

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's spirituality, which is the first of his communicable attributes we are considering. Last time we established that spirits are self-conscious, intelligent, moral, volitional, personal beings. Dr. Spencer, what else do you want to say about spirits and God's spirituality?

Dr. Spencer: Since we are talking about God's spirituality, I want to look at what is unique to God. We examined our spirituality last time because it helped us come to a better understanding of what is meant by spirit, but as always there is a significant difference between the Creator and the creature. God's spirituality is qualitatively different from ours.

Marc Roby: In what ways?

Dr. Spencer: First of all, he is the only eternally existing spirit. We sometimes talk about the fact that we will spend eternity with God in heaven, which is true. But we are being a bit sloppy with our language. Only God is eternal in the fullest sense of that term, so perhaps we should talk about eternity past and eternity future, or say that our spirits are everlasting. We all had a beginning, and that includes our spirit as well as our body, but God had no beginning. He has always existed as we have discussed several times. He exists necessarily. He alone has the power of life within him as part of his essential being, and his essence is spirit. So, we could say that spirit is the only absolutely necessary essence that exists. Our physical universe of matter and energy is unnecessary and contingent. It exists only because God chose to create it and chooses to sustain it.

Marc Roby: That is indeed a very significant difference. What else do you want to say about God's spirituality?

Dr. Spencer: I think that Wayne Grudem is right to connect God's spirituality with the Second Commandment. We read that commandment in Chapter 20 of Exodus. Verse 4 says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."¹ Grudem writes the following about this commandment, "The creation language in this commandment ... is a reminder that God's *being*, his essential mode of existence, is different from everything that he has created."² God is spirit and so it is obvious that he cannot be represented by anything we can make out of the material universe.

Marc Roby: That makes good sense. And you noted last time that God's spirit is qualitatively different than all created spirits. And, now that I've said that, I realize it's a tautology; of course a created spirit is different from the Creator!

Dr. Spencer: That's very true. We can't escape the creator-creature distinction. Even angels, who are spirits and don't have physical bodies, are so radically different from and below God that

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²Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pg. 187

they are not to be worshiped. In Revelation 19:10 the apostle John tells us about his wanting to worship an angel, he writes, “I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!’”

Marc Roby: That’s a good point. But let’s get back to God’s spirituality.

Dr. Spencer: Alright. There is another passage of Scripture that we should look at because it tells us something about the spirit of God. In Isaiah 11 the prophet speaks about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who we must remember is a descendent of King David, whose father was named Jesse. In Verse 1 the prophet says, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” And then, in Verse 2 he tells us that “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD”. From this verse we learn first that the spirit of God is a spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, power and knowledge. These five things can all be considered communicable attributes of God. The last thing mentioned seems a bit strange though, we are told that the Spirit of the LORD is a spirit of the fear of the LORD.

Marc Roby: That does sound strange when you put it that way. Why would the LORD fear himself?

Dr. Spencer: He obviously wouldn’t. But we are told three times in the Bible that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. For example, Proverbs 9:10 says that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” I think it is useful to see what the great Old Testament theologian E.J. Young said about these verses.

Marc Roby: What does he say?

Dr. Spencer: Before I quote Young, we must first notice that “The Spirit of the LORD” does not refer to God’s essence, it refers to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Second, we must remember that Jesus Christ is fully God *and* fully man. It was in his humanity that he had to obey God’s laws perfectly and suffer the penalty due us for our sins. In order to accomplish that, the man Jesus Christ needed the help of the Holy Spirit. And we are told in John 3:34 that the Holy Spirit was given to him without measure.

Then, with regard to the fear of the Lord, Young wrote, “The phrase itself is the practical equivalent of true piety and devotion. True religion is a reverent and godly fear, for it recognizes that the creature is but dust before the holy Creator, and it prostrates itself in His presence, expressing itself in reverential awe. ... Even the Messiah will be imbued with the fear of the Lord in order to accomplish His mighty work.”³

Marc Roby: That is very sobering. If Jesus Christ, the only perfect, sinless human being who has ever lived, if he needed the fear of God and God’s help to do his work, how much more should we fear God and seek his help!

³E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, W.B. Eerdmans Pub., Vol. 1, 1972, pg. 383

Dr. Spencer: We definitely should both fear God and seek his help all the time.

