

Examining the Physical Nature of the *Imago Dei*

Part 2 - The Plausibility of the Physicality of Bearing God's Image

Part 2a - *God as Spirit*

“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...”

In Part 1 - *The Words God Used*, it was demonstrated that the consistent - and therefore, *natural* - meaning of the Hebrew word translated “image” is that of a visual representation. Exegetically, we have to start with an understanding that our bodies (the only visible part of us) is crafted to “look like” God.

But is this understanding plausible?

While we have to acknowledge that the starting point of our understanding of “image” must be that there is a physical representation of God to be found in our visible form, we cannot yet conclude that this is indeed what God meant by the word until we have determined that there is no compelling reason to understand it otherwise.

Given the things we know about God from other Scriptures, the following questions may come to mind:

- Is it even possible for mankind to visibly represent the invisible God?
- Since God the Father is incorporeal, is it credible to believe that a material body can be crafted in the shape of a Spirit being?
- Can a human, bound by both time and space, display the visible likeness of a God Who is both timeless and infinite?

Such questions are too weighty to ignore.

The questions themselves, however, are not their own answers. Or, to put it another way, they are not rhetorical. They are valid questions, and we should seek valid answers. But if we do not find valid answers—affirmatively or negatively—we must be careful not to reject the plain meaning of God's Word on the *absence* of an answer.

The answers, of course, if they are to be found, must be found in Scripture and sound reason (in that order).

As I consider the questions above, I believe that they all boil down to a single question:

Does God, as a spirit-being, have “form” or “shape”?

If the answer to this question is “yes,” then all three questions above can be adequately understood in the affirmative. If the answer is “no,” then the other three questions must all be answered in the negative.

God is Spirit

The clearest declaration that God is Spirit is found in John 4:24 where Jesus stated it as a matter of fact. This truth of God’s nature is not in dispute. The uncertainty comes in the attempt to define what it means.

The nature of a spirit is of great significance in the context of the question being addressed in this paper, for if a spirit is formless by nature, then the question already has its answer.

If we entertain the idea that spirits are formless – that is, without dimensions – then we have an assumption we can test by Scripture. We know very little about the spirit realm or the beings that reside exclusively within it. However, we can learn something by examining the biblical accounts which relate the activities of spirit beings.

Hebrews 1:4 asserts that all angels are spirit beings. Therefore, we must assume that everything that it means to be a spirit is also true of angels. Things which are true of God but not true of angels must be attributed to something other than the fact that God is Spirit.

Consider the account of the angel who visited Daniel in Daniel 10. Here we have an angel who was sent to Daniel when he first began to pray. The angel was detained by the Prince of Persia until the angel Michael was sent to assist him. This leads to several observations about angels:

- Angels are not omnipresent, for they can only be in one geographical location at a time (v. 14)
- Angels are “sent” or “come” from one location to another (vv. 11-13)
- Angels’ mobility can be hindered by other beings, and that hindrance has a temporal component (This one consumed three weeks – v. 13)

- Angels are invisible unless God supernaturally enables them to be seen. Daniel was not alone, but he was the only one who actually saw the angel (v. 7).

Other observations about spirits confirm these observations.

- From Revelation 20:1, we see that the mobility of Satan will be confined to the Abyss for 1000 years.
- The man who had the “Legion” of demons in Mark 5 housed all of those demons within his body. When the demons “came out” of the man, they immediately “entered” the swine. Their influence departed from the man where they had been residing, and their influence began to be exerted in the pigs where they took up residence.
- Every human being has a spirit. That spirit, while the person lives, is geographically limited to the confines of his or her body.

These scriptural observations indicate that at a moment in time, a spirit being does indeed exist at a specific geographical location relative to the physical realm. Logically, it follows that if a being is limited geographically, then it must exist with spatial dimension. If it had no spatial dimensions, then it could not “go” or “come” or be confined for such descriptions could have no meaning. If a spirit has spatial dimensions, then it must have some sort of *form*.

Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that, by nature, spirits *do* have some sort of form.

Of course, God – as Spirit – is also *omnipresent*. But this truth cannot be attributed to the fact that He is Spirit, for if that were so, all spirits would be omnipresent. God’s omnipresence is an attribute of His divine nature, not His Spirit nature.

