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The Spirituality of God (2)

God's spirituality (John 4:24) not only very obviously accords with especially some of His other attributes (unity, invisibility, omnipresence and omnipotence); it is also necessary for the truth of the Holy Trinity. If God were not pure spirit, if God were even in part material or physical, then the three Persons would cause a division in the Godhead, the heresy of tritheism (three gods)! The one true God exists in three Persons only because His Being is one (God's unity) and His Being is spirit (God's spirituality).

This truth of God's spirituality rules out various unbelieving worldviews. First, materialism proclaims that everything consists of matter and motion. But this is false for God is spirit (not matter) and angels are spirits (not matter) and men have spirits (which are not matter). Materialism is very popular in our day, being the worldview of atheists and of most evolutionists. Second, pantheism maintains that all (*pan*) is God (*theism*). But the material universe is not God since God is spirit. Third, according to panentheism, all (*pan*) is in (*en*) God (*theism*). It claims that the material universe is, as it were, God's body which is animated by God's soul or spirit. But God is wholly spirit and not partly matter.

Now we are in a position to understand the anthropomorphisms in the Bible, those representations of God as if He were a man. In the Scriptures, we read of God's eyes, ears, nose, nostrils and mouth; God's arms, hands and fingers; God's soul. So is Jehovah physical and in the form of a man? Despite all we have said in this and the last issue of the *News!* Holy Writ also speaks of God as having wings and feathers like a bird (Ps. 91:4). But how can He be both in the form of a man and in the form of a bird! Moreover, in Psalm 18:2, David declares, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." So is God in the form of a man and a bird and a rock and a fortress and a buckler (or shield) and a horn and a high tower? How can He be in the form of all these things at once?

You understand, of course, that these are metaphorical references to the Almighty. He is like a fortress who defends us. He shelters us as a bird would under His feathery wings. God's power is signified by His arms. His omniscience or infinite knowledge is represented by His all-seeing eyes. God's putting the planets in place by His fingers bespeaks His skilful and precise craftsmanship (Ps. 8:3).

It is our Lord Jesus Christ who supremely taught the spirituality of God. "No man hath seen God at any time [because He is invisible and spiritual]; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).

In connection with His affirmation that God is spirit (John 4:24), Jesus declared twice that the Father must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" (23, 24). Significantly, Christ cleansed the temple both at the start of His public ministry (John 2:13ff.) and at the end of His public ministry (Matt. 21:12ff.). Twice in Matthew's gospel Christ declared, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (9:13; 12:7), quoting Hosea 6:6, and He told the self-righteous Pharisees, who were deeply concerned with externals, "But go ye and learn what that meaneth" (Matt. 9:13). Similarly, Christ denounced the Jewish religious leaders and the blind people who followed them for their merely formal and outward worship (Matt. 23; Mark 7:1-23). The truth of the spirituality of God fits perfectly with Christ's great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37). In keeping with this, the Lord Jesus explained the spirituality of God's law, especially in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

God's spirituality explains Christ's spiritual evangelism. The rich young ruler thought he had kept God's law (Mark 10:17-27), but his problem was covetousness: the love of money and what it can buy. To expose this sinful inward desire, Christ commanded him to sell all that he possessed (21). Nicodemus also held high office in Israel, but this did not save him. The Lord said to him and to fallen man in general, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

Most of those who followed Christ in John 6 were carnal people, who merely desired food for their bellies and exciting miracles. To them Jesus declared, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak

unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (63). Thus He explained Himself as the bread of life (35) and salvation as eating His flesh and drinking His blood (53-56), which no one can do but by the sovereign grace of God, for the Lord explained, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (44). Many of the people left Him (66) for they did not want a spiritual Christ and His spiritual salvation bringing the knowledge of the God who is spirit.

However, Christ especially teaches the spirituality of God by His cross. Yes, there were physical and historical events. Our Lord was betrayed, arrested, tried, scourged and publicly crucified. But much deeper and more awful than Christ's physical sufferings at the hands of men is His enduring the terrible wrath of God and so bearing the punishment which was due to His elect. Through this spiritual battle, the Lord Jesus defeated the invisible power of Satan and the demons, and triumphed over the law and sin and death.

