

THEISM

God Is Spirit

Jesus taught that “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit. . . .” (John 4:24). Since God is spirit, then our understanding of spiritual nature can enhance our understanding of God. That which is spiritual may be partially understood by contrasting it with that which is physical. Physical bodies are material and generally visible. Physical bodies are limited in the amount of space they can occupy. Physical bodies are finite, temporal and always changing. Living physical bodies are born, mature, and then eventually die. Non-living physical bodies are created, utilized, and then eventually decay. Unlike the physical, the spiritual is immaterial, invisible, spatially unlimited, eternal, infinite, and unchanging. To characterize God as spiritual is therefore to recognize that he is immaterial, invisible, omnipresent (i.e., everywhere), eternal, finite, and unchanging. To elaborate . . . :

God is immaterial. Jesus recognized God’s immateriality when he once responded to the Pharisees by saying, “if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). The kingdom of God is spiritual rather than physical. Jesus told Pilate that, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight . . . my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). The Apostle Paul observed that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Jesus said, “A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:39). Biblical wording that attributes to God such things as a face (Exodus 33:23; Isaiah 59:2), nostrils (Exodus 15:8), a back (Exodus 33:23), feet (Exodus 24:10), arms (Deuteronomy 33:27), hands (Exodus 33:23; Isaiah 59:1), ears (Isaiah 59:1), eyes, eyelids (Psalm 11:4), feathers, and wings (Psalms 91:4) must therefore be understood only as figurative.

God is invisible. Since the creation of the world, God’s “invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). By faith, Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh, “for he endured as seeing him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). God told Moses that “no man shall see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). The Apostle John wrote that “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18). The Apostle Paul told the Colossians that the Son of God is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Paul told Timothy that God dwells “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16).

God is everywhere. After Solomon built a temple to God, he noted in his prayer to God that, “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God asked, “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:24). Stephen quoted Isaiah, saying, “The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me? says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Has my hand not made all these things?’” (Acts 7:48-50, 17:24; Isaiah 66:1). The Apostle Paul observed that “He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28).

God is eternal, i.e., immortal. Abraham recognized the eternity of God. He “planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33). The eternally present God described himself to Moses as “I AM who I AM” (Exodus 3:14). God is always present, having had no beginning nor to have any ending. When Moses blessed the children of Israel, he assured them, saying, “The eternal God is your refuge,

and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27). Isaiah declared that the “High and Lofty One” “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15). Jeremiah understood that “The LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King” (Jeremiah 10:10). The Psalmist understood that “before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Psalm 90:2). The Apostle Paul acknowledged that God “alone has immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16). Paul also described God as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible” (1 Timothy 1:17).

God is infinite. God’s character attributes are immeasurable. For example, “the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:17). It is “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). Isaiah noted that God’s strength and understanding are limitless. He asked, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28). When the Israelites plotted evil and seemed unconcerned about judgment, the prophet Micah asked rhetorically, “Is the Spirit of the Lord restricted” (Micah 2:7). God’s power is infinite. Three times Jesus said that with God, “all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; 14:36).

God is unchanging. When Job desired to defend himself in the presence of God, he described God as “unique” and asked, “who can make him change?” (Job 23:13). Because the people of Israel sinned after they returned from Babylonian exile, God reminded them of impending judgment through the prophet Malachi. He said, “I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob (Malachi 3:6). God does not lie. “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19; see also 1 Samuel 15:29). When God determined to show “the immutability of His counsel,” he “confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:17-18). The Spirit of truth “proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26).

While various aspects of the spirit may be partially understood, “no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11). And yet, “we have received . . . the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). The spirit of God is given to obedient believers (Acts 2:38). “The Holy Spirit of promise” is the “guarantee of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13-14). “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9; Isaiah 64:4).

Recognizing in limited fashion the good and gracious spirit of God, worshippers come to him in a spirit of humility (Micah 6:8), obedience (Matthew 15:1-9; see also Mark 7:1-13) and faith (Hebrews 11:6); having reconciled themselves to whomever they may have had discord (Matthew 5:23-24). Lifting up “holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:8), people of God are like the “four living creatures” who proclaimed around the throne of God, “Holy, holy, holy; Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.” Worshippers exclaim in awe and great reverence, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:8, 11).