

2-2018

God is Spirit

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "God is Spirit" (2018). *The Three-in-One File*. 33.

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GOD IS SPIRIT

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24, NIV).

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psa. 139:7)

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24, 25).

Emery Bancroft has written:

“God as Spirit is incorporeal, invisible, without material substance, without physical parts or passions and therefore free from all temporal limitations” (Elemental Theory, p. 23).

Some have been disturbed as they compare these statements with certain Old Testament expressions that speak of God’s arms (Deut. 33:27), his eyes (Psa. 33:18), his ears (2 Kings 19:16), and his mouth (Isa. 58:14). However, these terms are simply anthropomorphic expressions, terms used to explain some function or characteristic of God by using words descriptive of human elements. Robert Lightner writes: “Such expressions do not mean that God possesses these physical parts. He is Spirit (John 4:24). Rather, they mean since God is Spirit and eternal, He is capable of doing precisely the functions which are performed by these physical properties in man” (*The God of the Bible*, p. 67).

We begin with a common myth, followed by a myth buster.

- The myth:

If God is said to be a Spirit, then He can rightly be thought of as a good-natured, celestial Casper the Ghost figure.

This concept of course comes from the popular 1995 Hollywood film, *Casper, the Friendly Ghost*. According to the movie, Casper (full name, Casper McFadden) was a twelve-year old boy living in New York who was sledding in the snow but who stayed out too long and died of pneumonia. However, he is somehow able to return as a ghost. In fact he first appeared upon the scene in 1936 in a children’s book and later in an animated cartoon on *The Friendly Ghost*. Thus, one of the little songs honoring him in those early days read:

Casper, the friendly ghost, the friendliest ghost you know.

Though grown-ups might look at him with fright,

The children all love him so!

But there’s even more . . .

Casper’s popularity afforded him the kind of exposure that was sure to give him lots of friends, even if it was with the Hollywood set. But, it did him, and others, a lot of good. By the middle of the next decade, Casper was the ‘spooks’-person for UNICEF, as well as

a pitchman for General Electric, the Apollo 16 flight to the moon, Major League Baseball's National League, the American Dental Association, the Boy Scouts of America, and even....Chex.

So, a little respect, please. I mean Casper is not just a ghoulish ghost, but rather a full-fledged spook! Well, whatever, this *Hollywood* fable is light years removed from the *Holy Word* fact in regard to the title, GOD IS SPIRIT!

- The myth buster:

Let's begin the debunking by observing Jesus' statement to a Samaritan woman:

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:24).

It is vital to note what the Savior did *not* say. He did not say "God is a spirit," but rather, "God is Spirit!" which does not limit Him to any one place at any one time (as would be the case for Casper) but rather is everywhere, at all times in His full presence! (Don't even try to understand, friend, just accept it.)

So, just what all is involved here?

- What this attribute does not mean:

It does not imply God is made of pure thought or energy, or of vapor, steam, space or air, it does not infer God consists of some exotic and unknown refined or radically altered form of either matter or anti-matter.

We would search in vain to locate a single proton, neutron, or electron (the three elements in an atom) in His entire being. Some, however, might argue that air can be likened to spirit. After all, it is invisible, universal, and the same everywhere. However, this is far from the truth.

A. In the first place, air (as we know it) is decidedly not universal. It does not exist in outer space but is confined to planet Earth.

B. In the second place, air is not always the same. There is cold air, hot air, polluted air, etc.

- What this attribute does mean:

It means that God exists as a pure and perfect Spirit Being, not having size or dimensions. Thus, the very nature of His existence is the ultimate existence, far superior to and totally different from anything He has created.

So then, the bottom line is His Personhood. God is essentially a spiritual Being rather than a physical being. Now, consider this: A spiritual being is also, by nature, an *invisible* being. (See Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17.)

Why? Well, all physical objects reflect light, thus allowing them to be seen. But a non-material one has nothing to reflect. And herein lays a glorious paradox – this spiritual, invisible being is both the Source and Giver of all light! He *is* light, He *provides* light! In fact, His first recorded words were: *"Let there be light"* (Gen. 1:3).

He is light (see Hab. 3:4; James 1:17; 1 Peter 2:19; 1 John 1:5).

He gives light (Psa. 27:1; 36:9; 78:14; 119:105; Isa. 60:20; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Furthermore, His Son Jesus came to function as the light of this world of darkness (Luke 2:32; 21:23; Matt. 14:16; 17:2; John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; Rev. 21:23).

One final thought: The basic reason why God strictly forbade the making of idols was simply this – His spiritual, non-material Being could not possibly be represented by any wooden, silver, or gold material! To the contrary, this would seem to be Satan’s attempts to degrade Him in the eyes of human beings.

Paul warns about this in the book of Romans:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth... For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:18, 21-23, ESV).

So what is the intended lesson to be learned from those words? Simply this—ingratitude can lead to idolatry.