

Uniquely Human (Part One)

What are you?

A body with a spirit?

A spirit with a body?

A soul with a body?

A spirit, soul, and body?

If a tree falls in the forest and no one there is there to hear it does it really make sound?

Just kidding – I’m not going to answer that last one, but we should answer the others.

Genesis 2:7 makes one of the most formidable statements on human anthropology:

“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 soul.”

Let’s first break this down in terms of the sequential process. Here is the order of things as depicted in Genesis 2:7:

First the body is formed. God forms the human body out of material that already exists. The material is referred to here as “the ground” (In Hebrew: *Adamah*). It is the same material, or ground, from which God had brought forth the flora and fauna (Gen. 2:9, 19). At this point the body is not yet a living organism.

Second, spirit is breathed into the body. In order for the material body which is formed from the ground to become animated with life, more is required. For man, this more is God breathing the breath of life into man’s nostrils. The phrase “breath of life” is a metonym for “spirit.”¹

Third, as a direct result of the body having spirit breathed into it, the body is immediately animated becoming a “living soul.”

¹ Cf. Genesis 6:17 and 7:15, 22; Further supported by Egyptian expression “breath of life” which was also standing expression for the “soul”.

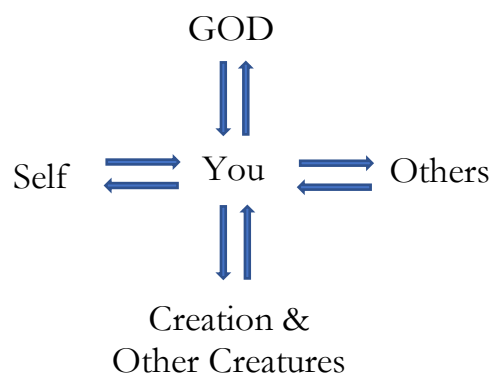
We might summarize Genesis 2:7 as follows:

body + spirit = living soul

Now let's draw some theological conclusions from this.

Our Earthy-Embodied Humanity. Our formation from the ground indicates we are thoroughly earthly and our existence is inseparably tied up with the earth and its creatures, since our bodies, crudely speaking, are made from the same stuff as everything else. Delitzsch connects our being made from the earth with our image bearing responsibility of being God's rulers set up on earth. It is for this reason, he says, "that man in order to become lord of the earth-world, must become, even in his coming into existence, closely associated with it, and it with him, in absolute connection...for both are destined to the fellowship of one history."

Being God's image bearers and fulfilling our royal calling of ruling over the earth is part of what it means to be human. Doing this well necessitates relationships. To reflect God's kingship, we must know God. That happens in the context of relationship. Subduing the earth also requires a relationship with the earth, as does carrying out our dominion over animals. These relationships are part of the "four-fold relationship" represented in Genesis for which God has made each of us. We may illustrate the relationships for which you are designed as follows:



God creating us to stand in solidarity with the earth and its creatures should come as no surprise as we consider the rule of our Lord. Jesus became one of us, being *both* fully human *and* fully God. He can relate to us. He associates with. As the mediator between God and man He is the God-man. In a similar way, as God's royal-priestly mediators between earth and heaven, between the visible material world and invisible spiritual world, human creatures are created as both bodily material creatures *and* spirit-

endowed creatures. Put another way, just as Jesus, as the God-man, is the bridge between God and man (He represents God to man and represents man to God), properly functioning image bearers, as those who are both earthly and heavenly/spiritual, are meant to be God's bridge between earth and heaven (Part of what Jacob's dream of the ladder was communicating – Gen. 28:10-13).

We may think about this in terms of modern day ambassadors. Ambassadors must be residents of the land or state they represent. Man as the ambassador between heaven and earth must in some sense must be a resident of both. We find exactly this in Genesis: we are from the earth (made of the dust of ground) and from heaven (breathed into with the spirit of heaven).

