

# Omnipresence of God

by Maurice Barnett

Entrenched theology declares that God is *everywhere at the same time*. That happens to be the exact meaning of *omnipresence* which is so much used by theologians. *Omnipresence* is not a Bible word. Derived meanings have ranged all the way from God's literally being in everything, everywhere, to His simply surrounding us with His being. Perhaps the most popular explanation is the following—

“Omnipresence signifies that God is totally present everywhere in creation. Hence we are not to understand God as spatially spread throughout the universe, so that a part of Him is here, another part there. God's filling heaven and earth means rather that He is totally and equally present everywhere. He is as much present to a single atom as to the most distant star, to a single seed as to all the plants and trees of the world. There is no place where God is not; He is everywhere.” J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, page 77.

There are other more complex statements of the position but it takes a great deal of effort to grasp what they are saying. It is certainly true the Bible teaches that God knows everything that happens in this world and beyond. He knows our thoughts, words and deeds and we will give account of such at judgment; these, along with other things, determine our eternal destiny.

The Bible declares that the Father, as well as Our Lord Christ, are in heaven. If the Father is actually, literally, everywhere at once, then heaven is everywhere around us and not in a place other than this earth. Secondly, Jesus' did not come down out of heaven because heaven is everywhere around us. The Bible lies to us about Jesus *having come down here out of heaven* and then *ascending from this world back into heaven*. Being God, He never came down to earth because He was already here and He never left. Further, He is not going to come back to this world in a second coming because He never left and we just can't see him.

Why is it so important that we understand this subject? Well, it is important because the very first requirement is that we believe in God in order to please Him, Hebrews 11:6. Every religion has its concept of God as to who or what he is. Even in those groups that claim to be “Christian” we find great differences in what they believe about God.

Christian Science teaches that god is everything; nothing exists that is not god. We are but figments in the imagination of god. They say, “god is good and god is all, therefore all is good. If all is good then there is no evil. Sin, sickness and death are evil.” One can imagine the consequences from that. Christian Science is not omnipresence but *omnibeing*, i.e., god is just everything.

Mormonism claims that there are an untold number of gods in this universe. The god of this world was once a human just as we are and lived on an earth like this one. He served the god of that world (who had attained godhood by serving the god of the world he in turn had come from). The aim of every Mormon male is to become a god and populate a world, or worlds, and be the god of that world. Thus, the god of this earth is a physical, renovated human. This would only conclude an omnipresence of *gods*.

Other religious groups define their god in other ways in order to suit a particular theology to which they have subscribed. It is important for us to discover and define the God of the Bible.

This is important for yet another reason. When you pray to God, what image do you have of Him and just where do you direct your thoughts? Jesus said to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven.” That is directing our prayers to someone, somewhere. Should Jesus have said to pray to, “Our Father who surrounds us?” In that event, what does it tell us of what and where heaven might be?

The Bible is replete with descriptions of God. His qualities are well defined. However, for the purpose of our study, we will focus on a particular characteristic of God—that He is a Spirit. Indeed, John 4:24 clearly says that “God is a Spirit.” There are many spirits—angels, demons and men. They all have in common that they are spirits. In this sense, a spirit is a personal being having a mind, free will, reasoning, memory, ability to communicate, creativity, aesthetic sense and act on a level far above animals. See Ecclesiastes 3:21. A spirit does not have flesh and bones as humans do, Luke 24:39, and yet each is just as individual and distinct from all other spirits as they would if they had fleshly bodies..

What this means is that every spirit has a boundary, “a line that marks the limits” of its existence. *Within this boundary* of a spirit is contained the mind, free will, reasoning, memory, ability to communicate, etc., *whether or not that spirit ever had a body of flesh*; angels for instance. These characteristics of a spirit are not merely dispersed into space and all such spirits thus intermingled together. The *individuality of the person* is retained, even at the death of humans, when the spirit is separated from the body, James 2:26.

As evidence, we take note of Samuel at the house of the witch in En-dor, I Samuel 28:7-25. Samuel had the appearance of an old man. Samuel said that he had been at rest and they had disturbed him. He knew who Saul was, conversed with him, and told Saul what was going to happen to him and his sons the next day. His body had long before decayed but note the characteristics and faculties of this spirit. The rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 demonstrate the same facts about these two spirits. Moses and Elijah at the mount of transfiguration, Luke 9:30-36, were spirits, distinct from one another, who spoke with Jesus about His coming death. Their bodies had long decayed. The angels who sinned were cast into Tartarus to be kept under punishment until the day of judgment, II Peter 2:4. They and the rich man in Hades show that spirits can experience punishment, torment. Each of these persons were independent of one another and each of them *had their own location*. Every spirit has to be somewhere.

