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## DOES GOD HAVE A SPIRIT BODY?

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Most Christians believe that the Creator God of the universe exists eternally as an infinite being outside of time and space, and is an immaterial being in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This infinite spirit-being not only brought into existence the physical universe but also a host of angels who share His nature of being spirit, unlike humans, who were created by God as beings who are composed of physical body *and* spirit.

Generally the only deviation from the orthodox doctrine given above has been the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, Mormons), which teaches that God the Father and God the Son are physical beings somewhat similar to the gods of Greece and Rome.

Between this Mormon view of God and that of historic and orthodox Christianity is the perspective of Finis Dake, author of *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*.<sup>1</sup> This book has been used by many Christians, unaware that he sets forth a number of ideas that are foreign to the historic biblical faith from the apostles and the Lord Jesus Himself. I will be addressing only one of these unorthodox teachings, namely, the nature of the divine being.

**Spirit Substance.** Dake argues that God is not a spirit but has a body of "spirit substance."<sup>2</sup> Because God is a person, Dake says, He has a personal soul and personal spirit within a spiritual body<sup>3</sup> that has actual fingers, hands, various other body parts, and inhabits a mansion in a city on a material planet called Heaven. He walks, rides in a chariot, sits on a throne, and can do anything that humans do.<sup>4</sup>

Dake bases his view of God on several lines of biblical argument. First, the Bible mentions that there are heavenly and earthly bodies, a natural and spiritual body.<sup>5</sup> There is no exclusion of God from this reality, so God, too, must have a body.

Second, he mentions that Moses said that man was made in the image of God: "If man was made in the image and likeness of God bodily, then God must have a body, and an outward form and shape."<sup>6</sup>

Third, Dake says that the writers of Scripture acknowledge that God has a body. They saw it with their natural eyes.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, he says the historic doctrine of God as one being in three persons is unscriptural and foolish, since one person cannot be three persons.<sup>8</sup> Rather, God is "three distinct persons as separate and distinct as any three persons we know of in this life."<sup>9</sup> For Dake, the Bible's descriptions of God are not figures of speech but rather descriptions of "real bodily parts of God."<sup>10</sup>

Fifth, all angels and spiritual beings have bodies with souls and spirits like human beings.

Sixth, human beings are able to understand God; He is not incomprehensible. Since humans have a body, soul, and spirit and they are like God, then each person in the Godhead must have a body, soul, and spirit. The members of the Godhead live as one in unity, but not as one being.<sup>11</sup>

Seventh, the Bible is plain that God has a spirit-body with parts like man: "This is proven by hundreds of plain Scriptures that do not need interpretation. They are too clear and literal to misunderstand."<sup>12</sup> Additionally, He is localized in His body: "His presence can be felt everywhere but His body cannot."<sup>13</sup>

The arguments of Finnis Dake are a serious challenge to the common understanding of God that has been understood by millions of believers in God for millennia, and particularly since the coming of God's Son, Jesus. Unfortunately, interacting with Dake's various arguments, and the manner in which he interprets numerous biblical texts he refers to, would require many more pages than can be dealt with at this time; but we are able to offer several lines of argument.

**How Does One Speak of God and Man?** Understanding the nature of God is the most difficult task of the Christian. This is so because everything that we may aspire to know of the infinite deity is restricted to what is revealed to us either in the universe that He has made or the Scriptures that He wrote through the prophets and apostles.

Additionally, finite beings cannot perceive the inner self of an infinite being, since He is beyond empirical investigation (that of the senses). Only in the manners in which God manifests Himself in finite terms can we know Him.

When we  *speak about humans* made in the image of God, we understand this as  *theomorphic*  and  *theopathic*  language. By this is meant that humans are created to be like, but not the same, as their Creator, in our form and in our spiritual expression, since God created humans physically in His image, as well as spiritually. I do not mean to suggest that God is physical or has a body but that our physical body, when joined with our spirit, has been enabled, in part, to experience and express attributes that God has without a body. Consequently, without material eyes, the infinite God sees, and without a brain, He thinks. God has created humans as finite physical beings to act similarly to God.<sup>14</sup>

How, then, do we *speak* of God? We must do so in human terms as to both form and attitude. Biblical passages that describe God in material language (hands, eyes, etc.) should be interpreted metaphorically. Although God is not physical, He acts in a physical world and communicates with material beings. In order to condescend to our limited understanding, it is both logical and natural to describe Himself in tangible ways. For example, in Psalm 139 the psalmist says that God guides his life with His “hand.” In Hebrews 10:31, we discover that people experience God’s judgment when they fall into His “hands.” One cannot properly understand these texts to be saying that humans actually are in God’s hand, whether for good or ill. This idiom is not even used literally when referring to humans being in the hands of another. The same is true when God is spoken of as a rock (Deut. 32:4), a fortress (2 Sam. 24:7), or a potter (Isa. 64:8).

**God as Spirit Is Invisible and Nonmaterial.** God cannot be simultaneously material and immaterial in His essence; this would be ontologically and exegetically impossible. We observe in Luke 24:39 and Isaiah 31:3 that the nature of spirit is contrasted with the nature of material things. Most notably the apostle Paul makes this point. In 1 Timothy 1:17, he says that God is invisible. Now, if something is invisible, it cannot be seen; it cannot be perceived with any form of device or by any human capability. The apostle also uses additional reinforced language to indicate that the “location” of God’s being is unapproachable, and that “no man has seen or can see” this divine Being. As well, the apostle John says, “No man has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son, who dwells in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him” (John 1:18 NAS95).

Then what do people of the Old and New Testaments see when they see God? They see manifestations or God’s presence but not God Himself. This is true of the burning bush of Moses (Exod. 3), the Shekinah glory in the tabernacle and the temple, His appearance with two angels with Abraham in Genesis 18, the visions of Ezekiel, and in the fiery furnace with the three Hebrew children (Dan. 3). These are ways in which God makes Himself known. None of these is the appearance of God in His invisible nature, which in itself is a contradiction of terms. One can no more see something that is truly invisible than one can construct a two-angled triangle.

Even though the divine being cannot be seen, He can nonetheless be perceived mentally through His creation. Paul says that “His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood (mental and not physical) through what (physical and visible) has been made” (Rom. 1:20 NAS95).

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## NOTES

- 1 Finis J. Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Bible Sales, 1963); also see Finis Dake, *God's Plan for Man: Contained in Fifty-Two Lessons, One for Each Week of the Year* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Publishing, 1949, 1977).
- 2 Dake, *God's Plan for Man*, 34.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid; see also Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, 63, 64, 96, 97.
- 5 Dake, *God's Plan for Man*, 52.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 53.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 54.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 56.
- 13 Ibid., 57.
- 14 H. Wayne House and William Grover, *Does God Feel Your Pain?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 110.