

THE ORIGIN, NATURE, AND DESTINY OF THE SOUL [PART II]

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

THE ORIGIN AND SOURCE OF MAN'S IMMORTAL NATURE

Biblical teaching regarding man acknowledges that he is composed of two distinct parts—the physical and the spiritual. We get an introduction to the origin of the **physical** portion as early as Genesis 2:7 when the text states: “Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (*nephesh chayyah*).” It is important to recognize both what this passage is discussing and what it is not. Genesis 2:7 is teaching that man was given **physical life**; it is **not** teaching that man was instilled with an **immortal nature**. The immediate (as well as the remote) context is important to a clear understanding of the intent of Moses’ statement. Both the King James and American Standard Versions translate *nephesh chayyah* as “living soul.” The Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Version, New International Version, and the New Jerusalem Bible all translate the phrase as “living being.” The New English Bible translates it as “living creature.”

The variety of terms employed in our English translations has caused some confusion as to the exact meaning of the phrase “living soul” or “living being.” Some have suggested, for example, that Genesis 2:7 is speaking specifically of man’s receiving his immortal soul and/or spirit. This is not the case, however, as a closer examination of the immediate and remote contexts clearly indi-

cates. For example, the apostle Paul quoted Genesis 2:7 in 1 Corinthians 15:44-45 when he wrote: “If there is a **natural body**, there is also a **spiritual body**. So also it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” The comparison/contrast offered by the apostle between the first Adam’s “natural body” and the last Adam (Christ) as a “life-giving spirit” is critical to an understanding of Paul’s central message (and the theme of the great “resurrection chapter” of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15), and must not be overlooked in any examination of Moses’ statement in Genesis 2:7.

There are six additional places in the Old Testament where similar phraseology is employed, and in each case the text obviously is speaking of members of the animal kingdom. In Genesis 1:24, God said: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures (*nephesh chayyah*) after their kind.” Genesis 1:30 records that God provided plants as food “to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life (*nishmath chayyah*).” When the Genesis Flood covered the Earth, God made a rainbow covenant with Noah and with every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*) that was in the ark with Him (Genesis 9:12). God pledged that He would remember the covenant that He made with every “living creature” (*nephesh chayyah*; Genesis 9:12), and therefore He never again would destroy the Earth by such a Flood.

The rainbow, He stated, would serve as a reminder of that “everlasting covenant” between God and every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*, Genesis 9:15). The final occurrence of the phrase is found in Ezekiel’s description of the river flowing from the temple in which every living creature (*nephesh chayyah*) that swarms will live (47:9).

Additionally, the Bible declares: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no preeminence above the beasts” (Ecclesiastes 3:19). Does this mean, therefore, that man possesses only a material nature and has no immortal soul/spirit? No, it does not! In speaking to this very point, Jack P. Lewis wrote:

It would seem that arguments which try to present the distinctiveness of man from the term “living soul” are actually based on the phenomena of variety in translation of the KJV and have no validity in fact. Had the translators rendered all seven occurrences by the same term, we would have been aware of the fact that both men and animals are described by it. To make this observation is not at all to affirm that the Old Testament is materialistic. We are concerned at this time only with the biblical usage of one term. Neither is it to deny a distinction in biblical thought between men and other animals when one takes in consideration the whole Old Testament view.

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Man may perish like the animals, but he is different from them. Even here in Genesis in the creation account, God is not said to breathe into the animals the breath of life; animals are made male and female; there is no separate account of the making of the female animal; they are not said to be in God's image and likeness; they are not given dominion. Man is the crown of God's creation (1988, p. 7).

When Dr. Lewis suggested that "man may perish like the animals," he captured the essence of the passage in Ecclesiastes 3:19. It is true that both men and beasts ultimately die, and that in this regard man "hath no pre-eminence above the beasts." Yet while both creatures are referred to as *nephesh chayyah*, the Scriptures make it clear that God did something special in reference to man. Genesis 1:26-27 records: "And God said, Let us make man **in our image, after our likeness**. . . . And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Nowhere does the Bible state or imply that animals are created in the image of God. What is it, then, that makes man different from the animals?

