

God is Spirit

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Date: 01 October 2017

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] We read that God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. You have headings in front of you, I didn't have time to get the full notes for these, so please be a witness as we go through this service.

God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. And if you've been here the last few Sunday evenings, you'll know that we've been looking at the way that the Bible, in different ways that the Bible describes God.

How we're given one word definitions of who God is, one word definitions, but of course these definitions contain an infinity of meaning, meaning concerning the one true God.

What have we seen so far? Well, we've seen that God is described as light, light in whom there's no darkness at all. That description that we're given that gives us full confidence to know God is the God who's all pure, the God of truth, the God whose light shines in the hearts of each and every believer, so that you and I who know the Lord as Savior, so that you're enabled to shine with that light of God, to shine for Christ, to shine with God's love and God's truth, that others will see the Lord Jesus who lives within each one of his people.

And what did we notice last Lord's Day evening? We noticed that God is described as love. The love of God is love. We saw that in 1 John. The love of God that reaches out to sinners and salvation.

[1 : 49] The love that we notice that's characterising the relationship between each member of the Trinity. That mutual love that characterises God in his love, one with another in each person, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And amazingly and astoundingly, that love that reaches out beyond the Trinity to sinners who deserve nothing of that love. So it's important that we grasp what Scripture tells us of who God is. That we know him. We know as God has made himself known to us. And these are not just nice sounding descriptions of God. God's work gives us that information of who God is so that that knowledge will impact our lives.

So that we'll follow him and his love for others. That we'll live in the light of God's love and be light in the world. As Jesus said, you are the light of the world.

As we seek to reflect the light of God and show others that light, that is true light. And so we come to the third of the definitions we're going to look at this evening.

[3 : 06] God is the Spirit. Now of course when we look at this definition, this description, we're going to look at what we're seeing here, what it's telling us about God's character. But also of course, what it means for us.

What it particularly means for each one of us in our relationship to God. Even in our relationship one to another. What this description of God tells us that actually increases our knowledge of God and even affects the way that we respond to him and to one another.

So we've read most of this chapter anyway. This chapter in which this great definition is given to us. And of course we really need to get the context first.

Jesus doesn't just launch out with this description of God without context. So we need to look at the context first and then look at what is meant by this description of God as God is Spirit.

So, context first. What did we read right at the start of chapter 4? Well we read that Jesus was in the south, or had been in the south of the country. Judea in the south.

[4 : 18] And we're told that he has to go back to Galilee where he's based. So he's going to head northwards to Galilee. Now ordinarily, Jews going from Judea to Galilee, they would bypass the middle part, which is Samaria.

They would cross the Jordan, go up around there and into Galilee. Because as we saw there in the passage, Jews and Samaritans simply didn't get on. Samaritans were a mixed race with different ideas in their religion.

But Jesus, we're told here, must go through Galilee. You see that in verse 4. This is what we call the must of divine necessity. He has to go through that area for a purpose.

What's the purpose? The purpose, of course, is meeting this Samaritan woman. And in meeting that woman, Jesus will identify himself to her, the Messiah, as the Christ.

Jesus would speak to her of salvation found in no one else. And this woman will be converted.

Jesus must go through Samaria.

[5 : 33] And this woman whom Jesus meets, this woman, we can see this as we read through the passage, and she's got great needs. She's been searching for satisfaction in her many husbands.

And now she's even living with a man who's not even her husband. She's still not satisfied. She's been even seeking comfort in her Samaritan beliefs. You see that in verse 20.

But Jesus is getting her to that point to see where true satisfaction's found. And that true worship isn't connected to any place.

It's not even in Jerusalem. But true worship is located in a heart that's right with God. So Jesus is bringing this woman to see that where our true soul satisfaction's found, and find in him, find in Jesus.

He's bringing her to know him as the Christ, the promised Messiah, the one through whom worship of God is possible.

[6 : 35] He's bringing her to have that heart knowledge of the gospel. And as we read in the passage there, he's explained the gospel to her. He's told her that she'll know living water flowing through her soul when she has a new spirit within her, when her life's transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then her worship will be true worship to the one true God. It'll be sincere, true spiritual worship. So Jesus is bringing this woman to the point where she'll know him as Messiah.

She'll know true worship of God. And Jesus announces what kind of worship is acceptable to God. It's on verse 23. The hour is coming and it is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

True worship of God. True service for God. True following of God. Jesus is saying has to be in a manner that's spiritual.

Because, verse 24, because God is spirit. And those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth. So how we worship God, and we're not just talking about a Sunday, of course not.

