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Lecture Series: The Doctrine of God
Lecture 4: “The Nature of God”

THE NATURE OF GOD

God is Spirit

“God is spirit” John 4:24. Before there was any creation, God existed as spirit. His own being is so very real that it was able to cause everything else to come into existence.

“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” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 188)

“A spirit does not have flesh and bones...” Luke 24:39 If God is spirit, He is immaterial and incorporeal. He has no natural body, no material body.

The Second Commandment, which forbids making any graven image or likeness of anything (Exodus 20:4), is based on the incorporeal (“having no body or form”) nature of God. So are the many commands against idolatry (Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 16:22).

What about the verses that speak of God as having hands (Isaiah 65:2), feet (Genesis 3:8), eyes (I Kings 8:29), ears (Psalm 34:15)? They are anthropomorphic and symbolic representations, which serve to make God real and to express His various activities.

God is Invisible

Deuteronomy 4:15-19—The Israelites “did not see any form” when the LORD appeared to them in Horeb and therefore, they were prohibited from making any image of Him. God told Moses that no man could see him and live (Exodus 33:20). John says “no man has seen God at any time” (John 1:18). Paul calls him “the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and declares that no man has seen him or can see him (I Timothy 6:16). There are Scriptures that indicate that the redeemed will some day see him (Psalm 17:15; Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:14; Revelation 22:4).

How about the Scriptures that say men saw God? Such as (Genesis 32:30; Exodus 3:6; 24:9ff; 33:11; Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 34:10 and Isaiah 6:1).

Men saw a reflection of God's glory, but they did not see his essence (Hebrews 1:3). No man has ever looked upon the face of God in his true essence. But man has looked upon his face and spoken mouth to mouth (Numbers 12:8) with God when God manifested himself in some form other than his true essence. A *theophany* is a manifestation of God in visible form. God appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1-33), Jacob (Genesis 32:28-30); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1) and others. Jacob said, after he had wrestled with a man, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30). "The Angel of the LORD" was a visible manifestation of God (Genesis 16:7-14); 18:13-33; 22:11-18; Exodus 3:2-5; Judges 6:11-23; I Kings 19:5-7; II Kings 19:35). It is to be noted that in certain of these passages "the Angel of the LORD" is identified as "the LORD" (cf. Genesis 16:11, 13; Exodus 3:2, 4; Judges 6:12,16). It is agreed among most Bible scholars that the Angel of the LORD is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself in pre-incarnate form.

God is Infinite and Personal

In the teaching of the Bible God is both infinite and personal: he is *infinite* in that he is not subject to any of the limitations of humanity, or of creation in general. He is far greater than everything he has made, far greater than anything else that exists. But he is also *personal*: he interacts with us as a person and we can relate to him as persons. We can pray to him, worship him, obey him, and love him, and he can speak to us, rejoice in us, and love us. (See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 167).

Apart from the true religion found in the Bible, no system of religion has a God who is both infinite and personal. For example, the gods of ancient **Greek and Roman mythology** were personal (they interacted frequently with people), but they were not infinite: they had weaknesses and frequent moral failures, even petty rivalries. On the other hand **Deism** portrays God as infinite but far too removed from the world to be personally involved in it. **Pantheism** holds that God is infinite (since the whole universe is thought to be God), but such a God can certainly not be personal or relate to us as persons.

In man, personality and corporeity (having a body) are united in one individual for the period of this life. At death this relationship is severed; the body goes into corruption, but the personality survives. At the resurrection the personality is again embodied and the normal constitution of man is restored.

But in God there is a personality without corporeity. The essence of personality is self-consciousness (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 45:5; I Corinthians 2:10) and self-determination (Job 23:13; Romans 9:11; Ephesians 1:9, 11; Hebrews 6:17) which God has.

God possesses the characteristics of personality: intellect (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 3:7); Acts 15:18) emotions (Genesis 6:6; Psalm 103:8-14; John 3:16) will (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 115:3; John 6:38).

Furthermore, the Bible ascribes qualities of personality to God:

Speaking (Genesis 1:3)

Seeing (Genesis 11:5)

Hearing (Psalm 94:9)

Grieving (Genesis 6:6)

Repenting (Genesis 6:6)

Being angry (Deuteronomy 1:37)

He is the Creator of all things (Acts 14:15)

He is the upholder of all things (Nehemiah 9:6)

He is the ruler of all things (Psalm 75:7)

He is the sustainer of all things (Psalm 104:27-30)

We must affirm both that God is **infinite** (or unlimited) with respect to change that occurs in the universe (nothing will change God's being, perfections, purposes, or promises), that God is also **personal**, and that he relates to us personally and counts us valuable.

God is Eternal

He is without beginning or end; He is free from all succession of time, and He is the cause of time (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; Psalm 102:27; Isaiah 57:15; I Timothy 6:16).

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