

The Origin of the Soul

Genesis 2:1-7, 18-25

(The following is the substance of an address given by David Silversides at an after-church meeting at Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church on 25th January 2009.)

We have looked before at the make-up of man and concluded that it consists of two parts, the body and the soul. The terms soul and spirit are used of the same thing, for example, "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour." Though referring to the same thing, they do not necessarily refer to the same aspect of the same thing. The term 'soul' seems to be more generally used of the embodied state. The soul is the spirit of man dwelling in the body whereas 'spirit' is more generally used as describing the spirit separate from or separating from the body. So Christ said, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." The term used of Christ and used of others of 'giving up the ghost' or 'the spirit' is describing the spirit leaving the body. So there does seem to be a different aspect to the two terms: the soul is used more of the embodied spirit and the spirit more of the disembodied, but nevertheless they refer to the same thing.

But the question here is not whether man has a soul because the Bible clearly teaches the he does, but how does that soul get there? How does the soul of man end up dwelling in the body? Does it come from his parents along with his body, or is it immediately created by God

at the point of physical conception? In other words, when procreation takes place, is the soul procreated in the same way as the body, deriving its existence from the parents, or is it created by God and infused into the body at the point of physical conception? The first view is called traducianism meaning basically by propagation, and the latter view is called creationism. There are other theories such as the pre-existence of the soul and so on, but we will not spend our time on these. These two are the main views that are held by professing Christians. Very few in the Reformed churches or of the Reformed writers held the traducian view. Nearly all the Reformed theologians of the past and present hold to the creationist view. There are one or two exceptions, for example the later Lutherans held to the traducian view.

Where does the soul come from?

1. Traducianism Considered.

This is the idea that the soul exists by propagation. So on this view, the soul of a child is derived from that of one or both of the child's parents. It is argued from the fact that only the origin of Adam as a living soul by direct action from God is recorded in Scripture. The argument runs that God created Adam's soul directly and yet thereafter it is claimed there is silence concerning God creating souls. Because there is silence concerning Eve's soul, the argument is that Eve's soul was in some sense procreated by means of Adam's rib. That would seem to be the logical conclusion. If the absence of specific examples of the creation of the soul at conception indicates that it is

not created but comes by procreation from the parents, then the logic is that the silence concerning Eve's soul must also indicate some kind of propagation from Adam through the rib of which she is made. This seems difficult to maintain. But on this view it is maintained that the souls of all the posterity of Adam and Eve are procreated along with the body; that they derive their existence either from Adam or from Adam and Eve and not by direct creation of God.

It is maintained that this is what is meant by those expressions of persons being in the loins of their forefathers in Genesis 46:26, "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six." Then there is the example of Hebrews 7:9-10 where the old priesthood of Aaron and the Levites of Israel are said to have been in the loins of Abraham, their forefather, when he paid tithes to Melchizedek.

Now going back to Genesis 46:26, the word 'soul' or 'nephesh' is sometimes used simply to refer to persons and even though it may be specifically referring to the soul, it is simply putting the part for the whole. It simply means persons and does not require the view that the soul as well as the body is derived from the seed of the father.

One argument that is also used in defence of traducianism is that it is said to explain the transference of original sin; that if you take the view that the soul of a child derives its existence from the parents and is not

created immediately by God and infused into the body at conception, that this, it is argued, better explains the doctrine of original sin.

How do we respond to that? First of all, this idea involves the thought of division of that which is spirit. Traducianism must involve the idea of division of that which is the human spirit. This is nowhere found in the Scriptures. Indeed, the angels which are purely spirit do not procreate. The fact that the purely spiritual beings, that is, the angels, do not procreate ought to be a cautionary note against the idea that procreation includes not only the procreation of the body but of the soul as well.

Secondly by way of response, as an explanation of original sin, it fails. If the guilt of Adam's first transgression is imputed to his posterity because their souls were in some sense residing in Adam when he fell, then so would also all of Adam's other transgressions and all the transgressions of our forefathers from Adam down to ourselves, whereas the Scriptures teach that the sin which is imputed to all of Adam's posterity is simply his first transgression. We sinned in him and fell with him *in his first transgression*. Not all the sins of Adam and of all generations down to ourselves are reckoned as ours. The implication of Adam's guilt at his first transgression cannot be said to be derived from the idea of the souls of his descendants in some sense residing, or at least the potential of them, residing in Adam.

