

The anatomy of God

By Garry W. Johnson

MOUNTAIN REVIEW

When I set out to write this article I thought I had been given something light and fluffy. At the time it came to me I was averaging a little better than a third of the Saturday Inmate Services (11:00 a.m. in the minimum compound chapel). Many of my messages there, as well as the articles I wrote from which they were derived, had become a little technical, maybe even taxing on the intellect.

The ideas often began simple enough, but as they would unfold and God's Word began to open up, it seems they would grow beyond what I was prepared for in the beginning. Each of these messages had an underlying idea or concept revealed in scripture, which I had hoped to relay, but the complexity and depth of God's Word I sometimes find hard to adequately express. "Keeping it simple, stupid," still seems to be beyond my capacity.

But I hope that puts me in good company. After all, Paul's writings were so complex that even Peter cautioned the early Church about those who would twist his epistles "in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16). I know the comparison is more than a stretch, but when the Apostle stood before the Roman Governor of Palestine (AD 60), Festus accused him, saying "with a loud voice, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.' But he said, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness'" (Acts 26:24-25).

Paul never spoke with the wisdom of men, but with the knowledge and understanding he gained from God. That does not mean, however, that Paul was uneducated, he was highly educated and well versed in earthly wisdom. But the knowledge of God often contradicts the reasoning of man. Proverbs 9:9-10 says, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." And that is what I hope we gain to day, the knowledge of the holy. And I pray that knowledge will help us tear down the reasoning of man.

My subject is the Anatomy of God, and when this message came to mind I thought, finally, something simple, non-controversial and easy to explain. I would write about God's body parts, how He has given us ones to match and how the natural man uses them for corruption. I would go into God's instruction as to what we should be doing with them and how conversion brings us back in line. Yet as I researched my subject, I found one of those five-dollar words I knew I would have to deal with: Anthropomorphism.

COMPREHENDING THE DIVINE

I know that many of you have run across this word in the study of theology. I have had occasion to run across it myself, when reading above my pay-grade. Webster's give a simple definition – "an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics: HUMANIZATION." It is this secular meaning that my mind latched on to and that I have employed over the years.

We use to have a large file on the newspaper computer with thousands of clipart images in it, which had been collected from various pieces of software over the years. I took it upon myself to try and organize that folder at one time, and in the process I created a category I simply labeled "anthro." In it I put all the anthropomorphic images I came across as I perused the files for useful graphics: the car with headlights for eyes and a bumper for a mouth; the dandelion with a face made of its florets and leaves for hands; the classic images of the "man in the moon" or the faces imposed on the sun – likely holdovers from our pagan past and the human tendency to worship the host of heaven.

Sunday and Monday after all are named after the sun and moon, Tuesday from the Latin for Mars, Wednesday after Mercury, Thursday Jupiter, Friday for Venus, and Saturday after Saturn. God only named one day of the week, the seventh day, the Sabbath. He just numbered the rest. But, I guess that is another article all together.

So you get the idea behind the secular usage of the word: Anthropomorphism. Now, briefly were going to look at the theological idea that falls under the same title. Orville J. Nave, the author of *Nave's Topical Bible*, defines anthropomorphism as "figures of speech, which attribute human forms, acts, and affections to God." To some degree I can imagine this form of interpreting God's actions and characteristics is necessary – this humanization of God – in order that our finite minds can understand the marvels of our infinite Maker. But what I want you to remember today is that man is made in God's image, after His likeness, and not the other way around!

I received a theological dictionary from a friend of mine who could not find much use for it and I have held on to it because from time-to-time I engage in conversation with folks who are educated in this area of

study. They have had occasion in the past to hit me with these super-smart-sounding words and threw them around until I was thoroughly confused. If you do not know the meaning or the concept represented by a 16-character word it is hard to confirm or deny what is being said. And I cannot say that I have not been accused of doing the same, but at least you usually do not need a *special* dictionary to look up the words I through around. Webster's will generally work fine. Besides all that, your education level has little to do with your spiritual understanding. Benjamin Franklin said, "The learned Fool writes his Nonsense in better Language than the unlearned; but still 'tis Nonsense."

