

Becky Bereans – Death and Resurrection – Session 2

Session 2

Review

Last time, we examined the subject of death beginning with a reminder of death's certainty for all human beings. Then we looked at the original reasons that death came into God's creation – God's loving gift of free will to His creation, mankind's pride which led him to rebel against God, and God's holiness which requires Him to judge mankind's sin with the promised punishment of death and prevents Him from just giving us a "pass" for our sin. Finally, we looked at the process of death, noting a distinction between the manner in which Christ followers face death versus the dying of non-believers. This examination of death leads to some challenging questions when we meditate deeply on the subject in the light of God's Word.

Man A Trinity (Spirit, Soul, Body)

To start with, we need to make clear that when we considered death in our last session, we purposely limited the discussion to bodily death. Many people in the world today consider this bodily death to be the end of our human existence. That is the philosophy/belief of secular humanists – e.g., virtually all of my own family. Of course, this immediately begs the question – When did our human existence begin? We'll table that question for the moment, and take it up during our discussions.

The secular humanist worldview, however, is a fairly recent concept. Most if not all cultures and religions throughout history have envisioned some manner of continuing life after bodily death. For example, some Native American cultures envision an afterlife in which the spirits of the departed go on living a spiritual life much the same as life in the physical realm with which we are familiar. In this spiritual afterlife they hunt spiritual animals alongside the spirits of ancestors and comrades who have gone before them. Hindus conceive multiple iterations of life right here on Earth in physical bodies in earthly stations within the caste system determined by the way in which previous lives had been led (karma). The goal of every Hindu is to live out one of these iterations completely free of any karma either good or bad, so that they may be finally freed from the cycle of re-birth. What all of these various conceptions regarding life after death have in common is the idea that human life is more than merely the electro-chemical processes of our physical bodies.

Q – What is it called when people who have died come back as hillbillies?

A – Reintarnation.

But while these various conceptions of eternity may be intriguing, what interests us most for purposes of this study is the Christian/Biblical outlook toward eternal life. The Bible makes it clear that our bodily death is not the end of ourselves. Furthermore, God tells us in His Word that our ongoing lives will have a radically different character than the earthly lives with which we are now familiar. The ideas of reincarnation here on Earth and of continued life in an entirely spiritual realm that mirrors our physical lives on Earth are contradicted by what the Bible has to say on the subject.

Dr. Lehman Strauss says in his booklet [Death and Afterward](#) that in order for us to come to grips with what God says in His Word about life, death, and resurrection, we must first grapple with the nature of man as a so-called "inferior trinity" of body, soul, and spirit.

We recognize that the Bible clearly affirms that God Himself is made up of three persons – God the Father, Jesus – God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. While we certainly cannot truly explain how God can be One (c.f. Deuteronomy 6:4), yet also exist in these three distinct Persons, Christians take

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the truth of this doctrine of the Holy Trinity as an immutable element of our Christian faith. We also know that God created mankind in His image.

Then God said, “Let us make man [אָדָם 'ādām] in our image, after our likeness...

Genesis 1:26a [ESV]

It stands to reason therefore that since God is made up of three component Persons, we who are created in His image are also made up of three aspects that are distinct, yet merged together somehow.

Body (בָּשָׂר *bāśār* / σῶμα *sōma*) – Our bodies are our interface with the physical universe. Our senses bring us information about our surroundings, and we in-turn exert effects on the universe by our physical presence, leaving those effects (good and bad) in our wake as we pass through our world. One of the most fascinating experiences for an adult is observing the process through which newborn babies become familiar with their own bodies. How heartwarming to hear a baby’s laughter when it first realizes that the little hand it sees in front of its eyes is actually a part of itself which it can manipulate by the power of its own will.

Aside – Babies do not have to be taught how to laugh (or cry). This in itself is evidence of the other two aspects of our existence – soul and spirit. More on that in a moment.

Note that God in His infinite wisdom divided the functionality of our bodies into two broad parts – those bodily functions we ourselves have dominion over, and those God Himself controls through our autonomic nervous system. Imagine how stressful life would be if we had to continually manage in our minds the beating of our hearts, and the regulation of the chemical secretions that sustain our lives. What a marvelous blessing God has given us by taking these mundane, yet essential responsibilities from us.

We have already considered bodily death in our previous session. We won’t dwell much further on the body and its eternal nature since we will be devoting an entire session to bodily resurrection later on. For now, suffice it to say that Jesus Himself demonstrated the truth of bodily resurrection, and gave us the promise that He will one day also raise us up somehow.

