

Lesson 8

The Indwelling of the Spirit

Introduction

Previously, we have defined regeneration as the moment a person is saved, i.e., the new life begins. It is the moment a transfer of location happens, we are picked up by God and moved from Satan's domain to the kingdom of Christ, Colossians 1.13. Romans 6.1-6 describes this as the time the old self dies and is buried with Jesus, and a new self is brought to life. 1 Corinthians 6.11 describes it as the moment our legal status before God changes ... we are pronounced "not guilty," justified in the name of the Lord.

These wonderful facts however do not mean that the Spirit's saving activity has been completed. Like an infant, the new Christian must be brought to maturity. Raised up from spiritual death, a new Christian is weak and needs to be brought to strong spiritual health. Now, the young Christian finds himself or herself even more susceptible to the temptations and lies of Satan.

Yet his renewal is not complete in any part. The faith of the Christian, though real and sincere, is not perfect at first, but often mingled and interrupted with distrust; his love, though genuine, may not be strong enough to encounter hardships or temptations: in a word, though he has a germ of spiritual life implanted within him, which in principle is higher than anything of which unrenewed men partake, he is still beset with allurements to sin, and possessed with tendencies or habits of yielding to these allurements. He really loves God and hates sin; that is the ruling principle of his soul: but that does not remove all possibility of sin, it does not make the pleasures of sin less attractive to his senses, or the self-denial that God requires less painful to flesh and blood: it does not destroy the power of habit which may have been contracted by former acts of self-indulgence; nor does it obviate the possibility of missing the path of duty through mistake or heedlessness.

Such is the state in which the New Testament describes the converts to Christianity as being, with their hearts filled with a new affection, love to God and Christ, yet prone to many sins, sometimes of a gross and shocking nature, and needing to have the most plain moral duties enforced on them. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak; nay, the flesh lusteth against the spirit.⁷¹

We cannot achieve spiritual healing and maturity on our own. This is why the Spirit remains with us. He continues the process of our salvation, for which regeneration was merely the beginning.

This process is typically referred to as *sanctification*. This process is only successful as we continually choose God's way, make the best effort we can, and allow the Spirit's moral power to work from within.

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

What is the *gift of the Spirit* in Acts 2.38? Some may first answer "salvation." This, however, is not true to New Testament teaching as a whole. *The Spirit Himself is the gift*. Consider these passages:

- Acts 5:32: And we are witnesses to these things, and so is **the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.**"

⁷¹ Candlish, James S. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d., p. 90.

- Romans 5:5: and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts **through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**
- Galatians 3:5: **Does he who supplies the Spirit to you** and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—

When we receive the Spirit, He dwells within us, i.e., He enters our hearts and bodies.

The Reality of the Spirit's Indwelling

In Ezekiel 36.26-27, we have unmistakable writing from prophecy. Here God promises regeneration and then says, *I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to walk in my rules.* Looking ahead to Pentecost, in John 7.37-38 NASB Jesus promised: *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.* Then, in verse 39, John explains, *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.* The term *from his innermost being* is literally “out of his belly” in the original language. This graphically locates the Spirit within the believer's body. This also seems consistent with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6.19.

Paul liked the language of indwelling and uses it throughout His writing. One example is Romans 8.9-11. The words “to dwell” refer to a house or dwelling place. This is not indicating a temporary place of residence, but a permanent settling down. When the Spirit enters us, He becomes a permanent resident. He moves in and makes himself at home. The body is called his “temple” and a temple is typically regarded as a dwelling place for deity, 1 Kings 8.10-11; Ephesians 2.22. It has been said that when Paul said we are temples of God and the Spirit dwells in us, he was making the most profound statement imaginable about our access to God and the way we relate to Him.”

The Nature of the Spirit's Indwelling

Obviously, our body is not a literal temple, so we understand, at least in some sense, that this is a metaphor. However, the question regarding the nature of His indwelling centers over His presence. Is it literal or figurative? Is He present literally within our body, or is He “present” with us only in the sense that His Word or power or influence is working within us?

