

Christian Anthropology and Ministry in Pauline Theology: Body, Soul and Spirit

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There are still many people who have died without knowing Jesus as their Savior in the world.¹ Human identity was broken and distorted because of sins and ignorance for God's existence. The understanding of the human being has played an important role theologically as well as missiologically. Through the self-understanding of a person, we can have a theological and missiological validity why we must proclaim the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18-21; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15). Paul Hiebert, missiological anthropologist, indicates why theological assumptions are important to understand missiology in relation to anthropology.

This is an important question, for we cannot divorce our anthropological models from our theologies. To do so is to imply a separation between the spiritual and eternal nature of human beings and their creaturely and temporal nature. Human history must be understood within the greater framework of cosmic events, and our anthropological models of humans must fit within our theological framework.²

Apostle Paul expresses a theme in the basic structure of the human. We need to study the construction of a person in terms of Christian anthropology in order to understand who and what he or she is *coram Deo*. We need to look anew at the biblical teaching about the human beings for understanding the various aspects of his or her existence in relation to God. Even though we cannot derive a scientific anthropology from the Bible, there are many important benefits to understand the

¹ Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (U.K.: Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001), 2.

²Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1985), 16-17.

human beings in this debate: body, soul and spirit.

I. Background of Anthropological Terms in the Theology of Paul

First of all, the Greek and Hebrew anthropological terms are used by Paul in different ways. According to Robert Jewett, "terms have provided stimuli for the crucial methodological debates which have led us through the developmental theories and the Hebraic-Hellenistic controversies of the last century to the more recent debates on the religious-historical background and the theological interpretation of the terms."³ Interpretation will be differentiated as how a person accepts the meaning of term. In relation to the issue of Paul's theological anthropology, it is important to understand and analyze his anthropological terms.

Some have categorized Paul's views as a trichotomy, i.e., body, soul and spirit. They are "Franz Delitzsch, J. B. Heard, J. T. Beck, and G. F. Oehler. More recently it has been defended by such writers as Watchman Nee, Charles R. Solomon, and Bill Gothard."⁴ Others have seen a dichotomy of soul and body, like Louis Berkhof who insists that "the prevailing representation of the nature of man in Scripture is clearly dichotomic."⁵ Some theologians have understood that the three parts of person are not separated but differentiated in the view of a whole person. Even if there are a lot of controversies, it is very helpful to understand how we see people from theological as well as missiological perspective.

According to Ladd, Plato was one of the most influential thinkers for the history of Greek philosophy and he "held to a dualism of two worlds, the noumenal and the phenomenal, and to an anthropological dualism of body-soul."⁶ Plato believes that when a person dies, his or her immortal soul goes out of body to be destroyed. For him, salvation is an escape from the material world to the spiritual or the ideal world. Plato thinks that "the body is a kind of prison for the soul"⁷ which exists long before birth

³ Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1971), 1.

⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 205.

⁵Ibid., 209.

⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*(Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 457.

and belongs to eternity. This dualistic Greek mindset separated the body from the soul, and it has greatly influenced Western theologians.

The Hebrew's anthropological view, however, is very different from the Greek's: here is little or none of the anthropological dualism which is a marked feature of some greek thought. The word *nephesh* (Greek *psyche*), 'soul' is actually applied to dead bodies in such passages as Num. v:2. Eccles. iii:21, 'Who knows whether the spirit(*ruach*) of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth', shows that the writer was familiar with anthropological dualism; but he probably rejected it. If dualism of this kind is to be found in the Old Testament at all, it is merely peripheral: the basic teaching of the Old Testament is anthropological monism.⁸

According to Whiteley, the Hebrew terms are applied to the complete person, "but they are typically employed under different circumstances."⁹ Ladd points out that "the difference between *nephesh* and *ruach* in man is that *nephesh* designates man in relation to other men as man living the common life of men, while *ruach* is man in his relation to God,"¹⁰ which it is valid to reflect the relationship between God and person.

