

# The Indwelling of the Spirit – a Figure of Speech

By Jerry Moffitt

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For many years our brotherhood has disagreed on the mode of the indwelling of the Spirit. We have never divided over the issue because there have not only been good, sound men on both sides, but we have wise men on both sides of the issue.

As with many others, I have never felt that acceptance of the personal indwelling was a step toward the dangerous error of a special leading of the Spirit. And some of the best warriors against the charismatic movement and against a direct operation of the Spirit have been those who believe in the personal indwelling of the Spirit.

For more than 26 years I have puzzled over the mode of the indwelling and have felt that there was insufficient scriptural evidence to settle the issue. God doesn't answer every question (Deut. 29:29). Still, in teaching on sanctification, from time to time, I felt I was being led by Scripture in a natural way toward what might be called an indwelling of the Spirit through the Word. Finally, I decided to put the Scriptures and such thoughts into a simple monograph.

Following are those Scriptures and thoughts.

## Transformation

Paul told the Roman Christians to "be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Truly a transformation is to

take place; other passages which seem to indicate the same thing in various figures are presented for your contemplation:

“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? *But we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:16).

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, *but Christ liveth in me*” (Gal. 2:20).

“My little children, of whom I am again in travail until *Christ be formed in you*” (Gal. 4:19).

“To whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image *from glory to glory*, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

“And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, *and the day-star arise* in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19).

As we have seen, some of the verses (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27) talk of Christ dwelling in us. Others talk of God dwelling in us or his Word dwelling in us.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16).

“And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, *which also worketh in you that believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

*“For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).*

*“I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; yet ye seek to kill me, because my word hath not free course in you” (John 8:37).*

*“In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).*

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).*

Now, I believe all this is talking basically about sanctification. Paul said, “Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Cor. 7:1).

I believe all these things happen much this way. A person hears the Word of God and of his free will and by obedience puts away bad traits and takes on good traits and holy characteristics. In doing so he resembles Christ more.

It can be said, figuratively, that Christ dwells in him. Christ is formed in him (Gal. 4:19). God has his abode with him (John 14:23).

The Word has free course in him (John 8:37).

It could be said he is full of the Spirit (Acts 6:3). It comes through obedience to the Word so the Bible attributes sanctification to the Word (John 17:17).

Now notice another passage. Paul said, “But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin” (Rom. 8:9-10).

Would not the concept of the Spirit dwelling in us fit well with all the passages above? Is it another way, by a figure of speech, of describing the transformation called sanctification which occurs in our lives by obedience to God's Word? Why would the dwelling of the Spirit be literal and all the other indwellings be figurative? And if the "indwelling of the Spirit" is a figure which describes the reality of sanctification, like all the rest, what figure is it?

## Metonymy

There is what is called the "metonymy of the cause" where the "cause" is put for the "effect." Sometimes a person is put for an activity of that person. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul says, "Quench not the Spirit," when he seems to have in mind the gifts of the Spirit, especially in context "prophesyings" (Gal. 5:20). Acts 7:51 says, "Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit." Bullinger says:

*The testimony of the Holy Spirit as given by the prophets. Their fathers resisted the prophets and would not hear the Spirit's voice in them and now they, like their fathers, were resisting the same testimony at Pentecost, and since then culminating in Stephen (see pp. 542-543 in Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, by E.W. Bullinger, published by Baker Book House in Grand Rapids, Mich.).*

Under "metonymy of the cause" and under "the person acting for the thing done" Bullinger has several whole categories involving the Holy Spirit. One is called the "Spirit for the gifts and operations of the Spirit" (p. 540). All examples he gives are worth considering. Could not the Holy Spirit (the Person) stand in the place of the thing he does (sanctification which comes through obedience to the truth [John 17:17])?

Could not the indwelling Spirit by "metonymy of the subject"

stand for the fruit he bears in our life when we obey his Word? Metonymy of the Subject is where the subject is put for something pertaining to it, so it seems so to me. For example, notice 2 Corinthians 3:6: "Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but *of the spirit*." Bullinger says *spirit* stands for "the ministration of the Spirit, verse 8: the New Covenant as contained in the Gospel" (p. 543).