[7 : 53] How we worship him in every area of our life is impacted by this truth that God is spirit. So we need, of course, to understand how this is connected.

How we are to understand what true worship is. So, to help us, of course, we have to understand what Jesus is saying about God. When he's saying that God is spirit.

Well, what do we find from scripture? Scripture interpreting scripture. Scripture. The first thing we know from scripture is that when we say of God as spirit, we speak of God as the invisible God.

Because, notice here, in verse 24, there, God is spirit. Not God is our spirit. God is spirit. And that, you see, helps us to understand what God's like.

It helps us to understand how God makes himself known the human beings such as ourselves. So that when we say that God is spirit, we're being shown what God is like.

[8 : 59] To inform us, to help us, to relate to him. To help us to serve him. So, the more we know him, the more we're informed about how we live for him, how we worship him, as we ought to worship him.

So, when we say that God is spirit, then first of all, that tells us that God is invisible. In other words, God has no physicality that we have.

And, you know, that helps us to, that informs us how we worship him. You see, because the way we worship God, it's not dependent on external things.

It's not a matter of physical place. It's not a matter of physical environment, you know, the ceremony and, and such like. Because, we can have the appearance of Godliness, but deny its power.

I mean, you know, let's take an example. Let's take how we worship God in our church buildings, for example. Of course, it's very important that we have order in our worship. Absolutely essential, because we worship according as God's word informs us.

[10:11] We want our worship to express our, our praise and gratitude to God. And even, even in the physical aspects of our surroundings, I mean, even the very building itself is indicative of our desire to glorify God.

You know, even the very way that it's kept, its buildings maintained, the buildings looked after, it's a place where we can worship God and the creative beauty that he's given us. But we don't worship God through these things.

We don't get our inspiration to worship from anything physical. No, because we worship God from the heart. We engage our spirits, our souls with, with God who is spirit.

So we worship God in spirit and truth, even the very depth of our unseen spirits, our unseen souls, from our very heart. a heart made right with God.

A heart that's been made right with God through a relationship with the Lord Jesus who's the way, the truth and the life. So, even the very manner of our worship is crucial in the way that we honour God and the way we show honour to him in our very lives.

[11:26] I know many of you have seen magnificent cathedrals, buildings that are, you know, architectural masterpieces. Some of you here, I know, know the Duomo in Milan.

It's astonishing in its architecture. It's artwork old and new within that building. These things, these things cannot lead anyone one step closer to God.

You can't reduce God to physical things. Why? Because God is spirit. spirit. So we meet with God from our heart, from our spirit, our souls, whether it's in a simple church building such as this, whether it's in a house, whether it's a home, whether even our daily commute to work.

we worship from our heart that recognises that God is spirit. Which is why any representation of God in any form, whether it's art, images, even our imagination, is contrary to God's word.

You know, in the wilderness when the Israelites were given the laws we were thinking of this morning, when they were given the commandments, you know, the second commandment that forbade any image of God being made.

[12:41] Because it wasn't for the people to, you know, to somehow restrict God to a form of their own creation and their own imagination. It wasn't for the people to reduce God to a carved piece of wood or metal.

Mount Sinai, as we were thinking of this morning, Mount Sinai, the people that were given the law, they heard God. Remember the revelation of God through the thunder, the mountain shaking, the fire.

The people didn't see the form of God. They didn't see God. But the people had been given sufficient knowledge of God to enable them to worship Him as God. They'd been given sufficient display of God and His power and His majesty.

He's the one alone to be worshipped. And they knew the God of creation. They knew who God was and making Himself known through His Word and even through these manifestations of His power. But they weren't to be like their neighbours. Their neighbours made images, idols. They weren't to be like their neighbours and somehow provide some kind of more satisfying way of coming before God and making images like golden cast and so on.

[14:02] Not at all. God decreed how He should be worshipped according to His Word. So, you know, whenever we create anything designed to lead us more fully in worship through any kind of physical form, whether it's images, whether it's art forms, whatever our imaginations crave, that's not worshipping God in spirit.

Now, don't get me wrong, of course not. Artistic beauty is a gift from God. Colour, form, design, shape, you know, part of God's creative gifts to be used and admired for God's glory.

But when they become means to intend to be more worshipful, you know, somehow more aware of who God is, that's not worshipping the God whose spirit, not worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

I remember some years ago, well, a lot of years ago actually now, attending a meeting in Glasgow of academics who were speaking on religion in Scotland and one such academic considered to take out what, I have no idea of what the thing was, couldn't it be described as some kind of ethnic wooden instrument?