Apostle Paul expresses the nature of the human being in various terms such as 'flesh', 'body', 'spirit', 'heart', 'mind', 'conscience', 'soul', and 'inner man', etc. Even though these may appear as dichotomistic anthropological terms or even trichotomistic, admittedly they represent a monistic idea of person. This monistic theme in Paul's writings is often difficult to detect because western theologians often read a dichotomic anthropology of the human being in consisting of body and spirit or soul from passages such as 1 Cor.7:34, 5:4, and 2 Cor.7:1. Some even believe that Paul affirms a trichotomy in person, i.e., body, soul and spirit, from 1 Thess.5:23. However, these problems can be solved by considering how Paul uses these various anthropological terms to denote the human existence.

⁷Ernest White, *Saint Paul: The man and His mind*(London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, LTD, 1958), 108.

⁸D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 34-35.

⁹Ibid., 36.

¹⁰George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 458-59.

II. BODY

Some scholars believe that *soma* is simply contrasted with *nephesh* or *pneuma* in Pauline literature. Yet if we examine closely Paul's thought, we can know this view does not reflect his essential thought. Ladd sees that "man, his person as a whole being, can be denoted by *soma*"¹¹ which contains both spirit and soul. The body, of course, is important psychologically because through it we are able to express our thoughts and emotions to other people. If "we take away the body from our picture of a person, we are left with an intangible abstraction."¹²

Here and hereafter, *soma* is the center of the personal life, and this has led to the supposition that it comes nearest to our conception of personality. It is often used in place of a personal pronoun, as *sarx*, *pneuma*, and *psyche* are, but there are grounds for thinking that *soma* was more completely identified with the 'ego' than these terms. *soma*, *pneuma*, and *psyche* only represent the person in limited spheres, *soma* represents him in every sphere. *soma* is the link of continuity between man in the bondage of sin, man in the service of Christ, and man in the Resurrection.

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We may think of the word *soma* monistically to connote the sinfulness of people. It is "not of the physical body, but of the sinful, evil part of our personality expressed in evil thought, desires and actions"¹⁴; "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6). In other words, even though the body is an entire element of the existence of the human being, the body has a sinful nature, and is corruptible, and mortal (Rom. 6:12, 8:10, 2 Cor.4:11), and it is the instrument of sin. Paul realizes that a person who has the body put oneself under the power of sin and death by one's disobedience to God, and he or she deplores that who will rescue him or her from this

11George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 464.

12D.H.E. Whitely, *The Theology of St.Paul*, 41.

13W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956), 190.

14Ernest White, *Saint Paul*, 112.

body of death (Rom. 8:24). Mankind is eagerly wanting for the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23), and at the time of Christ's coming, his or her perishable body will be transformed into an imperishable and glorious body. He or she will be raised with a spiritual body which has 'somatic existence'.

This will not be a mere mortal and physical body (1 Cor. 15:42ff); "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1 Cor. 15:52). This indicates that the "work of redemption does not mean merely the salvation of the soul or spirit; it includes the redemption of the body."¹⁵ According to Hoekema, the body, for the Greeks, was considered "a tomb for the soul" that a person gladly abandoned at death, but this conception is totally foreign to the Bible.¹⁶

Since in this earthly life, the body is corruptible and sinful, it must be disciplined through the spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul urges us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1). This self-discipline over the body results in dedication to God (1 Cor. 9:27, 15:30, Gal. 2:20).

This is not achieved by asceticism and mortification of the body itself. On the contrary, the Christian is to recognize that his body is indwelt by the Spirit of God (I Cor. 6:19) and is a member of Christ (I Cor. 6:15). The body is to be an instrument in the service of Christ. Since the body shares in sanctification even while it is mortal, it follows that the Christian must exercise a cultivation and care for the body and use it as a means of the fullest realization of his spiritual life.¹⁷

The weakness of a Christian's body is encouraged by the help of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for him or her (Rom. 8:27), and he or she is waiting for Christ to transform one's lowly body into His glorious body on the consummation day.

