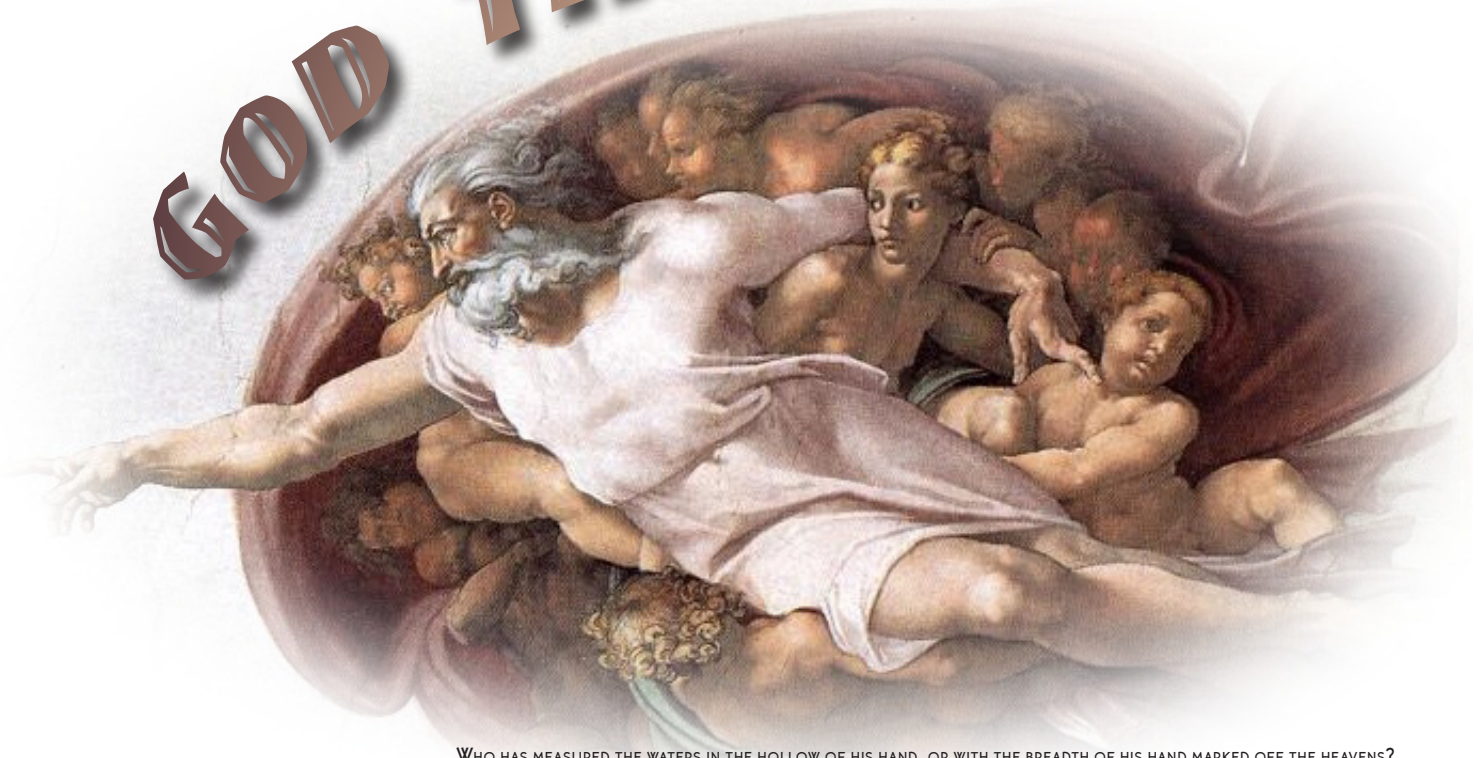


GOD THE FATHER



WHO HAS MEASURED THE WATERS IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND, OR WITH THE BREADTH OF HIS HAND MARKED OFF THE HEAVENS?
WHO HAS HELD THE DUST OF THE EARTH IN A BASKET, OR WEIGHED THE MOUNTAINS ON THE SCALES AND THE HILLS IN A BALANCE?
WHO HAS UNDERSTOOD THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR INSTRUCTED HIM AS HIS COUNSELOR?
WHOM DID THE LORD CONSULT TO ENLIGHTEN HIM, AND WHO TAUGHT HIM THE RIGHT WAY?
WHO WAS IT THAT TAUGHT HIM KNOWLEDGE OR SHOWED HIM THE PATH OF UNDERSTANDING?