The answer, of course, lies in the fact that man possesses an immortal nature. Animals do not. God Himself is a spirit (John 4:24). And a spirit "hath not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). In some fashion, God has placed within man a portion of His own essence—in the sense that man possesses a spirit that never will die. The prophet Zechariah spoke of Jehovah, Who "stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit (*ruach*) of man within him" (12:1). The Hebrew word for "formeth," *yatsar*, is defined as to form, fashion, or shape (as in a potter working with clay; Harris, et al., 1980, 1:396). The same word is used in Genesis 2:7, thereby indicating that both man's physical body and his spiritual nature were formed, shaped, molded, or fashioned by God. The authors of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* noted:

The participial form meaning "potter" is applied to God in Isa. 64:7 where mankind is the work of his hand. When applied to the objects of God's creative work, the emphasis of the word is on the forming or structuring of these phenomena. The word speaks to the **mode of creation** of these phenomena only insofar as the act of shap-

ing or forming an object may also imply the **initiation of that object** (Harris, et al., 1980, 1:396, emp. added).

As the Creator, God "initiates" the object we know as man's immortal nature (i.e., his soul or spirit). Solomon, writing in Ecclesiastes, noted that "the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto **God who gave it**" (12:7, emp. added). Man's physical body was formed of the physical dust of the Earth. Would it not follow, then, that his spiritual portion would be formed from that which is spiritual? When the writer of Hebrews referred to God as "the Father of our spirits" (12:9), he revealed the spiritual source of the soul—God.

WHEN DOES MAN RECEIVE HIS IMMORTAL NATURE?

When does man receive his soul/spirit? In one of the most illustrative passages within the Bible on this topic, James wrote: "The body apart from the spirit is dead" (2:26). This brief but important observation—offered by inspiration on the part of the Bible writer—carries tremendous implications. Without the presence of the spirit (*pneuma*), the physical body cannot live. There is, however, an important corollary to James' assessment. If the body is living, **then the spirit (*pneuma*) must be present!**

But when does life actually begin? The answer, quite simply, is that it begins at **conception**. When the male and female gametes join to form the zygote that eventually will grow into the fetus, it is at that very moment that the formation of a new body begins. It is the result of a **viable** male gamete joined sexually with a **viable** female gamete which has formed a zygote that will move through a variety of important stages.

The first step in the process—which eventually will result in the highly differentiated tissues and organs that compose the body of the neonatal child—is the initial mitotic cleavage of that primal cell, the zygote. At this point, the genetic material doubles, matching copies of the chromosomes move to opposite poles, and the cell cleaves into two daughter cells. Shortly afterwards, each of these cells divides again, forming the embryo. [In humans and animals, the term "embryo" applies to any stage after cleavage but before birth (see Rudin, 1997, p. 125).]

As the cells of the embryo continue to divide, they form a cluster, or ball, of cells. These divisions are accompanied by additional changes that produce a hollow, fluid-filled cavity inside the ball, which now is a one-layer-thick grouping of cells known as a blastula. Early in the second day after fertilization, the embryo undergoes a process known as gastrulation in which the single-layer blastula turns into a three-layered gastrula consisting of ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm surrounding a cavity known as the archenteron. Each of these layers will give rise to very specific structures. For example, the ectoderm will form the outermost layer of the skin and other structures, including the sense organs, parts of the skeleton, and the nervous system. The mesoderm will form tissues associated with support, movement, transport, reproduction, and excretion (i.e., muscle, bone, cartilage, blood, heart, blood vessels, gonads, and kidneys). The endoderm will produce structures associated with breathing and digestion (including the lungs, liver, pancreas, and other digestive glands) [see Wallace, 1975, p. 187].

Within 72 hours after fertilization, the embryo will have divided a total of four times, and will consist of sixteen cells. Each cell will divide before it reaches the size of the cell that produced it; hence, the cells will become progressively smaller with each division. By the end of the first month, the embryo will have reached a length of only one-eighth of an inch but already will consist of millions of cells. By the end of the ninth month, if all proceeds via normal channels, a baby is ready to be born. As one biologist (and author of a widely used secular university biology textbook) noted: “As soon as the egg is touched by the head of a sperm, it undergoes violent pulsating movements which unite the twenty-three chromosomes of the sperm with its own genetic complement. From this single cell, about 1/175 of an inch in diameter, a **baby** weighing several pounds and composed of trillions of cells will be delivered about 266 days later” (Wallace, 1975, p. 194, emp. added).

Is it alive? Of course it is alive. In fact, herein lies one of the most illogical absurdities of arguments set forth by those who support and defend abortion. They opine that the “thing” in the human womb is not “alive.” If it is not alive, why the need to abort it?