III. SOUL

The Hebrew word for soul, nephesh, commonly indicates the activity and the

¹⁵George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 465.

¹⁶Anthony A. Hoekema, 206.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 466.

vitality in whole personality in a person. It does not posit a contrast between the body and the soul. God created the human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into one's nostrils the breath of life, and the person became a living being (*nephesh*, Gen. 2:7). In this sense, "soul" means the "inner being of person," the "living being" and the "energetic being" as a whole person.

The soul is not an accident of something else but a self-existing living substance. The mutual relationship is such, that the connection between soul and body is not accidental but entirely essential, so that the body belongs essentially to the soul and to its Ego. . . . Man's soul is not only the form and perfection or the admixture or force potency or agitation resulting from the mingling with the body, but an incorporeal substance, living, knowing, dwelling in the body and supporting and moving it.¹⁸

In the New Testament, Paul's usage of the Greek word *psyche* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *nephesh* used of an individual person. The King James Version of the Bible translates Paul's thoughts in this manner: 'Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil,' (Rom. 2:9), and 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers' (Rom. 13:1). From these verses we cannot find, in particular, any proof for the pre-existence of the soul to be influenced by Hellenistic anthropological view.

Robert Jewett insists that "the particular sense of the word [the soul] depends upon the context in which it is used rather than upon a development within Paul's thought."¹⁹ In some contexts Paul applies the term to seal a vow or commitment. In 2 Cor. 1:23, Paul swears by his soul to God. Paul says he will very gladly spend himself for 'the souls of you' whom he loves (2 Cor. 12:15). Stacey also suggests some examples of *psyche* of Paul's usage for an individual person; "In Rom. 2:9, Paul speaks of 'every soul of man that worketh evil'. He means 'every person who commits sin'. . . . The reference is not merely to spiritual sins, but to sins of every kind."²⁰

In this situation, we can know that "Paul is concerned for the welfare of the whole man and everything life involves; but the emphasis is upon the inner life."²¹ Paul wants

¹⁸Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. by G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1950), 222-23.

¹⁹Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1971), 448.

²⁰W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man*, 123.

to share his whole being including his new self as his own soul with Thessalonican brothers.²² If the human being does not have the body, he or she cannot have the soul. The soul is not life in the abstract but the vital force of the body.²³ Thus, this word, *psyche* indicates an aspect in whole person.

As Clarence Bass comments on the word, "body", he points out appropriately the relationship between body and soul.

Body and soul are used almost interchangeably, soul to indicate man as a living being, and body (flesh) to denote him as a corporeally visible creature. . . . This unity of body and soul [has] led some writers to conclude that the Old Testament lacks a view of the physical body as a discreet entity. . . . More properly, however, the Old Testament sees body and soul as coordinates interpenetrating each other in function to form a single whole.²⁴

In the Bible, someone who is body and soul and someone who is body and spirit are used interchangeably: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28); "An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit"(1 Cor. 7:34); "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead"(Jas. 2:26).²⁵

IV. SPIRIT

The *pneuma* is the most important word in Paul's anthropological thought. According to Robinson, the doctrine of the Spirit, as active in the generation and sanctification of the believer united with Christ through faith and baptism, is his most important and characteristic contribution to Christian anthropology.²⁶

²¹Ladd, 460.

²²Ibid. In this case, soul means "a sharing of his whole being including all that is involved in his redeemed personality."

²³Stacey, 124.

²⁴F.B. Knutson, "Body," ISBE, 1:528-29. Recited by Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 212-13.

²⁵Anthony A. Hoekema, 206-7.

²⁶H.Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*(Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1947), 125.