Figuratively

This view takes the stance that the Spirit “dwells” within a person only insofar as and in the sense that the truth of Spirit-inspired Scripture has been received and believed with one's mind and accepted into one's heart. There is something to passages like Psalm 119.11, where David speaks of hiding God's work in our heart so that we might not sin against him. Passages like Colossians 3.16 and 1 John 2.20, 24, 27.

Some claim that the literal view is “unscriptural and illogical” by stating that if the Word of God is sufficient enough to bring the sinner to faith and repentance, then the Word is surely powerful enough to motivate us to live a Christian life. “To be filled with the Spirit of God is to have the word of Christ

dwelling in us richly, and when His word dwells in us richly it is the same as having Him abiding in us.” This answers the question, “How can I be filled with the Spirit?”⁷²

Literally

This is the view that the Spirit does, Himself, live within our hearts and bodies. If we are to believe that regeneration involves the Spirit’s direct work on a person’s heart, without equating that to Calvinistic error, then the same can be done in advocating a literal indwelling of the Spirit.

This is the view argued by Moses Lard, who wrote that there was no reason to take the passages about the Spirit’s indwelling as figurative. None of the Biblical texts are qualified and there are no theological reasons why it cannot be taken literally. Those who take this view assert that when Peter promised the gift of the Spirit, Acts 2.38, he did not refer to the moral effect of the Word in our mind. In fact, it seems that the natural meaning of Acts 2.38 and 5.32 is that God has given us His actual presence.

When we speak of His literal indwelling, we do not mean:

- A visible presence, unlike the display of God’s glory within Solomon’s temple.
- A result of His omnipresence, in which God occupies every created thing.
- Like the incarnation of Jesus, where divine and human were united into a single person.
- The pagan belief of a “divine spark,” naturally present in all humans.
- Like the way demons entered into and became spatially present within a person’s body.

So, while it’s easy to understand what the Spirit’s indwelling doesn’t look like, describing it positively is a different matter. *It is impossible for us to understand just how the Spirit ‘dwells’ in us. Nor is it a matter of vital importance that we should understand this.*⁷³ Boles argued that we cannot even explain how *our own* spirits dwell in our bodies. Thus we must be willing to accept an element of mystery here, being content to know that He dwells in Christians, and also why He dwells in us, namely, for our sanctification.

How Do We Know?

If He literally dwells in us, shouldn’t there be some kind of perceptible sign? This has long been argued by those who take the *figurative* view. But, why can’t the issue break down to the most simple level? In other words, we know the Spirit dwells in us *because God says so*. It comes down to nothing more than believing God’s promise. Acts 5.32 says God promises to give the Spirit to those who obey Him, i.e., those who obey His instructions on how to be saved, John 7.38; Acts 2.38; Romans 10.9-10. If we believe God keeps His promises, then we have all the assurance we need of the Spirit’s presence within us.

The Christian can know that the Holy Spirit dwells within him as certainly as he knows that his sins have been pardoned. He has no “tangible” evidence that he has received the remission of his sins, nor is he actually conscious

⁷² Savits, Ronald. “Be Filled with the Spirit.” *Christian Standard* (7/10/77) 13–14.

⁷³ Jones, A.B. *The Spiritual Side of Our Plea*. St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1901.

of his pardon, but he knows from the Bible that if he has obeyed God he has received the promise of remission of sins (Acts 2:38). In a like manner the Christian knows that if he obeys God he will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 5:32). The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is a matter of faith with the Christian just as is the knowledge of his pardon. It is not a matter of “feelings” any more than the knowledge of our being pardoned is based on feelings. The criterion is God’s word in both instances, not feelings. If God says that his Spirit dwells within us, then we believe that He does.⁷⁴

For Thought and Reflection

1. What is the term we most commonly use to describe the ongoing process of our salvation?
2. Who is the gift of salvation in Acts 2.38?
3. What did Jesus teach about the indwelling of the Spirit in John 7.37-38? How does John explain Jesus’ teaching (7.39)?
4. What is the meaning of the word “dwell” as found in Romans 8.9-11?
5. What are some of the arguments in favor of a figurative indwelling of the Spirit?
6. What are some of the arguments against a figurative indwelling of the Spirit?

⁷⁴ Black, Garth. *The Holy Spirit, rev. ed. The Way of Life series*. Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1973.

