

Series: The Name of God #1650

Title: Various Scriptures

God Speaks Our Language

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. This is the third in a series of broadcasts and podcasts where we examine the name (and the names, plural) that God gives Himself and reveals to us in the Bible. There is one name in particular I want us to spend the most time with and we will come to that. But preliminary to an assessment of the names of God, there are a few things we need to keep in mind. Last time I told you about the first. Please remember: only God can name Himself. "We do not name God; He names Himself (*Reformed Dogmatics Abridged in One Volume*, 167)," is how theologian Herman Bavinck puts it and he is right. Jot this down if you can: we do not name God. He names Himself.

Second, when God names Himself He does so in human language. That is, there is divine accommodation. God accommodates Himself to us, lowly human beings. He speaks in a language we can understand. The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, whom I have already referenced, writes as follows in his profound and lengthy work *Reformed Dogmatics*, quote, "God reveals Himself in the way He does because He is who He is. Noteworthy, nonetheless, is the fact that biblical revelation is specifically addressed to humanity and uses human language. God speaks to us in human words and even manifests Himself in human forms. We must therefore speak of divine accommodation. Scripture is accommodated language; accommodated to our human language and condition. It is anthropomorphic through and through (*Reformed Dogmatics Abridged in One Volume*, 167)." Unquote.

Bavinck uses a word there, in the last sentence, that we must define. The word is anthropomorphic. What is meant by this? Anthropomorphic can be defined as ascribing human form or attributes to God who is not human. Or an anthropomorphism is conceiving of God as having human characteristics or existing in human form. Let's see this in the Bible. And, following Bavinck and many other theologians, we will put these in six categories. I want to spend some time on this, because to understand this second point will be key to understanding how God names Himself such as He does. This is a worthwhile exercise.

Our first category is what I will call the physical. Bavinck writes, "all that is attributed in Scripture to humans is also attributed to God (168)." Here are just some examples. Just *some*. These will be examples of anthropomorphic language. God is said to have a soul (in Leviticus 26.11 God says, "**I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you.**"), God is said to have a face (in Exodus 33.20 God said to Moses, "**You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!**"), and God is said to have lips and a tongue (in Isaiah 30, verse 27 we read, "**Behold, the name of the Lord comes from a remote place; burning is His anger and dense is His smoke; His lips are filled with indignation and His tongue is like a consuming fire...**"). Friends, we are the ones with souls, faces, lips and tongues. So God accommodates Himself to us in order that we can understand Him.

Our second category are human emotions that are reflected in God, so that we can understand God. God loathes. Psalm 95.10, this is the Lord speaking, "**For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways.**" God gets jealous. Deuteronomy 32.21 God says, "**They have made Me jealous with what is not God...**" And God hates. Deuteronomy 16.22, the Lord speaking again says, "**You shall not set up for yourself a sacred pillar which the Lord your God hates.**" And there are many more emotions found in us that are found in God. With this language, God accommodates Himself to us in order that we can understand Him. Haven't you loathed, been jealous, and haven't you hated?

The third category are human actions. Tell me if you have ever acted in any of these ways? The Bible says God forgets. "**I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.**" (Isaiah 43.25.) God remembers. Genesis 8.1, "**But God remembered Noah...**" God rests. "**By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.**" (Genesis 2.2.) God rests.

And God works. In John 5, verse 17 Jesus declares, **“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”** And God writes. Exodus chapter 34 and verse 1, **“Now the Lord said to Moses, ‘Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words...’”** God forgets, remembers, rests, works, and writes. Do you also forget, remember, rest, work, and write? I think you do. I do. The human actions that we experience, God tells us, He experiences these also – so that we can relate to Him. This is all anthropomorphic language.

Our next category, the fourth, is that God has relationships, holds occupations, offices, and positions as we do. In Isaiah 61, verse 10 God, in reference to Christ, is described as a bridegroom, **“I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”** God is an architect and builder. Hebrews 11, verse 10, **“He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** And in Exodus 15, verse 3 the Lord is described as a warrior, **“The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name.”** And God is a gardener. Jesus, in John 15, verse 1 says, **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”** And I could go on and on. Believe me, for time, I am only sharing some examples of God who has relationships and holds occupations, offices and positions as people do. Here is more anthropomorphic language.

Let’s keep going! Fifth, God has certain things, as we possess things. The Bible says God has a seat, a throne, a footstool, a rod and a scepter, weapons, a bow and arrow, a shield, God has a chariot, a banner, a book, a seal, a treasure, and an inheritance. And, in our final category (as it were) God is described related to images we know very well from our very human experience. God is compared to a lion, an eagle, a lamb and a hen, He is compared to the sun, a morning star, the light, a lamp, a fire, a spring, a fountain, food, bread, drink, water, ointment, God is described as a rock, a refuge, a tower, a stronghold, a shadow, a shield, a road, and a temple. And again, we can keep going. As it is, I left out Scripture references because the clock is working against me.

The point is, look at all this anthropomorphic language. Anthropomorphic can be defined as ascribing human form or attributes to God who is not human. Or an anthropomorphism is conceiving of God as having human characteristics or existing in human form. This is what we are finding today in the Bible. Bavinck continues to comment, “These are all expressions that first of all apply to creatures and then are transferred to God by way of eminence...All the names by which God calls Himself and allows us to call Him are anthropomorphic – derived from earthly and human relations (168).” End quote. For example, God is called El (meaning the strong One), He is called El Shaddai (meaning the mighty One), He is called YHWH (meaning the One who is there), and He is called good, gracious, merciful, and just. Can’t each of us relate to these names? I know I sure can, and I anticipate you can also.

We know something of what is meant by strong, mighty, what is meant by being near, and good, gracious, merciful, and just. You see how much God relates to us who He is? And we will see this even more as we go deeper into one name in particular.

Alright, I soon have to go. But please be back with us next time so we can continue to talk about the names of God. We are still in the introduction and we have established that, first, only God can name Himself. And second, when God names Himself He does so in human language. That is, there is divine accommodation. God accommodates Himself to us. Well, join us next time because God Is!

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