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When Does a Human Receive a Soul?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about when a human receives a soul and how to respond to someone who rejects science, reason, philosophy, and objective morality in her effort to defend abortion, saying that pro-lifers just want to control women.

* When does a human receive a soul? In the zygote stage, the cells haven't differentiated yet, and some become the placenta, but the placenta doesn't have a soul, so why would the zygote?

* Should I give up trying to persuade someone who rejects science, reason, philosophy, and objective morality in her effort to defend abortion, saying that pro-lifers just want to control women?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Koukl, and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-T-R-S-I-G-S. Greg.

Amy. Okay, here's the first question. This one comes from Vic.

Okay. When does a human receive a soul? In the zygote stage, the cells haven't differentiated yet, and some cells become the same. The placenta, but the placenta doesn't have a soul, so why would the zygote? Also, it seems like my soul travels with my brain, so why would a zygote without a brain have a soul yet? Well, there's a lot there, including not only a question, but a number of assertions.

A zygote doesn't have a soul. That was an assertion, I think, in the question, right? No, he says, some of the cells become the placenta, but the placenta doesn't have a soul, so why would the zygote? Okay, and then also the comment that the soul travels with the brain. So, I mean, these are all mistake and notions, and they're fairly easy to demonstrate, but we are not used to thinking about the soul in very substantive ways.

And so, this is not meant to be condescending in any way. I didn't start thinking about it

carefully until I did master's work in philosophy, and JP Morlin, who is a specialist in this area, really helped. The soul is the invisible self.

Okay, first of all, it is not attached anywhere to the body in particular, but is in union with our body in a profound way. In other words, we could say that this is my body. Notice that the this, the body, is different than me who has it.

That's the normal way of talking about it, and it reflects our natural intuition that we have an immaterial self that somehow is in possession of this physical body that belongs to that self. But there will be a time when myself will no longer be attached to this physical body. That happens when I die.

I'll be gone, and the body will be here. Paul had an experience, for example, where he said, you know, he went like to the seventh heaven or the third heaven or wherever he went, and he said, whether in the body or not, I don't know. So the question that he raises or the issue raises makes it clear that he and his body are not the same.

All right. So your soul isn't attached to your brain. It isn't attached to your mouth or to your eyes.

It isn't attached to anywhere. It is, it is in a certain sense present, though not physically present because the soul isn't physical, but present at every place in your body. All right.

Now it uses your brain and your eyes and your mouth and your hands to accomplish things. There's an integration of things there, but it is separate from the brain. Okay.

So you certainly could have a soul, even though you don't have a brain. The Psalmist says you're in your inward parts. I formed you and you told Jeremiah when you were still in the womb, I knew you.

So there's a you when it wasn't in my view. It wasn't simply his body that he's talking about. He's talking about the person.

Also, we have John the Baptist and Luke chapter one in the second trimester, jumping with joy. All right. In the presence of Jesus, who is a zygote or maybe a. Let's see you cut.

Yeah, I think as I go. Listen, what's in between is I go to the fetus. Anyway, he's embryo embryo.

Yeah. Thank you. He's an embryo.

He's just been conceived yet that he's in the it isn't the physical stuff. It is the person of Jesus, the Lord. In fact, that's what Elizabeth said.

How is it that the mother of my Lord can come to me? So, so we get this evidence in the scripture and and also just from careful reflection on the matter that we are separate

from our bodies. Our bodies are what we possess that belong to us, but our but ourselves, our invisible selves, our souls are distinct and can be separate from the body as it as happens when we die. All right.

That's an unnatural condition, by the way. That's why eventually we will be united again with our bodies in the resurrection. Okay.

So the placenta is just tissue. The zygote is an individual human being. That's the difference between a placenta and the zygote or the embryo or the fetus or the newborn or the adolescent or the adult or the old person.

These are all stages of development of the same individual. So their body changes over time. They are still themselves over time.

Okay. So this is, this is the nature of of people say, well, a coin is not an oak. Well, yes, it is.

It's an oak in the seed stage and a sapling is oak in the sapling stage and et cetera. So just a quick tutorial on the nature of the soul, the invisible self that is in human beings, the soul is naturally bonded with the body. So when you become a human being, which is at conception, then you are a full human being and full human beings are dualistic in nature, body and soul.

Now there is a difference of opinion about this in Christian circles, some hold that God creates the soul separately from the natural reproduction of the body through mom and dad. Okay. I don't think this works because the soul is just as fallen as the body.

