

SOUL.

"What is the human soul?"

The Bible is not perfectly clear as to the nature of the human soul. But from studying the way the word *soul* is used in Scripture, we can come to some conclusions. Simply stated, the human soul is the part of a person that is not physical. It is the part of every human being that lasts eternally after the body experiences death.

[Genesis 35:18](#) describes the death of Rachel, Jacob's wife, saying she named her son "as her soul was departing." From this we know that the soul is different from the body and that it continues to live after physical death.

The human soul is central to the personhood of a human being. As George MacDonald said, "You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body." In other words, personhood is not based on having a body. A soul is what is required.

Repeatedly in the Bible, people are referred to as "souls" ([Exodus 31:14](#); [Proverbs 11:30](#)), especially in contexts that focus on the value of human life and personhood or on the concept of a "whole being" ([Psalm 16:9-10](#); [Ezekiel 18:4](#); [Acts 2:41](#); [Revelation 18:13](#)).

The human soul is distinct from the heart;

- A- ([Deuteronomy 26:16](#); [30:6](#))
- B- the spirit ([1 Thessalonians 5:23](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#))
- C- and the mind ([Matthew 22:37](#); [Mark 12:30](#); [Luke 10:27](#)).

The human soul is created by God; ([Jeremiah 38:16](#)).

It can be strong or unsteady ([2 Peter 2:14](#));

it can be lost or saved ([James 1:21](#); [Ezekiel 18:4](#)).

We know that the human soul needs atonement ([Leviticus 17:11](#)) and is the part of us that is purified and protected by the truth and the work of the Holy Spirit ([1 Peter 1:22](#)). Jesus is the great Shepherd of souls ([1 Peter 2:25](#)).

[Matthew 11:29](#) tells us that we can turn to Jesus Christ to find rest for our souls. [Psalm 16:9-10](#) is a Messianic psalm that allows us to see that Jesus also had a soul. David wrote, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." This cannot be speaking of

David (as Paul points out in [Acts 13:35-37](#)) because David's body did see corruption and decay when he died. But Jesus Christ's body never saw corruption (He was resurrected), and His soul was not abandoned to Sheol. Jesus, as the Son of Man, has a soul.

There is often confusion about the human spirit vs. the human soul. In places, Scripture seems to use the terms interchangeably, but there might be a subtle difference. Otherwise, how could the Word of God penetrate "even to dividing soul and spirit" ([Hebrews 4:12](#))?

When the Bible talks about "man's spirit", it is usually speaking of an *inner force* which animates a person in one direction or another. It is repeatedly shown as a mover, a dynamic force ([Numbers 14:24](#)).

It has been said that there are only two things that last: the Word of God ([Mark 13:31](#)) and the souls of men. This is because, like God's Word, the soul is an imperishable thing. That thought should be both sobering and awe-inspiring.

Every person you meet is an eternal soul;

Every human being who has ever lived is a soul, and all of those souls are still in existence somewhere. The question is, where? The souls that reject God's love are condemned to pay for their own sin, eternally, in hell ([Romans 6:23](#)).

But the souls who acknowledge their own sinfulness and accept God's gracious gift of forgiveness will live forever beside still waters with their Shepherd, wanting for nothing ([Psalm 23:2](#)).