

12.4

Words for Describing Humanity in Paul's Letters

When Paul talks about humans and the qualities of human life, he uses a number of different terms that do not always mean what we might think they mean.

Paul uses two words to refer to one's physical being: "body" (in Greek, *sōma*) and "flesh" (in Greek, *sarx*). His tendency is to use "body" in a neutral sense and "flesh" in a negative sense (what one is apart from God), but there are many exceptions (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:10–11).

Paul uses two words to refer to one's innermost being: "spirit" (in Greek, *pneuma*) and "soul" (in Greek, *psychē*). To English readers, "spirit" sometimes suggests something specifically religious, and "soul" suggests something more generic, but Paul uses the terms as synonyms. Both refer to the aspect of humanity that can be energized by God.

Paul uses two words to refer to the aspect of humanity that allows people to make conscious decisions: "mind" (in Greek, *nous*) and "heart" (in Greek, *kardia*). English readers might associate "mind" with intellectual activity and "heart" with emotional responses, but Paul uses the terms as synonyms.

See Joseph Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 82–84.