

THE SPIRITUALITY AND INVISIBILITY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

- Many false views of God have been promoted including the idea that he is an impersonal force, an inanimate object, a personified idea, pure energy, or simply an old man who lives in the sky
- A right understanding of God's spirituality and incorporeality corrects these wrong notions of the nature of God
- Most theologians list God's spirituality as a communicable attribute because God has given us human spirits
- It is with our spirit that we worship the Lord, are united with his spirit, and with which the Holy Spirit testifies that we are his children

John 4:24 ~ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

1 Corinthians 6:17 ~ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Philippians 3:3 ~ for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Romans 8:16 ~ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

- Thus, there is clearly some communication from God to us of a spiritual nature that is something like his own nature
- Additionally, angels are called spirits

Hebrews 1:7, 14 ~ And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE"...Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

- Thus, God is not the only being that may be described as a spirit
- However, at the same time, there is an "incommunicable" element to God's spirituality because his form of existence is far superior to anything we know or experience ourselves
- In this sense, he is the most pure Spirit, a spirit like no other

THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

- The concept of spirituality is used to communicate a variety of different ideas.
- To say that someone is "spiritual" may indicate their conscious commitment to the things of God
- For others, to be "spiritual" is to suggest that they have a generic interest in religious things, supernatural matters, or even New Age practices
- However, to speak of God's spirituality is actually to identify Him as a spirit, a being who is immaterial, invisible, and infinite and who is fundamentally distinct from his material, visible, and finite creatures

Definition

- God is a spirit, meaning that he is not a material being...he has no body...no flesh and bones
- He is not tangible or physical...he is not a corporeal being located in any one finite space...he is not limited to nor bound by the physical realm or any spatial location
- God is a spiritual being and as such has an immaterial nature which is the essence of who he is
- Because he possesses neither a material component nor a visible form, none of the properties of matter can be attributed to him
- He cannot be touched, felt, or seen because there is nothing physical of God's nature which these senses can apprehend
- Thus, his divine essence cannot be perceived by the physical senses

Isaiah 31:3 ~ Now the Egyptians are men and not God, And their horses are flesh and not spirit...

Luke 24:39 ~ See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

John 4:21-24 ~ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

- The discussion is about the location where people should worship God, but Jesus tells the woman that true worship of God does not require that one be present in a certain place
- The reason is because true worship has to do not with physical location but with one's inner spiritual condition
- This is because God is "spirit" and is in no way limited to a spatial location
- Christ contrasted God's spirituality with worship centered upon physical places
- Whereas the old covenant focused on ceremonial worship through an elaborate system of holy places, objects, priests, rituals, and sacrifices, the new covenant focuses on spiritual worship and makes the material objects irrelevant to worship
- "Since 'God is a Spirit,' he demands worship that transcends physical things, but engages our spirits with the Spirit of Christ to perform a more spiritual form of worship in new covenant simplicity."¹

2 Corinthians 3:17 ~ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

- "God's spirituality means that God exists as a being that is not made of any matter, has no parts or dimensions, is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses, and is more excellent than any other kind of existence."²
- "Thus, God does not have a physical body, nor is he made of any kind of matter like much of the rest of creation. Furthermore, God is not merely energy or thought or some other element of creation. He is also not like vapor or steam or air or space, all of which are created things: God's being is not like any of these. God's being is not even exactly like our own spirits, for these are created things that apparently are able to exist only in one place in one time. Instead of all these ideas of God, we must say that God is spirit. Whatever this means, it is a kind of existence that is unlike anything else in creation. It is a kind of existence that is far superior to all our material existence."³

¹ Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 609.

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 187-188.

³ *Ibid.*, 187.

