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The Personality of God

By Jeremy Cagle

Next to G. I. Joe, Transformers, and He-Man, the greatest memories from my childhood can be summed up in two words: Star Wars. I had a Star Wars pillow case from the time I was four years old until about a year ago when I moved from California to Georgia, a Star Wars plastic light saber, several Star Wars action figures, and an unusual fascination with Jabba the Hutt. Like many 20-somethings, my imagination would not be what it is today if it were not for characters like Han Solo, Chewbacca, Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader. While I have never dressed up like any of these characters as an adult (yet), I am still a big fan.

Please indulge me while I share with you one component of the Star Wars adventures that captured the curiosity of millions: “the Force.” The phrase, “May the Force be with you,” was repeated *ad nauseum* throughout the six episodes. The Force can best be described as the living power in Star Wars. According to www.wikipedia.org,

the Force is first described by the Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi as an energy field created by all living things, that surrounds and penetrates living beings and binds the galaxy together . . . The Force has a “dark side” which feeds off emotions such as anger and fear, whereas the Jedi use the Force only for peaceful purposes.¹

As the movies progressed, more information about the Force was revealed:

Midi-chlorians (also spelled “midi-clorians” or “midichlorians”) are a microorganism in the fictional Star Wars galaxy . . . They are microscopic life-forms that reside within the cells of all living things and communicate with the Force. Midi-chlorians compose a collective consciousness and intelligence, forming links between everything living and the Force. They are symbionts with all other living things; that is, without them, life could not exist. The Jedi have learned how to listen to and coordinate the midi-chlorians. In order to be a Jedi or a Sith, one must have a high concentration of midi-chlorians in one’s cells.²

Besides the brief descriptions of the midi-chlorians, very little is known about the personalities behind the Force. In fact, the Force itself remains a complete mystery throughout the six films. Many questions behind this energy/power/strength are never revealed. Is the Force eternal or does it have an origin? Is it only for certain

sections of the galaxy or is it omnipresent? Why does the Force give greater powers to some creatures than others? Why are the siths³ allowed to use the Force for evil? Why are they allowed to rule the universe for long periods of time?

Questions like these go unanswered in the movies because the Force has no distinct personality. While the midi-chlorians can directly communicate with the Force, nothing else can. Everything else is supposed to use an indirect means to communicate with the Force: inner impulses, feelings, premonitions, dreams, etc.

After talking to some professing Christians today, it would appear that their theology has been shaped more by Star Wars than by Scripture.

These “Star Wars” Christians look at God like they look at the Force: He is a mystery with no personality. He is able to work mightily in some, but the only ones who can really know him are the higher Christian life forms – the “midi-chlorians” – like pastors, priests, and rabbis. Many could probably relate to the personal testimony of R. C. Sproul, who earlier in his life said,

There was something missing in my early Christian life. There was zeal abundant, but it was marked by a shallowness, a kind of simplicity that was making me a one-dimensional person. I was a Unitarian of sorts, a Unitarian of the second person of the Trinity. I knew who Jesus was, but God the Father was

shrouded in mystery. He was hidden, an enigma to my mind and a stranger to my soul. A dark veil covered His face.⁴

The purpose of this article is to fill in this missing gap and to correct this misunderstanding. God is not the Force. Within the pages of Scriptures, He has clearly revealed Himself as a person.

I. UNIQUE PERSONALITY

When God's personality is discussed, it must be discussed with reverence, for His personality created the personality of man. As Louis Berkhof writes,

Human personality demands a personal God for its explanation. Man is not a self-existent and eternal, but a finite being that has a beginning and an end . . . Since man is a personal product, the power originating him must also be personal.⁵

This makes the Lord's personality the most unique personality in the universe. His mind and will came from nothing – it always was. Because of this, it is perfectly original. This distinctness has led theologians/philosophers from the past and present to refer to the Lord as “wholly other” from man. When we think of God's personality, there is no category to put it in. It is completely unique.

It is this originality that led one of Job's friends to write,

Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?
They are high as the heavens, what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?

Its measure is longer than the earth
And broader than the sea.
If He passes by or shuts up,
Or calls an assembly, who can restrain Him?

For He knows false men,
And He sees iniquity without investigating (Job 11:7-11).

To develop this one step further, God's personality is unique because He does not possess attributes in the same way that man does. Man's personality has attributes and characteristics, or facets. He can be a good man, a powerful man, and a wise man, but no one would say that he is the standard or the origin of good, power, and wisdom. However, this could and should

be said about the God of the Bible. Whatever attribute the Lord possesses, He *is*. For example, there are holy men and there are unholy men, but no man is said to be completely holy. God *is* holy (Is 6:3). There are honest men and there are men who lie, but no man is said to be the complete truth. God *is* truth (Jn 14:6). There are loving men and there are unloving men, but no man is said to be love. God *is* love (1 Jn 4:8).

