

BODY AND SOUL

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Matthew 10:28

Genesis 2:7 gives us the basic biblical picture of humanity: God formed man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a “living creature,” or “living soul.” The Hebrew word *nephesh* can refer to the soul, but also to the whole person. Likewise, the Greek word *psyche* may mean “soul” or simply “life.” We should not force a technical philosophical meaning into every use of these words. Scripture presents human beings as unified persons, not souls trapped inside bodies.

At the same time, Scripture distinguishes between the body and the inner person. Paul could speak of departing this life and being “with Christ” (Philippians 1:23), and he describes the body as an earthly tent that is eventually put off (2 Corinthians 5:1–10). Revelation 6:9 speaks of the “souls” of those who had been slain, prior to the resurrection. Human beings are therefore more than physical organisms. Death separates body and soul (James 2:26), though that separation is not our final hope.

The view that humans consist of body and soul is often called *dichotomy*. Some Christians argue for *trichotomy*, distinguishing body, soul, and spirit as three components, especially from 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. Yet Scripture often uses “soul” and “spirit” in overlapping ways. Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46–47). Jesus likewise speaks of being troubled in “soul” and then in “spirit” (John 12:27; 13:21). These passages suggest that “soul” and “spirit” can describe the same inner, immaterial dimension of human life.

This also helps us understand the intermediate state. Scripture indicates that the faithful continue consciously with Christ after death, but this is not the end. Christianity does not teach that salvation means escaping the body forever. Our hope is resurrection. God will raise the dead and restore embodied life in glory (1 Corinthians 15:42–49).

This matters because Scripture refuses to reduce us to bodies alone or treat the body as unimportant. Our bodies are part of God’s good creation and are to be used in holiness and service. Jesus warns us not merely to fear what can harm the body, but to recognize the eternal significance of the soul (Matthew 10:28). Christian hope includes both: the soul with Christ after death and, at the resurrection, the renewal of the whole person.

Why does it matter that we are more than physical bodies?