

Understanding the Nature of Humanity

*An Anthropological Framework
for Christian Doctrine*

by

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B.A., Religion and Philosophy



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The scholarly apparatus supporting the model — the sources in psychology, animal cognition, and historical theology — was developed for the 1987 foundational thesis and carried forward into the present bibliography.

Dedication

This study grows from a thesis I wrote as a young student under Arthur O. Roberts (1923–2016) — my professor and mentor at George Fox College, for many decades the chair of its department of religious studies. I was privileged to serve as his research and teaching assistant from 1983 to 1987, in Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics, and I was a recipient of his uncommon generosity: he entrusted me with his own classes while I was still an undergraduate. He once remarked that some of my conclusions were “novel and deserve serious consideration.” I offer it in that spirit — not as a novelty of doctrine, but as an effort to see an old confession more clearly.

Abstract

Christian anthropology has long been contested between multiple theoretical models including dichotomous models, which hold that the human person consists of body and soul, and classical trichotomous models, which add the term spirit but, in their most influential form, treat it as the rational mind. This paper advances a novel position, the Neo-Trichotomy model, first presented in 1987 and revised here. It retains the biblical vocabulary of body, soul, and spirit while redefining the latter two: the soul carries the rational, emotive, and amoral choice faculties shared in some measure with higher animals, and the spirit carries moral volition, intuition, and the created image of God (Imago Dei).

The redefinition is prompted in part by research in animal cognition, which increasingly suggests that reason, emotion, and elective behavior are less uniquely human than earlier models assumed. If those faculties do not distinguish humanity, the divine image must be located elsewhere.

The paper tests the model across the arc of Christian doctrine—the image of God, the fall and sin, redemption, and sanctification and the fruit of the Spirit, then the person and work of Christ in the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection, closing with the Trinity and the love of God—and argues that it illustrates each more coherently than the two models it questions: the classical trichotomy—which, in the form that equates the spirit with the rational mind, collapses when applied to Christ into the ancient Apollinarian heresy—and the traditional dichotomy, which treats the person as body and soul, the single immaterial part divided into a base and a higher nature. Its sharpest claim concerns the Incarnation: because the human spirit is a created gift, breathed in by God rather than arising from the flesh, Christ may be held fully human and fully divine without diminution of either, His full humanity recognized as created body and soul inherited through the Virgin Mary, and in the line of David, while His spirit was never created. His spirit is God.

One methodological commitment runs through all of this. Where most anthropologies aim chiefly to describe what a human being is, this model is concerned as much with how redemption moves through what a human being is — treating the person not as a static structure but as the arena in which grace does its work, one dimension at a time. The anthropology is the tool; the gospel is the point.

How to Use This Paper

This paper is the foundation beneath a set of teaching resources, not a standalone tract. It is not intended to be the first thing placed in a seeker's hands. Its purpose is to establish — for the teacher, pastor, or ministry leader — that the model on which those resources rest is theologically sound.

The companion materials (teaching guides, workbooks, conversational aids, and field cards) are built for practical use and can be given directly to students and disciples. This document exists so that those who teach from them may do so with confidence, knowing the framework has been thought through and can bear the weight placed upon it.

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1. Introduction

This study is not written primarily to advance a new anthropology. It is written to remove unnecessary intellectual obstacles — the misunderstandings of the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Cross that keep sincere people from the historic Christian gospel — by offering a single, coherent framework in which those doctrines can be seen whole. The anthropology is the tool; the gospel is the point. It is offered in submission to the historic creeds, not in judgment of them — not to sustain what already rests on surer ground than any model of ours, but to help a doubting age receive what the Church has always confessed.

Throughout Christian history, theologians have asked what it means to be human. The debate has largely run between two theoretical models for answers: that a human person is body and soul, or that a person is body, soul, and spirit. I first set out the position I take here in 1987, in my Intensified Studies thesis at George Fox College, *The Nature of Man: A Paradigm Revolution*, which — as that program required — I presented and defended before the college's faculty and students. In this work I call this framework the Neo-Trichotomy Model, and the pages that follow revise and extend that original argument as a tool to better understand Christian doctrines, from an anthropological perspective.

Neo-Trichotomy defines humanity's nature as consisting of three distinct yet interconnected dimensions: body, soul, and spirit. Unlike older models, this contemporary framework incorporates recent psychological findings about human and animal behaviors, decision-making processes, language development, and emotions deepening our comprehension of human identity and our relationship with God.

Why Neo-Trichotomy?

The Neo-Trichotomy model rests firmly on biblical and psychological foundations, distinguishing itself significantly from traditional dichotomous (body and soul/spirit) and classical (heretical) Apollinarian trichotomy model. Modern psychological research, combined with careful biblical exegesis, underscores a clear and functional differentiation between the soul (*psyche*) and spirit (*pneuma*).

Hebrews 4:12 describes the word of God as “living and effective, keener than any two-edged sword, piercing through to the very seam of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the heart's deliberations and intentions.” Paul prays likewise in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself set you apart entirely; and may your spirit, and soul, and body be guarded whole and unblemished until the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Together, these passages are consistent with the distinctions drawn here. The Neo-Trichotomy model provides a practical and coherent framework for understanding the uniqueness of human nature, particularly highlighting morality as related to our spiritual dimension.

Body, Soul, and Spirit Explained

In the Neo-Trichotomy model, humans are understood as:

Body (Soma): the person's embodied life and the instrument of action — where inward intention becomes outward deed.

Soul (Psyche): the machinery of personhood — intellect, memory, imagination, emotion, and natural will — amoral in itself and shared in some measure with the animals. The soul does not originate morality; it supplies the means by which a moral direction is understood, deliberated, and carried out.

Spirit (Pneuma): the moral center of the person, unique to humanity — the seat of moral discernment and volition, of holiness or its absence, and of communion with God; it bears the created image. The spirit leads.

Two kinds of choosing should be distinguished here, since both are sometimes called “will.” The soul has a will in the ordinary sense: it selects among options for its own ends, as any higher animal does, and this choosing is in itself amoral. The spirit exercises moral volition — the capacity to weigh a choice against the good and against the will of God, and to answer for it. Where this study speaks of the soul's “will” it means the former; “moral volition” always names the latter.

These three dimensions are not stacked compartments but overlapping fields, and the person is the region where all three meet. That center is marked P — the whole human being, body, soul, and spirit joined in one living person. Three further regions matter, for it is in the overlaps that the model does its work.

Nature (N) is where body and soul meet — the creaturely life we share with the animals: the natural processes by which life is perceived, interpreted, chosen, acted, and sustained. It is real and God-given, but it is not what sets us apart.

Heart (H) is where soul and spirit meet — the interface where the spirit's moral leading engages the soul's reason, memory, and emotion. It is not the seat of morality but the place where that leading is taken up into the soul's thought and natural will, and therefore the place where the struggle is fought. The spirit says, “this is right”; the soul answers, “how?” or “I am afraid” or “I do not want to.” Where the two agree there is peace; where they diverge is the incongruity that is the essence of the human struggle. When Scripture speaks of the heart, it speaks here — the wellspring the proverb has in view: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Conduct (C) is where body and spirit meet — the moral will made visible. What is settled in the heart is carried outward into action, word, and relationship. This is the region only humans occupy, where holiness, or its opposite, is seen.

These regions give the model its order of working, and that order is a direction. Morality is seated in the spirit, but it is never enacted by the spirit alone: the spirit leads, the soul must cooperate, and the body must follow, so that the person lives in the direction spirit → soul → body. The Fall does not reverse this design but disrupts it: temptation is the upward counter-pressure of body and soul resisting the spirit's intended leadership (James 1:14; Galatians 5:17). What the model finally describes, then, is less what a human being is made of than how God's holiness moves through a human life. Sin, redemption, sanctification, and the Incarnation are

each a disruption or a restoration of this one flow, and each figure marks where the change falls. Yet the Fall does not abolish the spirit or silence its conscience; the immortal spirit remains, still bearing the image and still accountable (Romans 2:14–15). What is lost is communion with God and the holiness that communion conferred, so that the spirit's leading, cut off from its source, can no longer rightly order the soul and body it still governs.

These three circles picture human beings. They are not a diagram of the Trinity, and must never be mapped onto Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Model in the Wider Conversation

It is worth saying plainly where this framework stands in the discussion of human nature as it now proceeds. Contemporary theological anthropology has largely moved past the older head-count of parts. The dominant instinct is holistic: the human being is a profound unity, not a soul lodged in a body. Within that instinct several positions divide. Some hold a holistic dualism, in which body and soul are distinct yet integrally one (Cooper 2000); others a conditional or psychosomatic unity, in which the person is a single whole whom God can nonetheless sustain beyond death (Hoekema 1986; Erickson 1998); others still a nonreductive physicalism, which dispenses with an immaterial soul altogether while resisting the claim that persons are merely their neurons (Murphy 2006). A careful dichotomism continues to be ably defended (Grudem 1994), and the whole terrain is well surveyed by Cortez (2010).

The Neo-Trichotomy framework is not a return to substance-trichotomy set against these. It shares the holistic instinct entirely: the person is one, and the three faculties are not stacked compartments but interpenetrating regions of a single life. It parts from the physicalist wing in retaining a real and immortal spirit — not a detachable part, but the seat of communion with God, without which the very things this framework exists to describe (holiness, estrangement, regeneration) would have nothing to describe. And it parts from a simple dichotomy in distinguishing that God-communing spirit from the soul we share, in some measure, with the animals. Its distinctive claim is finally not a number but a direction — how holiness moves through the person, from the spirit outward.

This is why the framework holds the soul-spirit distinction as functional and relational rather than resting it on a contested metaphysics. It does not require that 1 Thessalonians 5:23 or Hebrews 4:12 be read as an inventory of three separable substances — a reading many exegetes would resist — but only that Scripture names a real difference between the person's shared creaturely life and the God-ward center that bears the divine image. In this it stands nearer the relational account of the image, in which the *imago Dei* is realized in communion rather than located in a faculty (Barth 1960; Grenz 2001), than to either pole of the substance debate. What it offers that debate is not a fourth position within it, but a way of showing how the doctrines the Church confesses move through the person it describes.

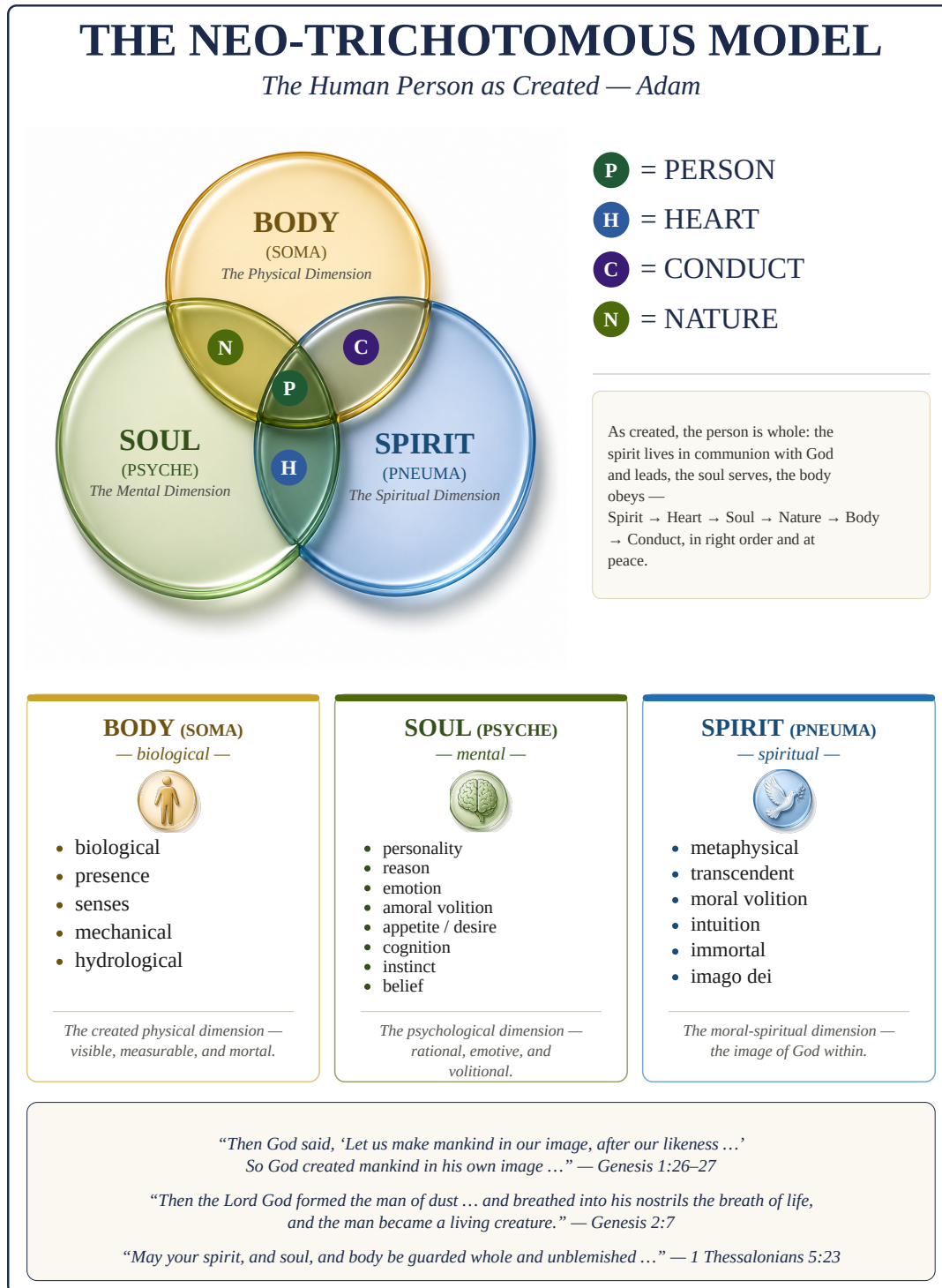


Figure 1. *The human person as created — Adam.* Three faculties, equally overlapping; the person is the region where all three meet. In the original creation of Adam the spirit was created directly by the breath of God — made perfect, yet corruptible, for God created him free: able to love and obey, and therefore able to turn away. This freedom, and the spirit that bears it, is God’s own gift, and what distinguishes mankind from the animals. Every human spirit since is inherited from Adam; the spirit is uncreated in Christ alone.

PART ONE

The Human Person

The Design and the Damage

2. The Image of God: Humanity's Unique Identity

The concept of *Imago Dei*—the “image of God”—is central to Christian theology and anthropology. From Genesis 1:26–27, where God declares, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” this concept has shaped the way we understand human nature, value, and destiny.

Traditionally, theologians defined the image of God in terms of both natural and moral attributes. These included reason, emotion, intelligence, imagination, self-awareness, creativity, personality, and the ability to choose between right and wrong. However, modern research in animal cognition, behavioral psychology, and neurobiology has increasingly shown that many of these so-called “uniquely human” natural traits—such as emotional bonding, rudimentary reasoning, communication, and even a form of self-reflection—can be observed to varying degrees in animals.