This also explains (without saying that every traducianist holds this) why traducianism lends itself to the idea that all that comes down to us from Adam is not guilt but a corrupt nature, not actual guilt before God but simply a corrupt nature with the potential to incur guilt when it comes to expression in personal sin. That view is quite common and, in turn, it lends itself to the idea that infants though possessing fallen natures, are not actually guilty until they sin personally and, therefore, all infants dying in infancy go to heaven not because of redemption by Christ but because of supposed innocence. We leave aside here the question of which infants dying in infancy we have grounds for believing go to heaven. What we do insist at this point is that all infants who die in infancy and go to heaven, go to heaven through redemption by Jesus Christ and not on account of innocence.

The correct explanation why Adam's sin brings guilt as well as corruption upon all descending from him by ordinary generation is the biblical doctrine of the covenant of works as set forth in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. We cannot fully elaborate on that here but the outline of it is that God chose to make the covenant of works (or covenant of life) with Adam and with all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation. According to that covenant, the guilt of Adam's first transgression is imputed, reckoned to the account of all his natural posterity as surely as the obedience of Christ is imputed to all who belong to Christ. It has nothing to do with sin being transferred, as it were, by the act of procreation. It is God in his covenant with

Adam, and according to that covenant, imputing the guilt of Adam's first transgression to all his natural posterity.

Corruption of nature is part of God's judgment upon the imputed guilt of Adam's first transgression. In other words, guilt comes first, then corruption of nature, then our personal transgressions and increased guilt. This is why we are mortal from conception. If infants were not guilty, then why are they mortal? Romans 5:14, "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." Even those without personal transgression are still guilty. The guilt comes first. The corruption of our nature is part of God's judgment upon that guilt. That is why sanctification, the removal of the corruption of our nature, is a blessing purchased by Christ in his atonement for sin. That is what the first few verses of Romans 8 teach us: Christ's death, bearing the guilt of sin, paves the way for the removal of the giving over to corruption of our nature which is part of God's judgment upon our guilt in Adam.

A third consideration is from Genesis 2:7, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The word 'soul' in Hebrew, 'nephesh,' is not as specific as the Greek word for soul. It is actually even used of animals in Genesis 1:20 where he talks about 'the moving creature that hath life' and you see in the margin, 'Hebrew soul'. Nevertheless there is an account of the creation of man in two stages: the body from the dust of

the ground and the act of God making him a living soul. This is not fully explained in Genesis 2 but when we proceed through the Scriptures, the distinction between body and soul or spirit becomes clearer. Eve was formed of Adam's rib. Adam, when expressing the closeness of the bond of marriage, only refers to her being physically made from him. In verse 23, "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." He does not say this is "soul of my soul". It is "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." In other words, insofar as Eve was made out of Adam, it was in the physical realm and not the soul.

2. The Biblical Evidence for Creationism.

Ecclesiastes 12:7, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." The body returns to the dust because Adam's body was made from the dust by God. The spirit returns to God who gave it, so the spirit evidently was not derived from the dust. Even if we allow that this is not a foolproof argument, it could be argued that both body and spirit are here being spoken of as represented by the creation of Adam only and do not indicate what is true of subsequent generations. It does at least suggest a continuing difference between the way that the body and soul come into being. They do not come into existence in the same way; they did not with respect to Adam and they do not with respect to his posterity.

Zechariah 12:1, "The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens,

and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him." The expression 'forming the spirit of man within him' rather than 'forming man, body and spirit', does indicate and is more consistent with the spirits of men being directly created by God or at least created by a different means from the body.

Likewise in Numbers 16:22 we have the phrase, 'the God of the spirits of all flesh.' This suggests that there is a difference. It is not simply saying that by whatever means God makes spirit and flesh. He is called 'the God of the spirits of all flesh' suggesting a more direct connection between God the Creator and the spirits as opposed to the flesh in which those spirits dwell. Everything comes to pass in the plan of God. He is the cause of the existence of all that exists, but it suggests a more direct and immediate connection between God's created activity in relation to the spirit as opposed to the flesh in which the spirit resides.

Then Hebrews 12:9, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" Here the 'Father of spirits' is contrasted with 'our fathers of our flesh'. Granting that the fatherhood of God in view here is not God as the Creator but rather that spiritual fatherhood of his adopted children in Christ as a result of the renewing of the spirit by the Holy Ghost, nevertheless there are still two points to bear in mind. Firstly, adoption is used of the body also, albeit future. Romans 8:21-23, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of

corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." The concept of being the children of God is not restricted to our spirits. There is the resurrection of the body in that manner appropriate to the adopted children of God.

Secondly, it does not alter the fact that flesh and spirit are contrasted and the 'fathers of the flesh' are evidently not the 'fathers of the spirit'. It says we have had "fathers of our flesh which corrected us", and then by contrast, "shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" And so the 'fathers of our flesh' are not the procreative fathers of our spirits otherwise the contrast does not make sense. Even allowing that the fatherhood in view is the fatherhood of God to his adopted children in Christ, it still indicates that our spirits do not exist by way of the procreation of human fathers in the way that our bodies do.

