

**PATHWAYS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
BIBLICAL OVERVIEW OF THE
MIND, BODY, SOUL and SPIRIT
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Introduction

In developing a good understanding of the true meaning of many concepts we encounter while studying the Bible, it is critical that we truly understand the meaning of certain key terms. In this series of lessons, we will take a closer look at the terms MIND, BODY, SOUL and SPIRIT. We have included a number of supporting scriptures for your reference and review before the discussion. Please look up the scriptures as self-study and during the lesson discussion further explanation and clarification will be provided.

Lesson 1

MIND — the part of a person that thinks and reasons. Although the Hebrew language had no word for mind, several Hebrew words are sometimes translated as “mind.” The word for *HEART* frequently means “mind” (Deut. 30:1; Jer. 19:5). The word for *SOUL* is sometimes used similarly (1 Chr. 28:9), as is the word for *SPIRIT* (Ezek. 11:5).

Four separate Greek words account for nearly all instances of “mind” in the New Testament. They all mean much the same thing: understanding, thought, mind, reason. While today we think of a person’s mind in a morally neutral way, in the New Testament the mind was clearly thought of as either good or evil.

Negatively, the mind may be “hardened” (2 Cor. 3:14), “blinded” (2 Cor. 4:4), “corrupt” (2 Tim. 3:8), and “debased” (Rom. 1:28).

On the positive side, humans may have minds that are renewed (Rom. 12:2) and pure (2 Pet. 3:1). They may love God with all their minds (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and have God’s laws implanted in their minds (Heb. 8:10). Since Christians have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), they are instructed to be united in mind (Rom. 12:16; 1 Pet. 3:8).

Lesson 2

BODY — the material or physical part of a person, whether alive or dead. Some religions consider the body evil or inferior to the soul, but the Bible teaches that the body is God’s good gift to us (Gen. 1:31). It is a necessary ingredient for a fully human existence (Gen. 2:7).

In the Old Testament the word “body” sometimes means “corpse” (Num. 6:6). Occasionally the reference is to the body as that part of a person that is involved in reproduction (Deut. 28:4)

In the New Testament these Old Testament meanings are carried forward, but new insights appear. Paul teaches that the body is often the instrument of sin (1 Cor. 6:18); that the body must die as a penalty for sin (Rom. 7:24); and that sin dishonors a person’s body (Rom. 1:24). On the other hand, believers in Christ may “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13) and present their bodies as holy sacrifices that please God (Rom. 12:1).

Since human life requires a body, sometimes the term “body” symbolizes the whole person. Both Jesus and Paul used the word in this way (Matt. 6:22–23; Phil 1:20). The Bible reveals little about existence after the death of the body. But complete salvation and full humanity begin not at death but at the return of Christ. Only then do believers receive their eternal resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:35–49).

Lesson 3

SOUL — a word with two distinct meanings in the Bible:

1. That which makes a human or animal body alive. This usage of the word “soul” refers to life in the physical body. The best examples of this usage are those passages in the New Testament in which the Greek word for soul is translated as **“life.”** “For whoever desires to save his life [soul] will lose it,” Jesus declared, “but whoever loses his life [soul] for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36–37).

This idea is also present in the Old Testament. For example, the soul of a dying person departed at death (Gen. 35:18). The prophet Elijah brought a child back to life by stretching himself upon the child three times and praying that God would let the child’s soul come back into him (1 Kin. 17:19–23).

2. The word soul also refers to the inner life of a person, the seat of emotions, and the center of human personality. The first use of the word soul in the Old Testament expresses this meaning: “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 being (soul)” (Gen. 2:7). This means more than being given physical life; the biblical writer declares that man became a “living soul,” or a person, a human being, one distinct from all other animals.

In the Old Testament the soul is described as the seat of many emotions and desires: the desire for food (Deut. 12:20–21), love (Song 1:7), longing for God (Ps. 63:1), rejoicing (Ps. 86:4), knowing (Ps. 139:14), and memory (Lam. 3:20).

In the New Testament, Jesus spoke of his soul as being “exceedingly sorrowful” (Matt. 26:38). Mary, the mother of Jesus, proclaimed that her soul “magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46). John prayed that Gaius would “prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

Lesson 4

SPIRIT — a word with three distinct meanings in the Bible:

1. The word is used as a general reference in the New Testament to the **spirit of human beings** (Matt. 5:3; Rom. 8:16; Heb. 4:12). Jesus made several specific references to His spirit in a human sense (Mark 2:8; John 11:33), as did Paul (Acts 17:16; 2 Cor. 2:13). Paul sometimes referred to the spirits of those to whom he wrote (Gal. 6:18; 2 Tim. 4:22).

2. A second common usage of the word is in **reference to good and evil spirits**, meaning the beings other than God and humans. An example of a good spirit is an angel (Ps. 104:4). The Bible also contains many references to evil spirits (Mark 9:25; Acts 19:12–17; Rev. 18:2).

3. The word “***Spirit***” also refers to the ***Spirit of God***, the ***Holy Spirit***. In the Old Testament, the Spirit occasionally came upon people to give them power to do God’s will or to enable them to serve God in a special way. For example, the Spirit of the Lord enabled Samson to kill a young lion with his bare hands (Judg. 14:5–6). Earlier the Spirit of God had given Bezaleel wisdom and skill to build the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3). The Spirit of the Lord also enabled the judges to lead Israel to military victory (Judg. 3:10; 11:29) and the prophets to prophesy (Num. 24:2; Ezek. 11:5).

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit was an even more active presence among the people of God. ***The Holy Spirit was the agent of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies*** (Acts 1:16; 2:16–21; 3:18; 28:25–27), and He continued to inspire Christian prophets and workers in order to work His will on earth (Acts 2:4; 19:6). ***The Holy Spirit came upon new Christians*** (Acts 10:44–48), ***purified*** and ***sanctified*** them (2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:13), and ***guided*** the direction of early Christian missionary work (Acts 10:19–20; 16:6–7).

This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:17). ***A person can relate to Jesus only by means of the Holy Spirit*** (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6). In the Gospel of John, He is called the ***Helper*** (John 14:16–17).