The evidence for this has only accumulated in the decades since. The affective neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp mapped the primary emotional systems — seeking, fear, care, grief, and play — onto subcortical brain structures that are anatomically and neurochemically homologous across all mammals studied, human and animal alike (Panksepp 2010). Frans de Waal has documented empathy, consolation, and grief in apes and other social species (de Waal 2019), and a systematic review of two decades of research found broad scientific agreement that animals experience a wide range of felt states (Proctor, Carder, and Cornish 2013). The shift has since become formal: in 2012 a group of neuroscientists issued the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, affirming that non-human animals possess the neurological substrates of conscious and affective experience (Low et al. 2012), and in 2024 the New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness extended that judgment across birds, reptiles, fishes, and even some invertebrates (Andrews et al. 2024). What the original 1987 work argued largely from the animal-language studies of its day, the intervening science has broadened and deepened: the very faculties once thought to mark humanity as divine are, in some real measure, shared with the creatures.

This discovery challenges older theological assumptions. If animals possess elements of reason, emotion, or intelligence, then these attributes cannot alone define the divine image (Owen 1956; Verduin 1970). Instead, according to the Neo-Trichotomy model, these traits are best understood as components of the soul—a mortal and amoral faculty shared in some form with higher animal species. They are real, meaningful, and valuable—but they are not uniquely divine.

God Is Spirit: A New Clarity on Imago Dei

The Bible declares, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). This affirmation opens a clearer path to understanding *Imago Dei*: that the image of God is not found in our reasoning capacity, emotional depth, or self-consciousness alone, but in our spiritual essence—our ability to morally choose, intuitively perceive truth, and enter into relationship with the divine.

Two primary capacities distinguish the spirit of humans from the soul of animals: **Intuition:** the ability to perceive or know truth immediately—without relying on sensory input or rational analysis. Intuition is a spiritual faculty that allows humans to respond to divine revelation, moral conviction, and spiritual discernment. It operates outside of instinct and reason, offering a sense of understanding that is rooted in our connection to the divine. While animals can react through instinct to environmental stimuli, they do not possess intuitive awareness of eternal truths, moral law, or the nature of God. Intuition is thus uniquely human and reflects a capacity for spiritual communion.

Moral Volition: the capacity to choose in light of moral consequences and eternal values. While animals may respond instinctively or emotionally, humans are aware of right and wrong and make choices accordingly—often in conflict with their own desires. This awareness transcends mere behavior and reflects a moral accountability grounded in spiritual identity.

Instinct, by contrast, is a biologically programmed, automatic response to specific stimuli. It is common among animals and humans alike, particularly in matters of self-preservation or basic survival. However, it lacks the moral dimension and relational consciousness that intuition entails. Instinct may guide action, but intuition guides moral insight. In this way, intuition is not an elevated form of instinct—it is a separate, spiritual faculty that reveals the divine image within human beings.

These are not simply advanced traits of intelligence—they are spirit-born faculties that mirror God’s moral and relational nature. They represent the true foundation of *Imago Dei*.

The Human-Spiritual Distinction in Creation

In Genesis 2:7, it says, “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” While the body came from dust and the *nepesh*—the soul—came alive through breath, the spirit—that which bears God’s moral and eternal image—was created by the very breath of God: not a portion of God’s own being, but a created reflection of Him. In Adam it was made perfect, yet corruptible—for God created him with a free will, able to love and obey God, and so also able to turn from Him. Adam alone was created in this way, directly by God; everyone since is brought into being through conception, inheriting from Adam a complete human nature—a body and soul now corruptible, and a spirit no longer in living communion with God but severed from Him at the root. Christ is the one exception: His body and soul are inherited through Mary, of David’s line, but His spirit is neither inherited nor created—it is God the Son.

Animals were also formed from the ground and animated by breath, but nowhere does Scripture say they were made in the image of God. That designation is unique to humanity

because only humanity has been gifted with a spirit that can know God, reflect His holiness, and respond to His will.

This understanding of *Imago Dei* brings clarity to why only humans are called into covenant with God, held morally accountable, and invited into eternal communion with Him.

Imago Dei: Restored Through Spirit and Soul

This view of *Imago Dei* does more than settle theological debates. It anchors human dignity in spiritual capacity, not intellectual superiority. It explains why every human life is sacred—regardless of age, ability, or cognition. It invites every person to live relationally with God—through a spirit regenerated by grace and a soul being renewed daily. This fellowship is not achieved through knowledge or status but through spiritual rebirth and ongoing surrender, as the spirit is made alive to God and the soul gradually reflects His likeness.

3. Sin: A Christian Understanding Through the Neo-Trichotomy Lens

In Christian theology, sin is not merely a behavioral misstep or violation of tradition—it is a profound disruption in the relationship between humanity and God. Sin originates in the spirit, the moral and immortal dimension of the human person, and reflects a willful rejection of God’s will and character. It is not defined by error or ignorance but by conscious moral intent. As John Wesley described, sin is “a voluntary transgression of a known law of God,” distinguishing it from unintentional mistakes or morally neutral decisions.

From a biblical perspective, sin entered the human story through a deliberate act of disobedience (Genesis 3), fracturing the harmony between God and His creation. The consequences were immediate and far-reaching: spiritual death (Romans 6:23), separation from God (Isaiah 59:2), emotional brokenness (Genesis 3:7–10), and the corruption of both body and soul. This is consistent with the Neo-Trichotomy model, which shows how sin distorts the spiritual center of the person, disrupting the integration of soul and body under God’s intended moral order. The distinction matters. Sin is seated in the spirit, but its effect was never confined there: the corruption of the spirit corrupted the whole person, just as the restoration of the spirit works outward again into soul and body. Nothing now stands as God planned it in creation. That is why we die, and why we await resurrection.

That order matters for what follows. What is inherited from Adam in body and soul is corruptibility—mortality, and the capacity to be corrupted—not corruption already accomplished. The corruption of body and soul is derivative: it follows from a severed spirit working outward across a lifetime. The distinction is not a fine one. It is what allows Christ’s body and soul, inherited through Mary, to be genuinely human and genuinely corruptible—able to hunger, to tire, to be tempted, to die—without being corrupt. Tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin; corruptible, and never corrupted. That is what a spotless sacrifice requires, and what no son of Adam bearing an inherited spirit could supply.

The Christian understanding of sin also emphasizes its universality—“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)—and its inability to be resolved through human effort alone. Attempts to address sin through self-discipline, law-keeping, or emotional suppression inevitably fall short because the core problem resides in the spirit. It is a moral condition requiring spiritual reconciliation, not merely behavioral correction.

That reconciliation is offered through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The cross is not simply a symbol of forgiveness; it is the means by which the penalty of sin is satisfied and the power of sin is broken. Through repentance and faith in Christ—confessing our sin and asking His forgiveness, and casting ourselves on the Savior who bore it—the spirit is regenerated—reconnected to God—and the process of restoration begins. As Paul writes, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Case Study 1: David and Bathsheba David’s sin in 2 Samuel 11 illustrates the moral breach that occurs at the spiritual level. His lust, adultery, deception, and orchestration of Uriah’s death were not amoral mistakes but calculated moral choices that broke God’s law. Though

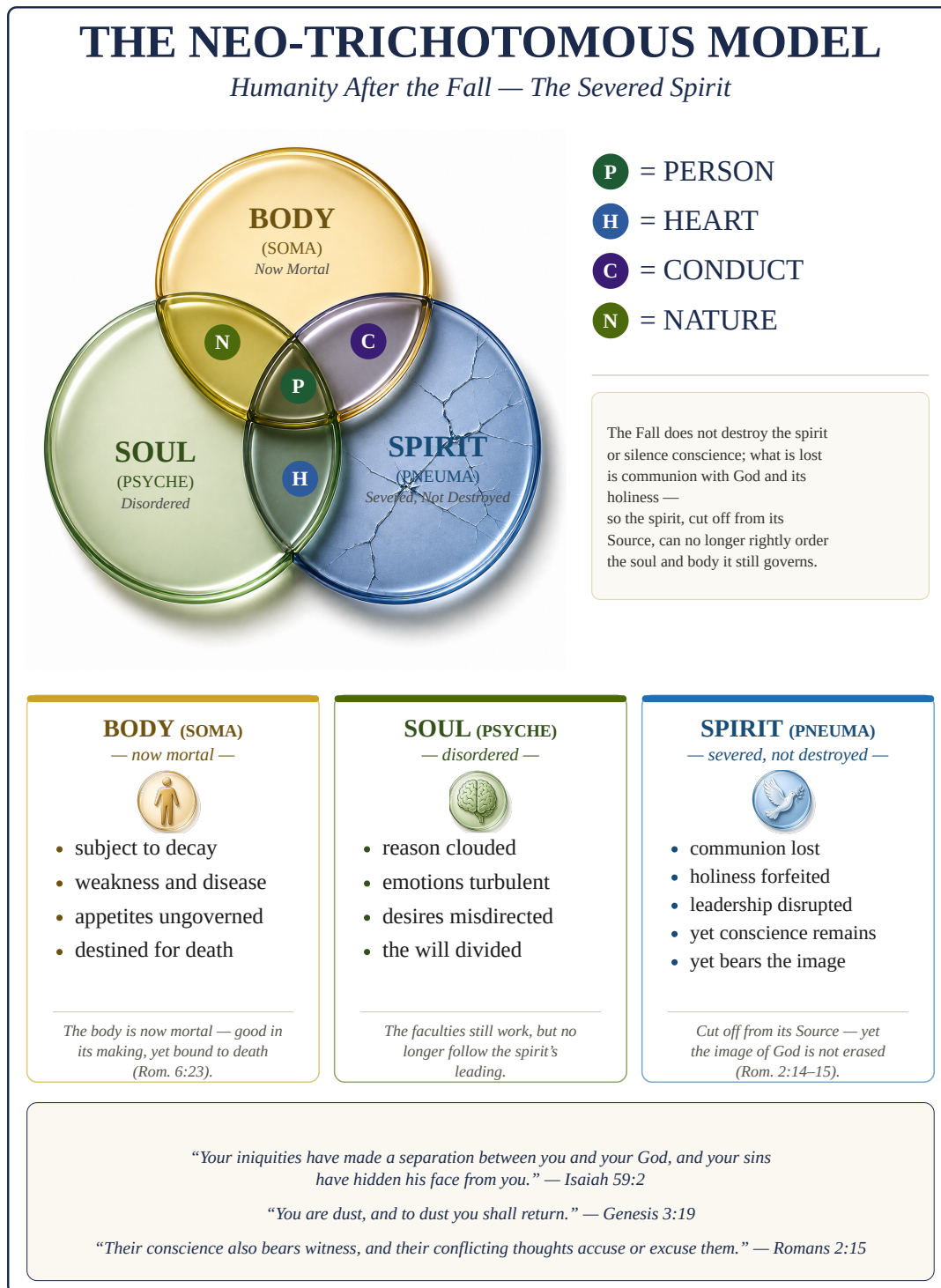


Figure 2. Sin located in the spirit. The vessel is cracked and cut off, yet still whole in shape—a spirit in fragments could not be renewed; a cracked one can.

emotionally affected (soul), and physically acted upon (body), the root of David's sin lay in a spiritual decision to ignore what he knew to be right. Psalm 51 shows his repentance was not just emotional but deeply spiritual: "A pure mind—create it for me, O God; and a spirit rightly ordered, make new within me" (Psalm 51:10).

Case Study 2: Judas Iscariot Judas's betrayal of Jesus (Luke 22; John 13) highlights a spiritual collapse masked by outward religious affiliation. Though he followed Jesus and appeared devoted, his decision to betray Christ for silver was a spiritual act of betrayal. Afterward, filled with guilt, Judas returned the money and despaired, but his remorse remained psychological and emotional—there is no record of genuine spiritual repentance. His soul was grieved, but his spirit remained separated from God.

Case Study 3: Peter's Denial and Restoration Peter's denial of Jesus (Luke 22:54–62) was a spiritual failure under pressure, yet unlike Judas, Peter's remorse turned into repentance. Jesus later restored him (John 21), showing that sin—even when it severs spiritual intimacy—can be healed. Peter's restoration brought renewal not only to his spirit but also to his soul and body, empowering him to lead boldly in the early Church. His transformation reflects how redemption radiates outward from a regenerated spirit.

The Need for Redemption — and for a Sacrifice

If the wound of sin is a severed spirit, the shape of its remedy is already half-decided. A cut that runs to the root cannot be dressed at the surface. The spirit is not merely sick but dead — cut off from the God who is its life — and the dead do not heal themselves. This is why Scripture speaks of salvation not as reform but as resurrection: "you were dead in the trespasses and sins... but God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:1–5). What is needed is not a better version of the old life but a new one, given from outside.

Scripture is equally plain that this new life is not given cheaply. From the first covering in Eden, where God clothed the man and woman in the skins of a slain animal, to the altar and the tabernacle, one principle runs unbroken: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). Sin earns death — "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) — and a debt of life can be paid only in the coin of life. The sacrifices of the old covenant announced this need generation after generation, a life laid down in the sinner's place. Yet by their own nature they could only cover; "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). They pointed beyond themselves to a sacrifice that could do what they could not.

Why We Cannot Redeem Ourselves

It might be asked why God does not simply accept our repentance and effort — why the severed spirit cannot mend itself by turning back. The model gives the reason with unusual clarity. The faculty that would have to do the mending is the very faculty that is broken. A darkened conscience cannot enlighten itself; a spirit cut off from God cannot, from its own side, restore the communion it has lost. Every human power we might bring — the discipline of the body, the resolve of the soul — operates below the level of the wound. We can improve our conduct

and even master our desires, but we cannot make a dead spirit alive, any more than a severed branch can graft itself back to the vine. This is not a counsel of despair but an honest diagnosis: the problem is deeper than our reach, and so the cure must come from beyond it.

The Redeemer We Require

Put the need and the impossibility together, and the outline of a Redeemer appears before we have named Him. He must be truly one of us — a real human being, with a body that can die and a soul that can stand in our place — for only a member of our own race can pay a human debt. Yet He must be more than one of us, for no son of Adam carries a spirit able to make dead spirits alive; that power belongs to God alone. The redemption we require, then, waits on someone who is at once fully man, and so able to die, and fully God, and so able to repair what death alone could never mend. Scripture names no mere prophet or teacher who could meet this description. It waits for the one place where the human and the divine are joined in a single person — which is to say, it waits for the Incarnation. To that answer the second half of this study will turn; but the shape of the answer is already fixed by the shape of the need.