Soul – Our souls are what make us living creatures. God formed the body of Adam out of the dust of the Earth, but Adam wasn’t a living soul until God breathed life into his body.

then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Genesis 2:7 [ESV]

The Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ *nepēš* rendered as “*living creature*” in this verse means soul, self, life, creature, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion. In fact, in this verse the KJV renders this Hebrew word as “*living soul.*” The Bible uses this same word to describe the departure of our souls from our bodies when we die. For example, when Jacob’s wife Rachel died giving birth to his youngest son Benjamin, the Bible speaks of the departure of her soul.

And as her soul [נֶפֶשׁ nepēš] was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. Genesis 35:18 [ESV]

The corresponding Greek word for soul in the New Testament is ψυχή *psyche*. Jesus spoke frequently about our souls. For example...

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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. Matthew 10:28 [ESV]

This Greek word is translated variously as soul, life, mind, and heart.

The soul is the source of our sense of self, and the seat of our emotions and passions as well as the domain of our thoughts and memories. During our earthly lives, our souls form our perceptions of the physical universe which our bodily senses deliver to us, and our souls are the source of the ideas through which we command our bodies to act. Yet our souls have their own existence apart from our bodies as the Bible makes very clear. But we will leave detailed discussion of that aspect of our souls for a later session.

Spirit – It is an oversimplification to regard the soul and spirit of man as the same thing. God’s Word clearly makes a distinction between the two. For example...

But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit [רוח rûah]. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul [נפש nepesh] before the LORD. 1 Samuel 1:15 [ESV]

My soul [נפש nepesh] yearns for you in the night; my spirit [רוח rûah] within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. Isaiah 26:9 [ESV]

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit [πνεῦμα pneuma], and soul [ψυχή psychē] and body [σῶμα sōma] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 [ESV]

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul [ψυχή psychē] and of spirit [πνεῦμα pneuma], of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 [ESV]

Not surprisingly, both the Hebrew word for spirit – רוח **rûah** – and the Greek word πνεῦμα **pneuma** relate to the concept of wind. Thus, Jesus used this illustration as He tried to explain to Nicodemus the meaning of His statement that we must be born again of the Spirit in order to see the kingdom of God.

5Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” John 3:5-8 [ESV]

NOTE – The same Greek word – πνεῦμα **pneuma** – is used to indicate both God’s Holy Spirit, and the spirit of man.

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As we have seen, the soul is primarily concerned with the physical universe – at least so long as we are living in these earthly bodies. But our spirit governs our interaction with God and His spiritual kingdom. The apostle Paul put it this way in his first letter to the church at Corinth.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14 [ESV]

Our spirits are associated with the more esoteric and noble aspects of our being – e.g., hope, faith, love, courage, moral uprightness, conscience, sense of justice.

Unfortunately, as Dr. Strauss points out, in our fallen state our spirits are separated from God's Spirit due to the curse of sin which brought death into God's creation. In His perfect holiness, God's Spirit cannot abide with our spirits. Our sin has placed a barrier between the two, and there is nothing we can do of ourselves to break that barrier and restore the original fellowship between God's Spirit and our own. Praise God that He foresaw this tragedy, and made the way for our spiritual fellowship with God to be restored by the atoning sacrifice of God the Son – Jesus on the cross.

But for those whose spirits have not been restored, there is another terrible aspect of the present reality of fallen mankind. Our spirits are also the means through which our great adversary and his demons gain access to our souls to communicate his blasphemies and temptations just as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unless we have been born again of God's Spirit, our spirits are subject to the whiles of our great enemy.

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Discussion Questions

1. Is there a true distinction between the three “persons” of the human trinity – can they be truly considered separately, or are they inseparably melded?
 - a. What about the Holy Trinity?
2. At what point is a human being “fully-formed” into the trinity of body, soul, and spirit...
 - a. ...At the Creation of Adam?
 - b. ...At the Creation of Eve?
 - c. ...At conception?
 - d. ...At birth?
 - e. ...At the “age of accountability?”
 - f. ...At the legally defined “age of majority” – 13, 16, 18, 21, 35?
 - g. ...At bodily death in Christ?
 - h. ...At the Great White Throne?
 - i. ...Ever?
3. Based on that answer, is it ever morally acceptable to kill a human being not yet “fully formed?”
4. Is it ever morally acceptable to kill any human being at all...
 - a. ...One’s self?
 - b. ...In war?
 - c. ...In “self-defense?”
 - d. ...To relieve someone’s suffering?
 - e. ...For any other reason?
5. Do “brain dead” people have souls?
6. Do “brian dead people” have spirits?
7. Do animals/plants/viruses have souls?
8. Do animals/plants/viruses have spirits?
9. Does anything else in creation have a soul/spirit?