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What You Need to Know about ... Him (Part Five)

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HIM – PART FIVE

by Dr. H. L. Willmington

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GOD IS SPIRIT

This is the **fifth** in a series in regard to basic facts about the God of the Bible!
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 Friendly 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 reads:

*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. But 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 Boys 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 super 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 in truth" (John 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.
- 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.

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.

So then, the bottom line is in 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; 6:16.)

Why? Well, all physical objects reflect light, thus allowing them to be seen. But a non-material one has nothing to reflect. And herein lies 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; Jas. 1:17; 1 Pet. 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.

“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 creeping things (Rom. 1:18, 21-23, ESV).

GOD IS ONE

It was during the month of April in the year 1405 B.C. The place was on a plain east of the River Jordan. The speaker was Moses and his work was addressed to a younger generation of Israelite men and women.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4).

Thus, in one short but sublime sentence, the great lawgiver aptly summarized both his God and their God. This profound truth, as opposed to polytheism and pantheism, is declared by both Old Testament and New Testament writers (see 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 44:8; 45:6; 46:9; Zech. 14:9; 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:4-5; 1 Tim. 2:5). In a very real sense, Moses’ statement at that time was nothing less than monotheism in its purest form! However, unlike the monotheism of Islam or Judaism, it is totally different. To explain: In the biblical concept of monotheism there exists three divine persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who have always been and always will be perfectly and inseparably united to form one great, grand, and glorious Godhead. In fact, when Jesus was asked which, in his opinion, was the greatest of the 613 Old Testament commandments, he replied:

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your

neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

Thus, biblical monotheism says there are three persons in one nature, or, in one essence. The *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* has this helpful note:

By saying God has one essence and three persons it is meant he has one "what" and three "whos." The three whos (persons) each share the same what (essence). So God is a unity of essence with a plurality of persons. Each person is different, yet they share a common nature. (p. 732)

A partial (and only a partial) human illustration may be seen by the usage of *echad* (Hebrew word for One) in two key Old Testament passages:

- As referring to the Godhead (Deut. 6:4)
- As referring to human marriage

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Again, a question from the Jewish leaders and the answer by the Savior:

- The Question

"And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' " (Matt. 19:3).

- The Answer

"He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6).

Thus, through *echad*, the two persons (husband and wife) can be considered as one flesh in a relative sense, just as the three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) must be viewed as one Godhead in an absolute sense!

However, it must be understood that the eternal, perfect, unchanging cooperation and unity existing between the three divine persons can never even remotely be achieved by any two married human beings!

Frankly, I'm already now at the deep end of the theological swimming pool, standing on my tiptoes, attempting to keep my nose out of the water, and we haven't even begun to probe into the mysteries of our fourth consideration regarding God—the TRINITY ITSELF! Perhaps a pair of water wings would prove to be a wise investment. So, gentle reader, if you can identify with my sad predicament, take comfort, as I have, by the reassuring work of David, Jesus and Paul:

- David

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple . . . The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me . . . The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple (Psa. 19:7; 116:6; 119:130).

- Jesus

"At that time Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children" (Matt. 11:25).

- Paul

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

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