God is also timeless. But like His omnipresence, this attribute is His because of His divine nature, not His Spirit nature, for spirits are also bound by time.

This line of reasoning does not force a conclusion that God has form, but it does conclusively rebuff the claim that because God is *Spirit*, He *cannot* have form. Every other spirit we find in the pages of Scripture is geographically localized. Every other spirit must have dimensions in order to be limited in that way.

Is God’s Spirit geographically localized?

Since God is Spirit—but clearly not limited like other spirits which have limits—is there any basis to claim that He still is geographically

localized? If so, then this would give evidence for a claim that God indeed *does* have some sort of form.

A search of the scriptures does reveal passages that present God as geographically localized. Consider the following:

- Genesis 1:2 - *“the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”*
 - In order for a spirit to “move,” it must be a localized in one place while not present in another.
 - The spirit who “moves” must do so within the parameters of time and space.
- Genesis 3:8-10 - *“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ 10 He said, ‘I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’”*
 - The plain reading of this account indicates that God was *not* tangibly present when Adam and Eve sinned. Of course, the event happened in God’s presence in the sense that nothing ever happens outside the absolute knowledge of God, but from Adam and Eve’s perspective, He was not present in the way they were accustomed to experiencing His presence.
 - When God’s manifest presence reenters the narrative, He approaches in such a way that Adam not only heard the sound, but also recognized the meaning of the sound. He knew that God was *approaching*. God was *not* at the location, but then He *came* to that location.
- Exodus 33:22 - *“...and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.”*
 - God told Moses that His hand would be placed (localized) over the cleft in the rock and that it would actually obscure Moses’ view.
 - God told Moses that He would “pass by.” This is a geographic description of where God would be moving... from one place to another. The text also indicates that this

change of location would actually alter what Moses would be able to see from where he waited.

- Matthew 3:16b - *“he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him”*
 - At Jesus’ baptism, John literally watched the Spirit of God come down from heaven to the place where Jesus’ stood in the water.
 - There was both a place of departure (the heavens opened) and a place of arrival (the Spirit lighted on Jesus).
- Acts 2:2 - *“And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.”*
 - The Spirit of God came down *from* heaven, *to* the room where the disciples waited.
 - There was actually noise that accompanied the coming of the Spirit of God. This means that there was literally a physical interaction between the material realm and the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 7:56 - *“and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*
 - It seems that Stephen looked up at a specific location, and there he saw God.
 - He also saw Jesus there (Who was and is physical), and was able to discern His physical location in relationship to the physical location of the Father.
- Job 2:2-3 - *“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. The LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’”* (compare also Job 1:6-7)
 - Even though this event is completely in the spirit realm, the “sons of God” (angels) must “come” to stand in the presence of God. When Satan was “before the LORD,” he was no longer “roaming about the earth” (a clear geographical reference)

- This underscores the geographical limitations of spirits.
- This means that “before the LORD” was a location *distinct from* “roaming the earth”
- This event and the similar one that preceded it both happened on “a day.” This clearly indicates that both God and angels operate *within* time as spirit beings.

Conclusion Regarding God as Spirit

The scriptures clearly teach that all spirits operate *within* both time and space, including God.

The fact that “God is Spirit” points us towards a conclusion that He does indeed have spatial dimensions (form) because all other spirits are temporally and spatially defined and bound.

However, God also transcends the nature of spirits; while He is Spirit, He is also timeless and omnipresent. We cannot yet on the basis of these observations alone conclude that God has *form*.

The firm conclusion that we *can* draw from these Scriptures is that **God’s existence as a Spirit does not preclude the possibility that He has *form*.**

In the attempt to answer the question of the plausibility that God could have a form (which could be represented by man’s physical body), we have first addressed the reality of God as Spirit and discovered that we cannot deny “form” on the basis of that knowledge alone. But we neither can we conclude that God has the spatial dimensions (form) simply because other spirits do.

God is not bound by the same limitations that His creatures experience. Therefore, the study must continue to see if the Scriptures show positive evidence that God exists in a spatially defined “form” which He could use as the template to create man physically “in His image.”

This will be the topic of the next segment of this paper Part 2b - *The Form of YHWH*