

**SOUTH GROVE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LONDON**

**Wednesday Bible study/Prayer Meeting**

**Date 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**Preacher Rev Philip Knowles, Ps/Hymns, Read John 1:1-14 Text John 1:1-14**

**Series The Doctrine of God series (6) Title The Substantiality of God**

Today in our study, we come to the substantiality of God.

The word **substantiality** in reference to God, refers to **God's substance, nature, being, essence as reality.**

I say that because in our previous study we learned that the Bible teaches, the spirituality of God, notice the words of **John 4:25** "**God is a spirit...**"

Therefore, God is absolute Spirit, **He is immortal, invisible, immaterial, infinite and indivisible.**

However, the natural understanding of man is spiritually dark and corrupt due to sin, causing his conclusions about God, to be in keeping with his own perverted nature.

One such conclusion of man's corrupt mind is since God is a spirit then He is not substance, not living, no characteristics, which is another way to say, God is not real, He is not a person, there is nothing to him.

In other words, by the vain imaginations of men, he claims God is only an idea, a thing, an imagination, God is whatever you want Him, her, it, to be or what you make God to be.

If you remember, our message on the existence of God, we mentioned the News report from a number of years ago, concerning the words of an actress upon winning an award, she said "I like to thank God whoever **she** is." There there

was a paused, to get a response and of course the crowds cheered.

Such blasphemy is at the highest level. God in their mind is a thing, whatever, whoever they imagine God to be.

They view God only as an influence, a force out there somewhere, but not real, as there is nothing to God.

However, the Bible teaches, God is not dead, nor a myth nor a legend.

Therefore, we must at once, say that by scripturally teaching the spirituality of God, we also teach the Biblical truth of Gods substantiality, the reality of His substance, nature, or essence.

The reason being, If God has no substance of any kind, then He becomes a non-entity or a non-existent person.

The phrase a non-entity means that which has **no existence**.

**One theologian, Willian G T Shedd, quoting Augustine said *God is a certain substance, for whatever is not a substance is nothing at all, Therefore to be something is to be a substance.***"

To say that there is no substance to God, is to lower God to a thing, force, or imagination and to teach God does not exist, not a real or an actual being.

Such would be attack upon God and His word, as He declared of Himself **Gen 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.***"

That is why we must come to the word of God, for it is forever settled in Heaven. Christ taught in **John 8:32 *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***"

As we read the scriptures and view creation, we conclude that God is real because He is substance.

### **I FIRST, THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S SUBSTANTIALITY.**

In the general sense to say a being is a substance is to have two things, properties (characteristics), and power.

Upon searching the scriptures, both **properties or power** are found in God, teaching God is a real and true substance.

It is not that substance, nature or characteristics are added to God, rather God is a substance, God is an actual being. He is ever active and living.

Notice **His properties**. By **properties** we refer to His characteristics, attributes or perfections.

These Perfections are not added to God, rather God has properties or attributes which He manifests in His works of creation and providence.

**Shorter Catechism Q.4, What is God? Answer: "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth."**

These attributes of God are those perfections that mark His character; and they are called **attributes** because they are ascribed to Him as the essential properties of His nature.

However, His attributes have been classified by Godly men into two groups to help our understanding.

They are what is known as **the incommunicable attributes**, and the **communicable attributes**. **In other words what God**

has not communicated to man and what He has communicated to man.

God's incommunicable attributes, refers to those perfections which cannot be communicated to men, such as the attribute of, eternality, infinity, all power, all knowing, everywhere present, and unchanging. These belongs to God alone.

Whereas, God's, communicable attributes are His divine perfections that are in a certain measure communicated to men, such as holiness, wisdom, love, truth.

Throughout our whole study of God, we will consider in greater detail, God's attributes.

**God has properties.**

**God has power**, which He uses in the universe, fulfilling His eternal plan.

God does not improve in His properties and power.

God is Spirit, self-existent, self-dependent, infinite. **He is transcendent**, meaning He is distinct or above His creation.

He is ever active, living and working. His activity is not affected or hindered by anything outside Himself. Nothing or no one can cause God to do anything.

Likewise, nothing can hinder God from accomplishing His will.

What God has purposed to do, He will do it for His own pleasure. He is all powerful.

This is what the Westminster divines meant when in the **Westminster confession of Faith ch.2, section 1** they wrote

of God to be "...**a most pure Spirit invisible without body, parts, or passions.**"

The word **passion** is from the Latin **patior**, meaning '**to suffer**'.

The phrase **without Passions** is used by the Confession of Faith not to mean that God is without feeling, but rather it is in reference that **nothing outside of God affects Him**, changes Him, causes Him harm, troubles Him or makes an impression on Him.

God depends upon none. He works according to His plan.

His creation depends upon Him, and His creation is affected by each other.

His creation is troubled by circumstances, we only need to think of the effects of the cov19, wars, inflation, however nothing troubles God, nothing can dethrone Him.

As Christians, we are often like the Psalmist Asaph, troubled by the continual rebellion of men, and the ever-changing schemes of men that set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed.

Laws made that are against God's word.

