

The Holy Spirit

Lesson 2: The Presence of God & The Word of God

“For we are the temple of the living God...” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Our first lesson focused on the glorious nature of the words above. God’s presence, His Holy Spirit, dwelt among the children of Israel in a holy tabernacle that had been sanctified for His use. Later, this movable tent was replaced by a lavish temple, a permanent dwelling for Israel’s holy God. Tragically, Israel failed to recognize that God dwelling with them had nothing to do with the permanence of the structure, but everything to do with their commitment to His covenant. Israel’s repeated breaking of His covenant resulted in God’s departure from the people, but in a glorious future He promised a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and a pouring out of His Spirit (Isaiah 44:3-4). A new temple was built, but God’s presence was not found in it. He had something more glorious in mind.

Christians, those who have been baptized for the remission of their sins, are now the temple of God; He dwells with us! I have no problem saying that because the New Testament Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Spirit does in fact dwell in us. Consider Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9,11,26-27; 1Cor. 6:19; 2Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; 2Tim 1:14; Heb. 6:4; 1John 4:13; etc. There may be some hesitancy to say that the Spirit is given to us (Acts 2:38) or that we are the dwelling place of the Spirit (1Cor. 6:19) because of the erroneous things that are sometimes said about the Spirit and His indwelling. However, as I cautioned at the start, we must not be reactionary in our approach to this topic. If others distort what it means for the Spirit to dwell in a believer it should not prevent us from affirming what the Scriptures teach: we are God’s temple, we are where His Spirit now dwells.

There is reason to be concerned over historical and current misunderstandings regarding the indwelling of the Spirit. Most disturbing are those teachings that would credit the Spirit with leading us into knowledge that is not found in inspired Scripture. However, true appreciation of God’s presence with us leads to greater appreciation for the God-breathed word. That is the focus of this

lesson.

God's Presence & The Word In Israel

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, they were not fit for His presence. Thus, Israel was warned not to touch the mountain when God was about to come down upon it (Exodus 19:10-13) and later the elders of Israel could only worship from afar (24:1). A tabernacle was to be built, a sanctuary where God could dwell among the people (25:8), but its construction was not left to Moses' desires or the will of the people. It would have to be fashioned according to God's will:

“According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it,” (25:9). Ask yourself, would God's presence have entered the sanctuary if it was not constructed according to His pattern? Absolutely not! **The point: there is a definite link between following God's revealed will (pattern) and receiving His presence.**

This was further illustrated in the construction of the ark of the covenant. Affixed to the top of the ark was a mercy seat constructed between two cherubim. Note the significance of its placement: “You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony,” (25:21-22). The tabernacle was where God's presence resided among the people, particularly His presence rested on the mercy seat. And below the mercy seat, within the ark, was found the two tablets that contained God's covenant with Israel (see Deuteronomy 10:2). God's presence among the people rested on His covenant, His revealed will to the people.

It's important to note that even though God's presence was with the entire nation, He selected certain people through whom He would reveal His will. As Peter reminded Christians in the first century, “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God,” (2Peter 1:20-21). Moses was the first prophet in the nation of Israel and is known as the Law giver.

However, God foretold that there would be other prophets. Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is a prophecy with Messianic fulfillment (Peter says that Jesus fulfills the prophecy in Acts 3:22), but the first application of the prophecy is to the nation of Israel. God would send other prophets among the people and it was their responsibility to heed the prophet's words. However, it was the prophet's charge to only speak the words of God, he must not speak "a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak," (Deut. 18:20). Another prophetic test was given in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Here a situation was envisioned where a prophet would speak to the people, even perform signs which would seem to validate his standing as God's spokesman. However, if he did not speak the truth about God and His word, he was a false prophet and should be executed. God's Spirit revealed God's will and if the people would heed the inspired word they would insure the Lord's presence remaining among them (Exodus 19:4-6).

Sadly, we know that Israel did not heed the words of the prophets (2Kings 17:13-14; 2Chron. 36:15-16), resulting in God's presence leaving them (Ezekiel 10:18-19) and the punishment of the people. The presence of God and the word of God are directly connected.

Summary points:

1. God's presence first came when the people followed His revealed will.
2. God's continued presence was dependent on the people continuing to keep His revealed will.
3. God did not directly reveal His will to every Israelite, but to selected prophets. It was the people's responsibility to test the prophets and follow those who said the correct things about God.
4. When the people departed from God's revealed will, His presence departed from the people.