Let’s introduce a Bible name for this boundary of a spirit within which are all of its personal characteristics. It is identified by the simple word *form*. A spirit has a distinctive form, whether it is man, an angel or God.. Two Greek words are translated as “form.” They are synonyms. *Morphe* is defined in Lexicons as follows—

*Thayer*, p. 418 “fr. Hom. down, the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; the external appearance.”

*Bauer*, p. 528, “form, outward appearance, shape gener. of bodily form.”

*Cremer*, p. 422, “the form, distinctively belonging to any essence, a synonym with *eidos* the form or appearance of a thing as presented in the mind ...” On page 230, Cremer says concerning *eidos* “derived from *eidesqai*, to appear, appearance, form, usually of the human form, yet of beasts, etc., and indeed both formally the form of a thing, *externa rei species*, and materially or concretely an appearance which presents itself.” *Thayer*, p. 172, says that *eidos* means, “the external appearance, form, figure, shape ...”

*Morphe* refers to the shape or appearance of something. Several English words derive from this—*morphology*, *amorphous*, *metamorphosis* and even *morphing*, changing shapes. All of these refer to appearance of form in some sense or another. Cremer points out that *eidos* is a synonym. Note some verses. Mark 16:12 says—

“And after these things he was manifested in another form (*morphe*) unto two of them, as they walked, on their way into the country.” Mark 16:12. His appearance changed.

“...the fashion of his countenance (*eidos*) was altered, and his raiment became white and dazzling.” Luke 9:29. All of Him, including His clothing, changed.

“And the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form (*eidos*) as a dove.” Luke 3:22.

“...and he was transfigured (*metamorphoo*) before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light.” Matthew 17:2.

But what of a spirit, especially God as a spirit? Does God have a particular form? Well, is He not a spirit? If He is, then He has a distinctive form. We are created in His image as a spirit. So, note the following—

“And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form (*eidos*).” John 5:37 Just as God has a voice, He also has form.

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 who, existing in the form (*morphe*) of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped...” Philippians 2:5-6.

These refer to God the Father as he is in heaven. The Word, before He came into the world in the flesh, continually existed in *the form of God*. The boundary line that was the form of God contained all that was God within that boundary. When the Word came into the world, that Spirit was fused with human flesh, as a human spirit is formed and fused with flesh. John 1:14, in saying that the Word became flesh, specifically identifies the Word that had always existed with the Father. It was *that* Word who became flesh. The Word only changed His form from that of God to that of a servant, found in likeness as a man. In the next article we must identify just where the Father may be.

So, God the Father is a personal being confined in a distinctive form. The question now before us is—Where is He? Is His literal, personal being in a particular location or spread literally throughout the universe, or somewhere in between? There are three places mentioned in the Bible where spirits exist—heaven, earth and hades, without getting in to where Satan and his angels may be. Surely, no one would say that God is literally in hades, the place of departed spirits. That leaves only Heaven and earth.

Heaven is said to mean *to lift* or *to heave up*. It is applied in several ways. The Bible speaks of three heavens, as Paul indicates in II Corinthians 12 about his being caught up to the third heaven. The first heaven was where birds and clouds are, the atmosphere of earth. The second heaven is the place of stars, planets, this universe. The third heaven is the place of God's dwelling. However, that third heaven existed before the other two did because God existed before He created the universe. Heaven was His home. What was created is temporary but heaven is eternal. There will be an end of all that He created when the Lord returns. But heaven will still be there for eternity. It is a spiritual realm. Let's put this in perspective.

*First*, heaven and earth are *two different places*. Matthew 6:19-20 tells us not to lay up treasures on the earth but in heaven. Matthew 16:19-20 records Jesus saying to the Apostles, what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Matthew 28:18 says all authority was given to Jesus in heaven and on earth. See also I Corinthians 8:5, Philippians 2:9-10.

*Second*, heaven is where Jesus came from and where He returned following His resurrection. It is where He will remain until His second coming. Jesus passed through the heavens, Hebrews 4:14, to far above the heavens, Ephesians 4:10, and was made higher than the heavens, Hebrews 7:26.

