

GOD – THE SPIRIT
The Attributes of God
Banska Bystrica, 24th April 2016

πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν¹ | **John 4:24 God is spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

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0. INTRODUCTION

- Faith in God has to be more than just a proven hypothesis...
- “...mere Reasoning, Logic, Abstraction, all that appears as the necessary instrument and expression of the Universal and Abiding, does not move or win the will, either in ourselves or in others...”¹
- **Rom 8:7** ...the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot (τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται)

0.1. THE MODERN NOTIONS OF THE WORD “SPIRIT”

- Oxford Dictionary examples:
 - ...vital principle in man (and animals); that which gives life to the physical organism
 - ...perception of a purely intellectual character
 - ...Incorporeal or immaterial being, as opposed to body or matter
 - ...The essential character, nature, or qualities of something; that which constitutes the pervading or tempering principle of anything.
 - ...The prevailing tone or tendency of a particular period of time
 - ...Disposition, character. *obs.*

¹ von HÜGEL, F. *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends*, London : J. M. Dent, 1923, p. 3.

- DESCARTES: mind–body dualism
- HEGEL: Geist (“Reason is spirit, when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to the level of truth... Die Vernunft ist Geist, indem die Gewißheit, alle Realität zu sein, zur Wahrheit erhoben...ist” [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*]) (...The faculties of perception or reflection; the senses or intellect; mental powers)
- ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033-1109): *God* – “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” (*aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest*) → God *co-existent* with human ideas(!)

0.2. HEBREW, GREEK

- “Ruach conveys to us at once the idea of wind or invisible force, and also the idea of breath or life and feeling; and under these aspects all other ideas range themselves.”²
- πνεῦμα – spirit of man; evil spirit; breath; The Holy Spirit; God as Spirit...

0.3. THEOLOGY

- [PRESTON] *simplicity* of God – “God is a Spirit: that is, he is not mixt, he is not compounded of body and soule, as men are, but he is a Spirit...”³ → *actus purus* (pure act)
- [CHARNOCK] “...the nature of God is the foundation of worship ; the will of God is the rule of worship...” (God is spirit) “...We call him so, because, in regard of our weakness, we have not any other term of excellency to express or conceive of him by...”⁴

0.4. CONDITIONS...

- the problem of *scientism* → determined by nature
- **Heb 4:12** ...piercing to the **division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow**,...
- [CHAMBERS] “If you don’t sacrifice natural good, you will barter the life I represent.”⁵

[CHAMBERS] God is a Spirit. What is spirit? Instantly we find insuperable barriers to thought. Did you ever try for one minute to think of God? We cannot think of a Being Who had no beginning and Who has no end; consequently men without the Spirit of God make a god out of ideas of their own. It is a great moment in our lives when we realise we must be agnostic about God, that we cannot get hold of Him. Then comes the revelation that Jesus Christ will give to us the Holy Spirit, Who will lift us into a new domain and enable us to understand all that He reveals, and to live the life God wants us to live. ...The essential nature of God the Father is Spirit. In order to show the difficulty of putting this into words, ask yourself how much room does thinking take up? Why, no room at all because thought is of the nature of spirit. It is by means of our spirit that we understand the things with which we come in contact. “God is a Spirit,” therefore if we are going to understand God, we must have the Spirit of God. Man’s spirit takes up no room and the Spirit of God takes up no room, they work and interwork. My spirit has no power in itself to lay hold of God; but when the Spirit of God comes into my spirit, *He energises my spirit, then the rest depends upon me*. If I do not obey the Spirit of God and bring into the light the wrong things He reveals and let Him deal with them, I shall grieve Him, and may grieve Him away.⁶

1. THE INVISIBLE POWER → APPROACHING GOD

- Col 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God,...
- **1Tim 1:17** To the King of ages, immortal, **invisible**, the only (ἀφθάρτῳ ἀοράτῳ μόνῳ) **God**, be honor and glory ...
- **Ex 33:20** “But”, he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”
- **Is 6:5** “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

² GIRDLESTONE, R. B. *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, London : Longmans, 1871, p. 101-2.

