

## Attributes of God 1 – A Spiritual being

**Reading: John 4:24a** “.... *God is Spirit*<sup>1</sup> .....”

### **Introduction:**

Mankind has an inquisitive mind. Over the centuries, various people have searched the heavens using telescopes to gain a greater understanding of our universe. Others have delved into the medical area, with the result that we now have a better understanding of how our body works, and we have better medical facilities to cure sickness and diseases. Mankind has made diligent searches in the areas of archaeology, science, technology, *etc.*

But there seems to be one area where mankind in general is not so enthusiastic to learn more, and that is in regard to God. For many in this world, they would prefer to forget about Him, in spite of all the evidence of His handiwork in this world (**Romans 1:18-21**). But as Christians, we are exhorted to increase in the knowledge of God (**Colossians 1:10b**) – we are to get to know Him (**John 17:3**). After all, He is our creator (**Genesis 1:26-27**). He is our heavenly Father (**Galatians 4:4-7**). And it is to Him that we must give account one day (**Romans 2:5-6; 14:12**).

Therefore, this is the first lesson in a series looking at the attributes of God<sup>2</sup>. The aim is for us to learn more about the nature and attributes of God, so that we can have a better understanding of Him. The attribute that we will look at in this lesson is that God is a spiritual being.

## **LESSON**

### **1) God is Spirit**

Many of the false religions in this world either had or have physical objects that they worship as their god. For example, the Buddhist's in their temples have statues or images of Buddha that they bow down to worship. In Biblical times, the Greeks had many gods, and their idols were everywhere. In **Acts 17:16, 23**, the apostle Paul noted many physical objects of worship throughout the city of Athens. In **Acts 19:24**, we read of Demetrius the silversmith in Ephesus who made shrines for the goddess Diana. Even back in the days of **Genesis**, relatives of Abraham and Isaac has small idols in their homes (**Genesis 31:19, 30-35**).

But the true God is not a physical being. When Jesus was speaking with the woman at the well in **John 4**, the topic of worship came up. In verse **24**, Jesus said, “*God is Spirit ....*”. God is not some tangible person or object that we can physically see and touch. Jesus said in **Luke 24:39** that a spirit does not have flesh and bones. Being a Spirit, God is invisible (**1 Timothy 1:17**), just like we cannot see the spirit (or soul) in each other. We can see God's handiwork (*e.g.* creation), and we can see the effect He has on people's lives (**1 Thessalonians 1:6-8**), but we can't actually see Him with our eyes (**John 1:18**).

Some may ask, “If God is not a physical being, then why does the Bible talk about God having hands (**Exodus 15:17b**), ears, eyes and a face (**1 Peter 3:12**)?”

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

<sup>2</sup> This series is loosely drawn from lessons contained in a booklet, “The Living Word – Attributes of God”, a publication by Sweet Co. Inc, Austin, Texas, USA, 1964.

## Attributes of God 1 – A Spiritual being

The use of these terms with respect to God is what is called “*anthropomorphism*”, and it is the idea of using human attributes to describe something that is not human, in this case, in order to help us understand God better. It is a form of figurative language and does not imply that God has a literal body like our own. For example, when it says in **1 Peter 3:12**, “... *and His ears are open to their prayers; ...*”, it is simply stating that God can hear their prayers, just like we hear things through our ears.

### 2) God is a living being

Physical gods (or idols) are inanimate, that is, they have no life. They cannot move by themselves; they cannot think; they cannot talk; they cannot teach or guide; in fact, they cannot do anything.

But the true God is alive. He is a living Spirit – He is the “*living God*” (**1 Thessalonians 1:9**). He can do things, He has a personality, and He has righteous characteristics. For example<sup>3</sup>;

- He is able to make plans and carry them out;
  - He had a plan for a special nation of Abraham’s descendants to live in Canaan. He carried out this plan by giving Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age. The descendants multiplied, and eventually God helped them conquer the land of Canaan (**Genesis 12 – Joshua 19**).
  - He had a plan for the establishment of the church and salvation for the Gentiles, as well as the Jews (**Ephesians 1:3-4**). He preserved the seed-line of David until the Messiah was born (**Matthew 1:6-16**). He sent Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins, and then raised Him from the dead. The apostles were then sent out to preach the gospel (**John 3:16; Matthew 28:16-20**).
- He has emotions;
  - He can be pleased
    - Enoch pleased God because of his righteous living (**Hebrews 11:5**).
    - God the Father was pleased with Jesus (**Matthew 17:5**), because Jesus did what the Father commanded (**John 8:29; 15:10**).
    - Making sacrifices in doing good is something that pleases God (**Hebrews 13:16**).
  - He can be angry.
    - When the Hebrews complained in the wilderness wanderings, God was displeased and angry with them (**Numbers 11:1**).
    - God was very angry with the northern kingdom of Israel because it had turned to idolatry, which involved causing their sons and daughters to pass through the fire (**2 Kings 17:17-18**).
- He demonstrates true love
  - “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ....*” (**John 3:16**).
- He guides and instructs His people.

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<sup>3</sup> Some of God’s characteristics will be covered in later lessons.