"And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, *even* the Son of man, who is in heaven." John 3:13.

"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh: he that cometh from heaven is above all." John 3:31.

Jesus entered heaven to appear before the face of God, Hebrews 9:24, completing the offering for sin. He ascended to where He was before, John 6:62, which means He ascended to the Father, John 20:17.

*Third*, God the Father is in heaven, not on earth. Here are verses, just in Matthew, where it declares the "Father who is in heaven," said one way or another. 5:16, 43, 6:1, 9, 7:10, 21, 10:31-32, 12:49, 16:17, 23:9. To these we can add Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1. See also II Chronicles 30:27. This shows that not only while Jesus was speaking but also decades later, Paul said the same thing about the Father's location as Jesus had done. Note this verse especially—

"See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 18:10.

The present tense verb in the verses above indicates His *continued presence in heaven*. Add to that Jesus' saying that the angels in heaven ALWAYS behold His face, Matthew 18:10, 22:30.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he sat down at the right hand of the Father, Acts 2:32-35, Hebrews 1:1-3, I Peter 3:21-22. That means the Father was there. Some time after His ascension to the right hand of the Father, Stephen saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of the Father, Acts 7:55-56. Hebrews 10:12-13 says—

"...but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet."

The time when all his enemies will become the footstool of his feet is when he returns someday, I Corinthians 15:24-26. "*Henceforth expecting*" means to "*remain until*." It means that Jesus will remain in heaven at the right hand of the Father until the end of the world. See II Thessalonians 1:7-10, Philippians 3:20-21. If the person of Jesus is literally in heaven with the person of the Father and he will be in that location until His second coming, it must mean that the Father will be at the same location all of that same period of time—heaven and not earth.

But, what about all of the Bible verses that speak of God's being everywhere? Is that literal, in spite of other plain facts we have already noted? Note the following, and there are others, such as Amos 9:2-3, Jeremiah 23:23-24, etd.—

"Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search

and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them.” Amos 9:2-3.

“Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.” Jeremiah 23:23-24.

“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.” Acts 17:27.

“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Hebrews 4:13.

The first passage usually pointed to by theologians to establish the idea of God filling all space is Psalm 139. To understand this literally in all its parts requires God’s literally being *inside* humans. God even saw with His eyes David in his mother’s womb, verses 13-16. God had to be literally inside David’s mother in order to do that, if we take Psalm 139 to be literal.

Verse 2 says that God “understandest my thought afar off.” How can that be if God completely surrounds a person; God is NEVER far off in that event. So, which is it? Acts 17:27 says that God is “not far from any one of us.” Here are some other passages that show the sense in which God fills heaven and earth and His “presence” is everywhere—

“The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” Proverbs 15:3.

“And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Hebrews 4:13.

At the same time, Psalm 139:23 says “try me and know my thoughts.” How does He do that? If we take Psalm 139 to be literal, we must conclude that the divine being, God the Father is literally inside our bodies, in our minds, and knows what we think in that way. That is what must be meant by God’s being EVERYWHERE.

Psalm 139:8 says, KJV, “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” True, the word “hell” is sheol that refers to the place of the departed and is comparable to Hades in the New Testament. In this verse, sheol is the opposite of heaven. If heaven is a spiritual realm, then sheol is as well. But, Hades is of two parts, that of the righteous and then the wicked, who are under punishment like the rich man in Hades, Luke 16, or the angels that sinned, II Peter 2:4. Is it saying that the very being of God literally fills *Sheol*, meaning *Tartarus* as much so as Paradise? God is literally in the place of punishment? That is a place of separation from God. Verse 8 shows Heaven and Sheol to be two different places.

The fact is, Psalm 139 is full of poetic figures that declare that God knows everything that goes on about all of us no matter where we are. Yet, it does not require His *personal* presence. Here is another passage from the Psalms—

“But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” Psalm 115:3.

Like God the Word or the Holy Spirit, or angels, the Father *can go* anywhere He chooses but heaven is his abode where His personal form resides while His powers can extend anywhere—Hebrews 1:3 says He upholds all things “by the word of His power.” An old illustration, in modern garb, is that I can be in Phoenix and call a friend in Tampa on my cell phone. I can reach out and talk with someone elsewhere. My body is in Phoenix, but a certain power allows me to reach out to far away. That is a poor illustration compared to the powers possessed by God, but it shows that God does not have to be literally present to know what is going on “far off,” nor for Him to perform any act He chooses.