And for the next ten minutes she explained how the signs of that instrument actually led us closer to God. And, you know, we think, well, of course that was utterly nonsense, that's a bizarre nonsense.

[15:32] But, you know, let's be careful ourselves. But, you know, somehow in our own imaginations we think we can come to God through anything physical or material. Because, you

know, we come to God with a heart that recognizes who God is in His glory and His majesty and His power.

We come before Him recognizing that He's God who is Spirit, that He's the invisible God, maker of heaven and earth, made heaven and earth like there's nothing by the word of His power.

We come to Him, of course, through Jesus. We come to Him through Jesus who's the image of the invisible God. And, of course, that leads to the question, well, if God is Spirit, if God's invisible, how can we know Him?

How can we, you know, how can we relate to a God who can't be seen? And the answer's quite simple and yet utterly profound. You want to know what God is like.

You turn to the Scriptures, you turn to the Bible, you turn to the Word of God. to find out about Jesus. As Paul tells us in Colossians 1, he tells us of Jesus.

[16:46] He is the image of the invisible God. He's Jesus from all eternity. Jesus, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Three-person God. Yes, three-person Spirit.

But in a moment of space and time, the invisible Son of God coming to earth, assuming our human nature, assuming our human form and becoming man.

John tells us earlier in his Gospel, tells us of God, no one has seen God at any time. But then the only begotten Son who's in the bosom of the Father, He has declared to Him.

And this great statement that we must keep in our heads at all times, that in Christ, the visible, sorry, that in Christ, the invisible is made visible.

In Christ, the invisible is made visible. So we can rejoice. We can rejoice with hope that we can say that by faith, yes, you have seen God.

[17:49] You do see God. By faith, you see God as God has made Himself known in Jesus. God, who is Spirit, which reveals His character through His Word, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have that confidence. You know, we have that confidence to say that, yes, we know God, we know God, who is Spirit, we know Him sufficiently to put our trust in Him.

We know Him sufficiently to worship Him and to worship Him from the heart, to worship with our spirits, so that we can have that sure confidence to approach God, yes, God, who is Spirit.

We can relate to God, who is Spirit, relate to Him from our heart, a heart that's made right with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Christ, the invisible, is made visible.

So, we've looked here a God is Spirit in relation to God as the invisible God, but secondly, what else do we find from Scripture and interpretation of Scripture? We find that God is the omnipresent God.

[18:59] Don't be put off with the word omni, you use it all the time. Isn't there a cinema in Edinburgh or the omni-centre? Omni just means all or everything. So, if God is Spirit, that tells us that God is all.

God is all. In other words, He's all present. He's everywhere. And, you know, when we just stop and think of that truth for a moment, doesn't that emphasize how different God is to created human beings?

How different God is to creation itself? So, what does it tell us of God that tells us how different He is from all creation?

Well, think of it like this. You know, you and I are limited to one particular place at any one time.

Okay? Because of our physicality. Our physicality reduces us, restricts us to one place.

Okay, we're body and spirit, we're body and soul, but body and soul together in one place, certainly on the side of eternity. But God is different.

[20:06] God is so different even to the apex of His creation, even to, different to man. because He's not confined to any one place. You and I are mortal, our bodies will die.

God is immortal, God cannot die. He's omnipresent, therefore, He's present at all times and all ages, from eternity to eternity.

So that from the eternity of His being to the eternity of His knowledge, even He knows the very details of our lives, God is there.

He's omnipresent. That's why we chose to sing from Psalm 139 because that psalm tells us of God as being omnipresent. We're singing verses 7 to 12.

Where shall I go from your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you're there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold

me.

[21 : 17] If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

And that truth, that wonderful truth, it tells us so much even about our own relationship with God. because we can't hide from God. I can't think that, you know, somehow God's not going to see, he's not going to know even the secret sins of our heart, the secret actions that we perform that we might want to hide from others, but not from God.

Because if God is omnipresent, there's no such thing as a hidden sin. when I was a child growing up in Perth under the ministry of the late David Patterson, I still remember, I must only have been nine, ten at the time, remember a sermon illustration that he used to describe God who's omnipresent.

He gave an example, and it might say it's a bit simplistic, it may well be, but it's certainly stuck in my mind for a long time. And it may well have been a true story, I can't remember.

But what he said has stayed with me. He spoke about some men who'd committed some dreadful, some terrible deed. They were assuring themselves that no one had seen.

[22 : 41] No one had seen they looked left, they looked right, no one had seen them. But as David Patterson said, they hadn't looked up. They hadn't looked up.

They hadn't reckoned on the God who sees all things, the God who knows all things, the God who's omnipresent, the God to whom one day we'll give an account of all that we've done.