In days gone by when Royal thrones were challenged and under attack, the King or Queen, would be alarmed, and disturbed seeking to gather a defence, or even have to vacate their throne for safety.

However, there is nothing that can impact God, or cause Him to vacate His throne, for He sits upon a throne of Glory and power.

**William Shedd** said “*He cannot be wrought upon, and impressed, by the universe of matter and mind which He has created from nothing.*”

In **John 5:17** Jesus said, “*My Father worketh hitherto and I work.*”

The point is that God is active in that He is constantly working in His creation, working according to His own divine and perfect purpose. As His will is done in heaven it will be done on earth.

In considering the substance of God, it causes us to have high and holy thoughts of the majesty of God.

It guides us in prayer to have a proper view of how God answer's prayer.

Prayer never changes God. When we pray, we are not asking God to do something against His will or what He has not chosen to do.

We are not praying to ask God to change how He works, or change His will, rather we pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray Lord do as thou has said.

Therefore, prayer changes us, because as we pray according to His will, He hears and answers prayer according to His will, and we rejoice in it.

## **II SECOND, THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S SUBSTANTIALITY**

if God had no substance, then He would have no existence.

If God was merely an idea, then He would have no impact, upon humanity but the very fact that He does have an impact, and intervenes points to His substance for example the Psalmist said in **Psalm 32:4** "***For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me:***" **Ps 77:3**, "***I remembered God and was troubled***".

In **Psalm 139:7-10**, David expresses the reality of God, ***Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?***

Therefore, Man is not terrified by a non-entity, he is not afraid of that which does not exist.

But that which troubles him is real. Only a real, living substance of properties and powers can impact the human heart.

When there is conviction of sin, man is troubled because God is Spirit, eternal, infinite, unchanging, a real being, a real substance, a real existence.

The hope that we have in sins forgiven is not a false hope, or a good story to bring comfort in hard times.

Rather, our salvation is real, spiritual, eternal, unchanging, living, because Salvation is of the Lord, He is spirit, eternal, unchanging and living. Christ in us is the hope of Glory.

God by His Spirit troubled our heart and exposed our sin, just as the woman in **John 4** who testified that Christ in **verse 29** "***...told me all things that ever I...***" then we cried unto Him like the publican in **Luke 18:13** "***...God be merciful to me a***

***sinner.*** Paul says in **Romans 10:10** “***for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***”

Therefore, salvation is not resting upon a false notion, blind faith, or an idea, Rather salvation is faith trusting in the glorious person and gospel ministry of Jesus Christ, who is God’s salvation.

### **III THIRD, THE DISTINCTION OF GOD’S SUBSTANTIALITY**

The distinction of Gods substantiality contradicts man’s false notions of God.

For instance, take the false teaching of **Pantheism**. The word **Pantheism** comes from two Greek words: ***pan***, which means **all**; then ***theos*** a word that we have come across before which means **God**;

Pantheism means or teaches **all is God and God is all**.

Pantheism is a denial of the transcendence of God. Remember the transcendence of God means God is distinct or above His creation. Pantheism refuses to recognise God as a being distinct from creation.

They teach God is the universe and the universe is God. That means everything is God and God is everything.

Such nonsense and error means whatever a person worships that is God.

**However, the doctrine of God’s substantiality contradicts the teaching of Pantheism which defines God as ‘the absolute idea’.**

An idea is not a being but merely a notion of the human mind. If God is only an idea, then He could not be real.

False teaching presents, it is man who creates God, the idea. They claim God is a myth, legend, a good story, fairy tale, invented by man.

Therefore, according to Pantheism, without the world, God would remain just an idea because, God could not exist before making the world.

Such false theories, deny and reject God as the creator, eternal, self-existent and sovereign being who created all things out of nothing.

See its very important to demonstrate the importance of the substantiality of God.

The heresy or false teaching of pantheism will lead on to further departures from Biblical truth.

Remember the principle go wrong in God and you go wrong on everything else. To consider God as an idea, an influence, no substance, it then opens the door for the denial of the person of Jesus Christ.

The word of God teaches the greatest revelation of the substantiality of God, is in the Person of Christ.

It is important to note that the incarnation is the union of the eternal Word of God, who is Jesus Christ with a human nature.

He is both God and man, two distinct natures, in one person forever. Full deity and full humanity, very God of very God and very man of very man.

To deny the substance of God is to reject that He was manifest in human flesh, with a true body and a reasonable soul.

This is important, because the incarnation did not make Christ the eternal word of God. He did not become the Son of God because of His birth in Bethlehem,

Rather the eternal Word, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, was a real person before the beginning of all other things.

He was in the beginning so He already existed as a person within the Godhead. For Christ said in **John 17:5** ***“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”***

In **John 8:58** Christ in speaking to the Jews He claimed to be the great I AM.

Here we have Christ’s statement in relation to Himself as God, for He and His father are one.

He is the eternal God and all His creation depends upon Him, as taught in **John 1:1-3** ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”***

Therefore, believer God is real, He is substance, He is the God of our salvation, and we know whom we have believed. Dwell in the word of God, and let the word of God dwell in you in.