

The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

Lesson #4 – God’s Immateriality²³⁰⁴

God created the heavens and the earth (the universe). Before He created the universe, there was no matter, there was no energy, there were no dimensions of space, there was no time (1 Tim 1:8-11 & Titus 1:1-3), and there were no laws that govern a universe. Anything outside of that universe, is beyond our ability to comprehend in this life. Jesus said: “*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*”²⁴ *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”²⁵ *The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”*²⁶ *Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”* **Jn 4:23-26**

spirit πνεῦμα *pneuma* (Str. 4151) 379x 2nd of 5 different meanings in the NT: “- - - that which animates or gives life to the body, the human spirit in general. It can also refer to the human person insofar as he or she belongs to and interacts with the spiritual realm. In this sense the human spirit is that aspect of a person through which God most immediately encounters him or her or where a person is most immediately open and responsive to God.” **William D. Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words.** p. 676

See Supplemental Handout, file #1900; What is the difference between the soul and spirit of humanity?

I. Definition of God’s Immateriality

God is transcendent, meaning He is not part of His creation. He is not of His own created order. He is not like anything that we have ever seen or touched or heard or tasted. Theologians say that God is immaterial, meaning not of this universe or the things of this universe. What God is, is revealed to us by Scripture to the degree that we can even possibly understand Him.

Scripture tells us what He is not with regard to the material universe, but we are not capable of comprehending what He is since we have never experienced dimensions where or what He is.

“Most theologians today hold that God is noncorporeal (does not have a body). One of the clearest passages from Scriptures is Luke 24:39, ‘Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’

Jesus makes it clear that a spirit cannot be of flesh and bones (also see Numbers 23:19; Hosea 11:9; Job 9:32; Jeremiah 23:24; 1 Kings 8:27).

Also, one must also take notice of the second commandment which prohibits fashioning *any* image of God (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:15-16). God is never to be thought of as an image, and instead is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Therefore, God cannot have a body.

“No property of matter may be ascribed to him. He has no extension in space, no weight, no mass, no bulk, no parts, no form, no taste, no smell. He is invisible (1 Tim 1:17; 6:16) and, being one in essence and without parts, is indivisible...” (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 167). Charles Hodge adds that,

‘He is not extended or divisible, or compounded, or visible, or tangible... The Bible everywhere recognizes as true the intuitive convictions of men. One of those convictions is that spirit is not matter, or matter spirit; that different and incompatible attributes cannot belong to the same substance. In revealing, therefore, to us that God is a Spirit, it reveals to us that no attribute of matter can be predicated of the divine essence” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 378-379).”

Theopedia web site on the Immateriality of God.

Categorical Discussions:

Is this an Existential or Relational Category? God’s immateriality is an existential attribute. We are material. We are made of the dust of the earth. We are flesh and blood created in some mysterious way to be in the image of God. We are not His physical likeness. That’s why the second commandment declares that we - - - *shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship or serve them; for I the LORD your God, am a jealous God, - - -* (Ex 20:4-6)

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Rom 8:14-17 *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

NOTE: All 3 of these mentions of "spirit" are the same as discussion preceding Roman Numeral #I above.

Is this an Incommunicable or Communicable Category? God's immateriality is an incommunicable attribute. We are physical. Although we who are in Christ have a spirit nature. We have a spirit and we live by the Holy Spirit's power, yet in this life we are altogether different than God. We are called to be Christ-like, but Christ was God incarnate and we could better relate to Him as a human being.

Problem Statement: As physical beings, we cannot conceive of God in ways that we can readily relate to as natural men and women. If we try to conceive of a God that the natural fallen man can relate to, we are immediately creating a mental idol. We must not fall back on the images of art, experience, analogy with the natural world, or our own imaginations to create an image of God that we can imagine. In so doing (creating an image) we are denying many, many aspects of the glory of God.

Our understanding of God must be driven by Scriptural descriptions only. This understanding must be driven by all that Scripture provides to us so that we might not sin in neglecting the whole glory of God that has been provided to us by Scripture.

II. Logic and Importance of God's Immateriality

God is Spirit and thus He is invisible to us. These are two sub-attributes that add some clarification to what is meant when we say that He is "immaterial". The importance of the word "immaterial" is not that it tells us much about God, but that it differentiates God from us and from the rest of His universe. He is not part of the universe, but rather is the prime cause and mover of the whole universe.

Note: It is important to note that the Scriptures use "anthropomorphisms" to describe God.

Dictionary definition – "The attribution of human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena." (or regarding the supernatural God of Scripture).

Examples include Scripture speaking of God's repentance, His hand, His eyes, His mighty arm, etc. Gen 6:5-8; Job 10:4-7; Job 14:3; Job 34:21; Ps 89:10; Jer 21:5; etc.

Anthropomorphisms do not detract from the practice of interpreting the Scriptures "literally".