4. Redemption: Restoring Harmony Through the Neo-Trichotomy Lens

In Christian theology, redemption is not merely a symbolic cleansing or a moral restart—it is the divine act of restoring humanity’s fractured relationship with God. Within the Neo-Trichotomy model, redemption is understood as a process that begins in the spirit, and radiates outward, affecting the soul and eventually the body, though their full restoration awaits the resurrection.

Redemption addresses the deepest wound of sin: the spiritual death of humanity’s core being. As Paul explains, the spirit dead in trespasses is the first dimension God revives by His grace (Ephesians 2:1–5), and becomes the conduit through which transformation begins.

From Covering to Cure: The Tabernacle and the Lamb of God

To see what redemption accomplishes on this model, it helps to begin where Scripture itself begins: with the covering. Under the old covenant, the blood of bulls and goats was brought into the tabernacle to atone for sin—and the Hebrew verb behind that atonement, *kaphar*, carries the sense of a covering. The sacrifice concealed the worshiper’s guilt from the eyes of a holy God, and for a time it sufficed; but it had to be renewed year upon year, for by its own nature it could reach no further than the surface. As the writer to the Hebrews observes, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4); the priests “stand daily,” offering “the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11). The covering was real, but it was temporary, and it left the inner person unchanged.

A strictly two-part account of the person is inclined to read salvation itself along these same lines. If the whole inner life is the soul, and the soul remains flawed throughout this life—its reasoning clouded, its affections disordered—then salvation cannot be expected to cure the inner person now. What remains is to cover: to spread the blood of Christ over a person still inwardly corrupt, so that God, looking upon the covering, accounts us acceptable. Redemption becomes, in effect, a permanent version of the tabernacle covering—a righteousness reckoned to us from outside and laid over a nature that is not itself made new. There is real truth in this; Scripture does speak of a righteousness credited to us. But taken alone, it makes the cross the last and greatest of the coverings rather than the cure toward which every covering had always pointed.

Yet the Lamb of God is announced in different terms. He does not merely cover the sin of the world; He “takes it away” (John 1:29). By His own blood He secured “an eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12), offered “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10), so that “by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Where the blood of animals could not touch the conscience, His blood “purifies the conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). This is not a covering renewed each year but a finished work that reaches inward—into the very place the old sacrifices could never go.

Here the Neo-Trichotomy model earns its keep, for it can name precisely what that finished work reaches, and why its effect is permanent. The wound of sin is not, at its root, in the

soul but in the spirit—severed from God at the fall. The Lamb’s sacrifice does not paint over an unhealed soul; it repairs the spirit itself, making the dead spirit alive and restoring the communion for which humanity was created. This is why it need never be repeated: it does not cover a symptom but heals the wound. The blood of Christ remains what pleases the Father—the sufficient and acceptable offering, indeed the true mercy seat that God has set forth in His own blood (Romans 3:25)—yet its effect is fully restorative, not cosmetic. Salvation, then, is not visual acceptability but real reunion. And because the spirit itself is made new, redemption opens directly into sanctification: the restored spirit progressively renews the soul, and will itself be brought to completion, while the body awaits its resurrection. Covering gives way to cure; and cure, once begun, becomes the whole restoration of the person.

Redemption and the Spirit: Immediate Regeneration

The spirit is the immortal, moral faculty of the human being—the place where communion with God is either broken (in sin) or restored (in redemption). At the moment of salvation, the human spirit is regenerated or “born again” (John 3:3–6). It is not improved or reformed, but made new: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through the Holy Spirit, the believer’s spirit is made alive, morally reoriented toward God, and permanently indwelt (Romans 8:11).

This spiritual renewal is real and immediate: the spirit is genuinely made alive—born again, not merely reformed—and reconnected to God. Yet the new birth is a beginning rather than the whole work; it opens communion with God and allows the believer to perceive Him, to obey His moral commands, and to begin to live in intimacy with Him, while the completing of the spirit is the work of the sanctification that follows. It is this revived spirit that empowers the soul and body to be instruments of righteousness.

Redemption and the Soul: Progressive Renewal

The soul—the seat of emotions, intellect, and will—begins to reflect the new spiritual life, but unlike the spirit, it is not instantly perfected. Scripture affirms this progressive transformation: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2), and “we take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The soul remains influenced by past habits, emotional wounds, and cognitive distortions, but under the influence of the regenerated spirit, it begins to conform to the character of Christ.

Though the soul experiences real transformation in this life, it is still subject to suffering, sorrow, and temptation. Full healing and perfection of the soul will not be realized until it is glorified in the presence of God (Revelation 21:4).

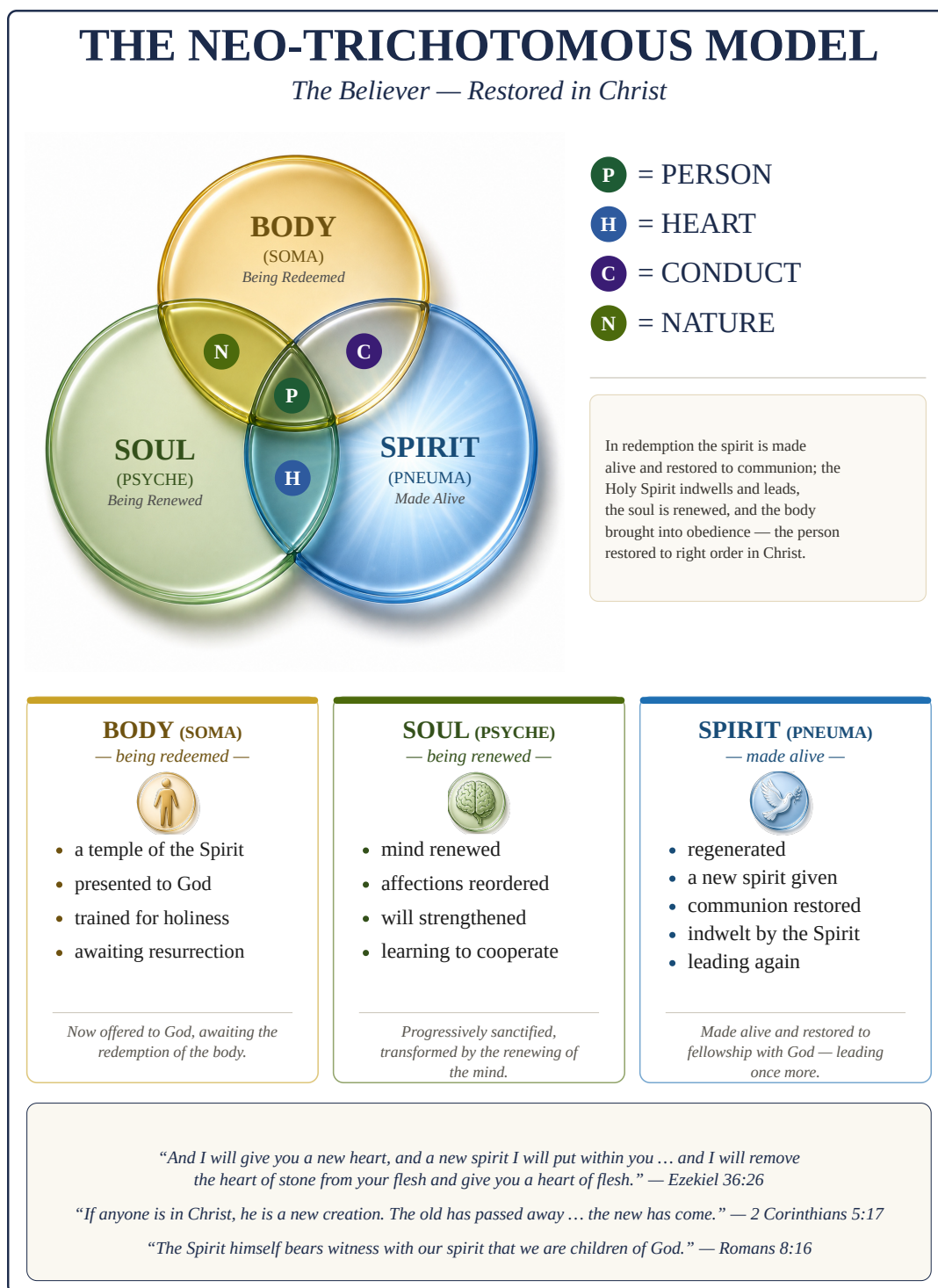


Figure 3. *The believer.* The same three faculties, the same person—and the spirit made new, the connection open again. The body is unchanged and still mortal. The soul is unchanged at first, and is reshaped over a lifetime.

Redemption and the Body: Future Resurrection

The body remains the most visibly unchanged aspect of the redeemed person. Though we present our bodies as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1) and seek to glorify God in our physical lives, the body continues to age, suffer, and ultimately die. As Paul writes, “though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

The hope of the Gospel, however, includes the resurrection of the body. Paul declares that “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11). This bodily redemption will occur at Christ’s return: “We eagerly await a Savior... who will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:20–21).

Until then, the body remains a temporary vessel—capable of expressing the renewed spirit, yet incomplete until it is fully glorified.

Biblical Case Studies in Redemption

Case Study 1: The Apostle Paul Paul’s conversion is a picture of spiritual regeneration (Acts 9). His spirit was radically transformed, his soul renewed through lifelong discipleship, and his body ultimately offered in suffering and martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6–8). He understood the tension: “I discipline my body and keep it under control... lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Case Study 2: The Prodigal Son The son’s spirit is awakened the moment he “comes to himself” (Luke 15:17). His soul had been degraded by sin, and his body abused by physical want—but through repentance and the father’s embrace, restoration begins. Yet the fullness of his redemption—soul and body included—unfolds within the father’s household, symbolizing the long-term process of grace.

Case Study 3: The Thief on the Cross Though his body was suffering the penalty of death, and his soul likely scarred by a life of crime, the thief’s spirit was regenerated when he said, “Jesus, remember me...” (Luke 23:42). Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” His soul and body would still face death, but his spirit had already been made alive.

Redemption, then, is a multidimensional reality. The spirit is fully regenerated at the moment of salvation. The soul begins a journey of renewal, as it learns to submit to the now-living spirit. The body remains unredeemed until resurrection, yet is invited to serve as a vessel of worship and obedience in this life.

This comprehensive, biblically supported vision of redemption is clarified through the Neo-Trichotomy model, revealing how God is actively restoring the whole person—from the inside out.

Grace, Not Achievement

Because the wound lies beyond our reach, its healing can only be a gift. This is the meaning of grace: “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). The severed

spirit contributes nothing to its own regeneration but the empty hands of faith. Redemption is therefore received, never earned — not a wage owed to the diligent but a life given to the dead. This guards the gospel at both ends: it keeps the proud from imagining they have climbed to God, and it keeps the despairing from imagining they are beyond His reach. What none can achieve, God freely gives.

The Ground of Assurance

If salvation were our achievement, our assurance would rise and fall with our performance, and no honest person could ever rest. But because it is God's gift, resting on His finished work, the believer's confidence has a firmer floor than feeling. Assurance is grounded first in what Christ has done — "it is finished" (John 19:30) — and then confirmed within by the Spirit Himself: "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). On this model the witness falls exactly where it should. The Holy Spirit indwells and speaks to the regenerated human spirit, and communion once restored is self-attesting; the reconnected spirit knows its Father as a child knows a parent's voice. Assurance is not the absence of struggle in soul and body, which continue to be reshaped; it is the settled knowledge, at the level of the spirit, that the reconnection is real and God-given.

5. The Fruit of the Spirit: Transformation Through the Neo-Trichotomy Lens

Here the model shows itself to be more than an account of what a human being is; it becomes an account of how a human being is changed. Most anthropologies describe the parts of a person. This one also describes the direction of grace through them — and so it pictures redemption, sanctification, and the fruit of the Spirit as one continuous work of God.

The Holy Spirit does not merely improve outward behavior, nor does He only stir inward feeling. He restores the human spirit to living fellowship with God, and from that restored center His influence radiates outward — into the soul, and at last into the body. Redemption begins in the spirit; sanctification progressively reshapes the soul; holiness finally becomes visible in the body. The movement is always from the inside out: spirit to soul to body, or, in the language of the regions, from vertical fellowship, through the heart, into conduct. The evidence of the whole work is what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit — “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

It is worth noting that Paul writes fruit, not fruits. The nine named qualities are not separate virtues to be collected but facets of one ripening life — the single fruit of a spirit made alive and increasingly given room to work (Colossians 1:10; 2 Peter 1:5–8). The model’s contribution is to show that this one fruit is borne in two places at once.

The Heart: The Inward Dimension

The heart (H) is where the restored spirit continually works upon the soul — the inward moral life of conscience, affection, and conviction. This is the new heart God promised — “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you... I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26) — the unresponsive heart made living flesh, so that the spirit’s leading now reaches a soul willing to receive it. Here the believer’s motives are renewed, desires reordered, moral discernment sharpened, and love for God deepened in growing communion with the Holy Spirit. This is chiefly the arena of vertical holiness: the Spirit teaching the soul to value what God values, forming an inward character increasingly conformed to Christ. At this depth love is *agapē*, the settled will to seek another’s good; joy is a gladness that does not depend on circumstance; peace is reconciliation with God before it is any outward calm. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34); the fruit is inward before it is ever seen.