³ PRESTON, J. *Life Eternall or Treatise of the Knowledge of the Divine Essence and Attributes*, London : Nicholas Bourne, 1631, p. 178[2]

⁴ CHARNOCK, S. *The Existence and Attributes of God*, London : Henry G. Bohn, 1849, p. 107, 109.

⁵ CHAMBERS, O. *If thou wilt be perfect*. In: Complete Works, p. 597.

⁶ CHAMBERS, O. *Biblical Psychology*. In: Complete Works, p. 201.

- **Is 45:15** Truly, you are a God who hides yourself (אַתָּה אֵל מְסֻתֶּתֶר), O God of Israel, the Savior.
- **John 4:24** God is **spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in **spirit and truth**.

1.1. NEITHER SPACE NOR PLACE

- **John 4:21** "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this **mountain** nor in **Jerusalem** will you worship the Father.

1.2. NEITHER NUMBERS NOR VIOLENCE

- **Isa 31:3** The **Egyptians** are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and **not spirit**
- **Zech 4:6** "Not **by** might, nor **by** power (לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ), but **by my Spirit**, says the LORD of hosts.

2. THE SUBLIME PRESENCE → WORSHIPING GOD

- "sublime" [BURKE] Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."⁷
- "The element grew dreadfull, the sea sublime and wrathfull." (HERBERT 1638)
- [KANT] „...the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as **limitlessness** is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality...“⁸ [das Erhabene ist dagegen auch an einem formlosen Gegenstande zu finden, sofern Unbegrenztheit an ihm, oder durch dessen Veranlassung, vorgestellt und doch Totalität derselben hinzugedacht wird ...] We call sublime that which is **absolutely great**...
- **Ps 68:35** Awesome is God (נִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים) from his sanctuary; the God of Israel- he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!
- "How awesome is this place! (מִהוֹ נִרְאָה הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה) This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

2.1. THE MYSTERY OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

- **1Cor 2:11** For who **knows** a person's thoughts except the **spirit** of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the **Spirit** of God.

2.2. THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

- perichoresis
- **John 17:21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,

3. THE UNSETTLING FREEDOM → ASPIRING TO LIVE IN GOD

- [BARTH] "God is He who lives and loves in freedom."⁹
- **2Cor 3:17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (ἐλευθερία)
- **Ps 145:3** Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, (גָּדוֹל יְהוָה וְיִמְהָלָל מְאֹד) and his greatness is unsearchable. (וְלֹא יִגְדְּלֻתּוֹ אֵין חֶקֶר)
- **John 3:8** The wind (τὸ πνεῦμα) blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος)."

⁷ BURKE, E. *On the Sublime and Beautiful*, New York : Collier & Son, 1909, p. 36.

⁸ KANT, I. *The Critique of Judgment*, § 23.

⁹ BARTH, K. *Church Dogmatics 2/1*, Edinburgh : T&T Clark, 1964, p. 301.

3.1. DISTURBING

- **John 3:8** The wind blows where it wishes (τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ), and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes (οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει). So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
- **Heb 11:8** By faith **Abraham** obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, **not knowing where he was going**.

3.2. LIFE-GIVING

- **Ps 33:6** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host (בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וּבְרוּחַ פִּי כָל-צַבָּאוֹת).
- **Job 33:4** The Spirit of God has made me (רוּחַ-אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה לִּי), and the breath of the Almighty gives me **life** (וְנִשְׁמַת שְׂדֵי תְהַיִּי).
- **1Cor 15:45** ...the last Adam became a **life-giving spirit**.

4. TO REMEMBER

- To know God and worship Him we have to approach Him through our spirit in the Holy Spirit.
- The Presence of God is awe
- Experiencing God as Spirit is disturbing in its unpredictability but life-giving in its results.