Paul emphasized that if a person does not have the Spirit of Christ, he or she does not belong to Christ. Even though our body is dead because of sin, our spirits are alive because of righteousness (Rom. 8:9-10). Thus, when Paul speaks of the *pneuma*, it is mainly identified with the activity of God in terms of the work of salvation. Stacey tries to clarify the term, the spirit used by Paul with six senses; (1) It is applied to God, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Spirit of Christ. (2) It is concerned as a divine influence in the life of believers, creating in man 'spiritual gifts', talents which one had not previously known. (3) There were 'seducing spirits', and a spirit different from that of Jesus. The diabolical world was spiritual in nature. (4) There are characteristics which ensued from the influence of disobedient spirits. (5) There is a purely Christian *pneuma*, created in a believer when he enters the Christian inheritance. (6) There is a personal *pneuma*, the natural possession of every man, which, of itself, is neither good nor bad, and is not easily distinguished from *psyche*.²⁷

In the Pauline letters, he mainly makes emphasis on the relationship of God with the human spirit for the biblical foundation- "I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son" (Rom. 1:9), "and man who unites oneself with Christ is one with him in spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). Paul asserts that when he prays in tongues, his spirit prays to God (1 Cor. 14:14), and prophecy is declared by the human being's spirit (1 Cor. 14:32). Grace of the Lord is with the spirit of a person (Gal. 6:18).

In the Old Testament, according to Earle Ellis, the Spirit of God had a prophetic as well as a creative role.²⁸ It is impossible to separate God from His Spirit. The Old Testament prophetic description indicates (1) the creation and maintenance of the present order of nature, (2) the mediation of God's word for the present age, and (3) the source of transitory "this age" benefits and judgments.²⁹ This is related to "the Spirit's present work as an anticipation or type of his future eschatological role."³⁰

In the New Testament, the activity of the Spirit is identified with the Spirit of God. But, even though both have similar prophetic and creative aspects, the work of the Spirit in the New Testament is different from that in the Old Testament in some points, such as that (1) the new work is mediated exclusively through Jesus the Messiah, (2)

²⁷Stacey, 128-29.

²⁸Earle Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 26.

²⁹Ibid., 27.

³⁰Ibid.

with respect to its *creative* aspect it is directed not toward sustaining the present creation but toward bringing to birth the "new creation" of the kingdom of God, (3) with respect to its *prophetic* aspect it primarily concerns the communication of the truths, demands, conditions, and promises of this resurrection life.³¹

During his[Jesus'] earthly ministry Jesus was, like a prophet, at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, however, the order is reversed. The Spirit is now at the disposition of the exalted Jesus. It is in this context that Jesus is represented as the one who, as the exalted Lord, sends the Spirit and his gifts to the Christian community. This is perhaps best seen in the Pauline letters in the quotation-exposition of Ps 68:18 at Eph 4:8.³²

Undoubtedly, Paul sees that the human being with spirit is able to enter into relationship with God, to have fellowship with God, and to enjoy the blessings of God (cf. John 4:24; "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth") through joining the Spirit of Jesus. We can call God, "*Abba*, Father" with our spirits (Gal. 4:6). The new self and attitude is experienced in the spirit with true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:23-24). The Spirit of Jesus Christ, a life-giving spirit, can deliver people (1 Cor. 16:45, Phil. 1:19) through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). The other significant passages say that the children of God need to strive for the sanctification of both body and spirit. Since the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), we have to purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body or the spirit (1 Cor. 7:34, 2 Cor. 7:1).

The *pneuma* is not a unique substance which only converted Christians have. That is, every person has a spirit which can "be applied to either the whole man or an aspect of his life."³³ For the non-Christian, however, he or she cannot realize one's true inner self if he or she is not incorporated in the Spirit of Jesus Christ even though he or she has a spirit. Paul confirms it in 1 Cor. 2:11: "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit, *to pneuma tou anthropou*, within him?" Ultimately, the only way the human being can take the living spirit from the dead is through

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 29.