And if God makes a soul, is he making a fallen soul? If he's making a fallen soul, then he puts the, I'm sorry, if he's making a non-fallen soul, which would be the way God would make something, if he's making it an ex nihilo out of nothing or de novo, the new thing, he's putting it in the body, then is it the body that makes the soul fall? That to me doesn't make sense either. I think what makes most sense is the view that mom and dad reproduce the full human being, body and soul. And so once there is a new human being and that would be at conception, then everything that is true about the nature of being human is true about that human being in its first moments of existence.

That means that human being would have a soul. Now, of course, the soul needs the body to express its capacities. It has lots of different capabilities.

And so the body then becomes the limitation of the soul expressing its capacities. The body has to grow and develop before the soul has a physical self to work with to accomplish its capacities like we have a capacity for language. Well, you can't speak while you're an embryo.

That capacity that innate capability becomes expressed as the physical body develops.

Now, we have this sense, which is expressed in Vic's comment that our souls are in our head. And lots of times that's kind of the way we even gesture about it.

My mind and we point to our brains. Sometimes we talk about ourselves or pointing to our chest. That's another way, but the soul isn't in any of those things.

We are just seeing through our eyes, our soul is using our eyes to see when it's in our body. I think the soul can see apart from being in the body. We know this from near-death experiences.

But nevertheless, I think it's natural for us then to just kind of localize our soul in our heads, so to speak. But if we are careful and we think about it, we realize that's just not the way it works. The whole body is ours and all the sensations that we experience are sensations of the soul.

Physical things, mere physical things don't have sensations. Sensations are functions of souls of invisible selves. As our beliefs, as our acts of will, as our intentions, that kind of stuff.

So, I think I'm glad for Vic's question. I hope that what I've offered here offers some clarification as we look more carefully about the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body. And incidentally, JP Morlin does a fabulous job, and this has written a bunch of books about it.

But I think the simplest book that's accessible, not too philosophical, is simply called the soul. I think that's the title of the book. And it's available by that title in Amazon and JP Morlin is the author.

So, I think the biggest point here is that a soul is essential to being human. It's not something that's added later, like a finger grows or a toe grows or and then a soul. No, it's an essential part of what it means to be human.

And so, the point that our brain enables us to express certain things, our hands enable our soul to express certain things. All parts of our bodies are working together to allow our soul to express certain things. But let's say you don't have those abilities just because the soul can't express itself doesn't mean it isn't there.

It just means it can't express itself yet. And since it's an essential property of being human, it's there even when we don't have hands or brains or whatever it is. And I will also note, you know, our cells become all sorts of parts of the body and all sorts of things.

Sometimes, you know, let's say some of our souls become a finger. We can lose our finger and we don't lose our soul. But that doesn't mean that the fact that our finger, we can lose it and it doesn't have a soul mean that the cells that we started with didn't have

a soul.

I mean, these things just don't follow from the argument here. All right, Greg, let's go to a question from Patrick. Ending a life is your phrase.

For me, it's a choice, a medical procedure to remove cells. Your kind just want to control women. Embryology is your science, not mine.

That's a quote. And then Patrick says her militancy rejected science, reason, philosophy, objective morality and the humanity of those cells. I'm at a loss.

Should I just move on? Oh, my goodness. I'm sorry. I'm kind of chuckling out of exasperation here because what is evidence and Patrick is asking this question about someone else, right? He's talking about the issue I suspect of abortion on what this none of these things that are said by Patrick's friend make any sense.

They make sense to Patrick's friend, but for one good reason. It's because Patrick's friend doesn't care about making any sense. He wants the liberty to approve abortion.

And that's all. That's what matters. Okay? You just want to control women's bodies.

Well, a person who says that hasn't has no idea of what the pro-life view is none, none whatsoever. The issue is in controlling women's bodies. If we wanted to do it, there'd be a host of other ways that we could accomplish that.

In this case, the question is protecting the unborn child the woman is carrying, not controlling her body. We're not forcing her not to have sex. If we wanted to control her body, we'd do that.

No, this is a libel against pro-lifers. It's silly, but it's very common to say because it's a great throwaway that is adequate to stonewall a lot of people. It's even if we just wanted to control women's body that wouldn't even address the question of the status of the unborn.

Is the status a real human being or not? Actually, all laws are meant to control people's bodies one way or another because the consequence of not controlling in that circumstance is morally unacceptable, sometimes morally devastating. Like taking another human life. And that's what we have here.

