

What is the “Spirit of Man”?

The spirit of man gives humans the potential to become sons and daughters of God!

Of all the creatures God has made to dwell on the earth, only man has been given various attributes of God—including the ability to think and reason; to speak and write; to plan, create and build; to teach and learn; to judge and rule. God gave human beings the capacity to love, to hate, to laugh, to cry, to forgive, to repent, and to experience every type of emotion. Man is able to experience these godlike qualities because he has been given a unique *spiritual* dimension—which, in reality, makes us human.

When God created Adam in His own image and likeness, He formed him out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 1:26-27) and breathed *into him* the “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). Common to all creatures—human and animal—is this breath of life (Eccl. 3:19). At the same time, God formed within Adam and Eve a *spirit essence* called the “spirit of man” (Zech. 12:1).

The spirit that dwells in man is not a “spirit being” or an “immortal soul” that inhabits the body. Rather, it is a *spiritual component* that imparts the power of thought, intellect and consciousness with self-identity: “But **there is a spirit in man** and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:8). The apostle Paul wrote, “For who among men understands the things of man except **by the spirit of man which is in him?**” (I Cor. 2:11).

The spirit of man is different from what the Bible calls the “soul.” The word “soul” is translated from the Hebrew *nephesh*, which refers to physical life, whether human or animal. In many occurrences, *nephesh* is translated “creature” or “life” (Gen. 1:20-21, 24, 30; 2:19; 9:4-5, 10, 12, 15-16). When translated “soul,” it refers to the physical life and strength of a human being (Gen. 2:7; Ex. 1:5; Lev. 23:30; Deut. 4:29; Josh. 11:11; Ezek. 13:18-19; 18:4, 20). Job 34:14 and Isaiah 42:5 demonstrate that humans possess *both* the breath of life and the spirit of man. It is important to understand that even with the addition of the human spirit, it is the *whole* physical and spiritual package that makes up the person—the *soul*. The whole person *is* a soul—not *has* a soul. Neither the soul nor the human spirit retain any consciousness after death (Psa. 146:4).

When a person dies, his or her conscious thoughts cease, and the body returns to dust (Gen. 3:9; Psa. 6:5; Eccl. 9:10; Isa. 38:18). Unlike the soul, however, which ends with the death of the body, the spirit in man *returns to God* when a person dies (Eccl. 12:7).

The human spirit is the *sum total* of everything about us that is non-physical—our thoughts, imaginations, plans, hopes, dreams, feelings, emotions, attitudes—and makes us each who and what we are. As such, the human spirit also provides God with what is comparable to a “recording” of all that we are—which, again, returns to God at death. God can then use this “recording” to resurrect us back to physical (or spiritual) life with everything that was unique about us intact.

It is the spirit in man that gives humans the potential to become sons and daughters of God. Through conversion—with repentance and baptism—our human spirit is conjoined by God’s Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit unites with an individual’s spirit, he or she is spiritually begotten as a child of God: “Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received *the Spirit of sonship*, whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself **bears witness conjointly with our own spirit**, *testifying* that we are *the children of God*” (Rom. 8:15-16). The workings of God’s Spirit with our human spirit enables us to understand the things of God (I Cor. 2:11).

Those who have God’s Holy Spirit added to their human spirit in this life become, at death, the “dead in Christ.” At the resurrection, every spiritually begotten child of God who has grown to spiritual maturity—having been led by the Holy Spirit to develop the mind and character of God—will be born into the family of God as an immortal spirit being (II Pet. 1:4-11).