Simply leave it alone! Obviously, of course, from their perspective that is not an option because, as everyone knows, in nine months that growing, vibrant, developing fetus results in a **living, human baby**. The truth of the matter is that human life begins at conception and is continuous, whether intrauterine or extrauterine, until death. Consider the following important scientific facts regarding the living nature of the fetus.

- (1) The baby’s heart starts beating 18-25 days after conception.
- (2) By the age of two months, the heart beats so strongly that a doctor actually can listen to it with a special stethoscope.

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- (3) At about this same time, brain activity can be recorded by use of an electroencephalogram. Brain waves are readily apparent.
- (4) By the age of two months, everything is “in place”—feet, hands, head, organs, etc. Upon close examination, fingerprints are evident. Although less than an inch long, the embryo has a head with eyes and ears, a simple digestive system, kidneys, liver, a heart that beats, a bloodstream of its own, and the beginning of a brain.
- (5) The unborn child hiccups, sucks his thumb, wakes, and sleeps.
- (6) The unborn child responds to touch, pain, cold, sound, and light.

Is the child alive? Do you know any **dead** creature that attains such marvelous accomplishments?

But is the fetus growing in the uterus actually **human**? It is the result of the union of the **human** male gamete (spermatozoon) and the **human** female gamete (ovum)—something that certainly guarantees its humanness. [The *Washington Post* of May 11, 1975 contained an “Open Letter to the Supreme Court”—signed by 209 medical doctors—which stated: “We physicians reaffirm our dedication to the awesome splendor of **human life—from one-celled infant to dottering elder.**”]

And how, exactly, does God view this unborn yet fully human child? He said to the prophet Jeremiah: “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and **before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee**” (Jeremiah 1:5, emp. added). Jehovah knew the prophet—even while he was *in utero*—and viewed him as a living person. Further, God already had “sanctified” Jeremiah. If his mother had aborted the baby, she would have killed someone that God recognized as a living person.

The same concept applied to the prophet Isaiah who said: “Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken ye peoples, from afar; **Jehovah hath called me from the womb**; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.... And now, saith Jehovah that **formed me from the womb** to be his servant...” (Isaiah 49:1,5, emp. added). Jehovah not only viewed Isaiah as a person prior to his birth, but even called him by name.

David, in Psalm 139:13-16, provided one of the clearest and most compelling discussions on the nature and importance of life *in utero* when he wrote:

For thou didst form my inward parts:
Thou didst cover me in my mother’s womb.
I will give thanks unto thee;
For I am fearfully and wonderfully made:
Wonderful are thy works;
And that my soul knoweth right well.
My frame was not hidden from thee,
When I was made in secret,
And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance;
And in thy book they were all written,
Even the days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was none of them.

The phrases, “I was made in secret” and “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,” refer to the psalmist’s development in the womb (see Young, 1965, p. 76). Notice also that David employed the pronouns “me,” “my,” and “I” throughout the passage in reference to his own prenatal state. Such usage clearly shows that David was referring to himself, and one cannot talk about himself without having reference to a living human being. The Bible thus acknowledges that David was a human being while he inhabited his mother’s womb (and prior to his birth).

Job, who was undergoing a terrible life crisis, cursed the day he was born when he said: “Why did I not **die from the womb**? Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bore me?” (3:11). It is clear that if the fetus had **died** in the womb, prior to that it must have been **living**. Something (or someone) cannot die if it (or they) never lived. It also is of interest to observe that in Job 3:13-16, the patriarch listed several formerly-living-but-now-dead people with whom he would have had something in common if he had died *in utero*. Included in the list—along with kings and princes—was the child who experienced a “hidden untimely birth” (i.e., a miscarriage). Job considered the miscarried child to be in the same category as others who once lived but had died. Obviously, the Holy Spirit (Who guided the author of the book of Job in what he wrote) considered an unborn fetus as much a human being as a king, a prince, or a stillborn infant.

In the Old Testament, even the accidental termination of a pregnancy was a punishable crime. Consider Exodus 21:22—“If men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follows; he shall be surely fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him... but if any harm follows, then thou shalt give life for life.” The meaning of the passage is this: If the child was born prematurely as the result of this accident, but “no harm follows” (i.e. the child survived), then a fine was to be exacted; however, if “harm follows” (i.e., either mother or child died), then the guilty party was to be put to death. Look at it this way. Why would God exact such a severe punishment for the accidental **death** of an unborn child—if that child were not **living**?

