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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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August 2012 • Volume XIV, Issue 4

## **The Spirituality of God (1)**

The problem with the Samaritan woman, at least in the first half of John 4, is that she has not grasped the spirituality of God. The Lord Jesus speaks to her about “living water” (10), but she thinks He needs a bucket to reach the bottom of the well (11). She misses the point that Christ is the living water! He tells her that this water springs up to “everlasting life” (14), but she reckons that this will stop her from thirsting so that she will no longer have to make trips to the well (15). She is overly enamoured with places connected to religious figures and history: Jacob’s well (12) and Mt. Gerizim where “our fathers worshipped” (20). But Jesus declares that she and the Samaritans in general did not even know what they were worshipping (22)! This woman has divorced and remarried several times, she has had five different husbands and the man with whom she is currently living she has not even bothered to marry (17-18). Yet she thinks she can worship the true and holy God at Mt. Gerizim! It is in this context and in order to correct her misconceptions that the Lord Jesus makes the greatest statement in all the Bible about the spirituality of God and His worship: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (24).

What is meant by God’s being “spirit” or His spirituality? Very simply, it means that He is not material or physical, even in the tiniest degree. He does not consist of any material or physical parts—there are no parts in God anyway!—for God is entirely immaterial and non-physical. He is wholly spirit, pure spirit.

God is not a solid or a liquid (obviously); He is not even a gas. He is pure spirit (not to be confused with an extremely fine gas).

What about God’s spirituality and man’s five senses? You cannot feel Jehovah with your fingers or smell Him with your nose. You cannot see God with your eyes; He is invisible. You cannot hear the Most High with your ears; He is inaudible. Even the voice that Israel heard at Mt. Sinai declaring the ten commandments was a created sound. Finally, you cannot taste God either. But what, someone objects, about Psalm 34:8: “O taste and see that the Lord is good”? This is not referring to tasting God with the mouth or seeing Him with the eyes. This is perceiving and knowing Him by faith through the Word so as to fellowship with, love and enjoy Him. God is spirit, pure spirit, infinitely exalted above our puny five senses, yet known with great certainty and blessedness by believers in the crucified and risen Christ.

But what about other entities spoken of as “spirits” in the Bible? Man has a spirit, being both body and soul (spirit, mind, heart). Man’s soul or spirit is created, finite (existing in this life within and not outside his body) and sinful (at least in this world), whereas the Almighty is

uncreated spirit, infinite spirit and spotlessly pure spirit.

Angels are spirits, as Hebrews 1:14 asks rhetorically, “Are they not all ministering spirits?” (cf. Ps. 104:4). As spirits and only spirits, angels are not joined to a physical body, unlike man; they are much more knowledgeable, powerful and swift than man. The elect, unfallen angels are sinless (I Tim. 5:21). But even the mighty angels, whether elect angels or reprobate angels, are still created and finite spirits.

Unlike men and angels, God is uncreated spirit. He is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent spirit; the perfectly holy, just and good spirit. There is not a broad generic category called “spirit” in which God also fits. Man’s soul is spirit and angels are spirits, both finite and created spirits. However, Jehovah is infinitely higher spirit for He alone is uncreated, eternal and absolutely righteous spirit.

What about God as spirit and the Holy Spirit? God’s being a spirit concerns His essence or being or nature. God is spirit and so the Father is spirit, the Son is spirit and the Holy Ghost is spirit. However, when we speak of the Holy Spirit, we are not talking about the divine essence or nature as such. Here we are speaking of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity as regards His distinctive personal characteristic. He is spirited or breathed forth from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father, as the eternal, divine and personal breath of the First and Second Persons.

God’s glorious perfection as pure spirit very obviously accords with especially some of His other attributes. First, God’s spirituality goes hand in hand with His unity. If God is in any way material or physical, then He must consist of parts and therefore He cannot be absolutely one or simple or united. But since God is pure spirit and not material, He can be and is absolutely simple, one and united. Perhaps this is why the unity of God is intimately linked to the spirituality of God at the very start of *Belgic Confession* 1: “We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God.”

Second, God’s spirituality necessitates His invisibility. Because God is pure spirit, He must be and is invisible. No technological marvel can ever be devised whereby God, who is spirit, could be seen by a creature. Remember the Russian astronaut who declared from outer space that God was nowhere to be seen, as if He did not exist. This was merely an instance of anti-Christian propaganda from a mouthpiece of communistic atheism. God, by definition, is spirit and invisible; of course, He cannot be seen!

Third, as spirit, God is omnipresent. Just think for a moment if God were both omnipresent and material (i.e., not spirit). Then He would fill the universe so that nothing else could exist, because matter fills its own space, for if God were physical and everywhere then there would be no room for anything else! However, being uncreated, immaterial spirit, the Most High is present everywhere and yet displaces nothing!