One writer sums up these attributes in this way,

The attributes are permanent and intrinsic qualities, which cannot be gained or lost. Thus, holiness is not in this sense an attribute (a permanent, inseparable characteristic) of Adam, but it is of God. God's attributes are essential and inherent dimensions of his very nature . . . The attributes are inseparable from the being or essence of God.⁶

II. INTERACTIVE PERSONALITY

A second way that God's personality is demonstrated is in His interaction with other personalities. To quote Lewis Berkhof again,

God is represented throughout as a personal God, with whom men can and may converse, whom they can trust, who sustains them in their trials, and fills their hearts with the joy of deliverance and victory. And, finally, the highest revelation of God to which the Bible testifies is a personal revelation. Jesus Christ reveals the Father in such a perfect way that He could say to Phillip, “He who hath seen me hath seen the Father,” John 14:9.⁷

While there are innumerable instances of this personal interaction throughout Scripture, one will suffice here. After explaining to Abraham His intentions to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord allows Abraham to have the following discussion with Him:

Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord.

Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

So the Lord said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.”

And Abraham replied, “Now, behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.”

Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.”

Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.”

As soon as He had finished speaking to the Abraham the Lord departed and Abraham returned to his place (Gen 18:22-33).

At the end of such a conversation, one could not help but wonder: Did Abraham just *bargain with God*? He talked God down from destroying a city with less than fifty righteous people to less than ten! How could Abraham do this? It would seem that somewhere in this conversation, the Lord would tell Abraham his place. After all, that is what He did with Job.⁸ Yet here the Lord allows Abraham to plead for a wicked city and He gives in!

Why is this? Because the Lord is a God Who interacts with people. He is a person. He was having a conversation with Abraham. He was revealing Himself to Abraham throughout this conversation. God knew that there were less than 10 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah but, apparently, Abraham did not. And because of His kindness and His interaction with Abraham, the Lord revealed it to him in a conversation.

The God of the Bible is very different from the god of the

deists. Dagobert D. Runes, in his *Dictionary of Philosophy*, defines deism as the idea that “God indeed is responsible for the world but for reasons unknown or conjectured God has no commerce with it.”⁹ Anthony Flew explains deism further by saying, “It is usually taken to involve God’s leaving the Universe to its own lawful devices, without any particular interventions, once the process of creation had been completed.”¹⁰

According to deism, God created the world and then left it alone. He “wound up the clock,” put it somewhere, and has not greased or repaired it since. In this philosophical system, God has left the world to its own devices.

Yet the God of Christianity could not be any more different. He loves people (Rom 8:28), He gave His own Son to die for sinners (2 Cor 5:21), and He still actively rules the world He created (Ps 66:7). His personality interacts with other personalities.

III. TANGIBLE PERSONALITY

Third, God’s personality is tangible. If something is tangible, it is “definite; objective,” it “asserts having real substance and able to be appraised for value.” The word can also be used to describe something that “can be touched or felt.”¹¹ While God is a Spirit (Jn 4:24) and not a being that can be directly “touched or felt,” He does reveal Himself in history in a way that has real substance and that is “definite; objective.”

As Lewis Sperry Chafer writes,

From the first disclosure of Himself to man in the Garden of Eden to the heavenly consummation when the redeemed shall know even as known . . . God has never left Himself “without a witness.” He has wrought with unfailing faithfulness to the end that men might see beyond their native horizon and apprehend to some degree the facts and features of a larger sphere. God has sought by every available means to manifest Himself, His words, His will, and His purpose.¹²

In His great mercy and kindness, God has chosen to reveal Himself to man throughout history in a tangible way. From the Garden of Eden to the judgment of the dead in the Book of Revelation, God has objectively interacted with man.

For example, there are numerous times in Scripture when God has spoken *audibly* to men. One example of this is the Mosaic law recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy. Consider how many times the Scriptures record the Lord speaking to Moses in the Book of Leviticus alone:

- “Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him” (1:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (4:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (6:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (6:8).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (8:1).
- “The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them” (11:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (12:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying” (13:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (14:1).
- “The Lord also spoke to Moses and to Aaron” (15:1).
- “Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron” (16:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (17:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (18:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (19:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (20:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (21:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (22:1).
- “The Lord spoke again to Moses” (23:1).
- “Then the Lord spoke to Moses” (24:1).
- “The Lord then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai” (25:1).
- “Again, the Lord spoke to Moses” (27:1).

While other portions of Scripture do not record the Lord speaking *as often* as Leviticus, there are numerous other examples of Him talking to men (Josh 1; 1 Kings 9:3-9; Acts 9:1-17).

The Scriptures also record times when God appears to man in physical form. This is what theologians call a “theophony.” A theophony is “An ‘appearance of God’ in which he takes on a visible form to show himself to people.”¹³ Several examples of these appearances occur in Scripture. He appeared in some type of physical form to Abraham (Gen 18:1-33), Jacob (Gen 32:28-30), the people of Israel (as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night: Ex 13:21-22), the elders of Israel (Ex 24:9-11), Monoah and his wife (Judg 13:21-22), Isaiah (Is 6:1), and others.¹⁴

The Lord has also tangibly displayed His personality by

inspiring the authors of Scripture to write (2 Pet 1:21) and He changes people’s lives today by the work of His Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-13; Eph 2:1-9).

