

In Search of the Soul

How Do I Know that I Have a Soul?

By Dave DeWitt

[In 2017 I wrote a short paper on the human soul but this question, asked by a friend of mine, caused me to look more specifically into what the soul is, while attempting to determine how to know we have one.]

Two Different World Views about the Soul

There are two common ways to view the makeup of living beings. Both deal with body, soul, and spirit. A living **body** on earth is one which eats, breathes, and reproduces. Humans and animals also have a physical brain and nervous system that results in personality (intellect, emotion, and will). Humans also have a spirit which is evidenced by morality, consciousness, and creativity.

Morality includes thoughts of right and wrong, justice and injustice.

Consciousness includes thoughts of purpose and destiny, “Why am I here?” “Am I significant?”

Creativity is the ability to innovate new things and ideas.

So the question that remains is, “What is the soul? Should the soul be a separate entity, or should it be part of the body, or should it be part of the spirit, or both?”

The trichotomous view says our body, soul, and spirit are three distinct entities. Imagine it as three non-overlapping circles. Most Christians who hold this view see the soul as a separate entity reflecting our immortality, but they would say we obtain immortality through salvation which involves our spirit relating to God’s Spirit.



The dichotomous view says that we have two entities, the material and the immaterial (or body and spirit). Imagine it as two non-overlapping circles, one for body and one for spirit. The soul is a third small circle inside one of the other circles. Some would place the soul inside the physical circle. For example, the atheists say everything is physical and the soul is just part of the physical makeup of our brain and nervous system. The pantheists say everything is spiritual, the physical is an illusion. So the soul is part of the spiritual circle. Most Christians who hold this view put the soul inside the spiritual circle, since it relates to our immortality.



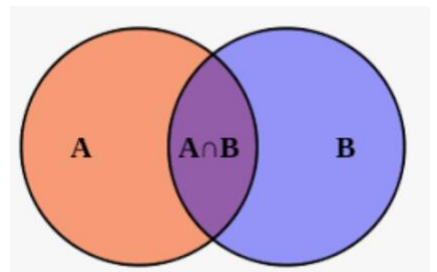
The Bible’s Use of the Word “Soul”

The Old Testament (Hebrew) word for *soul* is נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*).

The New Testament (Greek) word for *soul* is ψυχή (*psuchē*).

Taken together, the word *soul* occurs 263 times in the (NASB) Bible.

I will begin with my conclusion, then I will show how I got there. If we use the traditional labels of body, soul, and spirit, the human makeup can be pictured as two overlapping circles with the soul being in the middle, connecting our body (circle A in the diagram) with our spirit (circle B in the diagram). The body alone is not a soul, and the spirit alone is not a soul. And since humans always have a body and a spirit, whether in this life or the next, humans also always have a soul, whether in this life or the next. If you have a body and a spirit, then you also have a soul. Only our



soul is immortal. Our present body will return to dust. It cannot go into the next life. Our spirit by itself cannot go into the next life or we would be a ghost (and there is no such thing as a ghost in the Bible). Our immortal soul has a resurrected body and a sanctified spirit.

Some Possible Answers to the Question:

“How Do I Know that I Have a Soul?”

Since I am writing to Christians, as a Christian, I will use the Bible to describe the soul. Here is what I learned, examining the prominent Hebrew word and the prominent Greek word for *soul* throughout the Bible. In each case, I have suggested it is part of the answer to our question, “How do I know I have a soul?”

1. Both God the Father and God the Son have a soul. Our soul can connect to God because He also has a soul. If we relate to God, as in salvation, sanctification, worship, or prayer, it must be done through the aspect of our spirit, which is part of, and connected to, our soul.

- **Leviticus 26:11-30**, *Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you... and if your soul abhors My ordinances... My soul shall abhor you.*
- **Matthew 26:38**, *Then He [Jesus] said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death.”*
- **John 4:24**, [Jesus also said] *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*

Since the Bible says that God has a soul, and Jesus also said *God is spirit*, God is both soul and spirit. So in some way, God’s soul is connected to His spirit. God’s soul would also be connected to His body, but since no one has ever seen God (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 John 4:12), we know very little about His body, except that He has a body. For example, He is pictured as sitting on a throne in Ezekiel 10, Isaiah 6, and Revelation 4–5. Jesus added that *those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*. If we are to worship God, it must be done by our spirit through our soul, which is connected to our body. This would be true of all humans, but not animals. Animals have a body, but they do not have a soul because they do not have a spirit. Which is why we never observe worship in animals (no matter how intelligent they are), and we always observe it in humans (no matter how mentally incompetent they are). For example, plants and animals do not pray, but there has never been an adult human who has not prayed.

You can know that you have a soul if you pray.

2. The soul goes into the afterlife as that part of a person that does not decay.

- **Psalm 16:10**, *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.*
- **Psalm 49:15**, *...God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol...*
- **Matthew 10:28**, *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* [The Greek word the NASB translates *destroy* does not mean the soul of the unbeliever is eliminated. The word can also mean, *ruin*, or *lose* in the sense of being deprived of something.]
- **Genesis 35:18**, *It came about as her (Rachael’s) soul was departing (for she died).*

The parenthesis in Genesis 35:18 is part of the biblical text. This is the most concise description of death. Death is not when the heart stops or there is no breath or brain function. Death is only when the soul leaves the body. The physical body decays, the soul does not.