Conduct: The Outward Dimension

Conduct (C) is the visible expression of the renewed heart — the moral will made public in word, action, relationship, habit, service, and sacrifice. This is the arena of horizontal holiness. Others cannot observe the restored spirit directly, but they can see its effects in a transformed life; this is why the Lord could say, “you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20). The fruit is visible precisely because the Spirit works from the inside out — the same love now

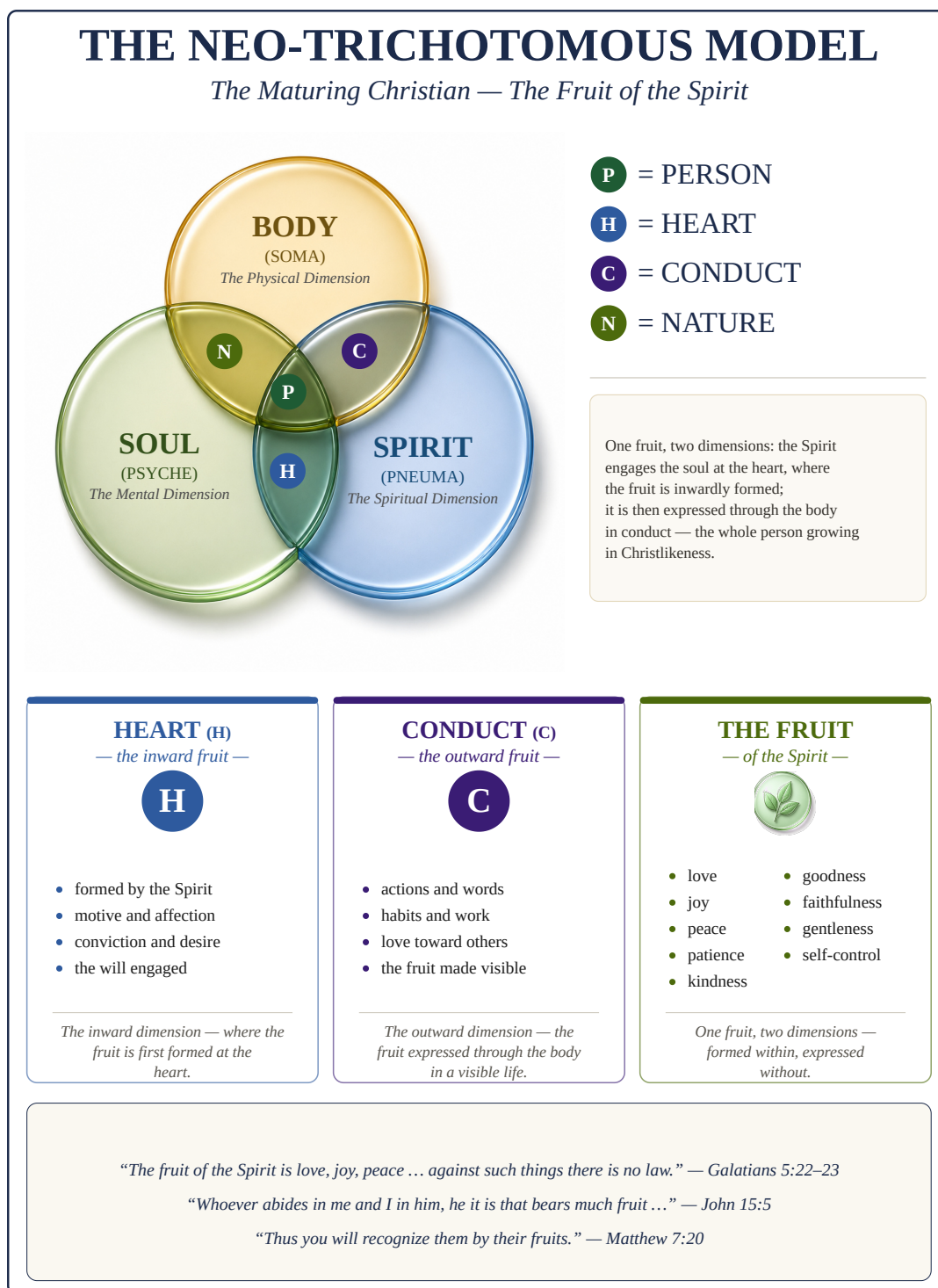


Figure 4. *The Maturing Christian.* The three regions where the faculties meet — nature (N), heart (H), and conduct (C) — and the fruit of the Spirit in its two dimensions: formed inwardly at the heart, expressed outwardly in conduct.

acting for another's good, the same patience now enduring others without retaliation, the same kindness now blessing and serving.

Two Dimensions of Every Fruit

It is better, then, not to divide Paul's list into inward graces and outward deeds, as though there were two kinds of fruit. Every fruit of the Spirit has two dimensions: an inward reality experienced in the heart (spirit and soul), and an outward expression demonstrated in conduct (the spirit reaching the body through the soul). These are not two fruits but two aspects of one transforming work of God.

Fruit	In the Heart (<i>inward reality</i>)	In Conduct (<i>outward expression</i>)
Love	Self-giving affection	Sacrificial service
Joy	Deep gladness in God	Encouraging presence
Peace	Inner wholeness	Peacemaking
Patience	Long-suffering disposition	Endurance toward others
Kindness	Compassion	Merciful action
Goodness	Moral integrity	Righteous conduct
Faithfulness	Loyal commitment	Dependability
Gentleness	Humble spirit	Gentle treatment of others
Self-control	Mastery of desires	Disciplined behavior

Nature, and the Progress of Redemption

The creaturely nature (N) — appetite, drive, instinct, the life shared with the animals — is not abolished in this work but brought under new government. Paul does not promise the removal of natural desire but its leading: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). The drives remain; increasingly they are led and refined by the Spirit, no longer the master they once were.

This also explains why a Christian may know real transformation and still struggle with emotional weakness or bodily temptation. The three regions are not renewed on the same timetable. The spirit is restored at once, in redemption; the soul is renewed progressively, through sanctification; and the body only gradually learns new patterns of conduct as the renewed soul submits more fully to the restored spirit. The direction never changes — spirit, then heart, then conduct — but the distance the work has travelled outward differs from person to person and day to day. This is what keeps Christian maturity from collapsing into mere behavior modification: holiness does not begin at the surface and work inward, but begins in restored fellowship with God, reshapes the inner life, and only then shows itself in what can

be seen. The doctrine of sanctification, to which we now turn, traces that same movement to its completion.

6. Sanctification: Growing in Christlikeness Through Spirit-Led Transformation

Following redemption, the Christian life moves into a phase of sanctification—the ongoing process of being conformed to the image of Christ. Sanctification is not merely behavioral improvement; it is the deepening transformation of the whole person, beginning in the spirit, shaping the soul, and expressing itself through the body. It is the journey of becoming wholly set apart for God’s purposes.

In the Neo-Trichotomy model, sanctification begins in the spirit, which has been regenerated through redemption. From this renewed spiritual center, the believer is progressively transformed, as the soul (thoughts, emotions, will) and body (habits, actions) come under the influence and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes this process in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself set you apart entirely; and may your spirit, and soul, and body be guarded whole and unblemished until the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This holistic transformation is not self-generated, but empowered by the Holy Spirit as the believer yields daily through spiritual disciplines, obedience, and faith.

Entire Sanctification: A Wesleyan Perspective on Perfect Love

While sanctification is often gradual, John Wesley taught that a deeper spiritual reality is possible—what he called “entire sanctification,” or “perfect love.” This is not moral perfection or sinless behavior, but a radical surrender to God that allows the Holy Spirit to fully cleanse and fill the believer with love. Wesley described it as a “second work of grace”—a distinct and instantaneous spiritual experience subsequent to salvation.

Wesley observed that some believers seemed to reach such holiness and love only at the very end of life, on their deathbeds. His point ran the other way: if this fullness can be received at the point of death—and if it is received by faith rather than earned by works—then it need not wait for death at all. It may be entered now, in this life, by any believer fully surrendered to God; for entire sanctification, like justification, is received by faith.

Experientially, this second work often begins as a quiet invitation. The Spirit whispers to a believer who has known genuine salvation yet still lives through spiritual highs and lows: *Are you weary of the rising and falling of your walk with Me? Are you ready to give yourself more fully into this relationship?* When the believer answers thoughtfully—“Yes, Lord”—the Spirit draws them into a new depth of relationship, one more intimate and settled than they have known. Entire sanctification is not a reward for spiritual achievement but the glad acceptance of a deeper communion that God Himself offers.

In Neo-Trichotomy terms, entire sanctification occurs in the spirit, where God’s love is poured in (Romans 5:5), and moral volition is fully aligned with divine will. The spirit is made perfect—not flawless in performance, but fully restored in its original purpose: to know, love, and obey God.

Vertical Holiness: The Completed Spirit in Intimate Fellowship with God

Vertical holiness reflects the state of a spirit that has been entirely sanctified—made perfect in love through the indwelling and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. This is not behavioral sinlessness, but moral and spiritual completeness. The bent toward sin is changed; the spirit, once rebellious or dormant, is now alive, aligned, and entirely surrendered to God.

This sanctifying of the spirit is not only a divine act of grace—it fulfills the very purpose for which humanity was created: to live in intimate, unbroken fellowship with God. From Genesis to Revelation, the goal of God’s relationship with humankind has been union, communion, and holy love. Sanctification is not an optional spiritual upgrade; it is the fulfillment of God’s original design.

When the spirit is made perfect, the believer’s relationship with God becomes deeply intimate—an immediate, conscious nearness to the unconditional love of God, accompanied by an acute awareness of what that love cost at the cross. In this nearness, sin loses its appeal. To sin is to violate a known moral law for the sake of self-gratification; but when one is consciously held in the presence of that love, and mindful of the price of Jesus’ sacrifice, it becomes very hard to pull away from such intimacy in order to gratify the self. The entirely sanctified believer is therefore more bent toward obedience under temptation than easily bent toward sin. This does not erase the capacity to sin—the believer still retains free will, and sin remains fully possible—but it offers the protection of nearness: so close to the will of God that sin becomes unlikely, not because of external restraint, but because of internal delight in the presence of God. As Paul writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). To be entirely sanctified, in this sense, is to be so fully in the presence of God that sin, though always possible, becomes improbable.

Sanctifying the spirit in this way fulfills God’s intention in creation: to dwell in intimate fellowship with His people. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). The sanctified spirit enjoys an unobstructed relationship with God, and from that place, everything else flows.

In the language of the regions, sanctification runs a path. The Spirit makes the spirit new; the renewed spirit reshapes the heart; and the heart works outward into conduct. This is why a spirit made entire can still leave behavior in progress: the route to conduct runs through the soul, which is still being reshaped over a lifetime. The fruit of the Spirit is formed inwardly, at the heart, and carried outward into daily life and relationships.

Horizontal Holiness: The Outward Expression of a Sanctified Spirit

While vertical holiness refers to the internal reality of intimate communion with God, horizontal holiness refers to the effect that a sanctified spirit has on the soul—reshaping thought, emotion, behavior, and relationships. It is how holiness becomes visible in our daily interactions with others.

This sanctifying influence has an enormous effect on the entire person, and especially on the soul. Under the leadership of a sanctified spirit, the soul begins to reason more truly about the value of its moral choices, growing sensitive not only to what is plainly right or wrong, but

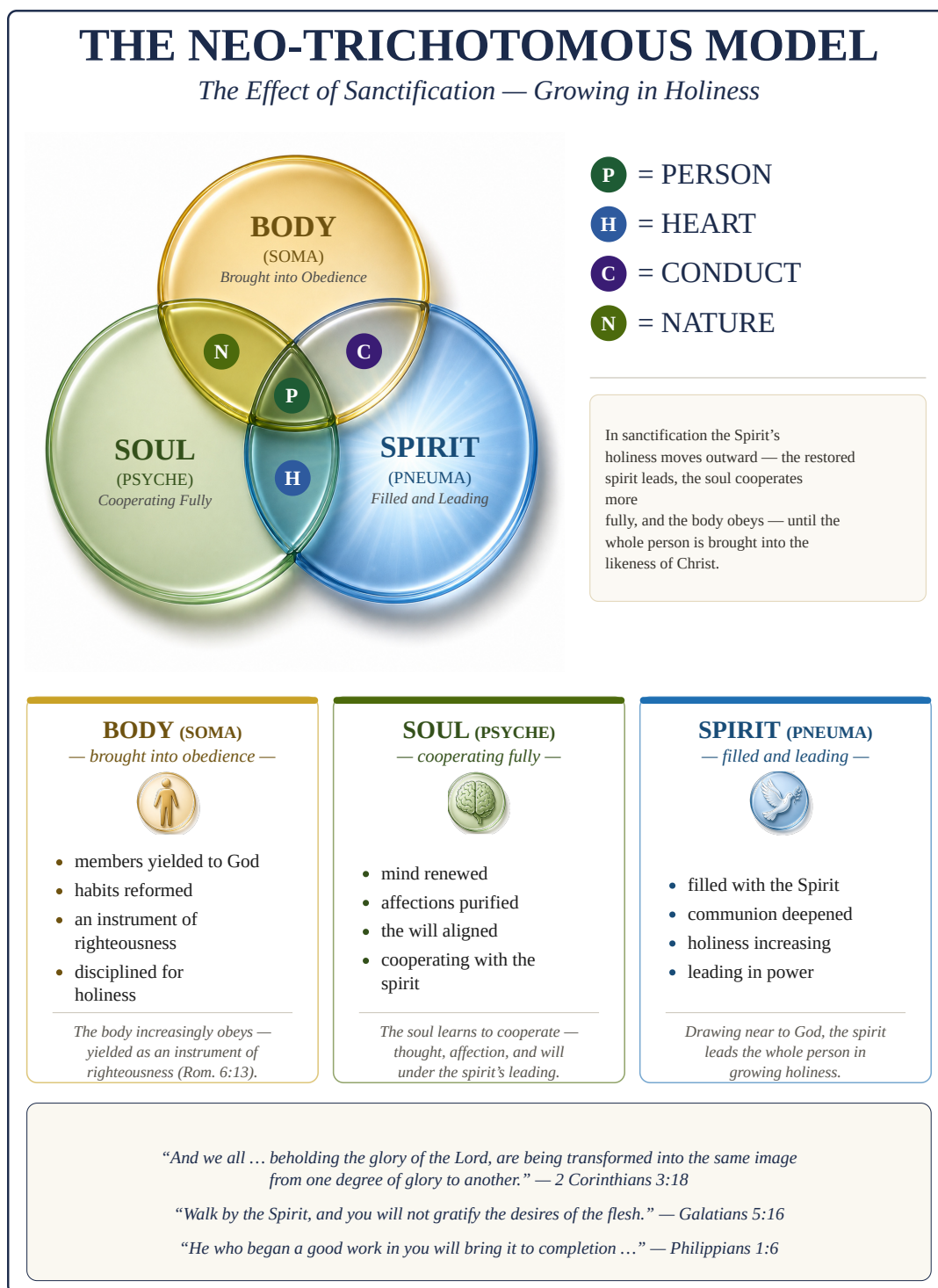


Figure 5. *The effect of sanctification.* The spirit, made new, works outward: the heart is reshaped, and its fruit — love, joy, peace, and the rest — is carried into conduct, in daily life and relationships.

to the subtle moral ramifications of choices that are in themselves morally neutral. It may not be sinful, for example, to drink a glass of wine; yet in certain circumstances the sanctified soul perceives that to do so may not be helpful to others, and freely lays the liberty aside for their sake. Holiness in this way refines not merely the will's resistance to sin, but the soul's very discernment—teaching it to weigh love, and the good of others, alongside the bare permission of a thing.

However, the soul—though increasingly influenced by the sanctified spirit—remains subject to fatigue, stress, illness, and misunderstanding. Even a believer whose spirit has been made perfect may occasionally fail in perception, reaction, or tone. These are not moral failings of the spirit, but signs of human frailty in the soul.

Paul affirms this reality in 2 Corinthians 4:7: “We have this treasure in jars of clay.” The sanctified spirit is the treasure; the soul and body remain the fragile vessels. Entire sanctification does not eliminate the possibility of mistakes or missteps, but it does purify the intent and empower a consistent trajectory of love, humility, and obedience.

This distinction guards against legalism and perfectionism, while affirming that sanctification is real, meaningful, and transformational—even in imperfect vessels.

