

# What About ... the Human Soul?

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## The human soul is the spiritual essence which constitutes the true self of a human being

### Where did our human soul come from and where is it going?

The human soul was created when *God breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being* (Genesis 2:7). The spiritual nature of man is passed along from Adam and Eve down to us through our parents (Hebrews 7:10). Our individual human soul begins at our conception (Psalm 51:5) and leaves the body when it dies (Genesis 35:18). The human soul of unbelievers goes to Hades (Luke 16:19-31) to await the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), and the human soul of believers goes to the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5:8). But.....

### What exactly is the human soul?

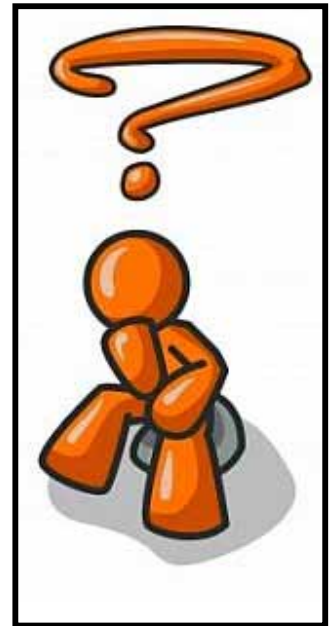
One of the complications involved in studying this is that the Greek and Hebrew words for *soul* and *spirit* do not always (or usually) refer to the human soul. *Soul* can just mean a creature with personality, and *spirit* can just mean a creature with breath, or just breath. Often, soul and spirit are used interchangeably. So, we need to look closely at each context.

We get some good insight from Genesis 35:18—listed above. Speaking of Rachel's death while giving birth to Benjamin, Moses wrote, *It came about as her soul was departing (for she died)*. This tells us that the human soul is possessing our body, but not part of it, because when Rachel's body died, her human soul left. It also seems that the human soul does not leave the body until the body dies. The human soul does not leave the body when it is comatose or has no brain activity. The soul only leaves when the body dies. After death, the human soul is always seen as existing in some sort of bodily form, either in the heavenlies (Matthew 17:1-5) or in sheol/hades (Luke 16:19-31) but is never a disembodied spirit. Demons are fallen angels who may cause various manifestations or apparitions, but there is no such thing as a ghost—a disembodied human soul roaming the earth.

But when the body dies, the soul does leave. The human soul is not only distinct from the body but it is our true self. This was also true of Jesus. In Psalm 16:10, David said, *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay*. Peter pointed out that David was referring to the Mes-

siah, because David did indeed die and *undergo decay*. David was referring to the Messiah who was Jesus the God-Man. Being a man, the body of Jesus died and Jesus Himself was separated from His body. The difference is, when Jesus left His earthly body, He was immediately in a resurrected body (Acts 2:25-28, 31; 13:35). When David referred to his own human soul in Psalm 49:15, he wrote, *But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me*. Notice here that David equates *my soul* with *me*. Solomon also saw the human soul as the person's true identity, when he said, *he who is wise wins souls* (Proverbs 11:30). Luke does the same when he writes in Acts 2:41, *that day there were added three thousand souls*. Both believers and unbelievers have a human soul. God told Ezekiel, *Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine...* (Ezekiel 18:4).

Our human soul can also be either troubled or at rest while we are in this body. After telling His disciples, *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*, Jesus said what God told Jeremiah, *and you will find rest for your souls* (Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:29). This is what makes human suf-



fering and human comfort more extensive than that of animals, who can only suffer and be comforted physically.

## **“You don’t have a soul You are a Soul”**

[gotquestions.org]. That seems to be a good distinction, although they are often mentioned together (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). We **have** a human heart (Deuteronomy 4:39), we **have** a human body (Romans 12:1), we **have** a human mind (Philippians 2:5), but what we **are** is a human soul. We have a physical body, as do plants and animals. Our heart and mind (the Bible has no word for brain) refer to aspects of our personality—our intellect, emotions, and will, which animals also have. But animals do not have anything comparable to our human soul. The human soul is our spiritual nature which is reflected in our thoughts about morality, justice, purpose, destiny, and creativity (Mark 12:30). These we share with God and angels, but not plants or animals. Our spiritual nature is in our human soul, and there is nothing comparable to it in animals.

## **Is there a distinction between the soul and the spirit?**

One passage that mentions them separately is 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But the point here does not seem to be to separate the soul and spirit of man but rather to emphasize that the whole man should be sanctified *entirely*.

Most of the discussion about separating the soul and spirit centers around Hebrews 4:12.

*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Ryrie comments,

“The meaning is that the Word pierces to the depths of soul and spirit, not between the two. They stand for the innermost facets of our immaterial nature, just as joints and marrow the

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have a  
body  
which is:  
**Physical**

**Animals**  
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**A. Body**  
**B. Personality**  
which is:  
1. Intellect  
2. Emotion  
3. Will  
Personality  
develops  
**Society**

**Humans**  
have a  
**A. Body**  
**B. Personality**  
which is:  
1. Intellect  
2. Emotion  
3. Will  
**C. Spirit**  
which is a sense of:  
1. Morality/Justice  
2. Purpose/Destiny  
3. Creativity  
Spirituality develops  
**Culture**

material aspect. Both soul and spirit can be involved in what pleases or displeases God.”

It does not seem that soul and spirit are two separate aspects of man, except where soul only refers to personality (animals in Genesis 1:24 and man in 2:7 are both called creatures with soul, i.e., personality). If there is a distinction between soul and spirit within the human soul, it is most likely that the spirit emphasizes the core motivation and the drive for sanctification.

When God declared that a whole generation of disobedient Israelites would not enter the land, he added this about Caleb:

*But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it (Numbers 14:24).*

Paul exhorted the Corinthians:

*let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).*

## **Conclusion**

The human soul is spiritual, not physical. It begins at conception, leaves the body at death, and continues on in some other bodily form—ultimately in a resurrected body, either in the New Jerusalem or the lake of fire. It does not exist in animals, but for us humans, it is “the innermost facets of our immaterial nature” (Ryrie). It’s our true self.

**We do not have a soul  
We are a soul**