As such, just as Jesus as both fully God and fully human is perfectly suited to usher humanity into the full glory for which God created us, so human creatures as the earthly-spiritual are perfectly suited to lead earth to its fullest potential. We may even say futures of humanity and creation are bound up with one another meant to share a common trajectory (cf. Romans 8:19-23). How we cooperate by ruling over creation in ways that are pleasing to God will matter not only for the unfolding story, but also for our corporate and individual spiritual well-being. To be fully integrated creatures requires our four-fold relational existence to operate in harmony – this is *shalom* (peace and wholeness). We cannot view creation rule and care as something auxiliary to our relationship with God or what it means to be human. Genesis, by depicting our being made from the earth, will not let us.

Further, that the body in Genesis comes into existence prior to the soul indicates that having a body is part of the totality of what it means to be human. Our bodies are not supplemental to our being. The body is not just some add-on to house the real you (i.e. your spirit or soul) from which we should one day hope to escape. Your body is part of the real you. It is part of the “very good” of Genesis and, as already mentioned, displays the image and likeness of God's glory. Our bodies share in God's redemptive story of making all things new. This is nowhere more clearly affirmed than in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jesus came with a body, lived faithfully in a body, died with a body, was resurrected with a body, and ascended into heaven with a body. Living faithfully in the story will entail living in the tension between the reality that from dust we were created and to dust we will return (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 3:20) and the glorious truth of the resurrection (1 Cor. 6:14; 15:35-58; 2 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14; Col. 1:18; John 5:28-29; 1 John 3:2). On one hand this should guard against the idolization of our bodies, and on the other encourage us to care for them (1 Tim. 4:8; 3 John 2).

Difference Between Humans and Animals. While humans stand in solidarity with the creatures (indicated by our all being made from the same matter), we also stand over and above them as God’s image bearers tasked with ruling over creation. Image bearing is one aspect that demarcates us from the animal kingdom – animals are not made in the image and likeness of God.

Another difference is our relationship to the Spirit of God. Both animals and humans follow the formula above which I’ll repeat:

body + spirit = living soul

All creatures are a result of mixing matter and spirit to create a living soul. It becomes obvious the often purported distinction of humans having souls and animals being soulless will not square with biblical parlance. In Genesis the same phrase of being a “living soul” used to describe the first human in Genesis 2:7 is also used of animals. In the Hebrew “living soul” is a combination of the Hebrew *nephesh* (“soul”) and *chayya* (“living”). Here’s a list the occurrences of “living soul” (*nephesh chayya*) in Genesis 1 and 2 applied to animals:²

“And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of *living souls*, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” So God created the great sea creatures and every *living soul* that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” (Genesis 1:20–21)

“And God said, “Let the earth bring forth *living souls* according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so.” (Genesis 1:24)

“And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything which in it is a *living soul*, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.” (Genesis 1:30)

“Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every *living soul*, that was its name.” (Genesis 2:19)

And now Genesis 2:7 again:

² Other occurrences in Genesis where “living souls” is used of animals: 9:10, 12, 15, 16; Also note Proverbs 12:10 which reads, “The righteous knows the *soul* of his beast.”

“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 soul*.”

Biblically speaking the difference between humans and animals has nothing do with whether one has a soul. Both share this is common. Where the difference lies has to do with humans’ and animals’ relationship to God’s Spirit.

Animals are a product of the Spirit of God but are so in a more general way. In Genesis 1:2 we have both the presence of matter and Spirit where the Spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters. The matter and Spirit of Genesis 1:2 are then summoned by the divine command of God’s Word to create the animal kingdom of living souls. We can restate and expand the formula we have been using to be even more exact with respect to animals:

The material/matter in existence of Genesis 1:2	+	The general movement of the presence of the Spirit of Genesis 1:2	+	The Divine Command of the Word of God	=	Animal Living Soul
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Man, on the other hand, is not a result of divine command nor the general presence of the hovering Spirit of Genesis 1:2. Compared to animals, man’s creation is much more intimate and immediately related to the very Spirit of God by the direct act of God’s breathing. We can further dial in our formula for human creatures as follows:

The material/matter in existence of Genesis 1:2	+	Direct act of God breathing the breath of life into man creating the human spirit	=	Human Living Soul
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This personal act of God breathing into man places humans in a more personal relationship to God as those who have a spirit more directly related to God. This stands in comparison to the animals who are related to God only by the general presence of God’s spirit that pervades all of nature.