Cultivating Holiness: Insights from Richard Foster

Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* outlines practices that support sanctification by aligning the soul and body with the spirit's renewed moral center. These are not mechanisms to earn holiness, but time-tested ways of remaining available to God's transforming presence:

Inward Disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, study

Outward Disciplines: simplicity, solitude, submission, service

Corporate Disciplines: confession, worship, guidance, celebration

Foster writes, “The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us.” These practices help form habits that reflect holiness in daily life. They train the soul to listen and respond, and the body to act in obedience.

When practiced in faith, these disciplines create space for God's grace to shape the entire person in the likeness of Christ.

Case Studies in Sanctification

Peter – The Power of Restoration and Growth Peter's life illustrates both process and breakthrough in sanctification. After denying Christ (Luke 22), Peter weeps bitterly in repentance. Jesus later restores him in John 21. At Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter's spirit is empowered by the Holy Spirit. His soul, however, continued to mature over time. Paul's later rebuke in Galatians 2 reveals Peter's remaining emotional and social biases. His spirit remained faithful, but his soul needed refinement—a picture of horizontal holiness in progress.

John – Love Perfected Through Intimacy The apostle John's writings reflect a life saturated with divine intimacy. Known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23), John leaned into Christ relationally and spiritually. His letters speak of a spirit transformed by love: “Perfect

love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). His consistent call to love others reflects both vertical holiness (spiritual union) and horizontal holiness (visible fruit).

Moses – Spiritually Surrendered, Soul-Stretched Moses walked in profound nearness to God—“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face” (Exodus 33:11). His spirit was deeply surrendered. Yet emotionally, Moses struggled under pressure. In Numbers 20, he struck the rock in frustration and disobeyed God, illustrating the soul’s limitations. His story reminds us that even saints with intimate vertical holiness may falter horizontally due to the soul’s human frailty.

This comprehensive understanding of sanctification—beginning in the spirit, influencing the soul, and expressed through the body—honors both divine grace and human process. It allows us to walk confidently in holiness, with humility, and with hope.

Assurance and Life in the Spirit

The same witness that assures the new believer deepens as the believer matures. Life in the Spirit is not a single crisis but a lasting communion: the indwelling Spirit leading, teaching, convicting, and comforting, so that the Christian comes to know God not as a doctrine held but as a Person walked with. “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). As the soul is progressively renewed, its perception of that communion grows clearer, and with it a deepening assurance — less the anxious question “am I saved?” and more the settled “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). This is the ordinary shape of a maturing Christian life: a restored spirit in growing fellowship with God, an assurance that no longer depends on unbroken feeling, and a soul and body being brought, day by day, into agreement with the Spirit who dwells within.

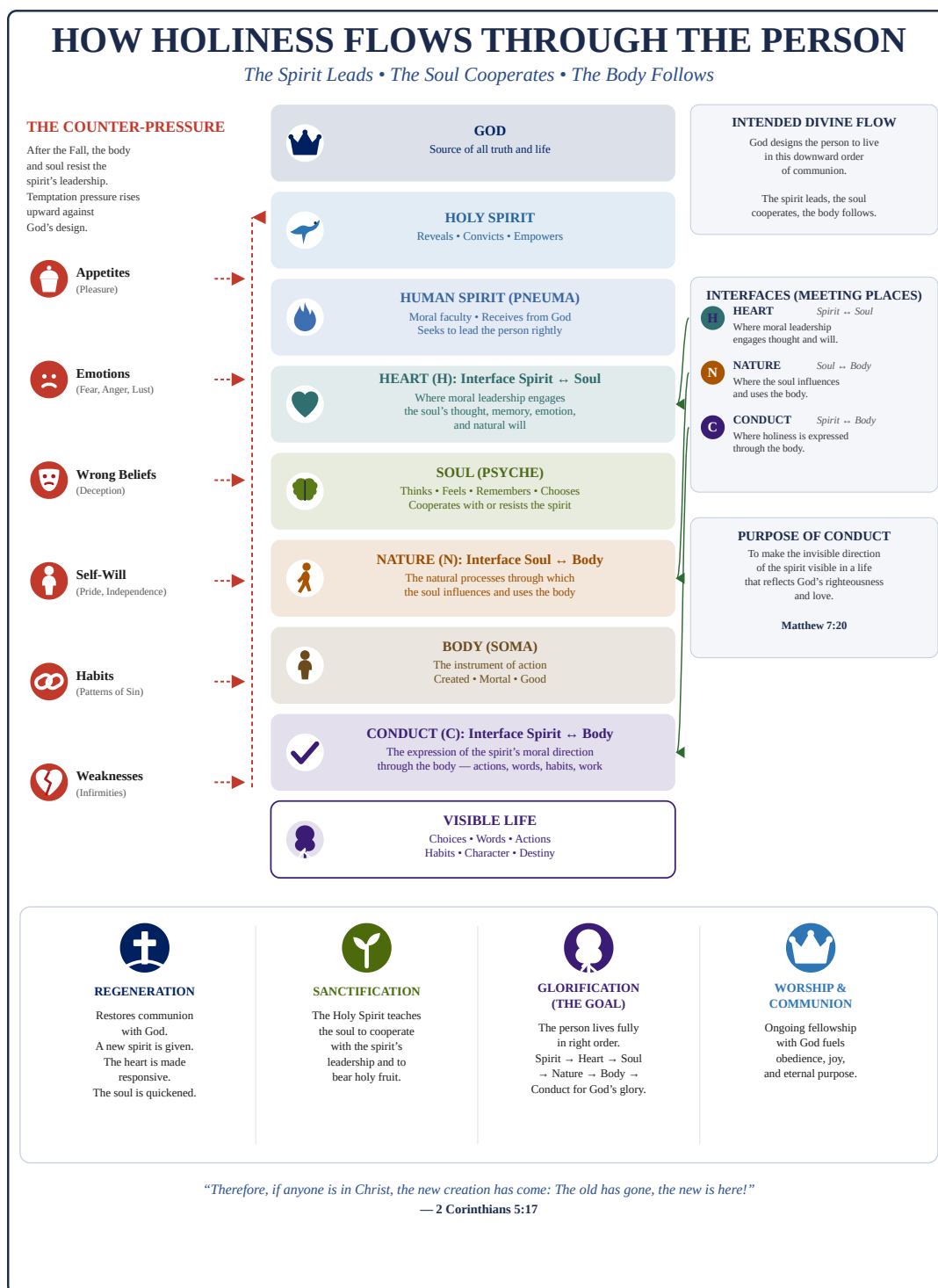


Figure 6. The order of divine influence and human response. The spirit's leading moves outward — through heart, soul, and body into visible life; after the Fall the appetites of body and soul press upward against it, and grace restores the flow through regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.

PART TWO

God's Answer

The Word Made Flesh

7. The Model and the Creeds

A model that speaks this boldly about the person of Christ owes the reader a clear account of its relation to the historic creeds. This work is offered in submission to them, not in judgment of them. Across three and a half centuries the ecumenical councils fixed, from Scripture, the boundaries within which the Church may faithfully speak of God and of Christ; nothing proposed here is meant to move them. Five of those councils bear directly on the person of Christ, and the model claims to honor each in turn. It is worth walking through them.

Nicaea (325). The first ecumenical council was called by the emperor Constantine to settle a quarrel that had spread through the whole Eastern Church. Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, taught that the Son, though the first and highest of all creatures and the very agent of creation, was nonetheless made — that *there was when He was not*, and that He was of a different substance from the Father. Some three hundred bishops answered that if the Son is a creature, however exalted, then what came to us in Christ is not God, and we are saved by a creature and not by God. The council would not rest on any word Arius could accept, and settled at last on one he could not: the Son is *true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance — homoousios — with the Father* (Percival 1961). A single letter divided the orthodox *homoousios* (of one substance) from the offered compromise *homoiousios* (of like substance), and the council refused the compromise.

The boldest claim in this model rests entirely on that refusal. When the model says that Christ's spirit is not a created human spirit but the eternal Son, it is not adding to Nicaea but standing on it: the Son is God, not a creature, and the personal center of the man Jesus is therefore uncreated. Everything the later chapters build — that His spirit was never made, that in Him alone the God-ward center of a human life is God Himself — depends on Nicaea being true. Athanasius, present at the council as a young deacon at the side of his bishop Alexander, grasped what was at stake and spent the next half-century, through five exiles, defending that single contested word against every attempt to soften it. The model takes its stand on the ground he held.

Constantinople I (381). If Nicaea secured that Christ is fully God, the First Council of Constantinople, gathered under the emperor Theodosius, secured that He is fully man. Its chief target was Apollinaris of Laodicea, an able defender of Nicaea who, pressing hard for the unity of Christ, taught that in Him the divine Word simply took the place of the human rational soul: Christ had a human body and its lower animating life, but no human mind. It was a tidy way to keep Christ one — and it left His humanity a torso. The council condemned it, and expanded the Nicene Creed to confess the Holy Spirit as *the Lord and giver of life*, completing the confession of the Trinity. Gregory of Nazianzus, who for a season presided, had already given the objection the form the Church never forgot: *that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved* (Epistle 101).

The model is built to pass exactly this test, and it is worth seeing why it does not fall into the Apollinarian trap it may at first resemble. Apollinaris removed a human faculty — the rational mind — and set God in its place, leaving a mutilated manhood. The model removes nothing. In Christ the human soul is entire: a real human intellect, real human emotion, a real

human will (*Jesus wept; My soul is very sorrowful, even to death*). What is uncreated in Him is not any part of that manhood, but the personal center that lives it — the difference, as the next council would name it, between a nature and the person whose nature it is. Nothing human is subtracted; only the identity of the one who bears the humanity is divine. The very faculty Apollinaris denied is the faculty the model insists Christ fully possessed.

Ephesus (431). The third council answered the mirror-image error. Where Apollinaris had joined the natures so tightly that the humanity was crushed, Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, held them so loosely apart that they read as two persons in cooperation rather than one. He would not call Mary *Theotokos*, the God-bearer, but only *Christotokos*, mother of the Christ — as though a human person had been born of her and a divine person joined to him afterward. Cyril of Alexandria saw in this a Christ split down the middle, and led the council to insist on a single subject: it is the eternal Word who is born, who hungers, who suffers and dies, not a human person alongside Him. *The Word*, Cyril wrote, *having personally united to himself flesh animated by a rational soul, did in an ineffable and inconceivable manner become man* (Second Letter to Nestorius). The council received the letter and deposed Nestorius; Mary is *Theotokos* because the child is God.

Cyril's phrase is, in older words, the model exactly. *Flesh animated by a rational soul* is body and soul — the complete human nature the model assigns to Christ, inherited whole from Mary. And the one who unites that nature to Himself is not a second person but the one divine Son, so that everything done and suffered in Jesus is done and suffered by God the Son in His humanity. This is how the model can be as bold as it is about the spirit without ever dividing Christ: there is one who acts in Him, one personal center, one Son who has made a true human body and soul His own. Ephesus guards the model from the very error a three-part picture might seem to invite — the suspicion that spirit, soul, and body name three actors. They do not. They name the single life of one person.

Chalcedon (451). A generation later the pendulum swung back toward Apollinaris. Eutyches, a respected archimandrite of Constantinople, taught that after the union Christ had but one nature, the human absorbed into the divine as a drop of wine is lost in the sea. A council at Ephesus in 449 endorsed him under duress and threat — Leo of Rome refused it the name of council and called it a *robbery* — and the Church had to try again. In 451 some five hundred bishops assembled at Chalcedon, heard the *Tome* of Pope Leo read aloud, and answered with the acclamation *Peter has spoken through Leo*. Their Definition has fixed the boundary ever since: one and the same Christ, *acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and one subsistence* (Percival 1961).

Chalcedon's four negations do the model's work for it, ruling out in one breath every distortion the model must also avoid: the natures are not confused (Christ is no divine-human hybrid), not changed (the manhood stays fully human), not divided and not separated (there are not two Christs). Beneath the negations lies the distinction the tradition would name *enhypostasia*: Christ's human nature is complete and real, yet has no independent human person of its own, for its very subsistence is in the person of the divine Son. The Neo-Trichotomy model

says the same thing in anthropological terms. Human nature is constituted by body and soul, and Christ received both, whole, from Mary; He lacks no human faculty. What He does not possess is a created human spirit standing as an independent center of personhood, because the personal center of this life is the uncreated Son Himself. Nothing human is missing, and only the identity of the person who lives the life is divine.

Constantinople III (681). The last council to bear on the model closed a question Chalcedon had left implicit. If Christ has two complete natures, does He will with two wills, or does one person mean one will? An imperial party, hoping to win back those who had rejected Chalcedon, proposed that He willed with one will only — Monothelitism. Against it stood Maximus the Confessor, who argued that a will belongs to a nature and not merely to a person, so that a Christ with only one will would be a Christ short one human faculty, His manhood incomplete after all. Maximus paid for the argument: tried, condemned, his tongue and right hand cut off, he was sent into exile and died in 662, nearly twenty years before the council vindicated him. In 681 the Church confessed that Christ has *two natural wills and two natural operations*, the human will neither abolished nor absorbed but following, *in subjection to His divine and all-powerful will* (Percival 1961).

Maximus's distinction is the one the model requires, and it is the hinge of the section on the temptation that follows. Christ possessed the natural human will that shrinks from suffering and death — *let this cup pass* — but not the fallen, vacillating will, divided against itself, that wavers between God and self; His personal orientation to the Father was never for an instant in doubt — *nevertheless, not my will, but yours*. So the agony in Gethsemane is neither performance nor contradiction: it is a real human will, recoiling as any healthy human will recoils, held without a crack in union with the will of God. The two wills are genuinely two and never in conflict, because the person who wills in both is one. A complete human soul means a true human will; and a true human will, never fallen, is exactly what the sinless Christ of this model possesses.

To the ancient rule that *what is not assumed is not healed*, the model answers directly: Christ heals the human spirit not by inheriting Adam's severed one, but by being, as the last Adam, the uncreated Image who rejoins our humanity to God. He does not take our estrangement in order to cure it; He ends it, from within a life that was never estranged. Like every generation of the Church, the Fathers confessed the apostolic faith in the vocabulary available to them; a later age may add, in Vincent of Lérins's phrase, not a truer doctrine but a clearer understanding — doctrine growing *in the same sense and the same meaning*. It is in that light, and only that light, that this model is proposed.

8. The Incarnation: Fully God and Fully Human

Part One followed the human person from the design of creation to the ruin of the Fall, and traced the exact shape of the rescue that ruin requires: a Redeemer truly man, so that He can die, and truly God, so that He can make the dead spirit alive. Part Two turns from the need to the answer. It begins where the two natures are joined — the Incarnation — and follows the one saving work outward through the Cross and the Resurrection, and up into the God whose own life makes such love possible.

The Incarnation—God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ—has long been described as a theological “mystery” because of our limited frameworks for understanding what makes someone truly human or truly divine. With the emergence of the Neo-Trichotomy model, this mystery becomes significantly more comprehensible.