The same understanding of the fetus as a living child is found within the pages of the New Testament. The angel Gabriel told Mary that “Elisabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a **son** in her old age” (Luke 1:36, emp. added). Please note that the conception resulted in neither an “it” nor a “thing,” but in a **son**. In Luke 1:41,44, the Bible states (in speaking of Elisabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist) that “the babe leaped in her womb.” The word for “babe” in these passages is the Greek term *brephos*, and is used here for an unborn fetus. The same word is used in both Luke 18:15 and Acts 7:19 for young or newborn chil-

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dren. It also is used in Luke 2:12,16 for the newborn Christ-child. *Brephos* therefore can refer to a young child, a newborn infant, or even an unborn fetus (see Thayer, 1958, p. 105). In each of these cases a living human being must be under consideration because the same word is used to describe all three.

The fact that the zygote/embryo/fetus is living (an inescapable conclusion supported by both weighty scientific and biblical evidence) thus becomes critically important in answering the question, “When does man receive his immortal nature?” When James observed that “the body apart from the spirit is dead” (2:26), the corollary au-

tomatically inherent in his statement became the fact that **if the body is living, then the spirit must be present**. Since at each stage of its development the zygote/embryo/fetus is living, it must have had a soul/spirit instilled at conception. No other view is in accord with both the biblical and scientific evidence.

[to be continued]

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EDITOR’S NOTE: This multi-part series on “The Origin, Nature, and Destiny of the Soul” ultimately will have four (or possibly five) installments due to the breadth and nature of the subject matter, and due to the fact that I want each article to do justice to the specific topic(s) being addressed. However, rather than publish the segments in a strictly sequential fashion, I intend to run them in two major groups—February/March (addressing the origin and nature of the soul) and May/June (and possibly July, addressing the destiny of the soul). I hope each of our readers enjoys and benefits from these articles. Upon their completion, they will be incorporated into book form (as volume nine) in our new “Scripture and Science Series.” I will announce the book’s availability in my “Note from the Editor” (around September, if all goes well).

FINANCIAL STATEMENT AVAILABLE

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IS GOD MALE?

Bert Thompson

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, whenever reference is made to God (or, for that matter, to the other two members of the Godhead) a **male** pronoun (He, Him, His, etc.) is employed. Why is this the case? Does God indeed possess gender comparable to that of humans? Is God male?

God's "gender" has been a hot topic for approximately the last two decades, owing in large part to the impact of the women's liberation movement and the sexual revolution. Books with titles like *When God was a Woman*, *The Feminine Face of God*, *Woman's spirit Rising*, and *Beyond God the Father* are leaping off bookstore shelves. Religious writers have capitulated to the "signs of the times" in attempts to make God "gender neutral." For example, the well-known writer on science and religion (and herself a believer in God), Kitty Ferguson, placed the following disclaimer in the frontispiece to her best-selling book, *The Fire in the Equations*, produced and distributed by the W.B. Eerdmans company (a religious publisher).

The author of a book on the topic of science and religion needs a pronoun for God. Regardless of whether I choose to call God "he" or "she," I find myself making a statement which

I don't wish to make. Using them interchangeably seems contrived and gets confusing. "She/he" or "he/she" is cumbersome...and one still has the problem of which gender comes first in the pairing. "It" will not do. Lacking a better solution, I have chosen to use "he," which makes the weaker statement and is more easily interpreted as inclusive (1994, ellipses in orig.).

Major religious groups even have begun altering their views on God and the language they use to express those views. In the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* produced by the U.S. Council of Churches, Christ's word for God, *Abba*, has been changed from "Father" to "Father and Mother," and the word for Christ's relationship to God has been altered from "son" to "child" (see Reuther, 1988, p. 144). At its annual conference in 1992, the Methodist Church in Great Britain concluded that "the use of female imagery is compatible with faithfulness to Scripture—indeed Scripture itself points in this direction and also gives us examples of that imagery." The Methodist Faith and Order Commission thus recommended that, in order to avoid distortion of our image of God, both female and male images should be used to refer to Him/Her (*Inclusive Language and Imagery about God*, 1992). And, as British writer Hugh Montefiore noted:

Even the Church of England, while not going so far as this, has made some suggestions for inclusive language. No doubt such measures are as yet in their infancy. Teaching will in future focus on the filial relationship of Jesus to God rather than on his sonship, and on our dependence on God and on his love and care for us, rather than on his fatherhood (1993, p. 131).