IV. EMOTIONAL PERSONALITY

While emotions can be a dangerous thing in mankind because of the instability and sinfulness of the human heart (Jer 17:9), they nevertheless demonstrate personality. God’s display of His feelings throughout Biblical history displays His personality. He is not an emotionless *thing*, but a *He* capable of every perfect sensation and passion.

A brief list of these emotions and their corresponding Scriptures will help to illustrate this:

Anger – For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and My year of redemption has come . . . I trod down the peoples in My anger and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth (Is 63:4, 6).

Compassion – He has made His wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate (Ps 111:4).

Gladness – Let the glory of the Lord endure forever; let the Lord be glad in His works (Ps 104:31).

Grief – The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Gen 6:6).

Hate – The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity (Ps 5:5).

Jealousy – For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children (Ex 20:5).

Joy – You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever (Ps 16:11).

Love – “I have loved you,” says the Lord . . . “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau (Mal 1:1-2).

It is important to understand that none of these emotions contradict God’s other attributes. In other words, He is never angry because His sovereignty is threatened or violated. He is never grieved because something has occurred outside the realm of His knowledge. He never

loves a statement or declaration that is not true. “There is no absolute power in Him that is divorced from His perfections.”¹⁵ In a similar way, there is no emotion in Him that is divorced from His attributes.

Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan thinker, said man should echo God’s use of emotions in his worship,

The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.¹⁶

Jesus commands all mankind to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:36). Just as it is impossible for God to divorce Himself from his emotions as He interacts with man, it is impossible for man to divorce himself from his emotions as he interacts with God. An emotionless Christianity is a dead Christianity, just as an emotionless God is a dead god.

V. DEMANDING PERSONALITY

If God’s unique, interactive, tangible, and emotional personality does not command reverence and worship, His demanding personality certainly will. Not only does God interact with human beings as one person to another, He also demands that His person be acknowledged and given the reverence He deserves.

First, His person will be acknowledged in the submission of every creature on this planet. Zephaniah 2:11 says,

The Lord will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place.

Romans 14:11 says,

“As I live,” says the Lord, “every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

No one will escape submitting to God’s demanding personality. Every heart will submit in humble surrender and every nation will bow before the God of the earth.

Second, His person will be acknowledged when every man gives an account of himself. Matthew 12:36-37 states,

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Romans 14:12, in a more general way says, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” Nothing that is said or done will escape God’s person. He sees all, knows all, and exists everywhere.¹⁷

Third, the Lord’s person will also be acknowledged in Heaven and in Hell. In his book, *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn describes the seriousness of this truth when he describes man’s mortality in the following way,

As human beings, we have a terminal disease called *mortality*. The current death rate is 100 percent. Unless Christ returns soon, we’re all going to die. We don’t like to think about death; yet, worldwide, 3 people die every second, 180 every minute, and nearly 11,000 every hour. IF the Bible is right about what happens to us after death, it means that more than 250,000 people every day go either to Heaven or Hell.¹⁸

Because of this it is very important for us to realize what God demands of His creatures in eternity. In Heaven, His presence will be acknowledged in praises. Isaiah 6:1-4 provides an example of these praises,

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

In Hell, His presence will be acknowledged in punishment. Revelation 20:12-15 state,

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

After one of His parables, Jesus described the torment in Hell in the following way,

The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 24:51).

Satan does not rule over Hell, God does,¹⁹ and He does so to punish those who denied His person while on earth. In light of these realities, we should all heed these words from A. W. Tozer,

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unregarded. As responsible moral beings we dare not so trifle with our eternal future.²⁰

End Notes

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Force_\(Star_Wars\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Force_(Star_Wars)) as of 8/28/08.

² Ibid.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sith_as_of_8/28/08. The "siths" are "an alliance of warrior priests who use the dark side of the Force and serve as counterparts to the Jedi Knights."

⁴ *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985) 7.

⁵ *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003 ed.) 64-65.

⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004) 292.

⁷ Berkhof, 65.

⁸ See Job 38-41.

⁹ *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Savage, Md.: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1983) 91.

¹⁰ *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Gramercy Books, 1979) 87.

¹¹ *Webster's New World Dictionary*, ed. by Michael Agnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2003) 658.

¹² *Systematic Theology*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Grand Rapids; Kregel Publications, 1976 ed.) 51-52.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000 ed.) 1255.

¹⁴ These examples are borrowed word-for-word from Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, 189.

¹⁵ Berkhof, 80.

¹⁶ *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 238

¹⁷ For more description of these and other attributes of God, please see our article "The Attributes of God."

¹⁸ *Heaven* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004) xix.

¹⁹ Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Philipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 1995). A quote from this excellent work is helpful here: "Instead of reigning over hell, Satan will suffer the worst punishment there" (47).

²⁰ *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961) 89.