

exception; hence, whether it be *evil advice* — given by a false prophet — or *any other form of evil*) must be avoided.

What follows is a concluding wish and a few urgent requests, such as one expects to find at the close of this letter; then the benediction.

23. And may he, the God of peace,
 sanctify y o u through and through,
 and without flaw may be y o u r spirit,
 and y o u r soul-and-body
 without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
 may it be kept.

In this passage the author points to the source of power for the believer. It is as if he wished to say, "In y o u r own strength y o u cannot fulfil the precepts which I have just issued. Y o u need God, *the God of peace* (cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; II Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20), a peace established through the cross, a peace which implies spiritual prosperity in the fullest sense (see on 1:1). May this God *sanctify y o u*, that is, may he separate y o u from the life of sin and cause y o u to be dedicated to him (cf. Rom. 15:16; I Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 7:14; Rev. 22:11; and see above on 3:13; 4:3, 7; also N.T.C. on John 17:17, 19) *through and through*. This "through and through" (ὁλοτελείς, from ὅλος *whole*, and τέλος *end*) is a rare word, occurring only here in the New Testament. It is a plural adjective, so that the literal meaning of the word in connection with the noun which it modifies is *y o u whole*, that is, "the whole of each of y o u, every part of each of y o u" (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Vol. IV, p. 38). (M.M., p. 447, points out that both here in I Thess. 5:23 and in a decree of Epaminondas the adjective has adverbial force.)

Now this process of sanctification occurs during the present life, the life here on earth. Paul expresses a closely related wish which pertains to the judgment day. The two thoughts constitute a unit. He expresses the wish — which has the solemnity of a prayer — that also "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see on 2:19), when others will be sentenced to everlasting damnation for both soul and body (the entire person), the spirit of the believers at Thessalonica (together with all other believers, of course) may be without flaw; indeed that their soul-and-body may be preserved from this terrible condemnation, that is, may be kept *blamelessly* (2:10; cf. 3:13).

So far there is no great difficulty. The *main* idea is clear. The problem arises in interpreting the details. See grammatical footnote ¹¹³ which because of its length has been placed at the end of this chapter (on pp. 146-150). If one wishes an answer to the question, "Was Paul a trichotomist?" "Does I Thess. 5:23 teach that man consists of three parts, spirit, soul, and body?" he should read that note.

- verses 19-22 the Holy Spirit and his gifts (also: would-be prophets). This is followed by
- verses 23, 24 a solemn wish for sanctification and preservation, the wish being immediately followed by the promise;
- by
- verses 25-28 a trio of urgent requests (for intercessory prayer, for extending greetings by means of the "holy kiss," and for the public reading of this letter); and finally by the benediction.

¹¹³ If a. the nominative, singular, neuter adjective "without flaw" or "entire" or "sound" (δολόληρον) is either treated as an adverb (some call it an adverb) or as an adjective belonging to all three nouns (spirit, soul, body); and b. this word is given a totally different place in the sentence than it has in the original, being now placed next to the word "without blame" (or "blamelessly"), as if also in the original the two occurred in close co-ordination, a rendering results which changes a little problem into a big one. The rendering to which I refer is:

"And may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame. . . ." (A.R.V., cf. A.V. and R.S.V. neither of which is any better).

Naturally, the question now arises, "Did Paul believe that human nature consists of three parts: spirit, soul, and body? In other words, was he a trichotomist?" The deeper question is, "Just what did Paul mean when he wrote I Thess. 5:23 (especially the words in dispute)?"

Among the answers or solutions which have been offered the following are, perhaps, the most important:

a. Paul was evidently a trichotomist. He clearly divides human nature into spirit, soul, and body.

b. Paul's readers were trichotomists. Paul accommodates himself to their view. Had he simply written, "And may your soul and body be kept sound and blameless," the readers would have asked, "Must not our *spirits* be preserved also?" In order to avoid this erroneous conclusion—that the *spirit* did not need to be guarded—the apostle writes as he does.

c. Paul does not distinguish at all between *spirit* and *soul* in the present passage. He is speaking rhetorically. We do the same thing today when we tell an audience to put its "heart and soul" into a certain worthwhile project.

d. Paul, in using the word *spirit*, meant the Holy Spirit, or that portion of the divine Spirit which dwells permanently in each regenerated individual. To this Holy Spirit, who dwells in (but is never part of) the human nature, he, as a true dichotomist, adds "soul and body" as constituting the human nature.

e. When Paul mentions both spirit and soul, he indicates *not two* substances but *one* and the same immaterial substance. However, he views this substance first from the aspect of its relation to God—as a recipient of divine influences and as an organ for divine worship ("spirit")—, then from the aspect of its relation to the lower realm—as the seat of sensations, affections, desires, etc. ("soul"). To this *one* immaterial substance, viewed from *two* aspects, Paul adds the body. It is in this sense that he writes, "and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless."

f. Paul does not have in mind a series of three co-ordinate elements: "spirit and soul and body." On the contrary, the first concept is "your entire person." To this, by way of explanation, the apostle adds, "both your soul and body."

With respect to these six theories our own opinion is as follows:

Theory a.