What should be the Christian's response to these kinds of innovations and the changes that ultimately stem from them? Is it scriptural to speak of God as "Mother"? Is it permissible to refer to Jehovah as "Her"?

To answer these kinds of questions, one first must know something of the nature of deity. And the only source of that kind of information is God's Word, the Bible. While it is true that something may be known of God through a study of the created Universe—namely "his everlasting power and divinity" (Romans 1:20)—there nevertheless are specific traits of Deity that can be explained to mankind only via supernatural revelation. Fortunately, such a revelation has been provided in the Bible. Arthur W. Pink expressed this concept most beautifully when he wrote:

If it were announced upon reliable authority that on a certain date in the near future an angel from heaven would visit New York and would deliver a sermon upon the invisible world, the future destiny of man, or the secret deliverance from the power of sin, what an audience he would command! There is no building in that city large enough to accommodate the crowd which would throng to hear him. If upon the next day, the newspapers were to give a verbatim report of his discourse, how eagerly it would be read! And yet, we have between the covers of the Bible not merely an angelic communication, but a Divine revelation. How great then is our wickedness if we undervalue and despise it! And yet we do (1976, p. 103).

If answers are to be found, they will be found within the pages of Holy Writ. The question then becomes: "What has God revealed concerning His nature and gender?"



Dr. Bert Thompson

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It is true that the Bible often uses masculine terms to describe God or His activities. Male names and terms are applied to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture. The names for God—*Yahweh, Elohim, Shaddai, Sebbaoth, Adonai, Kurios*, and *Theos*—are all masculine gender. Furthermore, male metaphors frequently are applied to God. The psalmist cried, “The Lord is king for ever and ever” (10:16) and wrote that “like as a father pitieth his children, so Jehovah pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13). Nehemiah represented God as a warrior when he wrote: “Our God will fight for us” (4:20). Jeremiah portrayed God as a spurned husband (3:1-2). Jesus likened God to a loving Father (Luke 15:11-32). The names for Christ—*Jesus* and *Christos*—are masculine. And Jesus is presented in the male roles of a shepherd (Matthew 25:32; John 10:11-18), a prophet (Luke 13:33), a priest (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 7:24-28), a bridegroom (Matthew 22:14), and a son (Mark 1:11; John 3:16 [John mentions the father-son relationship more than 60 times in his Gospel]; Hebrews 1:2-3).

It also is true, however, that on certain occasions God is portrayed via female images and metaphors. Isaiah 42:14 has God saying, “I cry out like a travailing woman,” and Isaiah 46:3 records God’s words as “Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb.” In Isaiah 49:15, God inquired: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee.” The psalmist used a female attribute in speaking of God when he said, “Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother” In Isaiah 66:13, Jehovah promised: “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” In one of His parables, Jesus portrayed God as a woman diligently sweeping her house in search of a single lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). And in Matthew 23:37, Jesus employed a female figure to refer to Himself in His lament over the city of David: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

However, there are other important factors to be considered as well. In an article titled, “Is God Female?,” Steve Singleton mentioned three of them:

1. God is referred to hundreds of times with masculine names and with masculine pronouns such as “he,” “him,” and “his.”
2. God is never given a feminine name, or referred to with feminine pronouns such as “she,” “her,” and “hers.”
3. This does not mean that God is male. The masculine pronouns have always had the second, generic sense, referring to both male and female,



just as “Man” has been used for centuries to refer to both men and women (1978, 120[10]:154).

These are critical points that must not be overlooked or minimized in responding to those who question the “gender” of God. I began this article by asking: “Does God indeed possess gender comparable to that of humans? Is God male?” In his book, *Credible Christianity*, Hugh Montefiore asked and answered those very questions. “Does this mean that God is male? The very question verges on the absurd.... God exists eternally, and in the eternal sphere there is no sexual differentiation. **God has no gender.** He is neither male nor female...” (1993, pp. 130-131,

emp. in orig.). As Singleton concluded: “God is not male or female. **God is God.** Do you hear the answer which God gave to Moses on the mountain when Moses asked, ‘Who are you?’ God said, ‘I am that I am!’ ” (1978, 120[10]:154, emp. added).

