

§ 10. Doctrine of Man
Lecture 09
Refuting Materialism / Monism

We've been looking at the apostle Paul's doctrine of the body and soul particularly with respect to the intermediate state of the soul between bodily death and bodily resurrection. We saw that in Paul's letters we have evidence that Paul thought of the soul as a free-standing ontological constituent of human beings that can survive the death of the body and be with Christ until the time of the eschatological resurrection. But this is not a doctrine that is peculiar to the apostle Paul. In addition to Paul's letters, let's look at a couple of other New Testament passages that suggest that we are in fact dealing with an ontological dualism of body and soul.

For example, in the teachings of Jesus himself found in Luke 16:19ff we have Jesus' parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus. Jesus said,

[blockquote]There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'[/blockquote]

Now, it's always risky, I grant, to try to draw doctrine out of a parable because a parable is meant to teach a central point, and you can't press the circumstantial details of the parable for doctrinal precision. Nevertheless, it does seem clear here that Jesus is assuming the traditional Jewish view of the intermediate state – that when a person dies that person doesn't simply cease to exist; rather, after bodily death, the souls of the evil and the souls of the righteous are separated from one another and there is a continued conscious existence in that intermediate state. So Jesus' parable would support a dualism of soul and body.

Next, 1 Peter 3:18-20. Peter says,

[\[blockquote\]](#)For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark . . .[\[/blockquote\]](#)

Here Peter is talking about that state between Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection on Sunday morning, and he says that even though Christ was dead in the flesh nevertheless he was alive in the spirit, and in this state he went and preached to the spirits in prison. Who are these spirits in prison? On the basis of texts like 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, 7 one might plausibly take them to be the so-called sons of God of Genesis 6:1-4 who took as wives the daughters of men and sired the Nephilim. Let me read 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 for this.

[\[blockquote\]](#)For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment; . . .[\[/blockquote\]](#)

Then in Jude we have verse 6 refer to the same thing:

[\[blockquote\]](#)And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day;[\[/blockquote\]](#)

In Jude and 2 Peter we find the sons of God of Genesis 6:1-4 equated with angels along with additional information concerning the angels' fate which is not inferable from Genesis 6, specifically their being bound by God with chains in the underworld. So it might be plausibly thought that these spirits in prison that 1 Peter 3 refers to just are these angelic spirits bound in chains in eternal darkness. But are the spirits in prison in fact angels, or are they just as plausibly the wicked human contemporaries of Noah now deceased? I think the modifying clause in 1 Peter 3 – “who formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark” – is a much more apt description for Noah's contemporaries than for the angels of Genesis 6:1-4 who are not said to have disobeyed God, tried God's patience, or sinned during the building of the ark as Noah's contemporaries are implied to have done. In the Jewish pseudepigraphal book that we looked at last time, 1 Enoch, the expression “spirits” is variously used to refer to human beings, to the Nephilim, and also to angels. You can find references of the word “spirits” to human beings, the Nephilim, and to angels in 1 Enoch. As we saw last time, in 1 Enoch deceased persons now disembodied and awaiting the eschatological resurrection and judgment are frequently referred to as “spirits” – the “spirits of the righteous” are separated from “the spirits of men who were not righteous but sinners” as each awaits their respective fate. Indeed, in the context of the intermediate state the

referents of the word “spirits” is virtually always to human beings in 1 Enoch, not to angels. So if we take the spirits in prison to be the wicked deceased of Noah's day who did not heed his preaching then this means that Christ visited not the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 but rather the disembodied spirits of people who once lived and were then disembodied. Not only are they alive during this intermediate state, but Christ himself exists in this intermediate state between the death and resurrection. So once again the assumption, I think, is that this is a real state. This state of the disembodied dead prior to the resurrection is not simply a metaphor but an actual state in which Christ himself once existed and in which he went and visited these so-called spirits in prison.

