

# March 3, 2019

## Life in the Spirit

### John 14:15-31

The centre point of Jewish life and faith was the Temple. The centre point of the Temple was the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the Temple, containing the Ark of the Covenant. Here the ancient Jews literally believed God was physically present on earth. It was so holy that only one priest, once a year, was allowed in on the Day of Atonement, reportedly with a rope tied around their ankle in case they died.

Think about the concept of God the ancient Jewish people had. God was remote and distant – out there, somewhere. He was unapproachable. He was impersonal. He was to be feared. Some people still have that kind of perspective on God ...

Jesus and the New Testament, however, radically change all of this. God still dwells in a temple, but now **we** are that Temple:

- our lives, personally, are temples where God lives: *"Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); and
- our church, all of us together, is God's dwelling place: *"Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

God is not remote and distant; He is within us. He is approachable and personal; He is always with us. He is to be loved rather than feared. That is radically different from the ancient Jewish understanding of who God is and who we are.

This is what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit, God within us, in John 14:

1. The Holy Spirit is our **God**. The Holy Spirit is, with the Father and Jesus, God. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God himself – setting up residence in our lives and church. The Holy Spirit helps us know God, because He is God.
2. The Holy Spirit is our **Counsellor** (14:16-20). God has not left us on our own. The word translated "*counsellor*" or "*helper*" is difficult to get right in English. It speaks of someone who stands with us and is for us. Imagine you were unfairly arrested and facing trial in a foreign country; you don't know the language, culture, or justice system. Wouldn't it be great to have an advocate who will represent you? The Spirit is our advocate, mentor, teacher, tutor, counsellor, comforter, and confidante. Through the Spirit, God stands with you and for you.

3. The Holy Spirit is our **friend** (14:23). God dwells within each of us. And as a true friend, He never leaves us; He stands with us through all circumstances.
4. The Holy Spirit is our **teacher** (14:25-26). He takes on the role Jesus had with his disciples. Revealing God's truth in Scripture, He helps us make sense of the world. Truth, in Scripture, is always practical. It's not just about what we believe; it is about how we live. The Spirit comes to change us to be more like Jesus, to bring the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).
5. The Holy Spirit **brings us peace** (14:27). There is much in life that can cause anxiety and worry. However, those in whom the Holy Spirit sets up home are promised a deep sense of peace as a result of His presence.

If anyone truly believes in Jesus, God, through His Spirit, is within them (Romans 8:9); but also the whole church is a holy temple built together by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 2:21–22). If God is within us, personally and corporately, how then can we relate to Him? As our counsellor? As our friend? As our teacher?

### ***The Spirit in Us***

*"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God ..."* (1 Corinthians 6:19). If we are temples of the Holy Spirit what does that mean?

A temple is a holy place. It is sacred space. As God's dwelling place, it is treated with reverence and respect. You – your body, your life, your being – is a holy place. It is sacred space. As God's dwelling place, it is to be treated with reverence and respect. This is who we are. This is who other people are. What does that mean for how we live?

As temples of God, we are meant to be filled with God, with the Spirit. Paul writes, *"Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18). The Greek verb tense in that verse drives home the point: the verb means to be filled, and to *"go on being filled"* with the Spirit, *"on and on and on."* It is not a one-off event; it is continual experience.

- Sometimes we describe being filled with the Spirit as a one-off thing. You made a decision, you felt warm and fuzzy, maybe you even spoke in tongues. That's it. You're good to go. Life goes back as it was before. Nothing really changes.
- We sometimes treat the Spirit like the Force in *Star Wars* – it's divine, cosmic energy coursing through the universe, so we somehow need to get Yoda/Jesus to tune into the right channel. We get the "Holy Spirit vibe" and we're in tune with God. But more often we feel out of sync and we're unhappy.
- We sometimes treat the Spirit like spiritual super-unleaded gasoline. When we're

feeling spiritually empty we pray, and God tops us up with an extra-peppy brew. We get some spiritual high-test and we're feeling spiritually good again. But we are on a roller coaster, continually needing a refill.

Why don't these approaches work? Because Scripture consistently describes being filled with Spirit as a state of being. It's a state of being, a reality, a way of living in which a Person, God, the Holy Spirit, lives in your life, and ideally fills every corner of your life.

How can you be "filled" with God? You invite Him into your life. You share every part of your life with Him. In your prayers, you ask for His wisdom and direction. You want to bring your life into harmony with Him. You try to walk every moment of every day with Him – allowing His Spirit to make you a holy Temple, worthy of God.

Notice three times in this passage, Jesus says:

- *"If you love me, obey my commandments"*(14:15)
- *"Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me"*(14:21)
- *"All who love me will do what I say"*(14:23)

A person full of the Spirit is trying to allow God/Jesus/the Spirit into more and more parts of their lives so their whole being is more in tune with His will and His way.

- We treat other people as Jesus would treat them.
- We make financial decisions as Jesus would have us use His blessings to us.
- We live ethically as Jesus would have us live.
- We live justly – with people and creation – in accordance with Scripture.
- We try to identify parts of our lives that are out of sync and bring them into alignment.

That's the ideal. But life isn't always like that, is it? Sometimes feel spiritually empty. Miserable. Disillusioned. The problem is not that God has left us: the promise of Scripture is that God never leaves us; Jesus never leaves us; His Spirit never leaves us.

It is a process, a growth process, rather like a bud growing and eventually blooming. That can be frustrating. We want "instant spirituality" when, in reality, it takes work ...

Perhaps we've left God standing on the doorstep. We've chosen to keep part – or all – of our lives out of His influence. There are doors we keep closed. There are corners we keep hidden. There are issues we are not even aware of. Our ongoing challenge is to prayerfully keep opening up our lives to the Spirit again and again, allowing the Spirit to fill us – completely – again and again. It's a moment-by-moment challenge.

We will never be perfect (this side of eternity). But His mercy never fails. His patience

never fails. His love never fails.

But His goal for us is that, more and more, we are filled to overflowing with His Spirit. More and more we know His presence, His hope, His joy, His peace, and His love.

### ***The Spirit in the Church***

What about our church? *"Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16). If our church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, we, as a body together, are a holy place. Our fellowship is sacred space. As God's dwelling place, we treat one another with reverence and respect. This is who we are. How, then, do we live?

Of course we are not perfect. But as individuals filled with the Spirit, that is the ideal toward which we strive in our lives together.

The phrase "one another" is used 59 times in the New Testament: We are to love one another (17 times), be at peace with each other, are devoted to one another in brotherly love, honour one another above yourselves, live in harmony with one another, stop passing judgment on one another, accept one another, instruct one another, greet one another, have concern for one another, serve one another, carry one another's burdens, be patient bearing with one another, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgive one another, submit to one another, do not lie to one another, bear with each other, encourage one another, build each other up, spur one another on toward love and good deeds, don't slander one another, pray for each other, offer hospitality to one another, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.

Imagine we were this kind of "one another" community – filled with the Holy Spirit individually and corporately. What would be the result?

What "one another" speaks to you? What will you do about it?

My prayer for our church is that we are a community of individuals filled with His Spirit: we each know God personally in our lives. My prayer, also, is that we live this out in community with one another and with the world.

*"You are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you ... all of you together are the temple of God and the Spirit of God lives in you."* God is not some distant, remote, unapproachable, terrifying beast: He is Jesus, He is the Spirit within you, your Friend: counselling you, teaching you, giving you His peace. Praise Him.