

What is God like?

God is spirit

Intro: Last Sunday I introduced to you the concept of the user-friendly god, the attempt of the modern religious world to make God more attractive to our society, though at the expense of misrepresenting and reducing Him to a god made in man's image. It is imperative that our concepts of God be accurate; for our concept of God affects how we see ourselves both organizationally and personally. It affects how we worship and serve the Lord.

What is God really like? What picture should come to our mind when we think of God? Last week we considered some inadequate portrayals of God commonly believed by people in society. Now let's consider what God has revealed about Himself. Let's try to think more deeply about God than we've ever done, and to have as a result a more profound understanding of His nature and greatness.

God is (a) spirit

"God is (a) spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24)

God is a spirit without a body.

This single statement has profound implications for how we understand and think of God!

God does not have a body (flesh and bones)

We are a spirit and a body. Even in death (when the body and spirit separate) we have difficulty distinguishing the person from the body he/she indwelt.

Standing by the casket loved ones often speak to the body of a person and touch it as if it is the person who has lived.

We announce that someone died and was "buried" on a certain day.

Yet as spirit does not have a body.

"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

(Luke 24:39)

The Greek portrayed their earthly images of the gods as having bodies. They were portrayed in physical ways that portrayed the principle feature of the god. Thus, an idol of Apollo (Poseidon) depicts Him as muscular because He is god of the sea and controls the powerful waters.

Though God is said in the Scriptures to have eyes, ears, hands, and feet, we are to understand these as "anthropomorphisms" (assignment of human form to God). Yet in no case are we to think of God as having material existence or even human form. Passages that attribute human features to God are instead accommodations to help our understanding of what God is like by using the images of our

world. They are not intended to be descriptions of God's appearance.
God is invisible

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18)

who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1 Timothy 6:16)

He cannot be seen as spirit any more than you can see the spirit of the person who departs from the dying.

But doesn't the Bible say that people "saw" God?

Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

(Exodus 24:9-11)

What people "saw" was a manifestation of God's presence in some material form (theophany). Likewise God has "appeared" in various forms:

An angel

A burning bush

A blinding light

God accommodates man's need to perceive His presence or some feature about Him by giving man sensual evidence of His existence and presence; but we are not to think of these theophanies as "God".

God is not material

He cannot be felt or touched

He is not subject to laws that govern matter

But what difference does it make that we consider these things?

Consider how our understanding of these things affects our worship to God

I found it interesting that the only time God is ever said to be spirit, it is in a context where Jesus attempts to explain the nature of NT worship, the kind that the Father seeks from true worshippers.

Jesus was responding to the Samaritan woman who acknowledged the ongoing debate between Jews and Samaritans about "where" God should be worshipped (on Mt. Gerazim where the Samaritans had their temple or on Mt. Zion where the Jews had theirs). So Jesus' first clarification is that place is not significant—"neither here in this mountain nor Jerusalem".

But more importantly, Jesus was concerned about the concept of God that grew out of the existence of a temple built for Him! Build a temple for a God and if you are not careful you will reduce God to the magnitude of the structure you have built for Him!

Our conceptions of God are affected by the boxes we put Him in! The Samaritans were not the first to do that!

Even God's people had reduced him to the 20 cubit temple constructed by Solomon and God vigorously protested the concept because it implies limitations on God and implies that God has needs that we serve.

Finally Jesus was concerned about the nature of the worship that we consider appropriate for a God who is spirit!

For centuries God had made His presence known by means of theophany in an earthly tent fashioned by men. He had given them rituals appropriate to that conception of a god who dwelt among them. Hence his priests "served Him" with food, drink, light, and music.

But Jesus shows all that is about to change. The worship more suitable to the real nature of God is not physical or symbolic, but spiritual. It is the exaltation in the heart of a person who knows God's true nature!

Never could a more powerful argument be brought to bear against those who seek to worship God today with instruments.

Never could a more powerful argument be brought to bear against those who think worship to God must be entertaining to the worshipper!

When people start thinking about God right, then all such nonsense will cease and in its place will be the humble, obedient reverence praise of God that comes from our inner being!

What picture comes to mind when you think of God?

Have you thought of Him as having a body like yours, a human form?

Have you thought of Him as localized in a single place like we are?

Have you thought of Him as an extremely old man sitting on a throne in heaven?

Have you thought of Him as needing anything that man provides?

God is none of these things; they are images of thought to help us understand a God who transcends space and time. God is spirit!

What kind of worship do you consider to be worthy of a god who is pure spirit?

Do you think of worship as form of divine entertainment?

Or worse yet, do you think it is commanded as a means of entertaining the people who come together to worship?

Did the worship you give God today consist of rituals performed outside the head and heart?

True worship is none of these things. Instead it is the intelligent and heart-felt exaltation of God that arise in our hearts when we properly think of Him!

Conclusion: Three simple words—one profound concept! Get a wrong headed vision of God, the user-friendly type, and worship will be corrupt and unscriptural. Get the vision of God right and worship will be just as God commanded!