

With this in mind look at John 4.24 which says, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” Jesus was responding to the woman-at-the-well’s assertion that worship happened in Samaria and Jerusalem according to her belief and the belief of the Jews. Jesus told her that the realm of worship, not the location of worship, was the issue. To worship *in spirit and truth* was the *spiritual realm or the realm of spiritual activity* that worship would naturally occur within. Therefore, to worship *in spirit* was to respond to the Holy Spirit with the inner man. To worship *in truth* meant to have genuine, truthful, honest worship. *Truth* is the knowledge of God which comes through Jesus. *Knowledge* is a part of the physical perspective of man. As so often interpreted, truth does *not* mean philosophical correctness or even the Word of God (Bible) in this passage.

So biblical worship brings together the inner and outer man in response to God. It is an outward expression from an inner response which God expects as we worship him. When we sing, “Bless the Lord, O my soul...,” we are blessing God with our total being, not some Platonic part of our being.

We should always be willing to let our popular understanding of biblical ideas be formed by Scripture and not try to insert our popular understanding into the text of Scripture and thereby make God say something he never said. The good news is: you don’t have a soul, you are one! God created you as a complete person. He sent Jesus to deliver you as a complete person. Rejoice and accept his work in your total person. Got Soul? Nope, you are a soul!

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GOT SOUL?

**A Platonic Theory
or
Biblical Theology?**

Dr. Winn Griffin

Like any other group of people, Christians have their own language system. It has often been called *Christianese*. With that language we describe what has occurred to a new believer as “God saving a soul.” This betrays a definite Greek thought form which has become the foundation for our use of the *soul* language. The idea of getting *souls saved* is the language of Jonathan Edwards in the First Great Awakening in the 18th century. It has carried down to the present as good evangelical language, usually based on the passage in 1 Peter 1.9, “...for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (NIV).

We have prayed and taught our kids to pray, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my *soul* to keep...” This is not Christian theology but Greek philosophy, unless *soul* is taken with its Hebraic concept of wholeness as we will discuss below. Plato (see above in box) developed the distinction between body and soul. Scripture does not indicate anywhere that man has a *soul* but rather that man is a *soul*. Body and spirit would be two different ways or perspectives in Scripture by which the *soul* is viewed.

The Hebrew word which we translate *soul* is *nepesh* which refers to a human being. It appears in the Hebrew Bible 750 times and is translated *soul* 119 times. No other Hebrew word is translated *soul*. All the other instances are rendered by English words such as *life, being, self, etc.* The New Testament term is *psyche* and essentially has the same meaning as *nepesh*. In Scripture, a *soul* is the complete person.

God shaped a lifeless form and breathed into him the breath of life (Gen. 2.7). Man became a *living being*. Our anthropology of man has suffered greatly by the translation of this verse in KJV as a *living soul*. The first human creation of God became a *complete being* not *body and soul*. The concept of humankind as being made up of body, soul, and spirit is Platonic philosophy, not Biblical theology. Man is a *whole* viewed from two perspectives, body and spirit. This composite nature of

PLATO

427-347 B.C.

Greek philosopher, one of the most creative and influential thinkers in Western philosophy. Born in Athens, he became a student of Socrates, accepting his basic philosophy and style of debate. In 387 B.C. Plato founded the Academy of Athens, often described as the first European university. Aristotle was the university's most prominent student. Theologians Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Saint Augustine were early Christian exponents of a Platonic



a human being does not by itself set humankind apart from the animal kingdom. Both are identified as living beings (Gen. 1.20, 2.19) and both are designated as having the breath of life (Gen. 6.17; 7.22). What we can say is that the word picture suggests that humans have received special attention from God. His relationship to humans is immediate and personal.

Dr. George Ladd presents us with a more natural view of *soul* in his book *A Theology of the New Testament* (Revised Edition).

“Soul (*nepesh*) is not a higher part of man standing over against his body, but designates the vitality of life principle in man. God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul (Gen. 2.7). Body and the divine breath together make the vital, active soul. The word is then extended from the life principle to include the feelings, passions, will, and even the mentality of the individual. It then comes to be used as a synonym for humanity itself (p. 500).

Psyche (often translated soul) and pneuma (translated spirit) are not strictly interchangeable but refer to man’s inner life viewed from two points of view. Pneuma is man’s inner self viewed in terms of man’s relationship to God and to other men; psyche is man as a living being, as a human personality...Paul never speaks of the salvation of the soul, nor is there any intimation of the pre-existence of the soul” (p. 502).

The *soul* designates the vitality of life in man. It is the summation of his personality. It is equivalent to the meaning of *I myself* or *yourself*.

A way to understand this is to comprehend the following equation:

Soul = Body (the outward part of man) and Spirit (the inward part of man). If we choose to use

Soul = Body + Spirit

the terminology that God wants to save our souls, we need to be Hebraic instead of Greek. Yes, God does want to save our *soul*, i.e., the salvation of the body and the spirit, the salvation of the complete person.

Worship serves as a good example of this total person view, because worship encompasses the total person. Remember, the Hebrew saw man as a unity with outer and inner dimensions. Man was for the Hebrew not divided into three parts, even though the Western rational interpretations of First Thessalonians 5.23 would try to so persuade us. Paul was using Platonic language in this passage, but with *Hebraic insight*. Man is *not* made of three parts any more than he is divided into four parts (Mark 12.30). We must be constantly reminded that although the New Testament is written in the Greek language, the concepts behind the language are rooted in Hebraic thought.