III. Scriptural Basis of God's Immateriality –

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are quoted from the New American Standard Updated version (NASU)
Some verses pertinent to this goal of knowing of God's Immateriality:

Gen 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* (clearly speaking of the material world which God is not part of) (also clearly infers God's transcendence)

Job 23:8-16 *Behold, I go forward but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; ⁹when He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him; He turns on the right, I cannot see Him. ¹⁰But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. ¹¹My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. ¹²I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. ¹³But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, that He does. ¹⁴For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with Him. ¹⁵Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence; when I consider, I am terrified of Him. ¹⁶It is God who has made my heart faint, and the Almighty who has dismayed me,*

Speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus says:

John 4:23-26 *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."*

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Ex 20:4-5a *You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, - -*

Ex 34:11-17 *Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. ¹²Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim — ¹⁴for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God — ¹⁵otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods. ¹⁷You shall make for yourself no molten gods.*

God is a Spirit God, not a physical God having no a physical likeness! Any physical depiction of God is an idol and is thus strictly forbidden as idolatry.

“**YHWH**” is the “Tetragrammaton” generally translated as Jehovah, Yahweh, or LORD in most Bibles.

John 1:3-5 *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

Rom 1:18-25 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

2 Cor 3:15-18 *But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; ¹⁶but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

Col 1:15-20 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

1 Tim 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Tim 6:13-16 *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which He will bring about at the proper time — He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone*

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possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

IV. Important Points About God's Immateriality

1st How God's Immateriality Relates to Other Attributes

Because God is altogether different than us, not part of His own created order, He is Incomprehensible to us. God is Transcendent (beyond the universe in all elements), God is Eternal (the universe is not), God's Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence are all related to His Immateriality, to God's Sovereignty, and to His Providence.

2nd Why God's Immateriality is Important to Our Faith

The created order consists of matter, of energy, of dimensions of space, the dimension of time, and of God's laws of nature. They are not eternal, they did not exist before God spoke them into existence. God is Transcendent over His own creations. He preceded His two creations (orders of the angels and the material universe).

It is essentially impossible for us to imagine what God is like, because anything and everything we know of is from His creation. We cannot imagine or comprehend what God in His transcendence is like. Nevertheless, we are left with God's holy Word as our source of knowledge of what God is like in descriptive form. The General Revelation (created order of the universe) leaves us (mankind) without excuse before the face of God. See Rom 1:18-25, Ps 8; Ps 19:1-6, Job 32:8, Job 37-39.

3rd Confessions or Creeds that Address God's Immateriality

1. The Baptist London Confession of 1644; Article 2 "That God is of Himself, that is, neither from another, nor of another, nor by another: **but is a Spirit**, who as His being is of Himself, so He gives being, moving, and preservation to all other things, being in Himself eternal, most holy, every way infinite in greatness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, truth, etc." - - -
2. The 3rd Baptist London Confession of 1689; Chapter 2 God and the Holy Trinity; The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; Whose subsistence is in and of Himself
 - Who is infinite in being and perfection; Whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself;
 - **Who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions**
 - Who only has immortality

4th Errors that Deny God's Immateriality

Mormonism definitely believes in a physical God who is part of the universe.

Pagan Gods are always included in, and part of the universe.

Un-taught Christians often believe in a God who is not transcendent nor beyond this universe.

Important Quotes About God's Immateriality

Voltaire once said, "God created man in His own image, and man has returned the favor. The eighteenth-century French philosopher was belittling the notion that there was one triune God who had uniquely created mankind in His own likeness. Like other agnostics before and since, Voltaire believed that man creates the notion of God in the laboratory of his own genius, casting a deity in his own image with finite limitations and humanlike qualities. Like a person looking in a mirror and then forming his thoughts about himself based on what he sees, so man creates God in his own likeness by looking inward, not upward. This god is the result of reflections, not revelation. **Steven J. Lawson**, *Made in Our Image*, p. 34

Philosophy and science have not always been friendly toward the idea of God, the reason being that they are dedicated to the task of accounting for things and are impatient with anything that refuses to give an account of itself. The philosopher and the scientist will admit that there is much that they do not know; but that is quite another thing from admitting that there is something which they can never know, which indeed they have no technique for discovering. To admit that there is One who lies beyond us, who exists outside of all our categories, who will not be dismissed with a name, who will not appear before the bar of our

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reason, nor submit to our curious inquiries: this requires a great deal of humility, more than most of us possess, so we save face by thinking God down to our level, or at least down to where we can manage Him. Yet how He eludes us! For He is everywhere while He is nowhere, for "where" has to do with matter and space, and God is independent of both. He is unaffected by time or motion, is wholly self-dependent and owes nothing to the worlds His hands have made. **A. W. Tozer**; *The Knowledge of the Holy*; p., 26