Fourth, God’s spirituality is necessary for His omnipotence. Think of it this way: man is body and spirit and so possesses physical and mental powers; angels, as spirits, are much more powerful and clever; as pure uncreated spirit, Jehovah is all powerful.

All this and more is included in Christ's profound affirmation that God is spirit! This great truth we shall consider more fully next time, DV. *Rev. Stewart*

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## **God's Sovereignty in Sanctification**

Question: "Is sanctification generally monergistic or synergistic? Or can we believe it monergistic in a definitive sense and synergistic in its progressive activity? Am I in error if I believe sanctification is monergistic? Or am I getting into Arminianism if I believe sanctification is synergistic? To define terms: if monergism is to mean God alone is the sovereign cause of our salvation and synergism is that we cooperate/participate in this cause, are these terms even appropriate in your opinion to be used in the doctrine of sanctification?"

The text to which the writer refers is Philippians 2:12-13: "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The answer to the writer's question is: Sanctification is absolutely monergistic in its definitive sense and in its progressive sense. Let me explain.

There are those to whom the writer evidently refers who teach that, although God graciously and without human aid begins the work of sanctification in the heart of the elect sinner, God, having begun the work, now leaves the sinner to maintain that work of sanctification and increase its influence in his life. God begins the work; the sanctified man carries that work out by his own efforts.

The justification for this position is supposed to be that the text admonishes one who is saved to work out his salvation. And because an admonition implies man's ability to do what is commanded, therefore, the on-going work of sanctification (working out one's own salvation) is man's work. God gets it started; man must complete it. This is indeed Arminianism of the worst kind.

Sanctification is the work of God by means of which, and through the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ, Jehovah cleanses His people from their total depravity and makes them holy as He is holy.

Sanctification is, however, a work which God performs only in principle in our life in the world. That is, our hearts are made holy. Our hearts are the moral centre of our whole nature (Prov. 4:23). Our natures remain depraved, while our hearts are cleansed from sin. Nevertheless, the holiness that now characterizes our hearts has great influence on our natures, for the Spirit works sanctification in our hearts and gives sanctification its power to have dominion over the activities of our natures.

Perhaps a rough and inadequate analogy would be the relation between an owner of a pit bull and the dog itself. The owner can, with a strong leash, hold the pit bull in check, just as the Holy

Spirit, through the sanctified heart holds our natures from committing many sins. The owner of a pit bull can even train the animal to obey his commands, just as the Holy Spirit enables our natures, contrary to their depravity, to obey God.

Yet it remains true that, as the *Heidelberg Catechism* says, we “have only a small beginning of [the new] obedience” (A. 114) and “our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin” (A. 62). We must wait for our deaths for sanctification to be completed in our souls, and for Christ’s coming at the end of this age for sanctification to be completed in our bodies.

All is the work of God through the Spirit of Christ. Not one thing is left to us.

But why then the admonition: “Work out your own salvation”?

We ought to notice first of all the little word “for” with which verse 13 begins. If the text read “Work out your own salvation ... although it is God which worketh in you,” the text would support antinomianism, that is, the idea that we cannot take the admonition seriously because we are unable to obey it.

If the text read, “Work out your own salvation ... and it is God which worketh in you,” the text would be Arminian because it would teach synergism, that is, the heresy that God and man work together to accomplish salvation. I am reminded of a secondary school which called itself Christian that had as a motto for the graduation of seniors, “Do your best and let God do the rest.”

But the text says, “Work out your own salvation ... For it is God which worketh in you.” The word “for” means “because:” we are to work out our salvation because God works in us. That is, we are to work out our salvation because God gives us all we need to do it and enables us to do it.

About this the text is emphatic. God works in us the willing; we are made willing to work out our salvation. We want to do it. We want, sometimes desperately, to do it. And the will must be there before anything else.

But God does more; He also works in us the doing. That is strong language. God Himself performs the actual doing. He doesn’t leave the doing of working out our own salvation to us, but He does that too. There isn’t anything more to do. God does it all.

And yet we are admonished to do it, and we actually do what He commands. How is this possible? The answer lies in the last part of Philippians 2:13: “of his good pleasure.” That is, God has a purpose in saving us. That purpose is the glory of His own name. He accomplishes that purpose by enabling us to do good works—work out our own salvation. He does the willing and the doing. But He does it through us. He does it through us so that we do it. He does it through us as a mother teaches her child to walk: giving the child the desire to walk, keeping the child upright by holding its little hands and moving one foot at a time forward step by step.

We have the privilege of being used by God to accomplish His purpose in our salvation by

working Himself what we must do, but always in and through us.

It is as my pastor of old times used to say, “We do not ride to heaven in the lower bunk of a Pullman sleeper.” Or as Augustine many, many centuries ago put it, “Give what Thou dost command, and command what Thou wilt.” *Prof. Hanko*