Then fourthly under this point, creationism, in the sense of creation of the soul, is not incompatible with the uniqueness of the six days of creation. One of the strongest arguments against the creationist view of the origin of the soul is that it is contrary to the uniqueness of God creating something from nothing which he did in the six days of creation. The argument runs that all direct creation of something from nothing took place in the six days of creation and that since the completion of

creation, in God's providence any other developments by way of procreation or propagation in the works of providence are developments of something into something else or increased in number and not by direct act of God.

Now there is some weight to this argument. We have noticed on a previous occasion that even those extraordinary providences known as miracles, seem to be always something being changed into something else or being multiplied in quantity. When there is a physical productive miracle, they generally at least seem to start with something that becomes either more of the same or is changed into something else rather than creation from nothing. So the water was changed into wine. The five loaves and the two fishes were multiplied to feed the 5,000. Blind eyes were given sight. The withered arm was made whole. Even the dust becoming lice in Egypt, Exodus 8:17. Moses' rod becoming a serpent. It may be that all the physical productive miracles, subsequent to the creation, accompanying God's giving of revelation, is something becoming more of the same or something being changed into something else rather than nothing and then something.

So the argument runs that all creation from nothing is to be confined to the six days of creation. Yet even within the six days of creation there are some processes, for example, the creation of man from the dust of the earth. The dust is made into something else. So process does exist within the six days of creation. But the argument is that all creation of something from nothing is within the

six days of creation. Allowing this to be correct, does this rule out the direct creation of the soul by God at conception for all men onwards from Adam? In the course of God's providence, is it inconsistent with that to say that God creates the souls of men directly in the ordinary course of his providence after the creation week? Does it actually blur the distinction between God's work of creation and God's subsequent works of providence? Christ maintained that distinction in John 5:17 when he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He was saying that the rest of the Sabbath day is not one of inactivity but of difference of labour. There is a difference between the work of creation and the work of providence so there's a difference in what we should do during the six days of the week and what we should do on the Sabbath day.

Does it blur that distinction? The answer, I believe, is no and here are the reasons. Firstly, the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 covers the physical creation. All that is mentioned in Genesis 1 and 2 has physical properties. Certainly in the case of man, not only physical but physical nonetheless. Genesis 1 and 2 does not cover the creation of the angels. In Psalm 104 which follows the creation days, the angels are mentioned in verse 4 in connection with those things made on the second day of creation. Some have argued that this indicates that the angels were made on the second day of creation, but whether that is correct or not is actually irrelevant. The point is that even if the angels were created within the creation week, they are not actually referred to in the account of

creation in Genesis 1 and 2 because it is giving an account of the physical or visible creation; there is no need. To insist that there can be no creation from nothing in the invisible and spiritual realm outside the six days of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is simply saying that what may well be true of the creation of the physical and visible world does not have to apply to the creation of the invisible and spiritual.

A second consideration is the parallel with the re-creation, the new creation. According to Delitzsch, the continued creation of souls is inconsistent with God's relation to the world. After the six days of creation, his creative work ceased. Louis Berkhof states in response to Delitzsch's objection, "But the question may be raised, what, then, becomes of the doctrine of regeneration which is not effected by second causes?" Regrettably, Berkhof does not develop this point which he raises but let us endeavour to do so anyway.

Let us concede that the miracles of Scripture, as far as they are physical and productive, are not creation from nothing but the development of something that already exists. We may also say that though the physical miracles point to the deliverance of the new creation, they are not actually part of that new creation. The physical miracles are a retarding of the effects of the curse upon the old creation. The withered hand becomes a restored hand of the mortal body pertaining to the present life. That restored withered hand did not become a glorified withered hand. It remained a withered hand restored to what a hand should be but it still remained part of the

body in this life not of the resurrection body. The healing miracles retard the effects of the curse. They do not produce that which pertains to the curse-free renewed creation. The miracles that Christ performed on the sick restore them to that kind of health which pertains to this life. They are not given resurrection health, if we can put it that way. The only part of the new creation which occurs in this world constantly in God's providence is the new birth and the progress of grace in the soul.

