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Man: A Tripartite Being: Composed of Spirit, Soul and Body, In the Light of the New Testament

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It is unnecessary for those who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Word of God to seek to prove from the New Testament that which we have already seen brought before us in the Old. We merely remark that examination will show to any who seek it that Old Testament truths are all established in the New, and fully unfolded. But there are others which come before the reader of the New Testament respecting "spirit and soul and body"; for now He, on whom in Himself death had no claim, has gained the victory over death and all its power, and has brought "life and immortality [incorruptibility] to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10), and this for man. Let us then first observe the distinct words (as in the Old) employed to distinguish "soul" and "spirit" in the New Testament.

It is generally admitted, by those who have had ability to examine it, that our Lord and His apostles quoted the scripture from a Greek version of the Old Testament, then in common use, and not from the older Hebrew. This Greek translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew was called the Septuagint. But by thus using it, our Lord accredited this version, and set His seal upon it as the Word of God. This is an important fact; for in this version we have before us the words then used as the equivalents in Greek to the Hebrew *rooagh* and *nephesh*, words we may also expect to find distinctively employed therefore by the writers of the New Testament.

Now in this Greek translation of the Old Testament (manuscripts of which still exist) we find in the passages we have already referred to (namely, Genesis 1:20-21,24,30; 2:7), speaking of the soul's formation, the Greek word *psukee* as the equivalent to the Hebrew *nephesh*. For spirit (Hebrew *rooagh*) we find in Job 32:8, where its existence is declared, as also in Zechariah 12:1 and Amos 4:13, where its origin and formation at first by God are spoken of — in all these places, the Greek word *pneuma* is given as the equivalent for *rooagh*. In this same translation also, where all three parts of which man is composed are spoken of in one chapter (Job 10), the same distinction as to the use of the words is maintained. "My soul [*psukee*] is weary of my life; . . . I will speak in the bitterness of my soul [*psukee*]" (vs. 1). "Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit [*pneuma*]" (vs. 12). "Thou hast clothed me [the man Job; that is, both soul and spirit] with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews" (vs. 11). In Ecclesiastes 12:7; Haggai 1:14; Ecclesiastes 1:14,17; Malachi 2:16, passages already referred to, the Septuagint has also *pneuma* for *rooagh*.

In entire harmony, and using the same words for soul and spirit as the Septuagint version gives, we find all the scriptures of the New Testament. There is no confounding of them; there is no confusion. In coming to the New Testament, we are emerging from a night of shadows into the full light of day as to all that concerns man. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8). But apparently small thing as it is, is it not fitting that we should see in this entire harmony of both Old Testament and New Testament God's care of His Word? "He is the Rock, His work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). Thus sang Moses, and this perfection is manifested in the little (as men speak) as well as in the greatest of His works. May it give to us, as we ponder it, increased confidence in Him who, Jehovah to Israel, is to us our Father (John 20:17), while He permits us to trace both Him and His ways (1 Cor. 2:10) in His Word. He will speak to us and instruct us therein (John 6:45) as to all that it is necessary for us to know. May the knowledge of who He is humble us. While our Father, He is, nevertheless, the Alpha and the Omega, the unchangeable God. As He says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

The three parts of which man is constituted, "spirit and soul and body," may for a time be separated. That hour is death. "Man dieth, and wasteth away," says Job (ch. 14:10), when regarding the body. Paul, in the New Testament, repeats it, but follows him beyond the grave. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Death is the penalty attached to sin. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12). It is that condition of the body when seen without a tenant. The body is the man's earthly house or tabernacle, the habitation of both spirit and soul, so that while in it he is said to be "at home in the body" (2 Cor. 5:6). While in the body, he is also said to be "clothed" (Job 10:11). But he leaves the body at death. Thus we read, "Willing [desiring] rather to be absent from the body" (2 Cor. 5:8); again, "To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23); and again, "The body without the spirit [*pneuma*] is dead" (James 2:26). Here we learn that at death the spirit is not there. But we also read that the death of the body does not affect the soul. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul [*psukee*]" (Matt. 10:28). At death the soul (*psukee*) is "required" (Luke 12:20), and then all that ministers merely to the body is left behind for others.

