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In our age of double-speak and innuendo, the Bible is a breath of fresh air. That's because it talks to us clearly and lays Godly truth on the line. One example of this concise speech is Matthew 16:24-27 where Christ says this: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" That's pretty blunt stuff. Yet in reading it anew, I wonder how many people ever give a thought to what a "soul" is? It's time to find out.

Let's start with the Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible for soul. The Hebrew word occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament. The Greek word around 60 times. The definitive Greek Lexicon (dictionary) has this included in the definition: "breath of life, life-principle, soul. Sometimes earthly life itself. The soul as seat and center of the inner life of man in its many and varied aspects...of feelings and emotions...as the center of life that transcends the earthly." Sometimes, because earthly life and the supernatural life are intertwined, soul and spirit are included together. Meanwhile, the Hebrew word means much the same with these aspects added: "living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion and passion." So, as I teach the confirmands: "Your soul is the eternal part of you which God placed into you. It consists of your essential, eternal nature, the uniqueness of your personality, and the best of what makes you, you!"

When did God put a soul in man? We're not told in Scripture that animals have an eternal soul, yet any pet owner well knows that they have a unique personality, certain traits, and they also have "beingness." When God made animals He simply called them into existence via His almighty Word: "Let there be. And there was." But not with human beings. No, in Genesis 2 we're told how God took special care with Adam and later Eve. In Adam's case, God anthropomorphically shaped and molded Adam's body from the dust of the ground, which He had already created. Then, He animated Adam by: "breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." One of the words in Hebrew for the Spirit is literally "the breath of God." So, God put part of Himself, I would say, a part of His eternity, into Adam and later, by extension, into Eve. This means our souls come directly from God. They are a part of His core nature. They are what make us special to Him. And because they are eternal, our soul never dies because God never dies, apart, of course, from laying down His life for our sins in Jesus Christ, and then taking that life back via the resurrection. So, if we go back to that Matthew passage at the start of this discourse, to poorly paraphrase Christ: "How could you ever give up foreverness in exchange for a

moment of earthly pleasure? It would be akin to trading in a billion in gold for one copper penny!"

The Bible introduces another word into this mix, as well. The word is "spirit" in small caps to signify we're not talking about The Spirit. Think back on Romans 8: 16 where Paul says this: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Then, let's add this passage, into the stew we're created, from Ephesians 2:1: "As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." So, although "spirit" and "soul" are often used interchangeably, they are separate and distinct. Our spirit as a Christian is regenerated by God. Thus, as believers, our spirit or our will are joined together and both horses pull the wagon of faith in equal measure. However, they are distinctive horses! Meanwhile, in the unbeliever, the will pulls away from God and His truth right into the ditch, taking the body and soul with it! This has given rise over the centuries to "dichotomist" and "trichotomist" views among Christians. The dichotomy view is that we humans are: body and soul. Period. The trichotomy viewpoint is that we are: body, soul, and spirit. Or, that our will is distinct from our soul. You can hold either view. Personally, I'm a bit of a trichotomist. After all, the Trinity is three in one, so why not have all three contained in one person since we're His crowning creation? It would also help explain those passages where it speaks of the unsaved as being "spiritually dead." That is, their soul still exists along with their body, but inwardly they are dead to God and His ways because they have rejected His new life in Christ.

Why have I spent the last page and a half talking about your soul? Well, it's Lent. It's the pre-eminent time of the year to get you to think about your soul and ponder what it took to save it and why. Since your body and especially your soul are the most important thing you possess, don't ever take it for granted. I say that because in our modern age, I fear the vast majority of people do exactly that. Either they don't believe in the reality of a soul, or they ignore their connection with God's eternal nature. Let's face it, in the age of social media, few such posts are very profound.....And so, just as human speech has become trite, so too human thought and human life. But Jesus changes all that! He made us very, very special. There really is something far beyond our senses. He made us to be a part of an eternal flow of love, forgiveness, energy, creativity, and life. Everything comes from God and in and through our lives everything goes back to God in the end. And even then, the "end" never really ends!

One of my favorite passages is from Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." I have every one of my confirmands memorize that passage. But let's also remember vs. 6: "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." So, through repentance get your inner spirit to pull you along equally with your soul. Avoid the ditch of unbelief and also the chasm of doubt and disobedience. In the process your life will find fulfillment—just as our wise God created you for "in the beginning." Pastor Thomas H. Fox