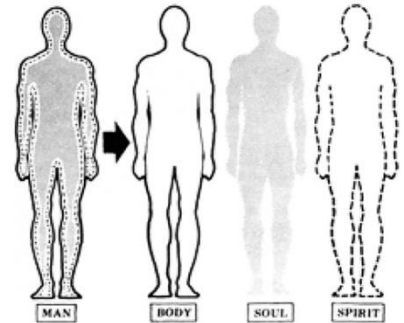


## Bible Study on Soul and Spirit

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### Getting started

1. When someone dies their body slowly deteriorates but their soul goes to heaven or hell.  
(a) Do you agree or disagree? Why?



- (b) Would you say most people agree with this statement?

2. Is there any difference between someone's spirit and their soul?  
If so, what is the difference?
3. If everyone has a spirit and someone becomes a Christian, then how does their spirit fit in with the Holy Spirit?

The idea that the soul separates from the body at death comes from Homer who lived in Greece at about 850 BC. His ideas, expressed in the Iliad, were that you went to the underworld at death. Pythagoras (570-495BC), Socrates (470-399BC) and Plato (428-348BC) modified these ideas and thought of the soul as being liberated from the body at death and going up through the universe to the planets and stars to live with the gods.

### Bible

#### Part 1 – difference between “soul” and “spirit”

The Greek word for “soul” (psyche) is translated in the NIV as “life” in Mark 8:35, 10:45, John 10:11, 17. Sometimes the NIV doesn't translate any word for “soul”, even though it appears in the original Greek because it is understood by the number alone e.g. Acts 2:41 “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand [souls] were added to their number that day” and Acts 27:37 “Altogether there were 276 [souls] of us on board.”

4. “Soul” doesn't always mean “life” in the same sense as above.  
Read Matt 26:36-38.  
Context: Jesus has eaten his last meal with his disciples. He knows Judas is going to betray him and he knows he is going to die soon.  
Verse 38: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow”.  
What does “soul” mean here?  
(See also 2 Pet 2:7-8 and John 12:27 where “soul” is translated “heart” in the NIV.)

5. What about the word for spirit, “pneuma” in Greek?

Read Luke 8:51-55.

Context: Jesus and his disciples have been travelling around Galilee healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching in parables and confronting opponents. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, has asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter.

Verse 55: “Her spirit returned and at once she stood up.”

What does “spirit” mean here?

“Spirit” means the same thing in Luke 23:46 = Matt 27:50 = John 19:30, Acts 7:59 and James 2:26.

6. “Spirit” means slightly different things in the following passages:

(a) Read John 11:32-33.

Context: Jesus was told Lazarus was sick but had been dead for 4 days before Jesus got there.

Even so, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Verse 33: “he was deeply moved in spirit”

What does “spirit” mean here?

(b) Read Matt 26:40-41 (similar to Mark 14:37-38.)

Context: Jesus asks his disciples to keep watch while he goes away to pray by himself. When he comes back he finds the disciples sleeping.

Verse 41: “The spirit is willing but the body is weak.”

What does “spirit” mean here? (Also in 1 Cor 14:29-33, Heb 12:9.)

(c) Read 1 Cor 2:10-11.

Context: Paul is writing to the Corinthian church in order to give advice on certain issues and answer their questions. Early in the letter he writes about God’s wisdom in Jesus and how that wisdom has been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?”

What does “spirit” mean here? (Also in John 13:21-22, 1 Cor 7:34, 2 Cor 7:1, Phil 1:27, Col 2:5.)

7. From what we’ve looked so far, how would you sum up what “soul” means and what “spirit” means? Do you think “soul” means the same thing as “spirit”?

So “spirit” can have different shades of meaning like “heart”, “emotions”, “will” and “mind”. This is understandable because the mind is closely associated with the will and the emotions.

Other shades of meaning for “spirit” can be seen from the following:

Temperament: 1 Cor 4:18-21, 1 Pet 3:3-4.

Philosophy: 1 John 4:1-3

Enthusiasm for life: 1 Cor 16:17-18, 2 Cor 7:12-13

Way: 2 Cor 12:17-18.

6<sup>th</sup> sense: Mark 2:8-9.

“Spirit” can also mean “breath” as in Gen 2:7 “And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” and 2 Tim 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed”. When a person receives God’s Spirit it is literally God’s breath he/she receives. When “spirit” appears in the text it could mean God’s Spirit as distinct from our spirit. If you compare English translations you will find that editors do not always agree on which spirit/Spirit is meant.

God’s Spirit has a role in transforming our minds and our thinking (see Rom 12:1-2). So when the word “spirit” is used in the text there is a close association between the person’s mind, thinking, heart, life and God’s Spirit.