Finally, look at Hebrews 12:22-23. The author says,

[blockquote]But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, . . . [blockquote]

Here he is talking about the saints who have gone to be with Christ and are awaiting the final return of Christ, the resurrection, and the Judgment Day. It refers to these glorified saints as “the spirits of just men made perfect.” So here again we have the notion of a disembodied soul in communion with Christ in a blessed state waiting until the time of the eschatological resurrection.

In summary, it seems to me that we have ample biblical grounds in the teaching about the intermediate state of the soul for believing that the soul-body dualistic language in the Scriptures is to be taken seriously, and that we are, in fact, composite entities made up of a soul and a body that are capable of existing independently of each other and therefore are ontologically distinct from each other.

In addition to that, I want to point out that the denial of the reality of the soul is not only unbiblical but I think that it has theological consequences that are extremely serious and indeed undermine all of Christian theology. Let me mention four such consequences.

1. Notice that God is an unembodied mind. God just is an unembodied soul in the same way that we will become disembodied souls when we die. *If you do not believe that unembodied souls are possible, it's very difficult to see how you can believe in the existence of God because that's exactly what God is.* You'll recall I shared that the first time I met Nancy Murphy (who is a professor of theology at Fuller Theological Seminary) at a conference at the University of Notre Dame, she said to me, *I'm a materialist*, and I was stunned. I said, *Well, what about God?* And she replied, *Oh, well, I make an exception in God's case.* Well, I'm glad that she did make such an exception, but I think that seems a rather ad hoc move on her part. Don't you? If God can be an unembodied soul then why can't there be created souls who are in his image?

2. *Free will seems to be impossible without the reality of the soul.* If we are just physical electrochemical machines then there isn't any room for free agency to enter in. Everything we do is going to be determined by our physical makeup and the inputs of our five senses, what the American philosopher W. V. O. Quine called *the irritation of your surfaces* by the various influences impinging on your nerve endings. These will determine everything that you think and do. Without freedom of the will, we are just machines; we are not moral agents who can do good or evil or who can be held responsible by God or who can respond freely to God's love. We would just be automata. So free will, I think, is essential to a Christian view of man, and yet that is undermined if we are just purely physical entities. Peter van Inwagen, who is another Christian philosopher who is a materialist, recognizes that he has no understanding of how on his materialism we can have libertarian freedom. But van Inwagen simply says, *I know that we do have libertarian freedom and so I simply affirm it even though I don't know how to reconcile it with my materialism.* Well, again, I'm glad that he affirms the freedom of the will and hence moral responsibility, but if you can't make sense of free will on a materialist anthropology then perhaps this ought to lead us to question physicalism or materialism in favor of a body-soul dualism.

3. *The resurrection of the body threatens to reduce to God's creating a replica of you rather than actually raising you from the dead.* If you just are your body and you cease to exist when your body dies and your body is destroyed (say vaporized in an atomic explosion) then when God raises the dead on the Judgment Day why is that you rather than just a duplicate of you? What makes that you rather than a replica of you with all of your memories and other things restored? To illustrate, typically materialists would say that what makes this podium the same podium that was here last Sunday is its material continuity. There is material continuity between the podium last week and the podium today. But suppose that we were to create out of nothing an exactly similar podium – a duplicate of it – not in the future but right now here on the platform next to it. Just being in a perfectly similar state wouldn't make them the same podium, would it? So say that the podium were destroyed and God in the future were to make a podium that looks exactly like it (it's in exactly the same state), why would it be this podium rather than a duplicate of this podium? Similarly, maybe it's not really you that is raised from the dead. You died and ceased to exist when your body died. But then at the resurrection God produces a duplicate of you. That is certainly not the biblical doctrine of the resurrection – that God is going to make clones of all of us on the Judgment Day. On the materialistic view, one has really got some explaining to do as to why God's production of the similar person on the resurrection day is really you rather than just a duplicate of you. By contrast, on dualism the soul persists through the death of the body and the intermediate

state and thus ensures personal identity with the person who died and the person who then is raised on the Judgment Day.