I had thought to describe the dictionary in this article but as I carried it around a friend noticed it and professed his admiration for its author. Being that the book is associated with a certain "brand" of theology, I did not want to seem to be picking on anyone ... though it *is* my intention to point out holes in its definition. *The Dictionary of Theological Terms* says that Anthropomorphism is: "1. The representation of God under a human form. 2. The figure of speech by which Scripture attributes human parts, actions, affections, and emotions to God. Thus while God as a pure spirit has no bodily parts or passions [?] the Bible speaks of His eyes, His ears, His hands, etc. God does not actually have any bodily parts."

Now notice this thought he puts in parenthesis, almost as an afterthought or side note: "(though it should be remembered that the Son of God did take an actual human body and soul into personal union with Himself. Thus any references to the incarnate Son's physical presence and properties must be taken literally; they are not anthropomorphic)." So at the very least we know the author is not a Gnostic writer.

"When the Bible attributes human characteristics to God, it speaks metaphorically to enable us to understand an otherwise abstract truth. Thus God's *eye* speaks of His knowledge; His *hand* speaks of His action; His *heart* speaks of His love; His *face* speaks of His presence. Failing to understand this figurative usage, some *heretics in the early church* interpreted literally those Scriptures which metaphorically attributed some physical characteristic to God...."

In Paul Johnson's *A History of Christianity*, he points out that the idea of *heresy* is a holdover from the Jewish religion. It was first employed in the Christian faith as Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem levied it against the Apostle Paul. Later the Jews would apply this label to Christianity as a whole. Before Felix Paul said, "after the way they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers..." (Acts 24:14). The encyclopedia notes that Catholics apply the term to Protestants, and Protestants through the years have applied it to each other...

BIBLICAL CLARITY

Lets take a look at the gospel of John, chapter 1, starting in verse 1. In the time order of God's existence – if there is such a thing as "time" in relation to God – this would be the earliest revelation of *Who* and *What* God is found anywhere in the scripture. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2).

Now many people seem to have a hard time understanding what is being said here, so let structure a similar scenario using more familiar nouns and a modern sentence structure. "Garry was in the chapel, and Garry was with a person, and Garry was a person. The same two people were together in the chapel." See how that works? Nothing mysterious there. So let's read it again. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

These two divine Individuals were together in the beginning, the Word and God, according to John 1:1. And they were both of the God family, both being God. Verse 14 tells us that, "...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." God became a Father by begetting a Son, who John later identifies as Jesus Christ. A Father had a Son. The Word became the Son of God. God became the Father of Christ. God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Son of God. Does all this make sense – a Father and a Son who are both God?

John tells us in verse 18, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18) The Son had a job, to declare the Father.

Spirit is invisible. Christ told Nicodemus it was like the wind (John 3:8), and chapter 4 of John tells us that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (v.24). Technically, there is no indefinite Article in the Greek, and the phrase should read, "God is Spirit." That is what God is composed of, but does that mean that God has no form or shape?

Jesus said to the Jews in chapter five, "...Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John 5:37). So the Son indicates that the Father has a shape, just not one the Jews, nor anyone else, had ever seen. *The Dictionary of Theological Terms* indicates that Jesus only has a shape because He was born in the flesh. But Genesis tells us this divine Family, this Father and Son, decided the form Christ

would eventually take by modeling it after Their own image. Genesis 1:26: “And God said, Let Us make man in OUR *image*, after OUR *likeness*: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God made man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (vv. 26-27). It’s the classic chicken and the egg argument which, of course, the Bible also answers in Genesis.

THE NATURAL SHADOWS THE DIVINE

God created man in the likeness that He and His Son share. Now we know that this first Adam sinned and brought death into the world, and Romans 5:14 tells us that “death reigned from Adam to Moses.” Thankfully God gave us a second Adam, begotten physically through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) and born into the human family. This Adam was able to resist the deceiver and make resurrection into God’s family possible. 1 Corinthians 15:21, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” (vv. 21-23).

Skipping down to verse 47: “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the Heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the *image* of the earthy, we shall also bear the *image* of the Heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:47-49). And what is that image?