It seems clear there is a "metonymy of the cause" where sometimes the person acting is put for the thing done.

Again, I do not find the doctrine of the personal, literal indwelling of the Spirit distasteful, in and of itself, as long as one does not teach he does something to us separate and apart from the Word. That notion can contradict truth regarding free will and lead to the error of Calvinism. Too, so far I cannot prove the two concepts on the mode of the indwelling are mutually exclusive.

Some Scriptures might speak of one mode of indwelling while other Scriptures speak of another mode of indwelling. Yet, I still have not seen a personal indwelling proved, though I desire to continue to study it with an open mind.

## A Personal Opinion

All good sound brethren I have spoken to agree that the mode of the indwelling does not affect salvation and must never divide us. We have good and sound brethren on both sides of this issue. Our dispute must be with those who suppose the Spirit in you works on you or does something to you separate and apart from the power of God's Word. To save us, God chose the persuasive power of his Word. That leaves our free will intact. The error of a mysterious working on us apart from the Word of God cripples personal choice, weakens human responsibility, and violates the Word of God.

In an age when the denominational world says, "Christ paid it all," and "God does it all," and "You can't save yourself," those who teach direct leading of the Spirit without the Word are enemies of truth and in our battle with them we cannot take prisoners. Some of our best fighters in the fray, however, are those who differ with my indwelling and who believe in a direct personal indwelling. It is an honor to fight alongside them.

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## The Spirit in Man

*By Earl Trimble*  
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Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God. Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain? Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying? (James 4:4-5 ASV).

Many denominational commentators consider the word *spirit* in verse five refers to the Holy Spirit. However, there are serious problems with this view.

The context shows that James was writing about "jealous envying and contentions" on the part of the Jewish converts (James 1:1). An evil disposition is under consideration. He stipulates "bitter envy and strife" (James 3:14). He speaks of "lusts that war in your members" ... killing ... praying for wrong things ... friendship with a sinful world ... unclean hands and impure hearts ... evil speaking against each other and the law (James 4:1-12).

In his commentary on the book of James, brother Guy N. Woods

gives the sense of this verse as: "The spirit which is in you is a covetous and envious one" (p. 217). Brother Woods makes this observation:

*It is incredible to us that the writer would affirm of deity that which he had earlier so severely condemned in men! If, as indeed it is, envy and jealousy are wrong in man, we cannot believe that James intended to assert that such are characteristic of God (p. 218).*

Not that it carries much weight, but the translators of the KJV, ASV, NIV, and the RSV all rendered "spirit" in James chapter 4, verse five, with a small *s* to indicate the human spirit.

The ASV (1901) has it, "The spirit which he made to dwell in us"; the KJV has, "The spirit that dwelleth in us." God appointed the spirit to dwell in and quicken the human body. He created the body and gave the spirit. The spirit is in the image and likeness of its giver. Today, of course, God makes the human body through the process of his law of procreation, and he still imparts the human spirit for the fleshly body, which gives it life. God is the "father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). "Father of spirits" is used in contradiction with "fathers of the flesh." There is but one father of all spirits. There are many fleshly fathers.

The spirit which comes from God the Father into the bodies of babies is pure and innocent and is not depraved. Calvinists mistakenly teach that every baby's spirit is corrupt and vile. If the spirits within humans are depraved at birth, God is the Father of those sinful spirits and the source of an imperfect and filthy gift. In the nature of God, this cannot be the case; the spirit God gives is perfect and good. It is sinless at the time it is given. Otherwise, God is not God (good).

The innocent spirit arrives in a sin-cursed world in the body of a baby. It is a free moral agent in the image of God, and,

therefore, has the power of free choice. It does not have infinite attributes, but is limited. The spirit is susceptible to the influence of flesh. Therefore, without discipline, and under the improper influence of the body and the world, it becomes depraved. It is not born depraved but becomes sinful by its own choice. The Jewish disciples to whom James wrote acquired spirits "lusting to envy." James rebukes their jealousy and thereby demonstrates they owned the fault, and had not inherited it from the Father of their spirits.

We must be careful not to read into this "spirit" passage a literal indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit, as this would be an indictment of God.