This can be dismissed at once. The fact that Paul was not a trichotomist is clear from such passages as the following: Rom. 8:10; I Cor. 5:5; 7:34; II Cor. 7:1; Eph.

2:8; Col. 2:5. Apart from I Thess. 5:23 he nowhere employs trichotomistic language with respect to the nature of man. The conclusion seems valid that also in the present passage he does not write as a trichotomist.

Theory b.

This accommodation theory, besides being questionable as to the ethics implied, lacks a solid historical basis. The readers surely were not Neo-Platonists!

Theory c.

The illustration employed is not very appropriate. When we tell an audience to put its "heart and soul" into a certain project, we immediately recognize the synonymous character of these two terms. But when *within one and the same clause* (as this theory implies) we co-ordinate *three* terms, the *third* of which is *clearly of a totally different nature from the second* (the third being *body*, the second being *soul*), the question is legitimate whether perhaps the first (*spirit*) should not also be distinguished in meaning from the others. Besides, Paul elsewhere frequently uses the term *soul* (ψυχή, whence ψυχικός "natural" or "unspiritual" I Cor. 2:14) in a sense different from *spirit* (πνεῦμα, whence πνευματικός "spiritual" I Cor. 2:15). It must not be taken for granted, therefore, that every distinction between *spirit* and *soul* is *here* (in I Thess. 5:23) completely absent from his mind.

The summary of the first table of the law, Mark 12:30, far from proving theory c. to be correct, would rather seem to establish the very opposite, for certainly here heart, soul, mind, and strength do not all mean exactly the same thing!

Theory d.

This is definitely wrong, though we admit that it is advanced by really great exegetes. Paul, Silas, and Timothy would not be expressing the wish that the Holy Spirit (or "a portion of the Holy Spirit") might be kept sound and blameless! Nor would they be hoping that the third person of the Trinity might be without a flaw!

Theory e.

This is probably the best of those so far reviewed. It has much in its favor: it permits Paul to remain a dichotomist, which is correct (as has been shown). It is also correct in indicating that the first and the second terms of the triad (hence, πνεῦμα and ψυχή) are at times to be distinguished in the manner stated in the theory. If we had to choose between the five theories discussed so far, this would be our choice. In fact, as we see it, in some respects this theory is also better than theory f. (below), for example, in that it does not render the adjective *sound* (δολόληρον) as if it were in the attributive position.

Nevertheless, the translation proposed here ("and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless") has the following debatable features:

(1) It co-ordinates the words "sound" and "blameless," placing them next to each other, which does not seem to harmonize with the intention of the original.

(2) It interprets the conjunction "and" (καί) which occurs between the second and the third terms of the triad as *adding* two different substances (soul, body), but it views the "and" (καί) which connects the first and the second as merely indicating that the *same substance* is considered from two different aspects. Although this may be possible, it is not the usual manner in which one would interpret two identical conjunctions in an expression consisting of three terms which one considers to be co-ordinate, *all occurring in the same clause*, and which one thus translates: "your spirit and soul and body."

(3) It connects the adjective *sound* with all three nouns (spirit, soul, body), but it does not show why in the original it is *in the singular*! (However, this objection is not formidable. It happens more often that in such a series, the number of the adjective which modifies all the nouns in the series simply agrees with the first or last noun mentioned.) Or if the word "sound" is considered to be an adverb modifying the verb "be kept" (some interpreters view it as such), it is not made

a single one in which it has the meaning "person," in the sense of one's soul and body.

It has become evident that I am not satisfied (at least not *wholly* satisfied) with theory f.

Having now discussed the six theories, none of which I am ready to accept in its entirety, though I admit that some contain valuable elements, I will state my own view:

a. The trichotomistic appearance of the passage is considerably reduced as soon as it is seen that the words in dispute are found not in one clause but in two clauses:

hence not: "And may your spirit and soul and body be kept . . ."

but

"And without flaw may be y o u r spirit,
And y o u r soul-and-body

.....

May it be kept."

But thus rendering the passage we can do justice to its grammatical syntax and even to its word-order (see the original).

b. Every trace of trichotomy which still remains can be obliterated in one of two ways:

(1) by considering the word "soul" to have the same meaning as "spirit," the change from "spirit" to "soul" having been introduced for stylistic reasons. This eliminates trichotomy.

(2) by accepting the position that although both "spirit" and "soul" refer to *the same* immaterial substance (hence, no trichotomy here either!), this substance is viewed first (in one clause) from the aspect of its relation to *God* — the "spirit" being man's power of grasping divine things, his invisible essence viewed as a recipient of divine influences and as an organ of divine worship — ; then, in the next clause, from the aspect of its relation to *the lower realm*, as the seat of sensations, affections, desires. This could well be the true element in theory e.

If a choice must be made, I would prefer this second alternative. It is in harmony with the distinction between the two words which is present elsewhere (as has been shown). There is also an interesting parallel in a somewhat similar passage, Heb. 4:12, where it is obvious that the two words have distinct meanings.

The main point has been proved, namely, that, either way, every trace of trichotomy has disappeared!