4. *The incarnation becomes very difficult if not impossible on this view.* If human beings are purely material entities then how could the second person of the Trinity become a man? The doctrine of the incarnation, as we have seen in our section on Christology, is not the doctrine that the second person of the Trinity – the *Logos* – turned himself into a human being. It is not like the ancient mythological stories of Zeus transforming himself into a bull or a swan. I proposed a model of the incarnation that presupposes that man has an immaterial constituent of his nature which the *Logos* can stand in for, and so man has this immaterial part. But how the *Logos* could become flesh or have a human nature is very difficult to understand, I think, on a materialist anthropology.

In sum, it seems to me that we not only have good biblical grounds for affirming the reality of the soul and the body as distinct, but also that the denial of the soul's reality has some very serious theological consequences which should make anyone reluctant to embrace such a monistic, materialistic anthropology.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I haven't read everything by van Inwagen, obviously, but my understanding of why he thinks free will is a mystery . . . I haven't really seen him comment on the materialist aspect of his view. He thinks it's more of a mystery because he says he doesn't understand agent causation or how free will doesn't devolve into randomness. He even said in an interview that even if you posit God then after you're still faced with the mystery of free will. I take from reading all that that even if he did believe in a soul he would still say free will is a mystery.

Dr. Craig: Yes, yes. I think you're right about that, and that would hinge on not regarding this immaterial substance as a free moral agent that can make decisions for reasons rather than just random acts of chance. So I think that's a good point.

Student: I'm glad you pointed out all these good trichotomous verses, but I went through my exhaustive concordance – not being a detail person but just glancing through – but there's many references to soul and spirit being separate. I think they work in tandem, but I think it enhances the dualistic nature of man by saying the spirit is a separate entity, much the same argument you used against a materialist that says God is spirit. We are made in the image of God. It makes sense that we also have a distinct spirit even though it's in tandem with our soul. Hebrews 4:4 says the word divides us under even the soul and the spirit. If you link the spirit with the breath in the Old Testament, there's many, many verses that relate to this. But if you take the idea that like in Proverbs it says that a man's spirit is God's lamp. This doesn't relate anything to activities of the soul – cognition, volition, emotion on our part. It has a presence and a significance apart from

soulful activities. So I can only find one verse that mentions God having a soul and that's Isaiah 1:14. I would say along those lines we have a stronger argument for the dualistic outline that you made here if we take a trichotomous point of view rather than just a straight dualistic point of view.

Dr. Craig: Obviously the burden of the lesson is to refute the monistic, materialistic view of human beings that is popular today. I see the distinction between dichotomy and trichotomy as very much a secondary issue that is less fundamental, and I'll say something about it more later on. But notice that one of the things that I tried to emphasize was that the appeal of the argument I've given is not just to the fact that the Scriptures use body-soul language because even though it uses body-soul language that could be figurative speech or relational speech and not really ontological. But it's when you come to the intermediate state that it seems to become clear that we are dealing here with real ontological differences, and that's not what I find with regard to spirit. I think that although the Scripture often speaks about – as we saw, the spirits of just men made perfect or the spirits in prison – there isn't any attempt to differentiate between spirit and soul in those kinds of cases. That just seems to be the disembodied person that might variously be referred to as spirit or soul or even “the spirits of the souls.” So the trichotomous defender, I think, is going to need to give us some reason to take this language in a weighty, ontological way rather than as relational or figurative or some such way. If he has nothing better than just the linguistic evidence then you're going to wind up being committed to things like a mind and a heart as well because we're also commanded to love the Lord with all our heart or with all our mind. You begin to proliferate entities in the human person or human nature. For that reason I'm not persuaded that we should multiply entities in that way. I think it's better to just say there is an immaterial part of human beings that can be variously referred to as soul, spirit, mind, heart, things of that sort. I think that I will say something more about that, but that would be my response at this point.