But why is it that God has no gender? Hopefully, the answer to this question will become obvious as we study the Scriptures. God is an eternal Spirit (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 102:27; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8) and, as Jesus pointed out, “a spirit hath not flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). In 1 Samuel 15:29, God Himself announced: “The Strength of Israel...is not a man.” Moses wrote in Numbers 23:19: “God is not a man ...neither the son of man.” Hosea repeated that affirmation: “I am God, and not man” (11:9). Time and again the Scriptures address the fact that, as a Spirit, God is invisible. John wrote of the fact that “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). Paul spoke of “God ...whom no man hath seen, nor can see” (1 Timothy 6:13,16) and of Christ as “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). He reminded the young evangelist Timothy that to the “immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Timothy 1:17).

Spirits—because they are non-corporeal beings—have no physical body and thus by definition are incapable of possessing gender. In speaking of the humans who one day will inhabit the heavenly realm, Jesus remarked that they “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but **are as angels**” (Matthew 22:30). His point was that we shall not take up our earthly gender roles in heaven, just as the angels, as spirit beings, have played no gender roles throughout their existence. Similarly, God, as a Spirit Being Who inhabits the heavenly realm, has no gender.

Why, then, if God has no gender, do the Scriptures refer to Him via masculine names and metaphors? And must we refer to Him via masculine names and metaphors?

The answer to the first question has to do with both history and authority. From a historical standpoint, the fact is that every known ancient religion—except one—posited both gods and goddesses as beings worthy of worship. The lone exception was Judaism. Kreeft and Tacelli, in their *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, addressed this matter when they wrote:

The Jewish revelation was distinctive in its exclusively masculine pronoun because it was distinctive in its theology of the divine transcendence. That seems to be the main point of the masculine imagery. As a man comes into a woman from without to make her pregnant, so God creates the universe from without rather than birthing it from within and impregnates our souls with grace or supernatural life from without. As a woman cannot impregnate herself, so the universe cannot create itself, nor can the soul redeem itself. Surely there is an inherent connection between these two radically distinctive features of the...biblical religions...: their unique view of a transcendent God creating nature out of nothing and their refusal to call God "she" despite the fact that Scripture ascribes to him feminine **attributes** like compassionate nursing (Is. 49:15), motherly comfort (Is. 66:13) and carrying an infant (Is. 46:3). The masculine pronoun safeguards (1) the transcendence of God against the illusion that nature is born from God as a mother rather than created and (2) the grace of God against the illusion that we can somehow save ourselves—two illusions ubiquitous and inevitable in the history of religion (1994, p. 98, emp. in orig.).

From an authoritative standpoint, as Singleton pointed out earlier, God is referred to hundreds of times throughout Scripture by masculine names and masculine pronouns—but **never** is given a feminine name or referred to by feminine pronouns. Thomas Rees, writing in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, addressed the matter of God as the ultimate authority figure when he wrote that "the essential nature of God, and His relation to men, is best expressed by the attitude and relation of a father to his children; but God is Father in an infinitely higher and more perfect degree than any man" (1955, 2:1261). K.C. Moser, in his book, *Attributes of God*, stated emphatically that "this manner of referring to God is significant" (1964, p. 12). Indeed it is. While those who were involved in the false religions that surrounded the Jews worshipped a myriad of non-existent gods and goddesses, the Israelites worshipped "Jehovah the true God, the living God, an everlasting King" (Jeremiah 10:10; cf. "the true and living God," 1 Thessalonians 1:9, NLB; "the only God," John 5:44).

Or, as Spencer, et al. put it in their book, *The Goddess Revival*: "The Judeo-Christian God, unlike the gods and goddesses of pagans new and old, exists above the limitations of gender" (1995, p. 48). It is an "authority" matter—not a "gender" matter.

But **must** we refer to God via masculine terms? The question has nothing to do with what **we would like to do**, but instead with what **God tells us to do**. C.S. Lewis addressed this point in his book, *God in the Dock*:

Goddesses have, of course, been worshipped: many religions have had priestesses. But they are religions quite different in character from Christianity.... Since God is in fact not a biological being and has no sex, what can it matter whether we say **He** or **She**, **Father** or **Mother**, **Son** or **Daughter**?

Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable (1970, p. 237, emp. in orig.).