The body only is that part in man which is mortal. In Hebrews 9:27 it is seen to be both capable of, and liable to, death, and after that also to corruption. (Compare Acts 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:42; Rom. 6:12.) "Flesh and blood [of which the body is formed] cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). So the remark of Martha, "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (John 11:39), though spoken of the man, could only refer to the body. She knew corruption had begun in it; but the cry, "Lazarus, come forth" (vs. 43), from Him who was both the Creator and the Life, was answered at once by the whole man, "spirit and soul and body." "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (vs. 44). We see therefore that that part of the man, the body in which he dwelt, and in which he is said to be clothed, "skin and flesh . . . bones and sinews" (Job 10:11), this only rested in that grave at Bethany, where corruption had already begun its work. It was there in the condition of which James speaks — "without the spirit [*pneuma*]; for the Lord had before said plainly, "Lazarus is dead." That the sorrow attendant upon death is also because of the absence of the soul (*psukee*), we learn from other scriptures. Paul said, "His life [soul — *psukee*] is in him," as a reason why they should not be troubled about the young man whose body they took up (Acts 20:10); but this only shows that the usual trouble and mourning at death are because the soul and spirit have left the body. And it was certainly so that day at Bethany; for they well knew that Lazarus would "rise again" (vs. 24), but at present, and from them, their brother was gone.

Having thus seen that death is the dissolving of the tie that has kept together the man, "spirit and soul and body," and having noticed that he is variously spoken of as seen sometimes connected with the one part of his being, and sometimes with the other, we may now ask, What light has the Lord been pleased to give us as to the place of the spirit and soul (or the man) when they have left the body? To this we will now turn, first remarking that, in seeking an answer, we shall have brought before us of necessity the wondrous way whereby Christianity triumphs over all the misery that sin and its consequence (death) have introduced into this world.

First, then, what is death to the believer? The Lord says to the poor thief dying by His side, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). These words, addressed directly to the man, did not refer to his body; for that neither remained with the Lord, nor entered paradise with Him that day. The Lord's body was borne to Joseph's tomb, while the mangled remains (John 19:32) of the poor malefactor were "taken away" by other hands (vs. 31) to find some other, and apparently in man's esteem, a more suited and fitting resting-place for such as he than the rich man's sepulcher. The Lord's body, resting there three days, saw "no corruption" (Acts 13:37), while the other returned to its kindred dust. But it mattered little. The veil had been lifted from that dark future that lay beyond the grave, by His own hand who came to bring "life and [incorruptibility] to light," and to remove the sting from death. And what the Lord said to the thief, He meant and fulfilled. The rejected and dying Saviour thus leaving the world, and the first believer who, dying, left it when the way had been opened by Him through death — these two can nevermore be separated. The words, "Today . . . thou . . . with Me," eternally linked together thus, declare the extent and the value of the blessed work He accomplished that day for every weary child of Adam's fallen race who will trust in Him.

This paradise was not a place that existed only for that moment, that is, for the Lord ere He ascended, as some have taught. It was the place called also by the Apostle Paul "the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2) — an existing place then, long after the death of the thief; for he says he was "caught up into paradise." When there, he had lost all consciousness of the existence of the body; for he said, "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell" (vs. 2). Yet he retained the consciousness of a man; he heard words which it was not possible for him to utter. Inexpressibly blessed was it to be in such a place, and freed from every hindrance, as one quietly reading the chapter must admit. And the blessedness of the place is also shown in the only other passage where this word paradise is used. The promise made to him that overcomes in the message to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:7) is that he shall "eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Paradise then, only named in these three places, is shown to us as a place of unspeakable yet conscious pleasure and rest and delight. It is with the Lord, which in itself is enough; but it is also to be there to hear and to feed, which, though it may be figurative language, conveys to us clearly enough the conscious enjoyment of the place.