Marc Roby: I think it would be useful to explain the shift you just made though. You went from talking about God's spirituality as an attribute of God to talking about the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity.

Dr. Spencer: I should explain that shift. As we have noted, in John 4:24 Jesus tells us that "God is spirit." So, that statement is true of all three persons of the godhead, in other words, it is true of the triune God in his essence. Nevertheless, the third person of the Trinity is called the Holy Spirit. The Bible makes clear that even though all three persons of the godhead are equal and are all fully God, they nonetheless have different functional roles. That is called the economic trinity as we discussed back in Session 28.

Marc Roby: And the term "economic" here has nothing to do with money.

Dr. Spencer: No, it doesn't, it refers to the organization of the Trinity. In other words, how the persons of the Trinity work together. In Session 52 we presented clear biblical evidence that the Holy Spirit is a person, and in Session 55 we presented equally clear biblical evidence for the fact that the Holy Spirit is God. But, because all three persons of the Holy Trinity are of the same essence, whatever is said about the Holy Spirit's essence is also true of the Father and the Son. So, the shift from speaking about an attribute of God to speaking about the person of the Holy Spirit is not as significant as one might think.

Marc Roby: Alright, but getting back to the verses in Isaiah 11. What does it mean when it says that "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him"? That is an interesting expression independent of whether the spirit refers to God's essence or the third person of the Trinity.

Dr. Spencer: Before I answer that question, I want to point out that there are other similar expressions used in the Bible as well. For example, in 1 Samuel 10:6, and Luke 1:35 we read of people having the Holy Spirit come upon them. And in Isaiah 63:11 we are told that God "set his Holy Spirit among" his people. In Matthew 3:11 and Mark 1:8 we read about being baptized in the Holy Spirit and in Luke 1:15, 41 and 67 we read about people being filled with the Holy Spirit. Then, in Acts 1:8 Jesus told his disciples, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you". And in 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul wrote, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" This list of verses is just a sampling of the different ways in which the Bible describes the Holy Spirit being sent to human beings to influence them. In fact, in Romans 8:14 we read that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Marc Roby: And it is a wonderful thing to be led by the Holy Spirit. But we also read about evil spirits coming upon people or even possessing them. What do all these references to being filled, or led, or having the Spirit come upon us, what do they mean?

Dr. Spencer: We need to be very careful here to not go beyond what Scripture explicitly teaches or what can be properly deduced from Scripture. Certainly, all of these expressions tell us that our spirit can be strongly influenced or even controlled by other spirits, which shouldn't be surprising since our physical bodies can be strongly influenced or even controlled by other

physical bodies, especially those who are stronger than we are. We can also say for certain that none of what happens in the spiritual realm is outside of God's control, just as nothing that happens in the physical realm is outside of his control.

Marc Roby: A great example of that is given in Job Chapters 1 and 2 where we read about Satan receiving permission from God to test Job, but where we also see God setting clear limits on what Satan is allowed to do.

Dr. Spencer: That is, in fact, the classic biblical example. But we also read in a number of places in the New Testament of Jesus casting demons out of people and there are a number of clear indications that those demons all recognize Jesus' absolute authority over them.

Marc Roby: I'm thinking that this topic, more than most, disturbs modern people. Talk of angels and evil spirits seems very mythological to most people in our culture.

Dr. Spencer: I understand that this topic can be disturbing. I spent the first 38 years of my life thinking that angels and evil spirits belonged in the same category with Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. But the entire worldview presented in the Bible makes good sense and no materialistic worldview is able to explain all that we observe to be true.

The world laughs at people who really believe the Bible, but I would say that we should laugh at the world for believing in a purely material universe. In order for God to not exist and materialism to be true, it would have to be true that this universe popped into existence out of absolutely nothing with no cause whatsoever. It would also have to be true that living beings came into existence out of inanimate matter and that self-conscious moral beings came from purely physical animals governed by the laws of physics. All of these are impossible as we clearly showed way back in Session 1.

Marc Roby: But what about angels and evil spirits?

Dr. Spencer: I think the arguments I just outlined are sufficient to show that this material universe is not all there is and I encourage any of our listeners who are interested to go back and listen to Session 1, it is available in our archive at whatdoesthewordsay.org.