## Attributes of God 1 – A Spiritual being

- He gave His people, the nation of Israel, the Law of Moses to guide them as to how they should live acceptably to Him (**Deuteronomy 5:1-33; Psalm 119:105**).
- He has given us His Word to instruct us here today so that we can be “... *thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).
- He shows mercy to the penitent (**Jeremiah 3:12-13**).
- He punishes the wicked (**Genesis 18:16 – 19:25**) and rewards those who are faithful (**2 Timothy 4:8**).

God is indeed very alive and active, and is working all things for good to those who love Him (**Romans 8:28**).

### 3) God lives in a spiritual realm - Heaven

God’s home is in Heaven (**Deuteronomy 26:15**). He does not dwell in a physical place made by hands (**Acts 17:24**). Heaven is a place that pre-existed the physical universe in which we live. What we physically see around us is only temporary. There was a time when it didn’t exist (*i.e.* before creation), and one day it will all be gone (**2 Peter 3:7, 10**). But the spiritual realm of Heaven, the dwelling place of God, will remain.

It was from Heaven that Jesus came to earth – previously He was with God the Father (**John 1:1-2, 14; 6:38**). He took on the physical form while He was here (**Philippians 2:7**) so that people could see Him, touch Him, hear Him and learn from Him (**1 John 1:1-3; 5:20**). He also had to be in a physical form so that He could be our sacrifice – men cannot sacrifice something that is purely spiritual. But once His task on earth was done, He returned to Heaven (**Acts 1:9-11**).

Heaven is also our eternal home (**Philippians 3:20**) – it is where Jesus is preparing a place for us (**John 14:2-3**). On the last day, those who are in Christ will leave this earth and be forever with our Lord and Saviour (**1 Thessalonians 4:15-17**). That is why we will be given a different body, for “... *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ..*” (**1 Corinthians 15:50**). If we are still alive at the time, we will shed this physical body and be given a spiritual body (**1 Corinthians 15:44; 49**).

### 4) Because God is Spirit, His kingdom is spiritual

Because God is Spirit, His kingdom is spiritual, and that has consequences for us.

When answering one of the questions that Pilate put to Him, Jesus said in **John 18:36**; “*My kingdom is not of this world. ...*”, *i.e.* His kingdom is not like the physical kingdoms that we see in the world, for example, the Roman empire. Rather, His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and it has a completely different approach to life. Worldly kingdoms concern themselves with power, politics, and the things of this earth. They basically follow the ways of the flesh. But the kingdom of God<sup>4</sup> is about righteousness - **Romans 14:17**<sup>5</sup>;

“... *for the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*”

<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Jesus are the same – **Ephesians 5:5**.

<sup>5</sup> The context of **Romans 14** is the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols (see also **1 Corinthians 8:4-13**), but the point about the kingdom is the same.

## Attributes of God 1 – A Spiritual being

That is why there are times when those in the Lord's kingdom will do things and display attitudes that seem odd to the ways of the world - we live by a different standard (**Romans 8:5**).

The Lord's kingdom is a kingdom where the focus is on what we are on the inside, rather than what we are on the outside (**Romans 2:28-29**). That is a point that Jesus was making to the woman at the well, *i.e.* that true worship does not depend on a specific physical location. Rather, true worship must come from the heart, from the inside, as well as being in accordance with God's truth.

It is because the kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that we see many of the teachings in the New Testament are either aimed at or deal with our heart and our attitudes – what we are on the inside. For example;

**Romans 12:2** “.... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*<sup>6</sup>, ....”

**Colossians 3:2** “Set your *mind* on things above, not on things on the earth.”

**1 Peter 3:3-4** “Do not let your adornment be merely outward - ..... rather let it be the hidden person of the *heart*, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.<sup>7</sup>”

**Matthew 12:35** “A good man out of the good treasure of his *heart* brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”

**Matthew 15:11** “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man but *what comes out* of the mouth, this defiles a man.”

**Galatians 3:7** “Therefore know that only those who are of *faith* are sons of Abraham.”

This is not to say that outward actions aren't important, because they are<sup>8</sup>. James said in **James 1:22**; “Be doers of the word and not hearers only ....”. Christians are to be engaged in doing good works (**Titus 2:14**). But our outward actions should be as a result of, or a reflection of, what is in our heart – a heart moulded and shaped by God and His word. Otherwise, they are simply insincere, hypocritical mechanical actions, and we become just a “.... *sounding brass or a clanging symbol* ...” (**1 Corinthians 13:1b**).

To conclude. God is Spirit, and He was in existence for eternity before this physical universe was ever created, and He will exist for eternity after this physical universe had disappeared. We too are spiritual beings. We currently live in a physical, tangible environment. It is an environment that is “in our face”, so to speak, and therefore it is easy for it to take our focus. But we are to seek the things of the Spirit (**Romans 8:6-14**), for we are, essentially, spiritual beings currently living in physical bodies - it is the spiritual part of us that is eternal and will answer to God, not the physical (**2 Corinthians 4:16**).

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<sup>6</sup> The emphasis shown in these verses is mine – Steve Keddie

<sup>7</sup> While the context of this verse is in relation to wives, the principle about having a “*beauty of the heart*” can also be applied to all of us.

<sup>8</sup> On the day of judgement, our actions in this life will play an important part in how we will be judged – **Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:29; Romans 2:5-10**.