The restoration of the body and of the creation in general is not until the last day. It is entirely consistent, therefore, to say that physical creation from nothing took place in the six days of creation. The physical aspect of the new creation, that is, the glorification of the bodies of the redeemed and the renewal of the physical world, does not take place until the last day. We leave aside here the translation of Enoch and the question of Elijah being taken up and possibly those saints that came out of their graves and were seen in the city in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's resurrection mentioned in Matthew 27:53. But even in these extraordinary things, if they were cases of resurrection bodies, the actual work of renovation was not made visible. In other words, in between creation and the last day in the invisible realm, we have the creation of souls and the renewing of the souls of the elect. So what is true of the physical is not true of the invisible either in creation or in re-creation renewal. It is entirely consistent with saying that physical creation from nothing was confined to the six days of creation and the physical re-creation awaits us at the last day to also

say that between these physical events in the normal course of providence where physical developments are by way of propagation, nevertheless the soul is created and the souls of the elect are regenerated. In other words, what may be true of the physical and visible is not necessarily true of the invisible and spiritual whether in creation or in renewal. The uniqueness of the six days of creation is not undermined by saying that throughout God's providence since creation, man's body is procreated, and yet his soul is immediately created by God at the point of conception. Of course, modern man believes in nothing invisible and so he rejects the existence of the soul and he rejects the reality of the new birth as well.

Finally on this point, the creation of souls as corrupt does not make God the author of sin. The traducianist argues, if God creates the soul and the moment it is created it is corrupt, does that not mean that God is the author of sin? Two points in answer. Firstly, any problem that exists here is no bigger than that which relates to the fall of the angels who kept not their first estate, the non-elect angels, or the fall of Adam and Eve from original righteousness. In other words, God is in control even of the fall of sinless creatures. God determined and decreed which angels would fall and which would be kept holy. God also determined that Adam as well as Eve would sin and fall from original righteousness. So if a sinless creature can fall within the providence of God, there is no greater difficulty in saying that God creates the souls of all men and yet consigns them to corruption and

depravity. Secondly, and we have to say that our knowledge of this is limited, but God only has to withhold righteousness for pollution to take place; there is in the creature that dependence upon God so that if God does not make him to be holy, he will be unholy. We can reflect on that but our knowledge of it is limited.

3. Conclusion.

First of all, we conclude that man's capacity to procreate does not mean that the whole of man exists by procreation but rather that God invariably infuses the soul whenever human conception takes place. This convergence of procreation of the body and the infusion of a soul corresponds to Adam's creation at the beginning when his body was created *mediately*, that is, by means of the dust of the ground, and his soul *immediately* by the direct act of God, is the view of almost all Reformed theologians.

Secondly, great caution is needed that we do not speculate beyond Scripture. What is indicated in Scripture is to be believed, and if there are unanswered questions in Scripture, we have to accept that and not overreach ourselves.

Thirdly, the unbeliever does not know what a human being is. Richard Dawkins does not know what Richard Dawkins is. He does not understand himself. Because he denies the invisible God and his invisible work either in the creation of souls or in the regeneration of his people, he cannot understand man and he cannot understand

Christians. He therefore takes it upon himself to invent his own definition of human life and that is not just Richard Dawkins but the unbeliever generally. He decides for himself what a human being is. He decides for himself when human life begins. He sets an arbitrary point and says that before this point, it is a non-human foetus. After this point, we treat it as a human being. But it keeps changing because he cannot be quite sure. He has no clue, but if he will not be told by God, he is in a complete fog and he will get it wrong and he does get it wrong. He wants to be able to treat an infant in the womb as not a human being up to a certain point so that he can conveniently destroy that child and not feel that he is a murderer when he is.

Scripture actually knows nothing of a living human body at any stage that has not been ensouled by the hand of God. In Scripture, there is no such thing as a living human body that is not indwelt by a soul. Life cannot be constantly lived as if nothing exists but what is visible and physical even in relation to man. Someone like Richard Dawkins cannot live by his own avowed principles. It cannot be done because everything is so meaningless. Why is he annoyed that Christians believe what they do? Why does it matter if they are all just a product of a meaningless process? Why does it matter if some people believe in this Christianity? Why does anything matter? The reason it annoys him and those like him is because they are creatures and sinners who hate God and they do not like to be reminded of these things. The annoyance of people like Dawkins is testimony to the truth of the

word of God. His reaction tells you that he is a guilty sinner who wants to hide in the trees of the garden from his Maker, otherwise it would not matter. Since the alternative to the constant contradiction of his own avowed principles is to acknowledge the unseen God and his unseen work of the creation of the soul and his unseen work of grace in renewing the hearts of whom he pleases, people like Dawkins would rather contradict themselves and not live according to what they profess than acknowledge the truth because the truth is unthinkable.

So men go on trying to live on the basis of a purely visible and physical view of man or else they throw themselves into some vague, nebulous spirituality that is simply an escape from reality. But our God made the heavens and the earth and he giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein, Isaiah 42:5. And the people of God know this and we will rejoice in our God and in all his works. Amen.