

D. The Partially Shared (Communicable) Characteristics of God

1. The personhood of God

The answer to question 4 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* begins with the clause, "God is a Spirit." Sometimes the emphasis in the word "spirit" as used in Scripture is on the idea of "nonphysical" or "incorporeal" being; other times the central thrust in the word (especially in the N. T. ) is "personal being" or "person".

When Scripture speaks of God, angels, demons, and human beings as "spirit", it views them as persons. Spirits are persons. God is Spirit. Human beings in their present earthly state are spirits in union with bodies. They are persons.

But what is a person?

A person is a being with a personal nature, personal faculties and powers, and distinct, individual existence or personality

Personal faculties include the intellect, the emotions, the will, the conscience, and self-consciousness.

Personal powers include believing, thinking, reasoning, knowing, discriminating, feeling, desiring, purposing, deciding, evaluating, judging, and interacting with other beings.

When we say that God is a personal being we mean all these things. And when we say that human beings are persons, we mean all these things.

John 4:24 is sometimes quoted in connection with this characteristic. The verse says either "God is spirit", or "God is a spirit." If the first translation is preferred, then this text is stressing God's essential nature as noncorporeal spirit. If the second translation is preferred, then this text is stressing God's noncorporeal nature and personhood.

The rest of John 4:24 says that "those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." If this is understood to mean that acceptable worship is rendered by those who worship God in their spirit (from the inner part of their being) and in truth (out of sincere hearts), then the text would appear to be saying that God is a spiritual being, and those who worship Him must worship Him in their spirit and from their heart. In such a case, this text would appear to have more to do with the spiritual nature of worship than with the personhood of God.