Before we move on to looking at what part of us goes to heaven, “soul” or “spirit” or neither, we need to heed a note from Tom Wright below:

The question of ‘what happens to me after death’ is *not* the major, central, framing question that centuries of theological tradition have supposed. The New Testament, true to its Old Testament roots, regularly insists that the major, central, framing question is that of God’s purpose of rescue and re-creation for the whole world, the entire cosmos. The destiny of individual human beings must be understood within that context – not simply in the sense that we are only part of a much larger picture, but in the sense that part of the whole point of being ‘saved’ in the present is so that we can play a vital role (Paul speaks of this role in the shocking terms of being ‘fellow workers with God’) within that larger picture and purpose. And that in turn makes us realise that the question of our own ‘destiny’, in terms of the alternatives of joy or woe, is probably the wrong way of looking at the whole question. The question ought to be, ‘*How will God’s new creation come?*’ and then, ‘*How will we humans contribute to that renewal of creation, and to the fresh projects which the creator God will launch in his new world?*’

From Surprised by Hope p 197 by Tom Wright.

## Part 2 – resurrected body and soul/spirit

8. Read 1 Cor 15:35-58.

Context: Paul continues to answer the Corinthians’ questions and here the question concerns the type of body that dead Christians will have when Jesus comes back and all people will be resurrected.

(a) What does this passage say about our resurrected body?

(b) What does this passage say about our soul/spirit?

(c) Does your answer to (b) imply anything about our soul/spirit?

## Part 3 – tricky passages

9. (a) Read Matt 10:1-31.

Context: Jesus has been healing people and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. He gives the 12 the authority to go out to do what he has been doing.

Verse 28: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

What does this suggest about the soul?

(b) Read Heb 12:18-29.

Context: The writer of Hebrews has been encouraging Jewish Christians to stay with Jesus rather than go back to Judaism. He says they are not alone in their struggles but God and all his people are with them.

Verse 23: “You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect”.

What does this suggest about “the spirits of righteous men”?

(The same idea about spirits is in 1 Pet 3:18-20 and Rev 22:6-7.)

(c) Do these passages suggest any difference between “soul” and “spirit”? Why/why not?

10. Read 1 Thes 5:19-24 and Heb 4:8-13.

1 Thes 5:19-24 context: Towards the end of the letter Paul gives some final suggestions to the Thessalonian church.

1 Thes 5:23 "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless".

Heb 4:8-13 context: The writer of Hebrews warns his audience against disobedience to God from whom nothing is hidden.

Heb 4:12 "Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit".

(a) Do you think there is an intended distinction in meaning between "soul" and "spirit"? Why/why not?

(b) How does this compare with your answer to 9 (c)?

#### Part 4 – Christian death

11. (a) What does it mean to be "in/with Christ" (see for example John 14:15-21, 17:20-26, Rom 5:12-20, 6:3-10, 2 Cor 5:16-17, Gal 3:26-28, Eph 1:1-14, 2:1-22, Col 1:24-29)?

(b) What does each passage tell us about what happens to a Christian when he/she dies?

- 1 Thes 4:13-18.

Context: Paul tells the church at Thessalonica what has been happening to him and Timothy. He tells them to live godly lives and, in these verses, what happens to dead Christians when Jesus comes back.

1 Thes 4:14 "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him".

- Luke 23:39-43.

Context: Jesus is being crucified with two other people on either side of him.

Luke 23:43 "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

"Paradise" is a Persian word for "garden". See also 2 Cor 12:4, Rev 2:7.

- Phil 1:21-24

Context: Paul is writing to the Philippian church while in prison and contemplates the possibility of his execution.

Phil 1:23 "I desire to depart and be with Christ".

- 2 Cor 5:1-9.

Context: Paul is thinking about the possibility of death – his own and other Christians'.

2 Cor 5:8 "We . . . would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

(c) Do these passages say anything about your soul/spirit?

A note on 1 Thes 4:17. "The expression **"caught up together with them *in the clouds*"** [ESV] recalls Jesus' return on a cloud (Dan 7:13, Mk 13:26 and elsewhere) - cloud riding is a symbol of authority in apocalyptic literature. Paul's point is that when Christ's judgement falls on the earth believers will not be dangerously underneath it; instead, they will be with the Judge on the 'cloud'. "In the air" just means at a safe distance from the judgement falling on the world."

From 666 and all that p 42 by John Dickson and Greg Clarke.

## Part 5 – our spirit and the Holy Spirit

12. If everyone has a spirit and someone becomes a Christian, then how does their spirit fit in with the Holy Spirit?

Read John 4:19-24 and 1 Cor 14:12-17.

John 4:19-24 context: Jesus and his disciples are travelling about Palestine when they have to go through Samaria. Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman.

John 4:24 "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth".

1 Cor 14:12-17 context: Paul is giving advice on spiritual gifts and their use in the church.

1 Cor 14:15 "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind."

## To finish

13. From the passages we have read, do any of them  
(a) say that a Christian has a soul which goes to heaven when you die? If so, which passage(s)?

(b) do you believe a Christian's soul goes to heaven when he/she dies?

14. Plato (424-348BC) believed that the soul was
- divine and pre-existed the body
  - superior and the body/matter was inferior
  - entombed in the body until liberated by death
- Agree or disagree? Why/why not?