- On the one hand, we should not think of God's existence as a spirit as meaning that he is infinitely large because all of God is present in every point in space at all times

Psalms 139:7-10 ~ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

Jeremiah 23:24 ~ "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

- On the other hand, we should not think of God's existence as a spirit as meaning that he is infinitely small because not place in the universe can contain him

2 Chronicles 2:6 ~ But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn incense before Him?

1 Kings 8:27 ~ But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

Isaiah 66:1 ~ Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"

- As a result, no matter how we understand God's existence as spirit, his being cannot be rightly thought of in terms of space

Explanation

- In the OT, God clearly demonstrated that he is spirit
 - He often appeared to his people as a formless fire to discourage them from attributing any physical form to him (Ex 3:2; 19:18; Deut 4:11-19)
 - The tabernacle that he instructed his people to make contained no image of him
 - He manifested his presence in the tabernacle by a glorious cloud (Ex 40:34-38) and did the same in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11)
 - Jonah learned that he could not escape God's presence (Jonah 1:3-4, 9-10, 17; 2:10; 3:10; 4:6-11)
- In the NT, the spirituality of God is underscored by a number of realities
 - Christ abolished the earthly temple and took his people as his living temple (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:20)
 - God makes his home inside of people all over the world (John 14:23)
 - God in Christ promised to be with his people at all times (Matt 18:15-20; 28:18-20)
 - "The triune God demonstrates through his church, a temple built of 'living stones,' that he is gloriously real – and yet not in a material, visible way, but as a Spirit who dwells therein. Therefore, Christ's declaration to the woman at the well anticipated the great change that would occur in the worship of the church under the gospel, as that which was physical and anticipatory gave way to the real and the spiritual."⁴
- Furthermore, Paul referred to God's spirituality when he argued with the philosophers on Mars Hill

⁴ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 607-608.

Acts 17:29 ~ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

- “God’s spirituality is crucial for the doctrine of the Trinity. If God were an embodied being by nature, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to believe that the one God is three persons, for they would have to inhabit either one body or exist as three bodies. God’s unity in Trinity is the oneness of his spiritual essence.”⁵

THE INVISIBILITY OF GOD

Definition

- Because God does not have a material body, He cannot be seen by human eyes
- The divine nature is not the object of physical sensation because God has not size, shape, or color that our eyes can behold him
- “God’s invisibility means that God’s total essence, all of his spiritual being, will never be able to be seen by us, yet God still shows himself to us through visible, created things.”⁶

John 6:46 ~ Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

1 John 4:12 ~ No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

- God’s total essence will never be able to be seen by us because his essence is invisible

Romans 1:20 ~ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

- It is by faith that we come to know and be known by this invisible God

Hebrews 11:27 ~ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Explanation

- Although God is himself invisible, he still shows something of himself to us through visible, created things
- We can know about God by examining the world that He has made

Psalms 19:1 ~ The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

- We can know about God by reading what the Bible says about Him

Psalms 119:27 ~ Make me understand the way of Your precepts, So I will meditate on Your wonders.

- We can know about God by entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ, who is God in human form

John 1:14 ~ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

⁵ Ibid., 610.

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 188.

John 14:9 ~ Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

- We can know about God by how his people interact with one another

1 John 4:12 ~ No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD BEING A SPIRIT

What About the Hope of Seeing God?

- True, the Scriptures say that men saw God

Jacob: Genesis 32:30 ~ So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”

Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the 70 elders: Exodus 24:10 ~ and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.

Isaiah: Isaiah 6:1 ~ In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

- But at the same time, no one is able to see God

Exodus 33:20 ~ But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”

John 1:18 ~ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Colossians 1:15 ~ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

1 Timothy 6:16 ~ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

- So, some of those of those occurrences involved people seeing manifestations of God’s presence, a theophany (pillar of cloud/fire, Moses seeing God’s “backside” in Ex 33, a reference to the afterglow of God’s illuminated glory but not God himself)
- Theophanies are not views of God’s essence but rather a sign that he is spiritually present
- No one has ever seen God the Father because he is a forever spirit; nor has anyone seen God the Holy Spirit
- In most of those occurrences, people saw a preincarnate appearance of Christ, a Christophany
- Long before Christ came to earth as a man, he had appeared by taking a bodily form
- Thus, Abraham encountered Christ (Gen 18:1-2), Jacob wrestled with the preincarnate Son of God (Gen 32), Joshua met Christ as the captain of the Lord’s host (Josh 5:13-15), and Daniel’s three friends saw Christ in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:25)
- Furthermore, every occurrence of “the angel of the Lord” in the OT is likely a reference to a preincarnate appearance of Christ (Ex 3:2-5; Judges 2:1; 6:11-12; 13:3)
- Additionally, Isaiah clearly saw a preincarnate appearance of Christ

Isaiah 6:1 ~ In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

John 12:41 ~ These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.