³³D.E.H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 42.

fellowship with Christ (Rom. 8:10). The *pneuma* in Paul's anthropological view means the true human being in terms of the whole person to have continual fellowship with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

V. CONCLUSION

As we discuss Apostle Paul's anthropological view, we do not advocate a dichotomy or a trichotomy in Christian anthropology. Particularly, the dichotomy was taught by Plato in the ancient Greek as two distinct substances; body and soul. On the one hand, the body is a physical part of the human being which dies, and it remains decomposition at the time of death and comes back to the earth. On the other hand, the soul is the immaterial part of a person which survives after death, and which sets him or her apart from all other creatures. In this view, of course, there is never the bodily resurrection. None of the Pauline terms (*soma*, *psyche* or *pneuma*), however, supports an idealistic or the dualistic concept of a person as we discuss in the previous chapters.

Some influenced by the Alexandrian fathers of the early century of the church insist that 1 Thess. 5:23 – "May your whole spirit (*pneuma*), soul (*psyche*) and body (*soma*) be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" – conveys the idea of trichotomy in the Pauline anthropology (cf. Heb. 4:12). However, in spite of Paul's terminology of trichotomic language, his anthropological thought is monistic in terms of the nature of the human being, not different component parts of. Even Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart," does not indicate that "the word of God causes a division between a 'part' of human nature called the soul and another 'part' called the spirit."³⁴

The language is figurative. The next clause indicates the intent of the author: he wishes to say that the word of God judges "the thoughts and attitudes (or intentions) of the heart." God's word (whether understood as meaning the

³⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, 208.

Bible or Jesus Christ) penetrates into the innermost recesses of our being, bringing to light the secret motives for our action. . . . There is therefore no reason to understand Hebrews 4:12 as teaching a psychological distinction between soul and spirit as two constituent parts of man.³⁵

Paul emphasizes and wants the entirety of the preservation in every aspect and wholeness. That is, these (body, soul and spirit) are not the separated entities but an anthropological view as a whole in the approach of the unified human personality to be taught by Jesus through the analytical usage of a person such as the passage, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27). In other words, the Bible is "not primarily interested in the constituent 'parts' of man or in his psychological structure, but in the relationships in which he stands."³⁶ The primary concern of Paul to use these terms is not "the psychological or anthropological constitution of man but his inescapable relatedness to God."³⁷

Accordingly, we cannot think the eternal future life without the bodily resurrection. And any kind of intermediate state between death and resurrection is excluded too (cf. Luke. 23:43, 16:22ff). Because, even though Paul expresses 'sleep in Christ'(cf. 1 Cor. 15:51, 1 Thess. 4:14) between death and resurrection, it must be interpreted "to stay with Christ in heaven" with imperishable body like Jesus' body after the resurrection, so called spiritual body, to be different with perishable earthly body. Ultimately, salvation is associated with both soul and spirit (Jas. 1:21, RSV; 1 Cor. 5:5), and praising and loving God is ascribed to both soul and spirit (Luke 1:46-47, RSV; Mark 12:30).³⁸

Even though human beings were created in the perfect image of God, they lost this original perfection because of the fall. Actual communion with God was ceased from the relationship of human beings after the fall.³⁹ From the wholistic perspective, this relationship must be restored in the Spirit of Jesus, the true image of God. In Pauline theology, as a matter of fact, sin is the most serious problem of human beings even in

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Anthony A. Hoekema, 204.

³⁷Ibid., 210.

³⁸Ibid., 207.

³⁹Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 47.

the debates of body, soul and spirit. Is there really, from the missiological point of view, only possible solution of the problem for all people?

Even in the Bible "the responsibility of human beings for their sins is not based on such a freedom of indifference. 'Freedom' in the New Testament is not thought of as something that human beings have from the beginning and 'by their nature' but as an effect of the redemptive presence of Christ and his Spirit (John 8:36: 2 Cor. 3:17)."⁴⁰ Missionaries as well as ministers must help people so that they may have the "true freedom" in the Spirit of Jesus, our Savior.

⁴⁰Ibid., 111. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

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