God's Presence & God's Word In Christ

Unsurprisingly, we see the same points already discussed are true in the new covenant. **First, even though the Spirit is promised to every Christian (Acts**

2:38; Eph. 1:13), God does not reveal His will directly to every saint. The basis of the new covenant was first declared by Jesus, the very Son of God. As the Hebrew writer declared, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world,” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Later, he exhorts his readers to “pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (2:1-2). The “word spoken through angels” referenced the law that was given to Moses (see Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53) and every Jew recognized it as the very words of God. God has now revealed His will through His Son, and it deserves the same kind of reverence. While on the earth, Jesus was quick to point out that His teaching did not originate with Him, but was from the Father (John 7:16). This did not diminish His authority, but correctly pointed out to the Jews that His words were God’s words.

John’s gospel focuses on the life-giving nature of Jesus’ words. Following His word makes us His disciples where there is truth and freedom (8:31-32); those who keep His words will not experience spiritual death (8:51); those who hear His voice are His sheep and will have eternal life (10:27-28). However, Jesus would not remain on this earth (13:33), so how would these life-giving words continue to be given? A Helper would come! “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth,” (14:16-17). The term “another Helper” is significant. First, two different words, *allos* and *heteros*, can be translated as “another,” but *allos* is used here which has the basic meaning of “another of the same sort.” “Helper” is the term *paraclete* and can be translated in a variety of ways such “comforter” or “advocate,” carrying the idea of coming to someone’s aid. Jesus’ point to the disciples was that a Helper like Him was coming. This Helper would “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you,” (14:26) and would

“guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come,” (16:13). It must be emphasized that Jesus’ words here were not directed to all disciples for all time, but to the 11 apostles who remained faithful to Him. The Helper, the Spirit of truth, would come upon them and guide them into all truth, He would deliver the words of God to them! They in turn would deliver the words of God to the rest of the world. This is the force of the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20, where the apostles were told that they were to make disciples and continue to teach the commandments of Jesus. The same arrangement is described by the Hebrew writer when he says, “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,” (Heb. 2:3). The word of God was first declared by Jesus, but it was then delivered to future disciples (the “us” in the passage) by “those who heard” (the apostles). The revealed will of God would not come through the Spirit to each saint, but would come to the saints through God’s chosen apostles and prophets.

Space will not allow a thorough discussion of miracles, but a few points should be made as they relate to this matter. First, miracles were given for a distinct reason and purpose:

- “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.” (Mark 16:20)
- “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” (Hebrews 2:4)

Second, baptized believers receiving the Spirit did not receive miraculous powers. There are two instances in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit descended on people, granting them miraculous abilities: when the Spirit descended on the apostles (Acts 2:1-4) and when the Spirit descended on the first Gentile converts (Acts 10:44-45). The only other means by which saints received miraculous abilities was through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:18). The Scriptures never attribute the giving of miraculous powers to any other means,

certainly not to baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Finally, the miraculous gifts that confirmed the word ceased when the word was completely delivered. This is the meaning of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 when he said that the things in part (prophecy, tongues and miraculous knowledge) would be done away when the perfect came. The "perfect" in context could only be the completion of that which was formerly "in part," the revealed will of God.

Just as God's presence only entered the tabernacle after the inspired pattern was followed, **people today can only receive the Spirit when they follow the inspired word.**

- "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" (Galatians 3:2)
- "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise," (Ephesians 1:13)

This is exactly what is seen in Acts 2. The apostles received the promised Helper (Acts 2:1-4), they then proclaimed the inspired gospel message and when people obeyed the inspired message they received the promised Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Furthermore, even though every Christian receives the gift of the Spirit, they must still rely on inspired teaching to know what God would have them do. Going back to the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20, when disciples were baptized they would have received the Spirit, but they must still be taught the commandments of God. In Ephesians 3:1-7 the apostle Paul states that the baptized believers in Ephesus, all of whom had received the Spirit (1:13), could only understand Paul's insight into the mystery of the gospel when he wrote it down for them. The Spirit did not reveal the mystery directly to every believer, He revealed it through Paul. Similarly, Paul consistently reminded Timothy to pay attention to the inspired word (1 Timothy 4:6, 16; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 3:14-17; etc.), even though Timothy had received spiritual gifts through the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1:6). Likewise, the apostle Peter sought to remind Christians of the principles of the gospel (2 Peter 1:12-15) even though these saints were becoming "partakers of the

divine nature,” (1:4). **The point is emphatic throughout the New Testament, the indwelling of the Spirit does not direct Christians in what they should do, the inspired word does!** And this word must be followed, or else God’s presence, the Spirit, will not remain with us. “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Let the importance of that verse sink in. Stay true to God’s revealed will and you have God; leave His revealed will and you don’t!