(ISAIAH 40:12-14 NIV)

Nothing else is so simple, yet so profoundly mysterious, as the image we have of the Almighty. From earliest Sunday School days, or perhaps from mealtime grace in our childhood home, we learned to love the one who began it all: who created our world; who sits on His heavenly throne, listening to and answering our prayers. Even the smallest child can easily grasp the grandfather image of a God who watches over creation from His lofty throne—the Michelangelo-inspired picture of an elderly

yet bright-minded, benevolent gentleman gazing down upon His people.

Then, a little older, we learned that this loving Father sent His Son “that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). That, too, was a concept easy to grasp, for most of us had a human father who was loving and compassionate, who would even sacrifice a part of himself for his children. We found it easy to pray to such a God, to look to Him for wisdom, for justice informed by mercy.

But then we moved into our rebellion years. Now God became confusing, contrary and contradicting, demanding, even quaint. Now this benevolent grandfather was old-fashioned, too distant and disinterested to be relevant in our world. He had too many rules, too many things He didn't like, too many restrictions on what we perceived to be our due rights. In our mind the loving grandfather became a tyrant, an angry ogre, or someone so hopelessly out of touch that He could safely be ignored.

Later still, once we were old enough to realize the stupidity of our rebellion, we set ourselves to learn more about this one we had “known” for so long. Hungry for the truth, in sometimes clumsy ways we applied ourselves to understanding a fuller truth of who He really was. Expecting the familiar, however, we were taken aback by the new and occasionally troubling evidence for God’s true personality and methods. Suddenly He was bigger, more multifaceted, more complex than we had imagined. The simple grandfather from our Sunday School days had become alarmingly so much more; the child sees only what is on the surface, but the adult must see what lies beneath.

The Useful Gift Inside

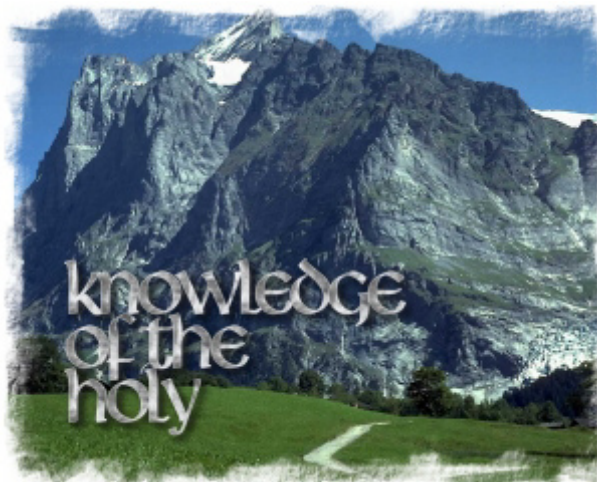
It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31)

God the father is uncomfortably real. It is almost a lie to see Him as the white-bearded grandfather dandling His little ones upon His knee. Though certainly a component, that image more often masks the true complexity of God’s personality, leaving even those who adore Him with a thinly veiled impression of who He is. It is like receiving an exquisitely wrapped Christmas gift, and refusing to mar its exterior beauty by opening it—thus doing without the useful, helpful item lying inside. God is beautiful. God is love. God is an attentive, giving Father. But He is also so much more.

God is basic Fact or Actuality, the source of all other fact-hood. At all costs therefore He must not be thought of as a featureless generality. If He exists at all, He is the most concrete thing there is, the most individual, “organized and minutely articulated.” He is unspeakable not by being indefinite but by being too definite for

the unavoidable vagueness of language... Grammatically the things we say of Him are “metaphorical”; but in a deeper sense it is our physical and psychic energies that are mere “metaphors” of the real life which is God. (C.S. Lewis)

God the Holy Spirit we can feel and experience; He is often manifested in the mind, the heart—in what the old King James Version calls the “bowels.” The Spirit—though a “He”—interacts with us in ways that are ephemeral, on occasion elusive, and always invisible. God the Son we can see and touch, for He alone has shared our form. Though now He has risen to dwell above this earthen plane, He is so real



and substantive that we can interact and converse with Him as we would a friend, a neighbor, a brother. We may not know exactly how He looked when He trod this soil, but we know that He *had* a look; Jesus was flesh and blood, a person, so it is not difficult to embrace Him as such.

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like

an emerald in appearance. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. (Revelation 4:2-3,5-6)

Source and Foundation

God the Father, however, is both of these—yet neither. As Spirit, His presence and influence are felt internally, invisibly. We can “feel” Him, but only in a visceral way. God the Father is so real and substantive to

us—so foundational to everything we are and know—that in our mind we can “see” Him upon His throne, the heft and expanse of His presence, His overpowering, intimidating holiness. Yet, unlike the Son, we cannot see His face; with our feet still upon soil, we cannot bear the sight of that terrible visage.

To know God the Father is to know ourselves, for from Him we came, and in Him we exist.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples

built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” (Acts 17:24-28 niv)