Going back up to verse 44: “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written. The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit” (v.45). So Jesus Christ was made spirit. God is spirit, yet with a body – a *spiritual body*. And what did that body look like? We read it in Revelation: “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace....” Does that sound metaphorical?

When one of His disciples asked to see the Father, Jesus said, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father...” (John 14:19). So this is where we get our visible God. The One who manifest Himself to man, taking on the image of His Father, the form and shape He carried in the beginning. This is the Spokesman of the God Family, the Word of John’s opening text. The One the book of Hebrews says the Father has, “...in these last days spoken to us by...” chapter 1, and verse 2. The One “He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds.” Now looking at verse 3, Christ is “the brightness of His glory, and the *express image* of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

Those of you who have children, do they look like you? Have they developed your mannerisms? They resemble you through their heredity, but they mimic you through their association with you. Raising a child takes both nurture and nature. And that is where man has gone astray. He has separated himself from God [Isaiah 59:2]. Yet God is still begetting children, even today. “Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Romans 8:10: “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Verse 14 and 16: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of GodThe Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” If you are a child of God, this is the evidence.

1 John 4:12-14 tells us that: “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that He hath given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” We bare the likeness and image of God through Adam, but we bare the character and love of God through Christ, the Second Adam, who made God’s Spirit available to His Church.

Proverbs 20:12 says, “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.” The Psalmist ask, “He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall He not correct? He that teacheth knowledge, shall He not know? The LORD knoweth the thought of man, that they are vanity” (Psalm 94:9-11).

And why is that? It is because of *the human spirit*. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save *the spirit of man* which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.... The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he

know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:11&14). We must have the Spirit of God to receive the things of God, even His spiritual image.

It was this same Spirit, the “Spirit of Christ” (1 Peter 1:10-11), which God gave to the prophets of old. Let us take a look at an encounter one of these prophets had with the covenant God of Israel recorded in Exodus, chapter 33, beginning at verse 17.

WITNESSING THE CREATOR

Moses had a very interesting relationship with God. We are told that he spoke to God “face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Both renderings of the word “face” here are from the Hebrew *paw-neem* (6440 pânîym) which simply means “the face.” The same word appears 18 times in Exodus and is used of Moses’ shining face and the veil he was forced to wear after his conversations with God, to keep from scaring the people with his glowing complexion. It is used again here in verse 20 of this passage we are about to read:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, ‘I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name.’ And he said, ‘I beseech thee, show me thy glory.’ And He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’ And He said, ‘Thou canst not see My face: for no man can see Me, and live.’ And the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen’” (Exodus 33:17-23). Does that sound Metaphorical to you?

This is the same God who appeared to Adam in the garden (Genesis 3:8-21), Abraham in the plains of Mamre (Genesis 18:2-33), Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 35:7,9); Moses, in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2), at Sinai (Ex. 19:16-24; 24:10), and with Joshua in the tabernacle (Deut. 31:14,15), Gideon (Judges 6:11-24), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:9; 2 Chr. 1:7-12; 7:12-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28)... to the entire nation of Israel (Judges 2:1-5).

Jacob was amazed when he received the name Israel, after wrestling with God at Peniel saying, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Genesis 32). The Psalmist plead for Israel, “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us...” (Ps. 67:1). But Israel often found themselves separated from God because, as Habakkuk wrote, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13). By Isaiah He said, “...when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

Yes, God has a face, and He has eyes and ears: “...Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). “Bow down Thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong Rock, for a house of defense to save me” (Psalm 31:2). “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). “The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and He overthroweth the words of the transgressor” (Proverbs 22:12). Deuteronomy 11:12: “The land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.”

God has a mouth... “By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6, 9). “For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly” (Proverbs 2:6-7).

God has feet and legs, He walks... When the Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, he “said, ‘My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree’” (Genesis 18:3-4). Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace and “said, ‘Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’” (Daniel 3:25). Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8).

God told the Israelites, “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:12). In Deuteronomy 23:13, the people were told, “the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee.”

You were made in the physical image of your Creator. It is His will that you develop His spiritual image as well. May God grant us each the strength of character, the depth of faith and the Spirit of God to fulfill His will. Amen. *MR*