

“Who Knows... the Spirit of the Animal?”

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Introduction:

A. Sermon request: “Does the Bible state definitively whether animals have a soul or a spirit? According to what has been taught in Bible classes in churches of Christ, animals (companion dogs, etc.) do not have souls. What does the Bible say?”

1. “If you ever owned a dog, a cat, or any other kind of animal to which you grew attached, you may have wondered whether or not that animal had a soul. Men and women through the ages have pondered the same question. Animals— whose vast numbers stretch into the billions—are ubiquitous as our co-inhabitants on planet Earth. They serve as an unpaid, ever-dependable, and quite invaluable work force as they help the farmer plow a rough field or the blind person cross a busy city street. They account for a considerable portion of the total world food supply for humans. They provide joy and companionship for young and old alike. They are an undeniable boon to mental health, especially for sick children and the infirm elderly. Surely none among us would doubt the many benefits that accrue as a result of the presence of animals among us. But do animals possess souls? And if they do, is their soul the same as a human soul? That is to say, is it immortal—will it eventually inhabit either heaven or hell?” (Bert Thompson, Ph.D.)

B. There are passages that seem to indicate that animals have souls. It is intellectually dishonest to dismiss them

1. Job 12:7-10 (ASV)

2. Prov. 12:10 (MKJV)

3. Nephesh (Hebrew) - “properly, a breathing creature, a living animal with vitality; used very widely in literal, accommodative or figurative senses (bodily or mental); appetite, desire, beast, body, breath, creature, discontented spirit, ghost, greed, hearty, having life or lust, man, mind, person, pleasure, soul, thing, a will” (Strong's)

a) “But it has to mean “eternal soul”!

b) Why? Because you want it to be so? Subjective

c) The context of the passage will determine its meaning. Objective

4. Soul (English) - “1. the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life; 2. the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe; 3. a person's total self; 4. an active or essential part of a movement, cause, principle, or paradigm; 5. a moving spirit, leader; 6. the moral and emotional nature of human beings; 7. the quality that arouses emotion and sentiment ; 8. spiritual or moral force, fervor; 8. person (not a soul in sight) 9. personification (the soul of integrity); 10. a strong positive feeling, intense sensitivity and emotional fervor; 11. African-American cultural influences; 12. defining essence (Merriam-Webster)

a. Which meaning?

b. The context will determine the connotation; our desire to have it mean one or the other has no bearing on the truth.

I. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND ANIMALS

- A. We all are living, breathing, animated creatures made by God
 - 1. Gen. 1:20, 24
- B. We all depend on similar things to sustain our lives.
 - 1. We all were given an instinct for procreation, social interaction, contentment, and especially survival
 - 2. We all were given the capacity to adapt to different environments and circumstances and a means of facilitating those characteristics
 - 3. We all to some extent learn and imitate behaviors that facilitate those characteristics
 - 4. What we would like to believe to be human intelligence in our pet companions is simply that ability God gave them to adapt and survive life among human beings
- C. Similarities in our common condition as living, breathing, animated creatures should move us to have respect for our common condition of life
 - 1. But only to the extent that God teaches us in His word
 - 2. Prov. 12:10; Deut. 25:4
 - 3. Cruelty to living creatures is an indicator of a sinful heart, regardless of professions of faith and piety
 - a. However, God gets to define cruelty; our opinions about what is cruel and what is kind are irrelevant
 - 4. Here the similarities end; let the word explain the differences

II. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND ANIMALS

- A. Ecc. 3:17-22, 12:6-7
 - 1. There is no mention of animals living on beyond death in the Bible.
 - 2. The word “soul” is used in the Old Testament to describe the physical form of life that both men and animals possess and that ceases to exist at death. It is life in this world, not the world to come.
- B. Gen. 1:28
 - 1. Man was commanded to exercise dominion over the earth.
 - a. The Hebrew word for “subdue” (kabash) is “to bring under subjection” (Strongs).
 - b. “When God gave Adam dominion over the creative order, He was describing a pre-emptive authority which man would wield over the creation” (Walker, 5, 2:25).
 - c. Gen. 9:3-6 - Food
 - d. Gen. 4:3-5 - Sacrifice
 - 2. It is not murder, because animals were not created in the image of God.
- C. Gen. 1:26-28
 - 1. Man alone was created in the image and likeness of God; something that cannot be said with any Biblical authority of animals.
 - 2. Man’s capacity to understand spiritual values, his recognition of morals, his Divinely given capacity to choose, and his responsibility and accountability before God for his own behavior, all set him far apart from the animal world.

3. Adam is called the son of God in Luke 3:38, obviously by creation. What animal is called the son of God or offspring of God?
4. Nowhere does God's Word imply animals were created in God's image.

Conclusion:

A. Philip Hughes commented: "Only of man is it said that God created him in his image. It is in this charter of his constitution that man's uniqueness is specifically affirmed as a creature radically distinguished from all other creatures. In this respect a line is defined which links man directly and responsibly to God in a way that is unknown to any other creature. Nothing is more basic than the recognition that being constituted in the image of God is of the very essence of and absolutely central to the humanness of man. It is the key that unlocks the meaning of his authentic humanity" (1989, p. 30).

B. Dr. Bert Thompson - "But do animals have souls? Animals may be said to have souls—if the word "soul" is used as the Bible employs it in discussing members of the animal kingdom (i.e., to describe only the physical life force found within all living creatures). But if the word "soul" is used to refer to an immortal soul that one day will inhabit heaven or hell, then no, animals may not be said to possess a soul. This is the only conclusion that can be drawn, respecting the instruction on the subject found within the Word of God."

C. This does not diminish the love we have for our animal companions, nor the joy we take from their company

1. It does not void the responsibility we have to treat them well as God's word instructs us
2. As honest Christians professing reverence for God and His word, we must lay aside what we wish to believe and accept what God has said