With this instant happiness of the believer after death all the scriptures of the New Testament agree. Thus "to depart" is to be with Christ, which, he adds, is "far better" (Phil. 1:23); and he (Paul), who says that it is "far better," knew more of communion and fellowship with Him when on earth than many. He knew perhaps more of it than any saint has ever known. Yet it is "far better," for he says to be "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Peter also speaks of the putting off of the body, "my tabernacle" (2 Peter 1:14), yet looks onward to the day when he, together with those who have fed the flock, shall receive at the appearing of the Chief Shepherd "a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4). But as to the meantime, Jesus had said to him, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards" (John 13:36). And where He went, and whither Peter followed Him, we have already seen. Similar, if figurative, is the testimony of Luke 16:22.

Having spoken of Hebrews 9:27, it remains to say a word as to the future (that which is after death) for the unbeliever. The veil is lifted here also, and we read, "After this [death] the judgment." This is the awful and dark shadow that falls from the future upon the deathbed of the unbeliever, that renders it terrible. Into the world's judgment the Christian can never come. "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). This is the record concerning such, though all shall appear (be made manifest) at the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10).

The believer cannot come into judgment, but there is a "resurrection of damnation [judgment]" (John 5:29). These judged are men — "spirit and soul and body" — for we read again: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). For as the death of the body was a severance for a time of the tie that bound "spirit and soul and body" together, so the destruction of death is the re-formation of that tie, now no more to be severed but to pass, one complete man, into all the horrors of the judgment and the second death — a death not marked by the separation of the parts — spirit and soul and body — but by their eternal union; for we are bidden to "fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). To this first resurrection, and to one special class in it, those who "are alive and remain" (2 Thess. 4:15,17), we will now turn ere we close this subject.

We have already seen that death is the wage of sin, and that man in Hebrews 9:27 is said to be both capable of and liable to death, because there he is speaking of the wage of sin, and of those who, not having faith in Him who has once come, are not looking for Him to come the second time. But he immediately speaks of another class who are thus looking for His second coming. These may die or fall asleep; but, though capable, they are not necessarily liable to death. "We shall not all sleep," he says (1 Cor. 15:51). There are some who "are alive and remain" when the Lord comes and who do not die, but are immediately changed. But what is changed? Spirit and soul? No; Philippians 3:21 says it is the body. "There is a natural body [which we have], and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44), for which spirit and soul are waiting, and which Paul calls "our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:2). This we shall have "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Cor. 15:52). When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. "We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body [or, body of humiliation], that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). Death then has no claim upon or power over the believers who are alive here upon the earth when this assembling shout is given. For them there is no separation of "spirit and soul and body." He has broken the power of him who had "the power of death" (Heb. 2:14); and He has satisfied all the claims which God's holiness demanded on account of sin. God was glorified too in it by Him, and it is proved by His own place now, so that "in a moment" they are to be caught away in the power of life. "That where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). They do not die, but "mortality" is "swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Such is our hope — to see and to be with Him who says, "Fear not. . . I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:17-18).

As Christians, we have ever to remember that the soul is the seat of the affections and desires, which must be, if we desire to grow in divine things, kept under control, so that the Word of God may at all times be allowed to come in. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul [psukee] and spirit [pneuma], and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The word "sensual" in Jude 19 is psukeekoi, and may be translated "soulish"; that is, they were controlled by it. Similar was the desire of the man in Luke 12:19: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This has been the language of very many since. The natural affections also, though formed of God, are strikingly referred to in many places as possible hinderers in the path of faithful discipleship, if allowed to govern us. How many have made shipwreck on this rock! "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Fitting in the midst of all the snares that surround us, the varied attractions for the mind and understanding, the varied desires and affections of the soul — the what-shall-we-eat, what-shall-we-drink, and (not least, the fashions of the day) wherewithal-shall-we-be-clothed of the body — fitting, amidst all this, is the prayer of the Apostle. And may it be increasingly our prayer for each other: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

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