

What Is the Difference between the Soul and the Spirit?

The terms *soul* and *spirit* have been discussed at length in philosophy and literature, and in the writings of various religions. They're sometimes used interchangeably because people believe they're the same thing.

But what does the Bible say? Are they different? And why does knowing if they're different matter?

In this post, we'll look at verses and notes in the [New Testament Recovery Version](#) to see the soul and spirit *are* different. We'll also discuss why knowing they're different is important in our relationship with God.

Two key verses

First Thessalonians 5:23 says: "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This crucial verse proves the soul and the spirit are *not* the same thing. It tells us human beings are composed of three parts—spirit, soul, and body. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the conjunction *and* in the phrase *spirit and soul and body* indicates these are three different things. The body is clearly distinct from the soul; in the same way, the soul is also distinct from the spirit.

Hebrews 4:12 says: "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to **the dividing of soul and spirit** and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The joints and marrow in our physical body are closely related, but they're distinct and can be separated. In the same way, our soul and our spirit can be divided by the Word of God, showing that they're also distinct from each other.

The different functions of our soul and our spirit

Now that we've seen that the soul and spirit are different, we need to realize their functions also are different.

The function of [our spirit](#), the deepest part of our being, is related to the spiritual realm: **it enables us to contact and receive God Himself.**

John 4:24 shows us our spirit is able to **contact God**:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him **must worship in spirit** and truthfulness.” God being Spirit means His substance is Spirit. Our spirit is the part of our being that corresponds to God and has the ability to contact, fellowship with, and worship Him.

John 3:6 shows us our spirit has the ability to **receive God**:

“That which is born of the Spirit is **spirit**.”

When we were [born again](#), we were born of the Spirit in our human spirit, not in our soul. We **received** the Lord, and He came to live in our spirit.

So what about our soul? Our soul is who we are, our personality, and is composed of our mind, our emotion, and our will. God created us with these faculties so we can express Him.

[God's purpose](#) in creating human beings with a spirit and a soul was that they would receive Him in their spirit and express Him through their soul.

Luke 1:46-47 shows the different functions of the soul and spirit in Mary's praise of the Lord:

“And Mary said, My **soul** magnifies the Lord, and my **spirit** has exulted in God my Savior.”

To *magnify* means to enlarge, or express, something hidden for all to see. Note 1 on verse 47 in the [New Testament Recovery Version](#) explains:

“First, Mary's **spirit** exulted in God; then her **soul** magnified the Lord. Her praise to God issued from her spirit and was expressed through her soul. Her spirit was filled with joy in God her Savior, and her soul manifested that joy for the magnifying of the Lord. She lived and acted in her spirit, which directed her soul.”

So the function of our spirit is to **contact** God and **receive** God, and the function of our soul is to **express** God.

Why is it important to know the difference?

We believers have the divine life in our spirit. Now God wants us to live and act not by ourselves, that is, by our soul, but by His life in our spirit.

But here's the problem. From the time we were born, we've lived by our soul. Our mind is educated in school, and we actively live according to what we think. We also experience the wide range of human emotions, and we often respond to situations and matters according to how we feel. Based on what we think or feel, we make decisions with our will. Living by our soul is what we're used to.

When we were saved, Christ came to live in our spirit. Now He's a wonderful Person in us who has His own thoughts, feelings, and intentions. He came to live in us so that He would be our life, and we would live by Him.

But living by His life in our spirit *isn't* something we're used to. So throughout our day, we have to realize we can either live according to our natural human life in our soul, or by the life of Christ in our spirit. We can easily live and act apart from the Lord in our soul, according to our own thoughts or feelings. When this happens, we express ourselves. Even if we do something good, the source isn't the Lord in our spirit, so God actually isn't expressed.

But when we live by the divine life in our spirit, Christ is the source of our living, and the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of our soul are directed by our spirit. Then in our words, actions, and living, we express God.

How can we tell if we're living by our soul or our spirit?

Sometimes it can be hard to tell whether we're living and doing things in our soul or in our spirit. Spending time with the Lord in His Word helps us discern where we are.

When we exercise our spirit by [praying with the Word of God](#), the Word becomes living to us. The living Word is then able to divide our soul from our spirit and discern all the thoughts and intentions of our heart, as Hebrews 4:12 describes.

When we discover we're living in and by our soul, we simply need to turn to the Lord in our spirit again. We can pray, "Lord Jesus, I turn away from living in my soul. I turn to You in my spirit. Lord, I want to live by You."

The more we contact the Lord and are filled with Him, the more He will be the source of our thoughts, our feelings, and our intentions. Then we can genuinely express God to the people around us.