempt to strengthen the flesh for its inevitable battle with the Spirit (Galatians 5:17) which is the source of conflict within the Christian. If there were no part of man which could be rendered inoperative by the Cross, then the Cross would accomplish nothing for us in dealing with the power of sin.

CONCLUSION

The model of man as being spirit, soul, and body is, to me, absolutely essential in explaining man. Since the believer is not a sinner who is saved, but a saint who may still sin, God's assessment of man is that he is righteous, though he may behave unrighteously. For this to be something more than just a word game, there must be a part of man that is made righteous, not just reckoned or accounted to be so. There must be a radical change in the essential nature of the believer. That this is true is affirmed in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;
that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*

and in 2 Peter 3:9:

...that we might be made partakers of the divine nature.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for the guilty sinner, God can pardon him and still be just. God's justice has been satisfied so He will no longer judge the believer guilty for what he has done. However, being forgiven for transgression does not change in any way what man is.

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Can the judge release a man who is still a criminal reprobate and with no choice or capacity to stop his crime (sins)? Can God set a man free with no recourse but to continue in the same condition? Such an action might be legal but it would not be moral. Although human justice might do so, God could not. Could His holy nature permit Him to justify a sinner and yet leave him a sinner by nature?

Not only has God done something for the sinner by payment for his sins by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also He has done something in him through the Cross of Christ. Scripture does not teach that something was merely added to man or accounted to him, but that man was regenerated and made a new creation.

SUMMARY

It is my conclusion that, if followed consistently from beginning to end, the dichotomous position must ultimately be one of doing or works righteousness (law). Conversely, the trichotomous position is supportive of dying and appropriating our righteousness by faith in our identification with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 2:6). DI or TRI? DO or DIE?

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