Case Study: Jesus Christ as the Perfect Image Colossians 1:15 declares Jesus Christ as “the image of the invisible God.” He is not merely made in God’s image—He *is* the image. This offers profound theological insight: Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, possessing a human body and soul, but His spirit is divine, eternal, and uncreated. He does not bear the image of God in the same way humans do; He is the perfect revelation of God’s nature.

In Him, we see the intended destiny of humanity—not just to be moral or intelligent, but to be one with God in spirit. As Romans 8:29 affirms, we are “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.” This is not mere behavioral resemblance—it is spiritual union.

Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God (Athanasius 1946). According to the Neo-Trichotomy framework, Jesus possessed: **A human body** – fully physical, subject to hunger, fatigue, suffering, and death (e.g., John 4:6; Matthew 4:2; Luke 23:46).

A human soul – including emotions, intellect, will, and personality (e.g., John 11:35 – “Jesus wept”; Matthew 26:38 – “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death”).

The Spirit of God – not a created reflection of God’s image, but God Himself (John 1:1,14; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3).

The sameness is the doctrine. Christ’s figure has the same overlap and the same central P; only one label differs.

The human spirit is created by God and made in His image, and to have one is part of what it is to be human. But Jesus’s spirit was never created: it is the eternal Spirit of God. So He too has a spirit, as every person does — His full humanity lacks nothing — yet where ours is created, His is divine; His body and soul are fully human, inherited from Mary, and at the spirit’s place stands the eternal Son. He did not merely possess the image of God—He was (and is) God.

Why Christ Needs No Created Image

This is the center of the whole Christology, and it can be put simply. We are body, soul, and spirit — and the spirit is no less human for being the image-bearing, God-ward center: it is created in every person, inherited with body and soul, and to have it is part of what it is to be human. In every other person that spirit is a created gift — a real but derivative reflection,

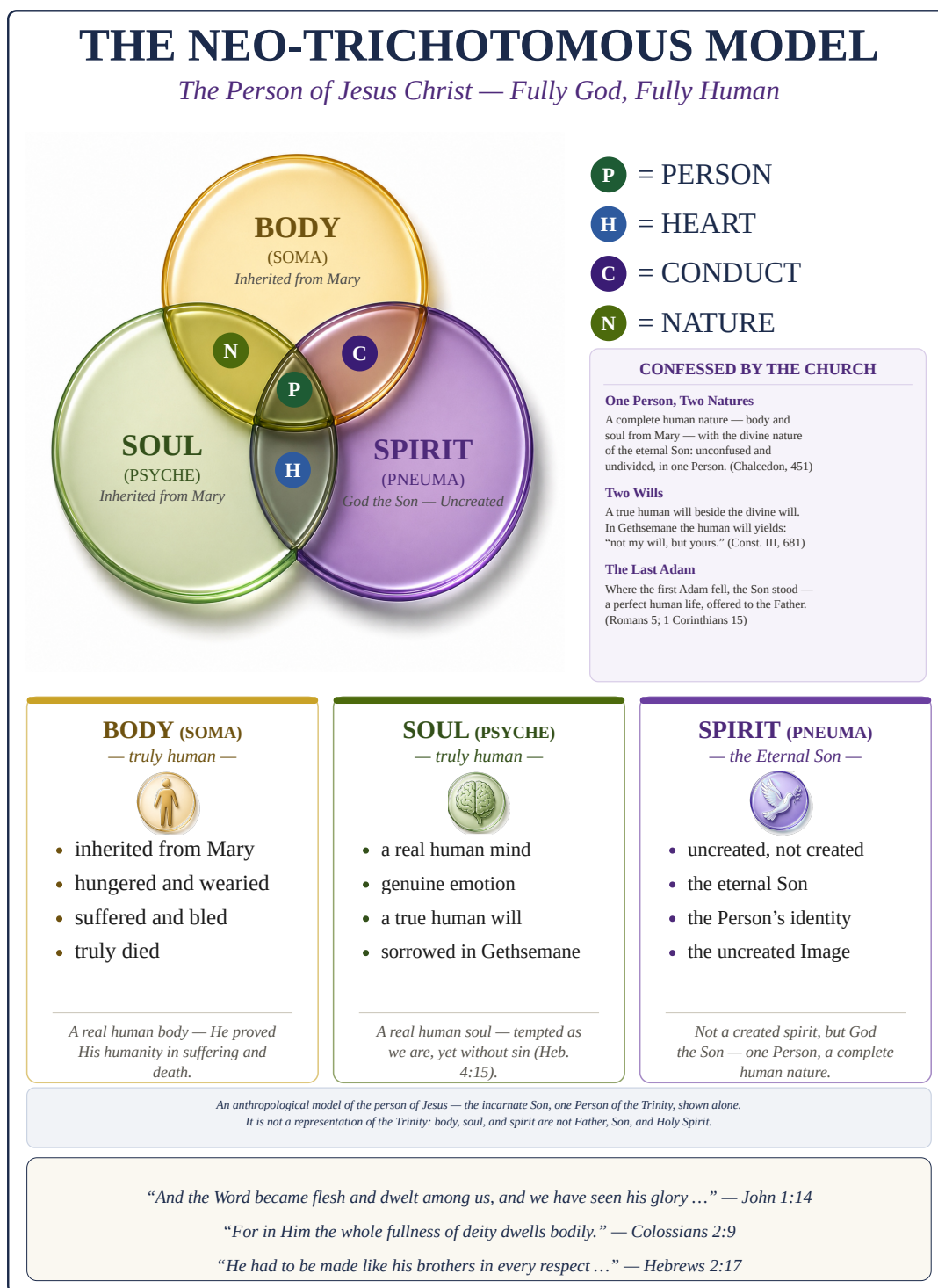


Figure 7. *The Incarnation.* Structurally identical to Figure 1—same faculties, same overlap, same whole person. Only the third is neither created nor inherited.

made to mirror God and, since Adam, mirroring Him poorly; but Christ is not the reflection, He is the original: “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), “the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3; on Christ as the eternal image, see Anderson 1978 and Knox 1967). He therefore needs no created image in order to bear the Image, because He is the Image the created one was patterned upon. His humanity is complete — a true body and a true soul, inherited whole from Mary, and a real spirit at the personal center — yet where we carry there a made copy, He is Himself the uncreated reality. That is why He is not less human than we are, but more truly what humanity was made to be.

Older theological models struggled to explain this dual nature. The ancient trichotomy model lacked the clarity to separate spiritual function from psychological personality. Most dichotomist accounts, treating humans as only body and soul/spirit together, do not draw an essential distinction between amoral soul activity and moral spiritual identity. Neither could fully explain how Jesus could be both fully divine and fully human without blending or dividing His nature.

This must be distinguished sharply from the Apollinarian error, which the Council of Constantinople rightly condemned in 381 (Percival 1961). Apollinaris held that the divine Logos took the place of Christ’s human rational mind—removing a human faculty and leaving a Savior who was not fully one of us. The Neo-Trichotomy model removes nothing. Reason, emotion, will, and personality reside in the soul, and Christ’s soul was inherited whole through Mary. He possesses all three, as Adam did and as we do; the structure is identical to our own, and exactly one thing differs. The model is therefore not a revision of Chalcedon but an explanatory structure beneath it, allowing *fully God and fully man, without confusion or division* to be pictured rather than only confessed.

The Neo-Trichotomy model addresses this directly. By clearly distinguishing between body, soul, and spirit, it offers a coherent theological lens for understanding the Incarnation. Jesus was born of a woman, inheriting a body and soul like every other human being. But His spirit was not created—it is the Spirit of God, eternally existent, through whom all things were made (John 1:3).

A note on Mary. The model takes no position on her own condition. What she transmits is body and soul—corruptible, and not yet corrupted—and she does not transmit spirit. Her own spiritual state is therefore not a factor in Christ’s purity, and the question may be left where each tradition has placed it.

The Temptation of Christ: Truly Tempted, Unable to Fail

No question presses harder on the Incarnation than this: if Jesus is God, how could He be tempted? Scripture says plainly that He was—“tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15)—and equally plainly that “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13). The difficulty is pastoral as well as doctrinal: to deny that His temptations were real is to empty His solidarity with us and His office as our sympathetic high priest; yet to say He might have fallen is to make the incarnate God capable of sin. It is sometimes pressed as an objection to the Incarnation itself—that a God who hungers, wearies, and is tempted cannot be God. The model does not dissolve the mystery, but it shows that the tension has been wrongly located.

In the language of the model, temptation is first of all a matter of the soul. It works upon the mind and the emotions — the appetites of the body pressing, the affections pulling, the imagination proposing a good that is not truly good — and it presents the spirit with a choice: to consent to what the soul desires, or to refuse it. That choice, where the soul’s desire meets the spirit’s moral judgment, is made at the heart, and it is there that the moral weight of a temptation falls. Christ’s temptations reached exactly that far in. The hunger of the wilderness was a real hunger of the body; the recoil in Gethsemane, “let this cup pass from Me,” was a real desire of the human soul, a true human will shrinking from the cross — sorrowful to the point of death, in an agony that fell as sweat like drops of blood (Matthew 26:38; Luke 22:44; Hebrews 5:7). These were not rehearsed motions. He felt temptation as acutely as any human being has ever felt it; He suffered through it; and He knows, from the inside, what we feel when we are tried (Hebrews 4:15).

It is sometimes supposed that because the divine Son could not sin, His temptation must have been less than ours — a contest whose end was fixed, and therefore not much of a contest. The truth runs the other way. It is the one who never yields who feels a temptation in its full strength; the man who gives in has felt only as much of it as it took to make him fall, and never learns how much more there was. Christ, who never yielded, bore every temptation to the end of its force and was never relieved of it by surrender. His inability to fall did not spare Him the struggle; it deepened it. And He entered that struggle owing none of it — no guilt of His own had earned it — and endured it on purpose, for us. What was tempted was His genuine humanity, tried in the soul as ours is tried; the One who bore it was God the Son, who cannot sin. So the reality of the struggle and the certainty of the outcome stand together, and the certainty takes nothing from the struggle — it is what let Him bear the whole of it.

This yields an account of Jesus’ sinlessness richer than that of a righteous man merely guarded from sin. His sinlessness is not a shield placed around a creature but the very holiness of the One He is: He does not fail because the Person tempted is God the Son. And this is why He, and no mere prophet or saint, can be the Savior. However righteous, a creature still shares our severed spirit and cannot repair it; the incarnate Son, tested as we are and yet un-fallen, carries an uncreated spirit that can. The temptation of Christ is thus no embarrassment to His deity but a window into it—God so fully joined to our nature that He meets our every trial, and so truly God that He triumphs in it.

One thing must be said without qualification, for everything that follows rests on it. God did not come to earth as a phantom, wearing humanity like a costume. He was not a ghost

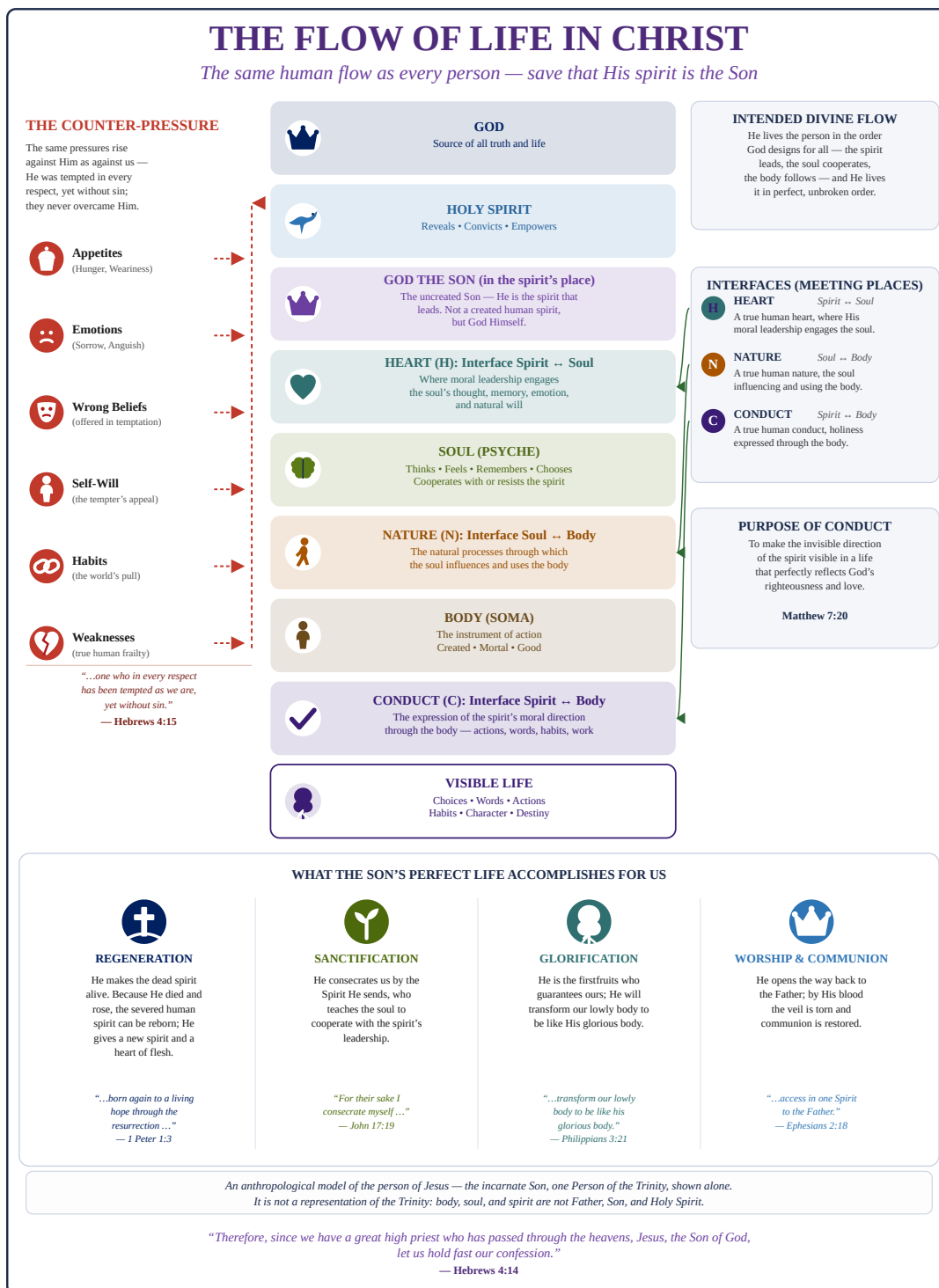


Figure 8. *The Flow of Life in Christ.* The same order of the person, seen in the incarnate Son: the eternal Son in the place of the human spirit, a true human soul and body inherited from Mary, tempted as we are yet without sin — and the fourfold work by which He provides regeneration, sanctification, glorification, and communion.

who seemed to hunger and only appeared to bleed; He did not act out a life He was not living or a death He did not die. He was conceived and born a child of the Virgin Mary, with a real human body and a real human soul; He grew, and wept, and feared, and suffered; and on the cross He truly died. The spirit within Him was God, and could not sin; but the man was as real as any man who has ever lived. A pretended humanity could not have borne real sin, and a pretended death could not have paid a real debt. Everything the next pages claim for the cross depends on this: that the sacrifice was actual — a true man, truly forsaken, truly dead — offered by the true God who had become that man.