There are clearly entities, which the Bible calls spirits, that are real even though we can't normally detect them in any direct way. And, given that fact, why on earth would anyone think it impossible for God to create intelligent spirit beings in addition to intelligent physical beings? I can't think of a single reason what this should be troubling. And since it is only spirits or beings with a spirit that are moral beings, evil is obviously only possible for them. I said last time that you can't blame your feet for carrying you into sin and I'll go even further and say that purely physical things, in other words things that do not have a spirit, cannot be evil in and of themselves. My wife may disagree, but a spider cannot be evil.

Marc Roby: I think a number of people would disagree with that. But your point is a serious one, there are living things that are not moral beings and cannot, therefore, be evil. We may not like them, but they are not evil.

Dr. Spencer: That's true. And I think it would be good at this point to define evil. Evil can be used as an adjective or a noun and it refers to actions or things that are morally reprehensible, which of course immediately begs the question of what moral means. Moral can again be an adjective or a noun. As an adjective, it describes whether an action is right or not. A moral action is one that is right, or good, and an immoral act is one that is wrong, or bad. But that again begs the question; right or wrong according to whom? Any real Christian must answer that question by saying that it is God who establishes the standard of conduct. He determines what is right and what is wrong. Doing something God defines as wrong is sin, and failing to do something he requires is also sin.

I wanted to go over this even though it is a seemingly obvious point because I wanted to establish clearly that when we talk about evil or morality, we cannot escape talking about God.

Marc Roby: It really gets back to our ultimate standard for truth doesn't it?

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. And as we discussed in Session 4, there are only two possible ultimate standards for truth; either revelation from God or human beings. So, getting back to our topic of spirits. Since it is only spirits that make moral choices, it is only spirits who can be morally good or morally bad, which we call evil. The Bible tells us that God created beings called angels who are pure spirits. But they are still created beings, so they are not the same as God himself. They are not omnipresent, omniscient and so on, although they are far more powerful than we are. The Bible also tells us that some of these angels rebelled against God and became his enemies, what we call demons. The head of these demons is Satan. This is all reality, not mythology.

Marc Roby: And a most unpleasant reality I might add.

Dr. Spencer: The existence of Satan and his demons is a very unpleasant reality. But we must remember that *all* sin is evil. It is wicked rebellion against God. We tend to minimize the seriousness of sin, but it is so serious that Jesus Christ had to come and die to redeem people from it. And we aren't just talking about murder and other sins that people think of as serious. We are also talking about sins that most people think of as being minor, like laziness, or disrespecting authorities and many other sins. These are all rebellion against God. Outside of Christ we are all slaves of sin as Paul tells us in Romans 6.

Marc Roby: I think we have gotten off topic again, can you tie this all back in to the attribute of God's spirituality?

Dr. Spencer: It all ties back in because human beings are made in the image of God and have spirits so that we can have fellowship with God. And, as we noted, the Bible clearly speaks in many different ways about our spirits being influenced or even, in some extreme cases, controlled by other spirits. And those spirits can be good or evil. When we become Christians, we immediately have some real and very powerful enemies, Satan and his demons. That is why we are told in Ephesians 6:12 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Marc Roby: That verse of course does not imply that we don't also have flesh and blood enemies, but it is emphasizing the spiritual nature of the warfare.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We can be influenced by evil spirits and by the Holy Spirit. They can plant thoughts in our minds and we must judge all of those thoughts by the objective word of God. We are told in 1 John 4:1, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." These false prophets are speaking things given to them by evil spirits, but the evil spirits can also put ideas in our minds directly. So, we must always test these ideas. We are told in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that we should "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Marc Roby: Very well. In the last two sessions we have established that spirits are self-conscious, intelligent, moral, volitional, personal beings. We've established that God is pure spirit, but he also created angels, who are spirits, and human beings, who have both body and spirit. We have shown that the Bible tells us that our spirits can be influenced by other spirits. You have also established that our spirits can live independently of our bodies and that our spirit is the seat of our personality, our decisions and our morality.

Dr. Spencer: That's a good summary.

Marc Roby: And we are out of time for today. Let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We appreciate hearing from you.