We may summarize the difference between animals as twofold:

First, humans are the image and likeness of God and animals are not.

Second, while both humans' and animals' corporeal (i.e. bodily) form is a product of the distribution of preexisting materials, the spirit which animates those bodies and forms the internal nature are related to God's Spirit differently. Animals are only generally related to God's Spirit that fills creation. God creates the human spirit by intimately breathing forth from Himself. Humans then stand in greater solidarity to God than animals and have a greater capacity for connecting and relating to God's Spirit through our spirits.

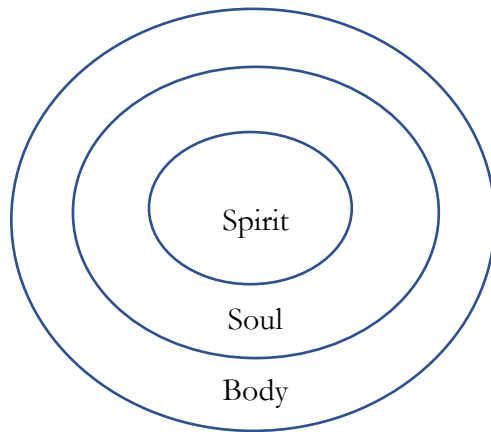
Human Beings as a Trichotomy. Let's now return to our original questions posed above. From our discussion thus far, it seems we are justified in describing human creatures as a trichotomy consisting of spirit, soul, and body. Paul makes this same distinction between these three elements of man in 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and the whole of your spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A few things we may notice for our present purpose:

- Paul distinguishes between spirit, soul, and body.
- All three are essential to what it means to be human, as indicated by the word “completely”.
- All three stand in need of being touched by God's grace and love to be made holy. It is striking that Paul refers to God as “the God of *peace*.” Peace/*shalom* is the completeness derived from God's creation working together in perfect harmony. In this case, it is the properly functioning human being harmoniously integrated in spirit, soul, and body, wholly sanctified by God.
- Paul sees each of these elements as multi-faceted. He applies to each the Greek word *holokleros*, which is translated into English above as “whole.” It is a compound word made up of the roots “whole” and “inheritance, possession, estate” thereby indicating, it is the whole estate or all that belongs in possession to each of these elements which stand in needs of God's sanctifying grace and love – this includes human faculties such as thinking, feeling, and the will.

This now raises the question as to the function and relationship of these three essential elements to one another. At the risk of being reductionistic and obviously over simplistic, we might illustrate man's composition with concentric circles:



The human spirit is directly created by God in Genesis 2:7 as He breathes of Himself into man. The soul, similar in nature to the spirit, then emanates from the inbreathed breath of life (spirit) but is not the spirit (cf. Is. 26:9; Heb. 4:12). We might describe the relationship by saying the soul is conditioned by or dependent upon the spirit. Think of the sun and then its rays that penetrate and heat the earth. We may liken the spirit to the sun, the soul its rays, and the body to the earth penetrated by the rays. In this analogy the rays of light stand in nearer relationship to the sun than the earth. The same is true of the soul, which stands nearer to the spirit in nature than to the body. We may press the analogy further. Just as the rays of light emanating from the sun share in the attributes of the sun and transfer them to the earth, so the soul partakes in the spirit's capacities (such as thought and knowledge) and communicates them to the body. The soul then acts somewhat as the mediator between spirit and body. Because of this, "soul" may also be used in biblical vernacular to describe the totality of a life with its internal and external nature (not dissimilar from the practice of the airline industry to refer to people as "souls on board").

A properly function human being will have his or her spirit connected with God's Spirit. The human spirit, working in conjunction with God's Spirit, then radiates God's glory through the soul and into and throughout the body of the individual so that the light and glory of God is displayed through the entire life of the person – in thought, word, and deed. Because of the interdependency of the body, soul, and spirit, our spiritual health will affect our bodies and our bodily health will affect our spiritual health. Though because of the primacy of the spirit, if the spirit is disconnected from the life of God's spirit, the body will die. Spiritual death will result in bodily death. Sadly, this is where the Story is headed.