9. The Cross: The Severed Spirit Healed

If the Incarnation is the person of the answer, the Cross is its work. Here the two natures that meet in Christ do together what neither could do alone. Because He is truly man, He can stand in our place and die; because He is truly God, His death is of infinite worth and His life able to remake ours. The model does not add a new theory of the atonement to the church's confession; it lets the old confession be seen whole, by naming precisely what the cross reaches and why it need never be repeated.

Scripture presents the cross first as substitution — a life given in the place of the guilty. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24); “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6); “for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sinless one takes the sinner's place and the sinner's penalty. On the account given here, this is why the sacrifice had to be at once genuinely human and genuinely sinless. Genuinely human: the body and soul He inherited through Mary were mortal, and could truly hunger, weep, dread, and die — as the wilderness, the tears at the tomb, the agony of Gethsemane, and the cross itself all proved (Matthew 4:2; John 11:35; Luke 22:44; Luke 23:46). Genuinely sinless: because the spirit joined to that body and soul was not a severed human spirit but God the Son, He never sinned, and His death was therefore owed for no guilt of His own. A man who deserved to die could die only for himself; only one who owed death nothing could lay down His life in the place of those who owed everything. He was hurt, and He died, for sins He did not commit.

Scripture presents the cross also as propitiation — the turning away of wrath, the true mercy seat “that God has set forth in his own blood” (Romans 3:25). Every covering of the old covenant had pointed to this; here at last the covering and the cure become one act. For the blood of Christ does not merely hide the worshiper's guilt from a holy God, as the old sacrifices did year upon year; it “purifies the conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). It reaches the place the animal blood could never reach — the severed spirit itself — and makes the dead spirit alive.

This is why the writer to the Hebrews can say that “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). A covering must be renewed because it changes nothing in the one it covers; a cure need not be repeated because it heals. The cross is the end of all the coverings precisely because it is not one more of them but the reality toward which they all pointed — the once-for-all sacrifice that repairs the wound at its root. What was severed at the Fall is rejoined at the cross; the communion lost in the first Adam is restored in the last.

And there was only ever one reason for it. The requirement of a life for sin was God's own, set down at the very beginning: on the day the man ate, he would die (Genesis 2:17), and the first death in Scripture is the animal God Himself slew to clothe the man and woman He had made (Genesis 3:21). From that first covering, every sacrifice looked forward to one that would be perfect and final — “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). So the law that required the sacrifice was God's, and the Lamb that satisfied it was God's, and the reason He gave it was neither debt nor any necessity laid upon Him from outside, but

love alone: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In Jesus the requirement God had set, God Himself met — the Spirit who is God, joined to a body and soul that could die, taking upon Himself the burden of a creation He loved. He alone could pay it, and He paid it for love.

And because the one who dies is God the Son, the cross is not only a transaction but a self-giving. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). It is here that the objection sometimes raised — that the God of the Bible is powerful but not loving — meets its answer in fact rather than in argument. A God who is “merely God” need not stoop; the God who is love empties Himself to the point of a criminal’s death to win back a severed creature. The cross does not make God loving; it shows, at the sharpest possible point, the love He has always been.

The Perfect Vessel

The substitution the cross accomplishes turns on a distinction the model makes exact — the difference between corruptibility and corruption. The body and soul the Son took from Mary were corruptible: mortal and passible, able to hunger, to dread, to bleed, and to die. He never corrupted them; He was without sin, unblemished to the end. Yet the capacity had to be real, for a nature that could not die could not save — He “himself likewise partook of the same things,” our flesh and blood, precisely “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14). This is why the Church set aside as error the aphthartodocetist teaching of Julian of Halicarnassus, that Christ’s flesh was incorruptible before the resurrection: a Savior who could not truly suffer could not truly redeem. He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) — real flesh, able to bear all that our flesh bears, yet never itself sinful.

On the cross that corruptible vessel became the place where the punishment of sin was laid — all of it. He bore it in His body and in His soul: the One who “bore our sins in his body on the tree” bore in His soul their anguish, and “poured out his soul to death” (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:11–12). But He bore it as penalty absorbed, not as defilement contracted — sin was reckoned to Him — imputed, not infused — and its death exacted from Him, while His own nature remained unstained. Here the model shows why it could be no other way. Sin’s seat is the spirit; but the spirit joined to this body and soul is not a severed human spirit — it is God the Son, whose moral center never wavered and never could. There was no way for God to become sin in His spirit. So the sin of the world could only be what Scripture says it was: a punishment absorbed into the body and soul of the sinless One, who was killed as the sacrificial Lamb, bearing what He had never done.

And it is precisely His remaining unblemished that qualified Him to bear it. The lamb of the covenant had to be “without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:19; Leviticus 22:20), for only an unblemished victim is an acceptable offering; a blemished one is disqualified. The paradox at the center of the atonement is therefore not a contradiction but the very thing that makes it work: the sinless One is “made sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), the spotless One carries every stain — and stays spotless. Had the moral center wavered even once, there would have been no offering left to give; because it never wavered, the offering is perfect and final.

One thing more the model holds together that is easily torn apart. The flesh that was corruptible truly died, and yet “did not see corruption” (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27) — it lay in the tomb without decay, and rose. Both are true, and for one reason. The vessel was corruptible, and so could be killed; but the Person who bore it is the deathless Son, and so death could not hold Him. The corruptible manhood dies bearing the world’s punishment; the incorruptible Person raises it incorruptible. Thus the sacrifice is acceptable because the manhood was unblemished, and victorious because the Person was God — the cross and the empty tomb held within a single frame.

The logic of this is not new; only its anthropology is. Athanasius — whose defense of the Son’s full deity at Nicaea this model everywhere presupposes — reasoned along strikingly similar lines seventeen centuries ago. In *On the Incarnation* he begins where this section begins: humanity, made from nothing, is mortal by nature, held back from corruption only by its share in the Word, and falling again under corruption and death once that bond is broken (§§3–5). And he presses the very question pressed here — why must the incorruptible Word become genuinely human? Because, he answers, the Word who cannot die “assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all” (§9). That body He offers to the Father “as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain” (§9); and because it belonged to the incorruptible Word, the body that truly died was not abandoned to corruption but raised (§20). What Athanasius casts in the vocabulary of mortality and incorruption, this model casts in the architecture of body, soul, and spirit — but the move is one and the same: the deathless One takes a nature that can die, because only what can die can bear death for the dying.

Irenaeus supplies the other half. Through his theme of recapitulation the Son enters our actual human condition and retraces the path of Adam — truly tried where Adam was tried, and victorious where Adam fell. In Christ, he writes, God has “summed up all things ... crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam”; for “the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man born of a woman who conquered him” (*Against Heresies* V.21). Adam was corruptible, was tempted, and sinned; Christ, no less genuinely human and no less genuinely tempted, remained unblemished and prevailed. What neither Father supplies is the anthropological map — where within the person temptation is received, where sin is seated, and why an assumed body and soul can bear what an uncreated spirit can never originate. That map is what the present model adds, and it lets the ancient logic be stated with new exactness: the same humanity that could truly be tempted could truly suffer and die, and because the moral center of the Person is the uncreated Son, the sin the vessel bore could never arise within Him. Athanasius had already seen the decisive thing — that death had fastened upon the body, and that Life therefore had to be joined to the body at the very place where death was at work. This model only carries that method one step further: name the wound exactly, and the shape of the cure grows plain.

The Blessings the Cross Secured

It remains to name what the cross secures for the one joined to Christ, for it is not only something done for us but something given to us — a set of settled blessings that reach the severed spirit at its root and work outward from there. Scripture gathers them into a handful of great words, and each of them answers one of the deep fears of the fallen self — of failure, of rejection, of punishment, of shame — a correspondence set out with rare clarity by Robert S. McGee in *The Search for Significance*, whose diagnostic framework — four false beliefs, and the blessing of the cross that answers each — this section gratefully follows.

Justification. In the cross God does not merely overlook our sin; He forgives it and credits to us the very righteousness of Christ. “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1); God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because I am justified I am completely forgiven and fully pleasing to the Father, and need no longer earn a standing I already have. The fear of failure loses its grip, for my worth no longer rests on my performance but on His.

Reconciliation. Those who were enemies of God are made His friends. “You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Colossians 1:21–22). Because I am reconciled I am wholly accepted by God, brought into an intimacy I did nothing to deserve; and the fear of rejection loses its power, for the one acceptance that finally matters is already mine.

Propitiation. By His death Christ turned aside the wrath our sin had earned. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). Because Christ is my propitiation I am deeply loved rather than condemned; and the fear of punishment gives way, for the penalty has already been borne — and one who no longer fears punishment is at last free to stop punishing others.

Regeneration. And the cross does not leave me the person I was; it makes me new. “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4–5); “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Because I am regenerated I am not merely improved but reborn — a new creation — and the old sentence of shame, that I am what I am and cannot change, is simply no longer true.

McGee sets the whole pattern out in a single chart — the false belief, the bondage it breeds, the answer of the cross, and the freedom that follows. It is worth seeing entire:

The false belief	The bondage it breeds	The cross's answer	The freedom it brings
I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.	Fear of failure; perfectionism; a driven, restless striving; withdrawal from healthy risk.	Justification — completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God (Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21).	Freedom from the fear of failure; freedom to pursue Christ and His kingdom.
I must be approved by certain people to feel good about myself.	Fear of rejection; pleasing others at any cost; oversensitivity to criticism; withdrawal.	Reconciliation — wholly and permanently accepted by God (Colossians 1:21–22).	Freedom from the fear of rejection; able to be open, honest, and at ease with others.
Those who fail deserve to be punished — myself included.	Fear of punishment; punishing and blaming others; a driving fear of failure.	Propitiation — deeply loved, no longer condemned (1 John 4:9–10).	Freedom from the fear of punishment; patience, kindness, quickness to forgive.
I am what I am; I cannot change; I am hopeless.	Shame; hopelessness; a sense of inferiority; passivity and isolation.	Regeneration — a new creation, made new in Christ (Ephesians 2:4–5; 2 Corinthians 5:17).	Christ-centered confidence; joy, courage, and peace; a desire to know Christ.

Four false beliefs of the fallen heart, and the blessing of the cross that answers each. The pattern is drawn from Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance*.

It is worth seeing where these blessings land. Each is spoken first to the spirit — the severed center now justified, reconciled, beloved, and made alive. But none of them stays there. A spirit no longer afraid of failure, rejection, punishment, or shame is a spirit set free to love, and that freedom works outward through the heart into conduct: patience and kindness toward others, quickness to forgive, and the courage, joy, and peace of a person who has finally stopped trying to save himself. The cross settles our standing before God; and from that settled standing the whole person begins to be remade. This is the practical principle McGee draws from it all, and it is the model's own: our conduct follows our values, our values follow our beliefs, and our beliefs follow our deepest relationship — so the way to change a life is not to drill the behavior but to deepen the one relationship that reorders everything beneath it, coming to know Christ and letting His Spirit remake the heart.

10. The Resurrection: Death Undone and the New Humanity

A dead Savior would leave the account unfinished. If the cross pays the debt of sin, the resurrection is God's public receipt — the proof that the payment was accepted, the sentence of death served and exhausted, and the life on the far side of it real. "He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). The same event that vindicates the Son secures everything promised to those joined to Him.

It is worth saying carefully what rose on the third day. The person who died was, and remains, one — God the Son, who had taken to Himself a true human body and soul. He did not lay that humanity down at death and resume it as an afterthought; the incarnation is permanent. He died a man and rose a man, the same body now glorified, still bearing the marks of the nails (John 20:27). In Christ, human nature itself has passed through death and out the other side. What this model calls the union of a human body and soul with the uncreated Spirit of God is not a temporary arrangement for the span of a rescue but the abiding form of the risen Lord.

Paul calls the risen Christ "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20) — the first sheaf of a harvest that guarantees the rest. On this model redemption has always been a work moving outward: the spirit made new at once, the soul renewed across a lifetime, and the body awaiting its turn. The resurrection is that turn, held in trust. The body that ages and dies is not discarded but raised and transformed: "it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44); "he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). The whole person — spirit, soul, and body — is at last brought into the wholeness God intended at creation, and death, the last enemy, is undone (1 Corinthians 15:26).

So the resurrection is not merely the happy ending of one man's story but the opening of a new humanity. The first Adam, at his making, "became a living being"; the last Adam became "a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45) — not merely alive, but the source of life to others. Those united to Him by faith are the beginning of a renewed race, bearing now the severed spirit made new and destined to bear the redeemed body as well. What began in Eden and was lost in the Fall is not merely restored in Christ but carried further than Eden, into a communion that can no longer be broken.

11. The Trinity: One God in Three Persons

A word of caution must open this section, because the very shape of the model invites a mistake. A reader who has followed body, soul, and spirit through these pages may be tempted to reach for the same three-part picture to explain the Trinity — as though Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three parts of God as body, soul, and spirit are three dimensions of a person. This must be refused plainly. The Neo-Trichotomy model is an account of the human person, and of the one person of Christ; it is not, and must never be made into, a diagram of the Godhead. To divide the one God into parts is precisely the error the church long ago condemned. The three circles picture a human being; they may never be mapped onto the three Persons.

What the model can do for the doctrine of the Trinity is not to explain it but to clear away a bad way of trying to. The familiar analogies — water as ice, liquid, and steam; a man as father, husband, and son — all err in the same direction: they make the three into modes or parts or roles of one thing, and so lose the real and eternal distinction of the Persons. The model's whole burden, by contrast, is that the deepest distinctions are personal and relational, not merely functional. Applied to the Godhead, that instinct points away from parts and toward Persons — three who are not three-thirds of God but each fully God, one in essence, distinct in relation. The doctrine is not proven by the model; it is guarded from a common corruption of it.

It is worth being specific about how the familiar pictures fail, for each fails in a way worth naming. The commonest — that God is like water, which is ice, liquid, and steam — shows one substance passing through three states, and no water is all three at once. Turned into a doctrine it says God is now Father, now Son, now Spirit, one Person wearing three masks in turn; and that is the ancient error of modalism, which cannot survive a single page of the Gospels, where the Son prays to the Father while the Spirit descends upon Him, all three present at once (Matthew 3:16–17). The picture of one man who is at once father, husband, and son fails in the same direction, making the three mere roles one person plays. And the pictures that avoid that error usually fall into its opposite: the egg of shell, white, and yolk, or the three-leaf clover, divide God into three parts, no one of which is the whole — yet the Father is not one-third of God but wholly God, as are the Son and the Spirit. Every analogy drawn from the created order breaks on the same rock, because nothing in creation is what God is: three who are each wholly the one He is, and yet truly distinct.