Student: I might be misunderstanding the materialist's point of view but they would believe that everything that exists has some interaction of matter. Right? There's not something that exists other than material things made of atoms. But they would believe that our thoughts would be the result of some sort of interaction of matter. Right? So why would being a materialist preclude the idea of free will?

Dr. Craig: Well, just because that. It seems to me what you just said explains why. Because your mental life is the product of various brain states – firings of various neurons in your brain. And those are explicable in terms of prior physical brain states. So the mental states, as we'll see next time, have no causal effect upon anything. They just sort of float along on these brain states which are fully explicable on a physical basis. So it seems to preclude any freedom of the will on our part.

Student: I was thinking about your thoughts on van Inwagen's view, and I was starting to think that maybe with respect to free will it's worth noting that the phrase "free will" is kind of like the word "evolution" – it can be expanded and contracted upon. I was thinking of John Martin Fischer's view of free will. He is what's called a semi-compatibilist where he thinks maybe free will and determinism are compatible but maybe moral responsibility and determinism are not. I might have that backwards. But on his view all you need to do is be responsive and receptive to reasons in a way. I don't think that there's anything about materialism that would include that sort of reason responsiveness or reason receptiveness that Fischer includes.

Dr. Craig: Could I just jump in there? So, on this view, if someone gives you reasons for doing something and you're persuaded by that, that would count as a free decision on your part even if physical causes are what produced your assent to those arguments that were offered you. You would be entirely determined and caused by purely physical states.

Student: I'm going to give a tentative "yes" but he gives these very nuanced criteria for what counts reason responsiveness, reason receptiveness, and possible world semantics and stuff like that. But then the second thing that I wanted to note was that maybe you could get around this by adopting a certain view of moral responsibility. There are a few ways to think about moral responsibility. For example, there's an accountability view which says you're morally responsible if it's fitting that you give an account for that action or omission. Then there are ledger views that think of moral responsibility on the analogy of a moral ledger. So if you do something bad or something good, it's to say this person got a good grade, a good mark, and this person got a bad mark. I'm thinking maybe if you adopt a sort of ledger view of moral responsibility with saying this person received a good mark, this person received a bad mark, you can circumvent these accountability views that it's fitting that I give an account for something or that I'm the appropriate subject of moral praise or blame.

Dr. Craig: Of course one can always redefine terms and especially weaken them so as to make them compatible with determinism and no free will, but then the question will be the adequacy of those new concepts. It seems to me that what you've described as a sort of moral ledger view just isn't adequate to what we would talk about when we mean moral responsibility. I'm thinking here particularly liability to punishment or worthiness of moral praise. That's got to be more, I think, than just a kind of ledger as you explained it.

Student: Theoretically, if you were a convinced atheist, would you be a firm hard determinist, and if so how could you live that way?

Dr. Craig: Now, you are asking me, right? I think that the plausibility of body-soul dualism is so strong, even apart from biblical teaching, that it would be better for the

atheist to be a dualist even though he's an atheist and just say that there is this mysterious mental substance that is connected somehow with my body that is free and therefore morally accountable, but just deny that it's the result of some sort of transcendent mind that has created us. But I think to embrace determinism and deny moral accountability would just be, as you say, an impossible way to live. I remember talking to one philosopher at a conference in Slovenia and he said to me over the dinner table, *Well, I kind of come to the conclusion that I think that determinism is true.* I looked at him with horror, and I said, *That's awful!* And he kind of looked surprised at me, like why would I react in this way? I said, *You know, if that's true, what are we even doing philosophy for? Let's just quit and become farmers and live off the land or something, but I just don't see any reason to engage in anything.* It's an unlivable view. Of course, if you're determined to do it, you don't have much choice! I guess my advice to the atheist would be: be a dualist even though you're an atheist.¹

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