

## Stand Up, My Soul

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Stand up, my soul; shake off your fears,  
and gird the gospel armor on;  
march to the gates of endless joy,  
where your great Captain Savior's gone.

Hell and your sins resist your course;  
but hell and sin are vanquished foes:  
your Jesus nailed them to the cross,  
and sang the triumph when he rose.

Then let my soul march boldly on,  
press forward to the heav'nly gate;  
there peace and joy eternal reign,  
and glitt'ring robes for conqu'rors wait.

There shall I wear a starry crown,  
and triumph in almighty grace;  
while all the armies of the skies  
join in my glorious Leader's praise.

## ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Spirit, Soul, and Body, Part One: Assessing the Problem**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

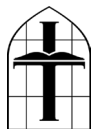
Doctrinal controversies go in and out of style. Students of the Bible may debate an issue at one time but find it boring at some later point. Sometimes disputes cool off for a while. They flare up again when someone works out a new potential implication of the argument.

One of these recurring controversies concerns our basic nature. What are we, and what makes us human? Is our material being our real self? Or is the immaterial the real us? Do our true selves live in our bodies, or do our bodies somehow define self-hood? If we are immaterial, how many immaterial parts do we have? Are soul and spirit distinguishable, or are they identical? What about other features such as the heart? How are all these questions related to our creation in God's image?

Much of this debate went out of style a generation or two ago. Recent perspectives are bringing it to the front again. For example, transgenderism forces us to ask how our bodies relate to our identities. Christian counselors are disputing how souls influence bodies and vice versa. Some theories of sanctification assume that spirit and soul are different. Other theories insist they are the same.

Two views used to be popular. We usually called one *dichotomy* and the other *trichotomy*. Sometimes we called them the *dipartite* and *tripartite* theories. Trichotomists argue that humans consist of three substances (body, soul, and spirit). Dichotomists see only two elements (body and soul/spirit).

Trichotomists advanced several scriptural evidences to support their position. One text, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, names spirit, soul, and body in parallel. Trichotomists view this parallelism as proof for three equal parts of human nature. They also point to Hebrews 4:12, which says that the Word of God can separate soul and spirit. Then they turn to Mary's Magnificat. Mary states that her soul magnifies the Lord and that her spirit has rejoiced in God her savior (Luke 1:46–47). Trichotomists see this as another proof that soul is not the same as spirit. They admit that soul and spirit are both immaterial. Yet they insist that soul and spirit are separate aspects of human being.



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Dichotomists respond to such arguments point by point. They note that the Magnificat follows Hebrew poetical forms. It employs synonymous parallelism, implying that soul and spirit are identical. Hebrews 4:12 also implies that soul and spirit cannot normally be separated. They note that 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is not the only text to employ a parallelism of human parts. Deuteronomy 4:29 lists heart and soul. Ezekiel 36:26 includes heart and spirit. 1 Corinthians 7:34 points to body and spirit. Matthew 22:37 includes heart, soul, and mind. Mark 12:30 lists four elements: heart, soul, mind, and strength.

It is worth noting that one passage (1 Cor 2:14–3:3) does contrast the soulish or natural human with one who is spiritual. But in this case the reference is to the Holy Spirit, not to a separate part of human nature. The passage also includes references to a “fleshly” or carnal person. The word *flesh* here refers to the sin nature, not the body. Hence, this passage contributes little to the debate.

Some take all the parallelisms equally. They reason that human nature consists of many elements. These include spirit, soul, body, heart, mind, and others. The problem with this view is that parallelism can mean many things. Sometimes it distinguishes things. Sometimes it makes them the same. Sometimes it indicates other sorts of relationships. The evidence for this view is weak at best.

Others move in the opposite direction. They emphasize the unity of human nature. They see a close connection between the soul and the body. Some even deny that the soul can survive when the body dies. They talk about “soul sleep.” What they really mean is that nothing remains of us after death. We cease to exist, at least for a while. Some even deny the existence of a soul.

Advocates of these views look for biblical evidence. They also introduce philosophical categories. They talk about the difference between substance, accident, and function. This discussion can become complicated. These categories do not always help people think more clearly. The problem is not that the categories are bad. It lies in deciding how to apply them to this discussion.

I would like to take a more fruitful approach. I wish to discover how each individual term is used throughout Scripture. The terms *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* will be most important. The Bible often uses words in a variety of related senses. Perhaps these words will be like that. Once we discover the pool of uses for each term, we will understand how those uses overlap—and where they do not. We can look especially for ways in which the terms relate to each other. Thus, we can gain an inductive impression of what human nature looks like and how it functions.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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