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Mini Study

What Is The Soul?

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Genesis 2:7)

the soul that sins, it shall die (Ezekiel 18:4)

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28)

Indestructible? Surviving death? Instantaneously deposited upon death in either Heaven or Hell? Most people don't wrestle daily with the "theology of the soul." What it is, however, does exercise some minds - in all religions - some of the time. It's an almost universal belief that tucked somewhere inside the human body is this spiritual entity we call "soul." Some believe it is unique to mankind. Some believe that animals, and even plants, are endowed with a soul. When we get it is also debated. So what is the soul?

- in Christianity, the generally accepted position is that every human being is endowed with an indestructible [immortal] soul at conception; some believe at birth. This soul is unique to mankind and not to animal life
- the soul therefore, for most Christians, survives death and is the true essence of each individual. Depending on a person's lifestyle or their belief in Jesus Christ, each goes, upon death, to Heaven or to Hell
- as in all matters of doctrine, it is prudent to derive our theology from the Christian Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments - and to accept tradition only as it agrees with the Scriptures. What is their view of the soul?
- note that the two Testaments are a unity, the teaching of the New Testament transitioning smoothly from the Old. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament all shared this unity; and all they teach is to be set against this backdrop
- man was first created as a lifeless "clay model," made solely from earthly elements (Genesis 2:7). Into this form, God "...blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,". The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nephesh*. There is no indication here as to the soul's immortality or otherwise
- before the creation of the "human kind" God had created "...every living creature that moves" (Genesis 1:21pp), each after its own kind (*i.e.* species). "Creature" here is *nephesh*. So man and animals are both "souls," made from the material elements. Only man, however, is made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26pp)

What Is The Soul?

- in the Hebrew Scriptures the term has varied meaning, both physical and figurative. It is translated, for example, as *person, creature, mind, and desire - fish*, even. “Soul” is the “operating system” of the physical body - of animals and men. It is the life of the flesh passed on to every living creature from those initial acts of creation. “...*the life [Heb nephesh] of the flesh is in the blood...*” (Leviticus 17:11) (The most high tech laboratory is totally incapable of breathing life into a piece of clay!)
- the first lie ever told instilled the false notion - now almost universally believed - that the soul survives death: “...*it’s certain you won’t die*” said Satan, and convinced his hearers (Genesis 3:4pp)
- God, however, had told them differently. “Eat from this tree,” He had said, and “...*in the day you eat you will certainly die*” (Genesis 2:17pp), *Die* - not live forever in flames. So also Ezekiel: “...*the soul that sins, it shall die*”. And Jesus: “...*fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna - the rubbish dump]*”
- the sole hope of ever having a life beyond the grave is by means of a miracle, by a supernatural resurrection from among the dead - to live forever as indestructible spirit, or to face a time of judgment (John 5:28-29)
- and the spiritual resurrection is available only through belief in and commitment to Jesus Christ: “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live*” (John 11:25)

(All Scripture references are ASV unless otherwise noted. [pp:paraphrased])

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