You can know you have a soul if you can imagine an afterlife.

3. Only the soul represents a person’s entire life.

- **Psalm 17:13**, *Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword.*

- **Ezekiel 18:4**, “Behold, all *souls* are Mine; the *soul* of the father as well as the *soul* of the son is Mine. The *soul* who sins will die.”
- **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.

The Psalm 17 and Ezekiel 18 references see the soul as the entire person. In the 1 Thessalonian 5 passage, Paul also keeps the body, soul, and spirit together as one person with the words *entirely* and *complete*.

You can know you have a soul if you see yourself as both physical and spiritual.

4. The written Word of God can restore the soul because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- **Psalm 19:7**, *The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul.*
- **Psalm 23:3**, *He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.*
- **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...*

Remember, the difference between the soul and the spirit is the soul is connected to the body, the spirit is not. The Holy Spirit convicts our spirit, which is part of our soul, using the *word of God* (John 16:8; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Unbelievers can understand what the Bible says, but it is the Holy Spirit who allows us to understand the Bible to be true. And when we understand it to be true, it convicts us of *sin and righteousness and judgment* (John 16:8; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

You can know you have a soul if reading the Bible convicts you of your sin.

5. The soul is the part of us that expresses creativity.

- **Psalm 30:12**, *That my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent.*
- **Psalm 33:2**, *Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre ...sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.*
- **Mark 14:26**, *After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*
- **Acts 16:25**, *But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*
- **Ephesians 5:19**, *...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.*

A body without a spirit is not creative. Animals have personality, but not creativity. Birds do not sing! Animals do not worship, they do not argue about politics, write poetry, set goals, celebrate victories (or anything). They do not think about where they came from or where they are going. They do not build different kinds of houses, or innovate a better lifestyle. We humans sing songs, worship, argue about politics and religion, write poetry, celebrate all kinds of things, build different houses, develop AI, use the internet, and put GPS systems in our planes, trains, and automobiles.

You can know you have a soul if you sing, or argue, or innovate.

6. Our emotional suffering and rejoicing are both because we have a soul.

- **Psalm 31:7**, *I will rejoice and be glad in Your lovingkindness, because You have seen my affliction; You have known the troubles of my soul.*
- **Psalm 42:1-2**, *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so, my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...*

The troubles evidenced by the soul are spiritual, connected to things like worry, anger, resentment, or jealousy. Rejoicing in the soul includes things like contentment, satisfaction, and happiness. The personality of animals does not remember the past or project to the future, as a source of suffering or rejoicing. Our physical brain cannot create projected suffering or rejoicing. That is a function of the

spirit, but it is realized (manifested) in the brain, which is in the body. So only the soul, which connects with both the body and spirit, can realize emotional suffering, or rejoicing.

You can know you have a soul if you worry or rejoice about the future.

7. The soul is what understands that God is our Creator.

To deny that God is our creator, such as with evolution, is to deny our soul. If we evolved from animals, we have no soul. But since there is massive evidence that humans have a soul, evolution is impossible.

You can know you have a soul if you believe in creation.

8. The soul is pleased with knowledge, when knowledge is learned with wisdom.

- **Proverbs 2:10**, *For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your **soul**.*
- **Hosea 6:6**, *For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*
- **Romans 11:33**, *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

Animals, by themselves, do not have teachers. They do not seek for understanding beyond that of their parents. It is our spirit which learns new things, and that learning is enjoyable when it is connected to wisdom. Wisdom comes from the mental capacity of our brain to understand truth. Learning with wisdom is a connection between our spirit and our body, which is our soul.

You can know you have a soul if you enjoy learning, with wisdom.

9. Romance is connected to the human soul.

- **Song 1:7**, *O you whom my **soul** loves, where do you pasture your flock ...*

Animals do not have romance. For them, sexual attraction is only a physical sex drive connected to instinct and opportunity. It is all physical. Human romance is physical, but it is also connected to morality. Human societies have always seen a need for sex to be regulated by moral laws based on something more than the sex drive and an opportunity. But moral regulation comes from the spirit. If you fall in love romantically, you will immediately face some moral regulations from your society about, say: fornication, adultery, dating, cohabitation, divorce, and marriage. So romance is a function of the body and the spirit, which is (by definition) the soul. When morality is ignored, sex is left to the physical brain, connected only to the physical sex drive, which in humans is a formula for disaster. There is an old saying, "Our brain is a wonderful thing, it works flawlessly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from the day we are born until the day we fall in love."

You can know you have a soul if you have ever fallen in love, romantically.

10. Sin is a function of the soul.

- **Isaiah 66:3**, *their **soul** delights in their abominations ...*
- **Habakuk 2:4**, *Behold, as for the proud one, his **soul** is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his **faith**.*
- **1 Peter 2:11**, *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the **soul**.*

You can know you have a soul if you are convicted about your sin.

11. Hope is a function of the soul.

- **Lamentations 3:24**, *"The LORD is my portion," says my **soul**, "Therefore I have **hope** in Him."*

Animals do not have hope. All humans have hope or they are in agony because they do not have hope.

You can know you have a soul if you have hope or feel hopeless.

Summary

Our soul is that entity which contains and combines all the aspects of body and spirit.

Conclusion

The most precise way you can know you have a soul is because you asked the question.