

THE NATURE OF GOD

The Bible speaks of the hand, the arm, the finger, the eye, the ear, the face, and even the "hinder parts" of God. Are we to take these literally or are these figures of speech the inspired writers employed to help us relate to the Infinite? The Pagan religions have consistently attributed literal physical characteristics of various creatures (including men) to their false concepts of God (Rom. 1:22–23). However, the nature of **true** Deity is beyond and above such physical forms. "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and "a spirit hath not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39).

The notable exception to this, of course, is the Incarnate Word, the Christ, who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Paul's description of the Incarnation is similar: Our Lord existed "in the form of God" while with the Father, but he "emptied himself...being made in the likeness of men" (Phi. 2:6–7). Obviously, the "form of God" is not the same as the "form of man," otherwise there would have been no need for Him to **become** flesh and **be made** in the likeness of men.

To attribute literal physical form to the true and living God is to make God in man's image. Those who do so doubtless believe they are being true to the Word of God. However, they are just as mistaken as Roman Catholicism which insists on taking literally Jesus' words concerning the unleavened bread ("This is my body") and the fruit of the vine ("This is my blood") (Mat. 26:26, 28).

The actual name of the figure of speech that attributes human characteristics and forms to God is *anthropomorphism* (a Greek word which literally means "human form"). For failure to recognize it as a figure of speech, the Mormon Cult insists that both the Father and the Son have fleshly bodies and are material beings. Moreover, they

declare that God the Father was a man who became God and that He had a sexual union with Mary, from which union Jesus was conceived and born.

It is not difficult to understand that when our Lord said, "I am the door" (John 10:9), He did not mean that He literally was a slab of material attached to a post by hinges. No, we correctly perceive that He used a figure of speech and that His meaning is that there some ways in which He behaves as a door, opening for some and shutting others out. In the same context, He used a second figure to describe Himself: "I am the good shepherd" (v. 11), yet He never had a flock of four-legged sheep. So it is with the human parts and traits that Scripture attributes to God. in The very nature of Deity is infinitely above anything of which we, in our finiteness, can conceive. God is thus sometimes described in terms with which we are familiar and which we can grasp. Those who think they are being true to God's Word by taking literally figures of speech that describe God in physical terms (and that those who do not are disloyal to the Word of God) are actually the ones who fail to rightly divide the Word

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