Summary Points:

1. Even though every Christian receives the gift of the Spirit, God’s will was revealed through His Son, apostles and first century prophets. We have the word that still serves as our guide.
2. God’s revealed will must be followed for us to receive the Spirit.
3. God’s revealed will must be followed for the Spirit to remain with us.
4. When we depart from God’s revealed will we break covenant and do not have God.

The Ongoing Importance Of God’s Presence Being Tied To His Word

Throughout the Scriptures it is affirmed that God’s presence with man is directly tied to man’s faithfulness to His revealed will. Understanding this leads to several important applications to current ideas and religious trends.

- **Teachers should be judged on Biblical criteria.** I have benefited greatly from a variety of Biblical scholars, teachers and authors over the years. However, I must always remember the true test of God’s spokesmen given in Deuteronomy 13:1-3; do they say the correct things about God and his commands? This is the test for any teacher, myself included, and should be used to discern everything we hear and read. Our religious climate is inundated with a variety of teachers, many going so far as to claim that their teaching is inspired by the Spirit. I’ve read many of them, gleaned some

things that are profitable, but because they do not consistently say the right things about God and His commands they cannot be led by the Spirit. We must heed John's warning, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world," (1 John 4:1). Were the false teachers of John's day wrong about everything? I doubt it, but since they weren't saying the right things about the incarnation of Jesus, they were deemed false and not led by the Spirit (vs. 2-3). I do not accuse many modern teachers of purposefully distorting the Scriptures and I pray that they come to a better understanding of God's will (I pray the same for myself), but simply because they are Biblical on some things does not mean I should heed what they say on everything. Test the spirits!

- **Calvinism has it backwards.** One of the basic tenants of Calvinism is referred to as "irresistible grace," meaning that the only way someone can be saved is if God sends the Holy Spirit into their heart, to change it and make it receptive to the gospel. This false doctrine is the logical conclusion one reaches when he starts out with the false premise that our nature is totally depraved and we are unable to do anything good. This is not Biblical teaching. We receive the Spirit when we obey the gospel message (Acts 2:38). Following God's word is what makes us fit for the Spirit, not the other way around.
- **The test for having God's Spirit is not miracles.** I'm often asked about miracles today, and I understand the curiosity. When we read Acts we see the apostles performing miracles and them bestowing spiritual gifts on others. As we've noted, the purpose of miracles was to confirm the revealed word of God and when that was completed the miraculous gifts ceased. However, there are many who teach that receiving the Spirit today must result in the ability to perform miracles. We receive the Spirit through faith and obedience to the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Acts 2:38), not through a miraculous Holy Spirit baptism. Having the spirit will produce fruit (Galatians 5:22-23)

and that fruit is not miraculous.

- **Intuition has its place, but it isn't revelation.** This is at the root of most “led by the Spirit” discussions, the idea being that the Spirit leads us through intuition, hunches and feelings. In our final lesson we will note the role the Spirit has with our intuition, but it is not Biblical to think of the Spirit directing our lives outside of the word. When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, a Spirit filled evangelist, he did not tell Timothy to wait for the Spirit's leading. He told Timothy to pay attention to what the Spirit had already revealed (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 3:14-17)! If we are expecting the Spirit to reveal God's specific will for our lives, we are asking Him to do something God never promised.
- **There is a connection between the Spirit and emotions, but it may not be what you think.** The Spirit, God's presence, dwells with us when we abide in His word. This should produce an emotional response from us as we seek to comprehend the great love God has for us, that He would redeem us by the blood of His Son and send us His Spirit. But many have confused emotion with the Spirit, that if I'm not emotionally moved by a worship service that means the Spirit is not present. That's not how it works! Understand, I'm not advocating formal worship that's devoid of emotion. It upsets me to see brothers and sisters “going through the motions” to worship God. However, the solution to cold, formal worship isn't to depart from the worship we know God desires; the solution is to remember the glorious things God has done, that His Spirit is present with us! Only then can we worship in “spirit and in truth,” (John 4:24).

The Spirit and the word are not the same and we do not need to say they are. However, the Spirit and the word are intimately connected. The word came via the Spirit, and our obedience to the word guarantees the Spirit's presence with us. So, if we value the Spirit we must also value the word!