Yet the model does more for the Trinity than guard it, once we recall what it has already established about Christ. If the spirit of Jesus is not created but is God the Son — the model's central claim about the Incarnation — then a distinct divine Person stands before us in the Gospels, and He does not stand alone. The incarnate Son prays to the Father, does the Father's will, and is sent by Him; the Father answers from heaven, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17). The Son is plainly not the Father. And a third is at work throughout: the Spirit who overshadows Mary at the conception, descends at the Jordan, and is sent by the Son into the world. Grant the Incarnation as the model frames it, and the plurality of Persons is not a further doctrine to be argued but a fact already conceded — one who is God, praying to another who is God, in the fellowship of a third. In this sense the Trinity proves itself from the ground already

laid: not read off the three parts of a human being, which would be the old error, but disclosed in the relations of the incarnate Son. The anthropology opens onto the Incarnation, and the Incarnation opens, of itself, onto the Three.

The confession itself is more careful than any of its analogies. There is one God — one divine Being, one undivided essence. Within that one Being are three who are genuinely distinct: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are not three personalities of a single Person, nor three parts of one thing, nor three names for one actor; they are three Persons, each of whom is fully and equally God. Whatever belongs to God belongs to each of them without division — eternity and self-existence, almighty power, perfect knowledge, presence everywhere, unchanging holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and love. The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God — not three Gods but one, for there is only one divine essence and each Person wholly possesses it. What distinguishes them is not their Godhead, which is one and the same, nor any division of the attributes, which they share entire, but their relations alone: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father. They are undivided in being and distinct in Person — one What, three Whos.

This is also why the Christian faith is not, as it is sometimes charged, a disguised polytheism. We do not worship three gods. We worship one God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — distinct in Person, undivided in essence. The charge of three gods arises only when the three Persons are mistaken for three beings; the confession refuses both errors at once, dividing neither the substance into parts nor the Persons into a single blur, holding the three and the one together exactly as Scripture does.

The Trinity is also the answer to a question the model has kept before us: why must God save us at all — why not simply forgive from a distance? Because the debt of sin is a debt owed to God, and a severed spirit is a communion broken with God, no third party can make it good. Only the offended One can absorb the offense; only the Life that was cut off can restore the connection. So God does not send a creature to do His saving for Him. The Father gives the Son; the Son, taking our nature, dies and rises; the Spirit applies that finished work to us and dwells within. Salvation is Trinitarian from first to last — the one God, in the fullness of His Persons, doing for us what none but God could do.

12. The God Who Is Love

There is an objection to the Christian faith that grants God everything but a heart. It can be put very simply: God is not love, it says, but merely God — sovereign, holy, one — and that is enough. The sentence is serious and revealing. It concedes God's power and His oneness and withholds only this: that the one God is, in Himself, love. Here, more than almost anywhere, the Christian confession parts from a bare monotheism — not over whether God is one, which many faiths affirm, but over whether the one God is love in His own eternal being.

Here the doctrine of the Trinity, far from being an embarrassment to be defended, becomes the very ground of the good news. Love is not a solitary act; it requires a lover and a beloved. A God who was a single undifferentiated will could be gracious to His creatures, but He could not be love in Himself before ever a creature existed — love would be, for such a God, a thing acquired, not a thing He is. The God of the Christian confession is otherwise. Before creation, before there was anything to love, the Father loved the Son and the Son the Father in the fellowship of the Spirit. "You loved me before the foundation of the world," the Son says to the Father (John 17:24). This is why the apostle can write not merely that God loves, but that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) — love is not one of His activities but the eternal life of the three Persons.

And this is where the model's account of the human person meets the doctrine of God. If the image of God in us is the spirit — the faculty made for communion, for moral relation, for fellowship with God — then we were made, at the root of our being, for exactly this love. We are not merely creatures God happens to be kind to; we are made in the likeness of a God who is love, fitted at creation to receive it and return it. The severed spirit is therefore not only a broken faculty but a thwarted purpose: a creature built for love, cut off from the Love it was built for. And the whole work traced in these pages — incarnation, cross, resurrection — is that Love refusing to leave its image an orphan.

And here the doctrine turns personal, as few others so fully do. For the Christian, "God is love" is not first a proposition to be defended but a reality to be lived — an experience before it is an argument. Across twenty centuries the witnesses say the same thing in nearly the same words: I am able to love because I was first loved. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This is not mastered as a lesson but known in the spirit — felt intuitively, answered in the emotions, and confirmed in the reason — and it is, at bottom, what faith is: not the conclusion of a proof but the recognition of a love already known within. It is innate to the reborn spirit, and needs no more explaining than a child's knowledge of being loved.

Its effect is a strange one, and it is the surest sign that its source is not in us. The Christian becomes able to love without condition — to love the ungrateful, and even the enemy: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). That is no human instinct; instinct loves its own and guards itself. Such love is the overflow into conduct of a love first received in the spirit, and it is why the Lord could name it the mark of His own: "by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). When Christians are known by their love, what is seen is not finally a human virtue at all, but the whole triune work made visible in a life — the will of the Father who first loved, the sacrifice

of the Son who proved it, and the ongoing comfort and intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who pours that love into the heart (Romans 5:5).

This is very near to what Wesley meant by perfect love. It is not a heightened human affection, worked up by effort, but the fruit of an intimate fellowship with the God who is love — a fellowship that deepens only as we come to know Him better, and only where our own spirit is drawn near to His. Fallen humanity is no natural soil for such love; the human heart, left to itself, loves what rewards it and draws back from what wounds it, and a love offered without condition to the undeserving, and even to the enemy, does not grow there of its own accord. It is borrowed love — drawn from the God of love by a spirit near enough to Him to receive it — and it grows toward perfection as that nearness grows. To be made perfect in love, in Wesley's sense, is simply to live so close to the God who is love that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18), and His love becomes the very air one breathes and the manner in which one meets the world.

So the difference is not finally a matter of how many arguments each side can muster. It is a matter of what kind of God stands at the end of them. A God who is "merely God" is enough to be feared and obeyed. Only a God who is love, in the fullness of His own eternal life, is enough to explain a cross — a God who would rather die than lose the creature He made for Himself. The model cannot manufacture that God; no model can. But it can show that Christian love is not sentiment laid over a stern monotheism. It is the necessary shape of a faith whose God is, in His very being, a communion of love, and whose image in us is a spirit made to share it.

13. Limitations of the Model

A model is a lens, not the thing itself, and it is worth naming plainly what this one does and does not claim. It does not claim to be the Trinity, or to explain God; the caution held throughout — that the tri-part structure of the human person illustrates, but is not, the divine life — is a boundary, not an aside. Nor does it claim novelty in doctrine. Every conclusion reached here is meant to stand within historic, creedal Christianity; where the model appears to innovate, it intends only to clarify what the creeds already confess.

The model likewise does not rest its case on empirical proof. The observation that reason, emotion, and elective behavior are shared in some measure with higher animals is offered as motivation for locating the divine image elsewhere than in the intellect; it is not advanced as a laboratory demonstration, and a reader who weighs that evidence differently may still find the theological proposal coherent on its own terms. And the lines between soul and spirit, drawn sharply here for the sake of clarity, are in lived experience deeply interwoven — the diagrams mark regions within a single person, not partitions in a divided one.

These are limits, not weaknesses. A framework that names its own edges is easier to trust than one that claims to explain everything; and this model is offered in that spirit — as a coherent and, I hope, illuminating way of seeing, to be held as long as it serves the reader's understanding of Christ, and set aside the moment it does not.

14. Summary

This study set out to test one model of the human person against the great doctrines of the faith, and to let a single, simple picture — body, soul, and spirit interlocked in one living person — carry the weight of the whole confession. Traced through these pages, that one model has given a common lens to what might otherwise seem separate mysteries: what we are, made in the image of God and for fellowship with Him; what went wrong, in a spirit severed from that fellowship at the Fall; what God has done to mend it, in a redemption that begins at the severed spirit and works outward, a cross that heals rather than merely covers, and a maturing life that bears the Spirit's fruit; and, at the center of it all, who Jesus Christ is — fully God and fully man — together with what His work secures, from the empty tomb to the love of the triune God.

The model's chief contribution above the others is clarity. A great many who stumble over the Christian faith stumble not over what it actually teaches but over a misunderstanding of it — that the Trinity must mean three gods; that the Incarnation is a plain contradiction, a God who cannot really suffer or a man merely dressed as God; that the cross is a cruelty visited on an innocent; that the God behind it is power without love. The model does not so much prove these doctrines as clear the ground on which they have been misjudged. It shows the Incarnation coherent — a true human body and soul joined to the uncreated Spirit who is God the Son; the Trinity no tritheism — one undivided essence in three distinct Persons; the cross a cure and not a cruelty — the offended God Himself bearing, out of love, the debt no creature could pay; and the God at the end of it all not merely powerful but, in His very being, love. When the caricature is set aside, the doctrine can be seen for what it is, and the honest doubter is left facing the real claim of the faith rather than a distortion of it.

The claim made for the model has been modest in kind and large in reach. A model is never proof of what we believe; Scripture and the settled creeds stand where they stand, and a diagram is worth keeping only insofar as it pictures them more faithfully than the alternatives — to be set aside the moment it stops doing so. But a faith that can be seen whole, its parts holding together by one clear logic from the design of the human person to the love of the triune God, is a faith that can at least be understood before it is either believed or refused. That is what these pages have tried to offer: not a new gospel, but an old one made clear — a way of seeing that meets the doubter less with a demand to believe than with an invitation to look again, honestly, at what Christians have confessed all along.

Glossary of Key Terms

Aphthartodocetism. The sixth-century error, associated with Julian of Halicarnassus, that Christ's body was incorruptible — incapable of suffering and death — from the moment of the union. The Church held instead that His flesh was genuinely corruptible and passible before the resurrection; otherwise He could not truly have died.

Apollinarianism. The error, condemned at Constantinople I (381), that the divine Word replaced Christ's human mind, leaving His humanity incomplete. The model is its opposite: Christ's human soul is entire.

Body (*soma*). The physical dimension — the person's embodied life and instrument of action, where inward intention becomes outward deed.

Chalcedonian Definition. The confession of the Council of Chalcedon (451): one Christ in two natures, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation," in one person.

Conduct (C). The interface of body and spirit — the moral will made visible in action, word, and relationship; the region only humans occupy.

Confession and repentance. The human response to the gospel: to acknowledge and confess one's sin, to ask God's forgiveness, and to turn from sin to Christ in faith. It is the act through which the finished work of the cross is received and the severed spirit regenerated — not a work that earns the repair, but the empty hands that receive it.

Corruptibility. The capacity of a nature to suffer and die — mortality and passibility — as distinct from *corruption*, the actuality of sin or of decay. The body and soul Christ took from Mary were corruptible (able to die) yet never corrupted (He remained sinless); the capacity was essential to the sacrifice.

Dichotomy. The traditional view that the human person is composed of two parts — a body and a single immaterial element (named soul or spirit, often interchangeably). The Neo-Trichotomy model keeps the body-soul distinction but sets the spirit apart from the soul as the moral, God-ward center.

Enhypostasia. The doctrine that Christ's human nature, though complete, has no independent human person of its own; its subsistence is in the person of the divine Son.

Entire sanctification. In the Wesleyan tradition, the work of grace bringing the believer into perfect love; here, the spirit's completed fellowship with God issuing in changed conduct.

Heart (H). The interface of soul and spirit — where the spirit's moral leading engages the soul's thought, memory, and emotion. Not itself the seat of morality.

Homoousios. "Of one substance" (Nicaea, 325): the Son is of one substance with the Father — true God, not a creature.

Imago Dei. The image of God; in this model, borne by the human spirit — what distinguishes humanity from the animals.

Imputation. The reckoning of sin's guilt and its penalty to Christ — and of His righteousness to those who trust Him — without any transfer of moral character. He was "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) by bearing sin's penalty, not by becoming sinful; His own nature remained unblemished.

Last Adam, the. Christ (1 Cor. 15), the uncreated Image who, unlike the first Adam, lives a human life in unbroken communion and rejoins humanity to God.

Monothelitism. The error, condemned at Constantinople III (681), that Christ had only one will; the Church confessed two wills, human and divine, undivided.

Moral will (moral volition). The spirit's will — the capacity to weigh a choice against the good and against the will of God, and to answer for it. One of the two kinds of willing in every person (see *Two wills*); in Christ, the will in the spirit-place is the divine will of the Son.

Natural will (human will). The soul's will — rational and emotional, choosing among options for its own ends, amoral in itself and shared in some measure with the animals. "Human will" and "natural will" are interchangeable here, and answer to the councils' "natural human will" (see *Two wills*).

Nature (N). The interface of body and soul — the creaturely life shared with the animals, through which the soul perceives, chooses, and acts.

Neo-Trichotomy. The model advanced here: humanity as body, soul, and spirit, with soul and spirit redefined so that morality and the divine image belong to the spirit.

Nestorianism. The error, condemned at Ephesus (431), that divided Christ into two persons — human and divine — loosely conjoined.

Perfect Vessel, the. The truth that Christ's corruptible body and soul could bear the whole punishment of sin — imputed, not infused — while His uncreated moral center never wavered; the unblemished offering alone qualifies as the acceptable sacrifice, and the flesh that truly died "saw no corruption" and rose.

Person (P). The whole human being — body, soul, and spirit joined in one living person; the center where all three overlap.

Soul (*psyche*). The mental dimension — the machinery of personhood (intellect, memory, imagination, emotion, and natural will), amoral in itself and shared in some measure with the animals.

Spirit (*pneuma*). The moral-spiritual dimension — the moral center unique to humanity: the seat of moral volition, of holiness or its absence, and of communion with God; it bears the created image. Created in every human; in Christ alone, the uncreated Son.

Theotokos. "God-bearer" (Ephesus, 431): the title of Mary, affirming that the one born of her is God the Son.

Trichotomy. The view that the human person is body, soul, and spirit. In its classical form, which equates the spirit with the rational mind, it collapses — applied to Christ — into the Apollinarian error; the model advanced here redefines soul and spirit so that the spirit is the moral-spiritual center, not the mind (see *Neo-Trichotomy*).

Two wills. Two kinds of willing. In every person the soul's natural (human) will and the spirit's moral will meet and decide in the heart. Christ, sharing this human structure, has a complete human will in His soul and, in the spirit-place, the divine will of the Son — the two wills, human and divine, confessed at Constantinople III (see *Monothelitism*).

Vertical and horizontal holiness. Holiness toward God (the restored spirit's communion) and holiness toward others (its outward expression in conduct).

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