

The Nature of God

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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 terms literally or are they 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. 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 that could be opened or closed. No, we correctly perceive that He used a figure of speech and that His meaning is that there are some ways in which He behaves as a door. So it is with the human parts and traits that are attributed to God in Scripture. Deity, in His very nature, is infinitely above anything we in our finiteness can conceive, and thus He is 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 these descriptions of God literally (and that those who do not are disloyal to the Word of God) are actually the ones who fail to handle the Word correctly (2 Tim. 2:15).

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