Oh, embryology. That's your embryology. That's not my embryology.

What does it mean? Your embryology, my embryology. Embryology is embryology. This is what people have discovered about prenatal development.

What justifies relativizing it in that way? Nothing justifies it. And the other comments as well. What this shows is this person is not interested in any argument.

What they're interested in is doing what they want to do. Not even an attempt. Well, there's a minor attempt here to sanitize it.

You just want to control people's bodies. We are opposing your evil intention by going with our view. Well, let's just, you know, an attempt to sanitize the view.

We're going to let you not let you control us. Kind of okay. So in a person like this, I might ask a few questions to try to show the weakness of their view, the street smarts approach.

But if there may be maybe put a little stone on their shoe that they don't acknowledge, but might figure out later, I don't know. But I wouldn't spend a lot of time with a person like this with the exception of if they're willing to engage on these things in a reasonably civil manner. And there are other people that are listening.

You may be able to influence other people. I think this is called ricochet evangelism by Lee Strobel actually. So you never know.

And I've had occasions like that where the comments I'm making in one person really are having an impact on some third party that I wasn't aware is listening. So sometimes that's the case. And sometimes if they're willing to engage, you could talk and raise the issues and maybe some of that stuff will get in.

You'll get a stone in their shoe, the Holy Spirit will use it. But some people, all they want to do, all they want is to do what they want. That's the real issue.

And that's why they can shrug off all kinds of different things that are relevant, like embryology. Well, that's your embryology. What does silly thing to say? Yeah, I see two ways to approach this.

And the first one has to do with exactly what you're saying, Greg, the quote, embryology is your science, not mine. I think that's where I would, because I think that's where it really goes off the rails and it doesn't make any sense. So I think that's where I would start by saying, what do you mean by that? What do you mean? It's my science and not yours.

What does that mean to you? I don't even know what she would say. Or you might even ask, do you believe in identical twins? Yes, of course they do. Okay, who's embryology are you talking about now? Maybe they're just to throw a wrench in the spokes or something like that.

Well, I don't know what this person would say because I don't know what that could mean. Maybe what that person means is they're not really human, even though they start at that stage. But I see that as a way into the conversation because it is such an objective issue.

The beginning of human life is completely objective. And so if you can at least figure out what is meant by embryology is your science, not mine, and get this person to talk about what that might mean and why she objects to your view and separate the idea of the beginning of human beings from human beings being valuable and just take one of those issues at a time and just help that person understand, is that the beginning of a human being? And just leave aside the question of value for now. Let's just start with that.

That is like the baseline of where we can start. It's completely objective. There's no question about this at all.

So can we agree on that? So maybe you can get there. The second thing I would do would be to go after the you just want to control women statement and I would do it this way. I think I would say, look, let's just forget about trying to persuade each other and let's just forget about trying to agree.

All I want to get to is a place where you just understand where I'm coming from and you can completely disagree, but can you see that if it is the case, as I think is true, that a human being begins a conception and is valuable intrinsically throughout the human beings life, can you understand that I wouldn't want you to murder that human being? Can you just understand that from my perspective? Because if you can, you can see this isn't about controlling women. It would be about controlling women if I didn't think it was a human being and I was just doing this to control you. But I just want to get to a point where you can see what my view is and at least we can understand each other and then we can find out where areas of disagreement are.

Because our area of disagreement isn't over whether or not I should force women to A, B or C or I'm just against women or just want to make them do whatever I want. That's not that if we argue about that, we're not even hitting the problem here. The issue is, is this a human being? If it is, then my view follows.

If it isn't, then your view follows. But neither of us is doing this out of malice. Can we get to that point? So I think those are the two places where I might address this.

That's what Dennis Prager would call clarity and not a green one. Excellent. It's a really great council, Amy.

Really great. So Patrick, I mean, maybe this conversation is long gone and you'll never get back to your friend, but I would love to hear if either of those work. Because for anyone, if we ever answer your question and it's helpful and you can tell us how it turned out, that's really helpful to us too because we're always trying to think through ways to respond to people.

And if we have feedback about how things worked out, that's helpful. So thank you, Vic and Patrick. We appreciate hearing from you.

You can send us your question on X with the hashtag STRS. Or you can go to our website at str.org and just go to our hashtag STRS page. You'll find a link there and you can send us your question.

We hope to hear from you soon. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.