- But what about those promises that we as believers will see God?
- This has been called the “beatific vision” (i.e. “the sight that makes happy”), referring to the moment when we, at last, stand face to face before our God to perceive him fully
- Many texts speak of this hope of seeing God

Matthew 5:8 ~ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

1 Corinthians 13:12 ~ For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

1 John 3:2 ~ Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Revelation 22:4 ~ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

- In what way will we see God?
- Many Cxns have wrongly taken this to mean that, when we die, we will see God because He will become visible; however, this is impossible since God is invisible and will always remain invisible
- So, how will we see God?
- First, we will behold the resurrected Christ who is the image of the invisible God and who makes him known
- The man Christ Jesus is the gloriously invisible Creator now made gloriously visible as a human being
- So, we see in the Son’s face the reflection of the beauty, glory, and marvel of God’s being

John 1:18 ~ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

John 14:8-9 ~ Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Colossians 1:15, 19; 2:9 ~ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him...For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Hebrews 1:3 ~ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

- “For finite creatures, what more of God might there be for us to see than God himself having entered into our world, having put on our flesh and bone, and now transfigured in the glorified humanity of the world to come and presenting himself to us in love? In that moment, there could be nothing more. There could only be eternity to come to keep seeing ever more.”⁷
- Additionally, seeing God in the future may mean being able to behold more and more of God’s revealed nature as we are free from the limitations of sin
- “[In] heaven and in the eternal state, believers will not have any corruption caused by indwelling sin, so they will have a greater perception of God, because their spiritual vision will be greater. The statements about seeing God and his face in the future should be interpreted as relating to a comparatively greater spiritual vision of God’s revelation of himself, not as a physical vision of his essence. In the eternal state, the believer’s spiritual perception of God will reach beyond what physical senses can see.”⁸

⁷ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-will-see-his-face>

⁸ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 179.

- “Even the beatific vision of God in the kingdom...most likely will consist not of a sensory apprehension of his essence, but a glorious, experiential knowledge of God mediated through the incarnate Christ, his glorified people, the holy angels, and the new heavens and earth.”⁹

What About Anthropomorphisms?

- How are we to understand those passages in the Bible that portray God as having human body parts?

Eyes

2 Chronicles 16:9 ~ For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

1 Kings 8:29 ~ that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place.

Proverbs 15:3 ~ The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.

Hands

Ecclesiastes 9:1 ~ For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him.

Isaiah 65:2 ~ I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts,

Hebrews 1:10 ~ And, “YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

Ears

Nehemiah 1:6 ~ let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned.

Psalms 34:15 ~ The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are open to their cry.

Feet

Genesis 3:8 ~ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

- Further, how are we to understand those passages in the Bible that portray God as acting humanly?

Genesis 11:5 ~ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

Isaiah 42:13-14 ~ The LORD will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies. 14 I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant.

- Even though God reveals Himself in these human terms, we must understand that these expressions are figures of speech, given graciously to us to understand who God is

⁹ Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 614-615.

- God has described himself in these ways so that we can better grasp the incomprehensible truth about who he is and attempt to wrap our minds around the sheer magnitude of his divine being
- This is God accommodating himself to human weakness, revealing himself to us in ways that we can most easily understand
- These figures of speech in no way intend to communicate that God actually possesses physical body parts
- He is spirit, without flesh and bones and is, thus, not bound by the constraints and limitations of the human body
- “God does not possess a physical body with actual physical eyes, hands, ears, and feet. This imagery is used to reveal what God is *like*, not who God *is*. To say that God has hands means that He is powerful and strong. To say he has feet means that He moves about the earth and is everywhere. To say that He has eyes and ears means that He sees and hears everything.”¹⁰

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S SPIRITUALITY AND INVISIBILITY

