

What is the difference between soul and spirit? Do animals have a soul and a spirit?

It is very difficult to explain the difference between the soul and the spirit because both are invisible and non-material.

In general, the word “soul” carries the idea of a breathing creature. A dead dog has only a body, but a living dog has life or breath in its body. Thus we say that a living animal has a body and a soul. The soul here simply means animal life. The soul distinguishes a living being from a dead one.

In Revelation 16:3, we read that “every living soul died in the sea.” This simply means that every creature in the sea that had breath died. It refers, of course, to fishes and sea mammals.

Usually, the word “soul” is translated “creature” when referring to animals. Thus, the same word translated “soul” in Genesis 2:7 when speaking of man is translated “creature” in the following passages when referring to animals (Genesis 1:21; 1:24; 2:19; 9:10, 15, 16; Leviticus 11:46).

Now the Bible teaches that man has not only a body and a soul but a spirit as well (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We all readily recognize what the body is because we can see and feel the body. It is that part of us by which we are conscious of the world around us. It is more difficult to define the difference between the spirit and the soul. We know that the body is distinct from the soul and spirit because at physical death these are separated from the body (2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

Hebrews 4:12 teaches us that there is a difference between soul and spirit, but it is only in the Word of God that we find this division between soul and spirit. The soul and spirit are never viewed as separated one from the other. Thus we find it hard to note where the distinction lies. Generally speaking, the soul is that part of our being which has to do with our emotions and feelings, and through the soul we are able to know about ourselves. The spirit is the part of us which enables us to worship and to have communion with God.

Angels are spoken of as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14). They are spiritual and superhuman beings. The lesson notes state that they do not have HUMAN bodies or souls. This does not mean that they only have a spirit; it simply means that they do not have a body and soul like ours.

Sometimes the words “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably in the Bible, but at other times, as in the references given above, they are distinguished.