God's infinite, eternal and unchangeable justice, holiness, righteousness, love, mercy and grace met at the cross, for it is there that God particularly reveals—and we can most clearly see—His absolute harmony and unity as the God who is spirit. The cross shows God to be perfectly spiritual and not in any way material because it reveals Him as powerful, just, wise, holy, true, loving, unchangeable and merciful—all spiritual qualities. *Rev. Stewart*

Leaving the Faith

A reader writes, "I am trying to interpret I Timothy 5:5-16. What does Paul mean when he says, 'But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth' in verse 6? What does Paul mean when he says, 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' in verse 8? What does Paul mean when he says, 'But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith ... For some are already turned aside after Satan' in verses 11, 12 and 15? I know that this does not mean that believers apostatize. I know that the many other passages that speak of God's grace, salvation by grace and perseverance refute any claim that this passage refers to true Christians apostatizing. But I am having difficulty properly explaining it and finding clearer passages that clarify this passage. Perhaps the answer lies within the context of this passage, but my understanding is fruitless for now."

I thank the reader who sent in this question, for he calls to our attention a passage that is often misinterpreted; and, indeed, such passages are often used by Arminians to support their erroneous notion of a falling away of true saints. It is good that we be clear on this point.

The author of the above question does not hesitate to state his firm faith in the truth of the perseverance of the saints. This is good, for we need not take the time to prove this crucial doctrine of Scripture. I only point out, somewhat in passing, that already the great church father, Augustine (354-430), held to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and wrote a famous book entitled *On the Gift of Perseverance*. It was written shortly before he died and was a sequel to a book on divine predestination. Augustine wrote it to refute the error of the Pelagians. The Roman Catholic Church adopted the position of the Pelagians or Semi-Pelagians in preference to the teachings of Augustine and so went further and further down the road of apostasy.

The questioner, committed to the truth of the preservation of the saints, wants to know how it is possible that people who are designated as Christians can apostatize, lose their faith and perish everlastingly. This seems to be the interpretation of the passage in I Timothy 5:5-16. The passage speaks of those who are members of the church. They deny the faith (8), are worse than an infidel (8), wax wanton against Christ (11), and suffer damnation (12). They cast off their first faith (12) and are turned aside after Satan (15).

But a passage such as this one is not alone in Scripture. An even more striking text is II Peter 2:1: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." This verse speaks even more emphatically of false prophets who are said to have been purchased by the Lord.

These passages underscore a fact concerning the church of Christ in this world in her visible form. Not all those who belong to the church, even a faithful church that bears the marks of the true church, are true believers. Many are in the church, but not of the church. To use Paul's words in Romans 9:6, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Some are in the church because God, who has promised to save us and our children, has not promised to save all our children. There is now, as in the old dispensation, a carnal seed. Also some join the church from outside for reasons other than conviction of the truth: they marry someone from the church; they find themselves in circumstances where it is convenient to join the church; they are temporarily struck by the beauties and blessedness of the truth (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21; Heb. 6:4-5).

The point is, however, that, although they are members of the church, they are not true people of God. They appear to be genuine Christians; they confess outwardly the same truth that the church confesses; they may even be active in church work and may even serve as office-bearers in the congregation. But, for reasons known only to them, all their life is an empty sham and sooner or later, for one reason or another, they leave the church. Scripture speaks in many passages of such people.

There is an important point here. Jesus recognizes this fact in his parable of the tares in the field (Matt 13: (Ps. 8:3) 24-30, 36-43). Not only must the field workers understand that the tares must remain until the harvest, but other Scriptures tell us that this carnal seed serves a good purpose in the church. Scripture uses, for example, the figure of wheat. The kernels, the only good part of the wheat, need the roots, the stalk, the chaff until the harvest when the two are separated.

The truth that wicked people are found in the church is a reason why the gospel must always be accompanied with admonitions. Part of the reason is, of course, that the people of God are very prone to sin and must constantly be called back to the path of righteousness. But the reason for admonitions is also to warn the wicked of their certain judgment when they refuse to heed the call of the gospel and its command to repent of sin and believe in Christ. They must be confronted with the demands of the gospel, so that, when God's judgment comes on them, it is evident to all that this divine judgment is a righteous judgment.

Perhaps a word yet about the woman who "is dead while she liveth" (I Tim. 5:6). The meaning is that while she is physically alive in the church, she is nevertheless spiritually dead. It too points to the presence of wicked members in the church.

In the passage in I Timothy 5, the church is also pointed to its obligations with respect to widows and is warned against giving too much responsibility to younger women. Further, families are warned of their obligations towards needy members of their own family, such as aged parents who need their assistance (4, 8, 16). *Prof. Hanko*

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