Scripture makes it clear: "O Jehovah, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand... Shall the potter be esteemed as clay; that the thing made should say of him that made it, 'He made me not'; or the thing formed say of him that formed it, 'He hath no understanding?'" (Isaiah 64:8; 29:16). Since when does the clay have the right to dictate to the potter or override his decisions? As a believer in God and His inspired Word, and yet as one speaking from an inherently masculine view point, Lewis went on to say:

We have no authority to take the living and semitive figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures.... It is painful, being a man, to have to assert the privilege which Christianity lays upon my own sex. I am crushingly aware how inadequate most of us are, in our actual and historical individualities, to fill the place prepared for us. But it is an old saying in the army that you salute the uniform not the wearer.... A given man may make a very bad husband; **you cannot mend matters by trying to reverse the roles...** (1970, pp. 237-238, emp. added).

It is not man's (or woman's!) place to question God's sovereign authority or divine will; neither falls under mankind's jurisdiction. As Kreeft and Tacelli noted: "One issue is whether we have the authority to change the names of God used by Christ, the Bible and the church. The traditional defense of masculine imagery for God rests on the premise that the Bible is divine revelation, not culturally relative, negotiable and changeable" (1994, p. 98). Christ Himself left us the perfect example (as He always did) when He said: "Our **Father** Who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name" (Matthew 6:9, emp. added). The fact that biblical designations of God are placed within the specific framework of the masculine settles the matter once and for all. It simply is not a matter up for discussion.

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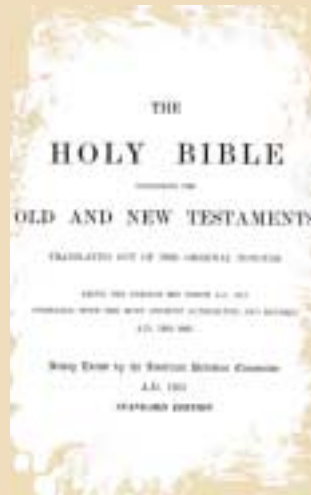


NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

ANNOUNCING: THE RETURN OF THE 1901 AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (ASV)

The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) was published in 1611, and for more than two centuries remained the Bible of the common man. During this period, however, many valuable, ancient manuscripts were discovered that had not been available to the KJV translators. Plus, biblical scholarship had made tremendous advances. Hence, there was a wide-spread feeling that a revision of the KJV might be in order. The beginnings of the revision process started with the Convocation of Canterbury of the Church of England in 1870, when a committee of 16 members was appointed—with the power to add to its numbers as the need arose. The committee extended invitations to some of the most renowned Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek scholars in Great Britain, and eventually two Companies were formed (one for the Old Testament and one for the New), consisting of 27 members each.

Later, American religious groups were invited to participate, which they did by forming two Companies that were the equivalent of their British counterparts. Due provision then was made for the mutual comparison of results and suggestions originating from the four Companies. Under the general presidency of Dr. Philip Schaff, an OT Company of 15 members was formed, along with a NT Company of 16 members. By October 1872, the four Companies had been appointed and begun their work. The NT of the English Revised Version (ERV) appeared in May 1881; the OT appeared four years later in 1885. [HISTORICAL NOTE: Upon completion of the NT, Matthew-Romans was telegraphed from New York to Chicago, composing the longest telegraphic message ever sent up to that point in time—more than 118,000 words!]



The two American Companies continued their work, and in 1900 released the NT of the American Revised Version (ARV). The entire Bible was released the following year, and the American Revised Version (ARV, as it originally was designated) soon came to be known as the American Standard

Version (ASV). The translators stated in the Preface of the ASV that it was their goal to bring “the plain reader more closely into contact with the exact thought of the sacred writers” than any previous version had accomplished. And this they did. In his book, *The English Bible*, famed biblical scholar F.F. Bruce wrote: “It has often been called a schoolmaster’s translation, and there is much truth in this.... [T]he almost pedantic accuracy and precision which the revisers aimed at makes their work an admirable version for the student.” In his *Review of the New Versions*, Foy E. Wallace, Jr. called the ASV “the most accurate, word-for-word translation ever made.” Jacob Mombert, writing in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious*

Knowledge, remarked that “its translation is a marvel for fidelity, accuracy, elegance, purity of idiom, and harmony of expression.”

All of this, no doubt, explains why the ASV has been a favorite among members of the churches of Christ. Originally published by the Thomas Nelson Company, it eventually went out of print. However, Star Bible of Fort Worth, Texas has republished it in a beautiful, leather binding with gold-trimmed edges, a dictionary, and a concordance. [A leather-bound NT is due out in two months as well.] We are happy to announce the return of the 1901 ASV. Cost is \$59.95 (\$3.05 s/h). For credit card orders, call us toll free at 800/234-8558.