There's no use trying to cover up, no use trying to think, well, God didn't know. He does, he sees, he knows. But you know, the wonderful truth is this, the God who's omnipresent, the God from whom we can hide nothing, is the same God who forgives us all our sins, even the secret sins that we bring before him and come before him in repentance.

And that's his great love for sinners, for you, for me, who come to him and seek his forgiveness.

Because the omnipresent God is the God of omni-love.

He is all-loving, all-loving to those, to you who come to him, to you who recognize him and his greatness, recognizing even his greatness and his great love for sinners.

[24 : 00] You know, just pause for a moment, just pause and reflect on the God who's spirit, the God who's omnipresent. You know, even the vast universe can't contain God.

And if that's the case, and it is the case, then who am I? Who are you? To reduce God to some kind of benign grandfather or some kind of deity with limited love or limited grace or limited power.

God whom we can try and manipulate, you know, like the gods of the pagan neighbors of the Israelites. Because if God is spirit, then it's for you and I to bow in his presence and to offer up unto him spiritual worship.

That spiritual worship that recognizes who he is. To recognize that he's even beyond our understanding. That true spiritual worship that recognizes the Lord as God.

It's for you and I to fall before him. Yes, and repent of our pride in elevating ourselves above almighty God. God is the invisible God.

[25 : 15] The omnipresent God. And lastly, and briefly really following on, I suppose, the limitless God is really upfaling on from thinking of God as omnipresent.

Because when we speak of God as spirit, we're speaking of God who's accessible at any time. He's accessible anywhere, on any occasion.

He's not limited to space, time, or location as we say. And that surely means this. Wherever you are, wherever God's people are, God is there.

And he's always there. He's as close to you at this very moment as he's close to all of his people in every part of the world. He's not remote.

He's not at a distance to any one of you, to any one of his people. Because he's with you always.

So there's no limitations on his presence. He's near you, even now.

[26 : 18] Even now in your need. Even now in your troubles. Even now in your anxieties. He is spirit. And in his limitless being, his limitless love for you.

And so it's for you and I to worship God in spirit and truth. And we focus much as it was on the truth part. Certainly the truth and knowing God as the God of truth.

And worshiping God as God has directed us how to worship in his word, his infallible word.

Worshiping him sincerely from a heart that knows God as God.

As God has made himself known through his word. Worshiping him through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Worshiping him in our spirits, in our hearts, engaged in serving the one true God, the invisible God, the omnipresent God, the limitless God.

And so it's for you and I, for our souls, our spirits, to recognize the greatness of God. To know the God who's got no beginning, no end, who's all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, infinite, infinite, eternal, unchangeable.

[27 : 32] God who draws us to himself by his Holy Spirit so that you and I can know full, wholesome worship, that worship that doesn't rely on man-made props to somehow bring us into God's presence.

We come before him in the spirit of worship. We come before him in the spirit of adoration, the spirit of praise, in the spirit of expectancy.

As we come before our limitless God, our God who gives to his people above and beyond what we can even ask or think.

That's why I love Psalm 23 that speaks of our cup running over with God's goodness. He gives to his people above and beyond what we can even ask or think.

Come to him. Come to him and know that God is spirit, that God is love. that God is light. And when you come to the God who is spirit, who is love, who is light, you'll know that eternal security that's found in our eternal God, our Lord, our Savior.

[28 : 46] Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, forgive us for the many times we have limited you in your grace, limited you and your love, limited you in your power.

Forgive us, Lord, for the many times when our thoughts of you have been too small and we've reduced you to have been made in our image. Lord, we thank you that you correct us, that you correct us by your word, that you show us who you are in your greatness so that we have no excuse when we come before you in worship.

O Lord, help us truly to worship you with that spiritual worship from the heart that knows you, that you have made yourself known to us. Lord, help us, we pray, not to give to you any substandard worship, but help us, Lord, to offer up unto you that true worship that is due unto your holy name.

So we pray, Lord, for your forgiveness for many times when we have not recognized you as you have declared yourself to us. And Lord, be with us in this week that has begun.

Lord, we know that there are many difficulties that lie ahead, many burdens, many hurdles, but we know, Lord, that you are the God who helps. You are the God who is our helper.

[30 : 14] And we thank you, Lord, that we go into this week with you beside us, alongside us, with us. your promise never to leave us, never to forsake us.

To be with us in this week, may we know that this is the week that you have made, that you have formed, created. You know it. We thank you that we trust in you for all things.

To hear us, Lord, as we continue to worship you now, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.