

Distinction -- far-reaching indeed -- is implied between soul and spirit, yet these terms are used synonymously. Thus the controversy is between those who are impressed with the distinctions and those who are impressed with the similarities. It would be well to recognize that, when so required, the Bible assigns to these two terms a distinctive meaning and that when no specific distinction is in view, the Bible supports both dichotomy and trichotomy. The distinction between soul and spirit is as incomprehensible as life itself, and the efforts of men to frame definitions must always be unsatisfactory.

P. B. Fitzwater, in his Christian Theology Second Edition, p.309, states:

In I Thessalonians 5:23 we have the classic passage on the constituent elements of man's nature. These elements stand out in clear and bold relief showing that man is made up of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit of man links him with the highest Intelligence and shows that he is susceptible to the quickening of the Holy Spirit. It is by the human spirit that man communes with God. The soul is intermediate between the body and the spirit and seems to be the sphere of the affections, the reason, and the will. When the human personality was vitally united with the material body, man became a living soul.

Millard J. Erickson, in Volume 2, pp.520-522, 524 of his *Christian Theology* writes:

A view rather popular in conservative Protestant circles has been termed the "trichotomist" view. Man is composed of three elements. The first element is the physical body. A physical nature is something man has in common with animals and plants. There is no difference in kind between man's body and that of animals and plants. The difference is one of degree, as man has a more complex physical structure. The second part of man is the soul. This is the psychological element, the basis of reason, of emotion, of social interrelatedness and the like. Animals are thought to have a rudimentary soul. Possession of a soul is what distinguishes man and animals from the plants. While the soul of man is much more involved and capable than that of the animals, their souls are similar in kind. What really distinguishes man from the animals is not that he has a more complex and advanced soul, but that he possesses a third element, namely, a spirit. This religious element enables the human to perceive spiritual matters and respond to spiritual stimuli. It is the seat of the spiritual qualities of the individual, whereas the personality traits reside in the soul.

Probably the most widely held view through most of history of Christian thought has been the view that man is composed of two elements, a material aspect, the body, and an immaterial component, the soul or spirit. Dichotomism was commonly held from the earliest period of Christian thought. Following the Council of Constantinople in 381, however, it grew in popularity to the point that it was virtually the universal belief of the church.