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**Series: DESCRIPTIONS OF GOD**

**“Human Forms That Describe God”**

**INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the Bible God is described using human terms such as: *“the face of God”*, *“the feet of God”*, *“The hands of God”*, etc. These descriptive terms are called “anthropomorphisms” – the representations of Deity using the forms of humanity. The word *“anthropos”* is Greek for “man” and *“morphē”* means “form.” Therefore, the word “anthropomorphism” means the attributing of “man forms,” that is, human characteristics, to God. These terms are used by God to aid mankind in understanding Him.

Often God is spoken of and refers to Himself in very human terms. He walks (Genesis 3:8) and talks (Genesis 1:3). He is depicted as having a body with a face (Exodus 33:20; 33:23), arms (Job 40:9), hands (Isaiah 59:1) and feet (Nahum 1:3). He is said to grieve (Genesis 6:6), is angry (Exodus 15:7), jealous (Exodus 20:15) and even laughs (Psalm 2:4).

To describe God using human characteristics is not an attempt to humanize Him. It is not man trying to reduce God to man's level. It is God Himself condescending to accommodate Himself to man's finite thinking. It is God making Himself accessible to mankind. We must keep in mind throughout this study that *“God is not a man.”* (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29)

We often use anthropomorphisms without realizing it. We pray, "Lord, keep your hand on me!" or "Watch over us!" and "We want you to smile upon us." So, without thinking, we are using anthropomorphism. That is, we are speaking to God in human terms because we realize that God has communicated Himself to us using those same human terms. Jesus declared in John 4:24, *“God is Spirit.”* God, Spirit Being, condescended to describe Himself to mankind in physical terms that are familiar to us.

Dr. James Orr, General Editor International Standard Bibl Encyclopedia, defined anthropomorphism as: “The attribution to God of human forms, parts or passions, and the taking of Scripture passages which speak of God as having hands, or eyes, or ears, in a literal sense. It ascribes to Deity physical characters, mental and moral attributes, like those of man, merely means to make the Divine nature and operations intelligible, not to transfer to Him the defects and limitations of human character and life. The scriptural representations as to God's hand, eye, and ear, etc. were declared by Calvin to be but adaptations to the slow spiritual progress of men, as Calvin puts it.”

Bernard Ramm, in his classic book, "Protestant Biblical Interpretation" states: “Holy Scripture is the truth of God accommodated to the human mind so that the human mind can assimilate it. Through such accommodation the truth of God can get through to man and be a meaningful revelation. Stated another way, revelation must have an anthropomorphic character.”

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To sum up the subject of these studies I conclude as follows: anthropomorphism is God communicating to man in language drawn from the human sphere. The Bible is full of anthropomorphic metaphors and these metaphors matter. God intended for this manner of communication to disclose truth about Himself, truth that impacts the readers as to who and what God is like.

(I am indebted to E. W. Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 1968; J. Fiske, *The Idea of God*, 1901; Graeme Crouch, Bible teacher; J. Orr, *God's Image in Man*; Baker's Evangelical Dictionary; G. W. Bromiley, *The Doctrine of God*; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, for information on this subject.)