Any Physical Representation of God is Inappropriate

- God’s spirituality prohibits idol worship because all forms of idolatry dishonor the living God who is a spirit

Exodus 20:4-6 ~ You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- To think of God in terms of anything else in his creation is to misrepresent him for any visual representation of God would be a distortion of his true identity
- Any picture, statue, or carving of Him who is invisible would only limit our thoughts about him
- Thus, any attempt to identify God with any material image is a grave offense against God’s glory and constitutes a gross misrepresentation of him
- The oft-repeated denunciations of idolatry throughout the OT are based upon the revealed fact that God is an invisible Spirit, not a corporeal being
- God is in no way limited by the aspects of a corporeal being; therefore, we must never embrace the errors of those who identify God with physical matter

He is Always with Us

- Because he is a spirit, God is able to be present everywhere at once (omnipresent, ubiquitous)
- Rather than being a limitation, God’s absence of a physical body is part of what makes Him the divine Lord of all
- Since He has no body, God is not subject to spatial constraints and can therefore be present in all places at all times
- Thus, we can be assured that wherever we go and no matter how alone we may feel, God is with us still

Psalm 46:1 ~ God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

Psalm 145:18 ~ The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

- God is always near to us and is always present to help us when we call out to Him

¹⁰ Steven Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, 65.

The Image of God in Man is Not Reflected in the Material

- The definition of “image of God” must include that which is unique to humanity and not shared by animals since those aspects that we share in common with animals cannot constitute what distinguishes us from them
- Because God is a spirit and has no body, the image of God in man cannot speak primarily of man’s physical body or what he looks like
- In fact, many of mankind’s physical traits do have much in common with animals (i.e. similar internal organs, similar skeletal structures, etc.)
- So, the image of God in man must primarily relate to his immaterial nature, things such as self-consciousness, moral consciousness, and consciousness of others, namely the mental and moral likeness of his soul to God
- Therefore, we must not deduce our knowledge of God by looking at mere humans
- Man’s physical body actually argues not for any material correlation to God but to the immaterial correlation
- “Man’s very posture, standing upright, distinguishes him from four-footed beasts and creeping things. The animals’ natural posture directs their gaze downward, toward the earth. Man, on the other hand, is naturally positioned to look upward, toward the heavens, where he can contemplate the glory of God displayed there...Our tongues, with their ability to form words and speak meaningful language, also reflect our likeness to God. Even our faces, with their naturally expressive eyes and a host of meaningful expressions are especially suited for relationships. So while the human body itself is neither the seat nor the primary expression of the image of God in man, even the body is specially made so that it can serve as a vehicle through which that image is manifest.”¹¹

Worship Must be Simple

- The worship of God is not primarily about visible things, but about invisible realities revealed in the Word
- Since Christ has done away with all old covenant rituals and ceremonies (Heb 8:13; 9:1-14), we have no need of temples, priests, and altars
- Any worship which focuses on holy days, ceremonies, rituals, or exaltation of the clergy distracts worshippers from Jesus Christ
- “The complex system of old covenant worship has been replaced with the simplicity of worship in spirit and truth, in which we read the Word, pray the Word, sing the Word, preach the Word, and see the Word made visible in baptism and the Lord’s supper. When people add sacred objects and actions (“human inventions”) to God’s ordained worship, they implicitly rebel against his spirituality and seek a sensual, material religion. Men naturally seek fleshly worship that pleases them instead of spiritual worship that is befitting God’s nature.”¹²
- This is the error of Roman Catholicism and all other religions driven by icons and ceremonies

Worship Must be Sincere

- Because is a spirit, any worship of him must be spiritual, not mechanical or cold

John 4:24 ~ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

¹¹ MacArthur, *Battle for the Beginning*, 164-166.

¹² Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 620-621.

- Any mindless worship, hypocritical lip service, or mere going through the motions does not honor God who is a spirit
- Rather, our hearts and minds must be thoroughly engaged as we consciously and reverently enter the presence of our awesome and majestic God
- It must be balanced worship...both spiritual and truthful, avoiding one without the other