

## The Holy Spirit and Man As Person (4)

### The Holy Spirit and Christ's Dwelling in Man

#### INTRODUCTION: IMITATION OR HABITATION?

Down through history, within the Christian church there has been a debate more generally implicit than explicit. Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* has been variously praised and criticised.<sup>1</sup> Are we asked to imitate Christ or to operate as though his life were within us and being worked out through us? Is it imitation, or is it (Christ's) habitation? In fact it may not be an either/or proposition in the ultimate.

Ephesians 5:1–2 quite definitely speaks of imitation of the Father. Note, however, the children can only (and must) imitate the Father because: (i) He is the Father; and (ii) they are the children! In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul urges his followers to be imitators of him as he is of Christ. He is speaking of high, ethical living. If we look at Philippians 3:17, 1 Corinthians

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1965.

## THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

4:16, 2 Thessalonians 3:7 and 9, and 1 Thessalonians 1:6 we see that Paul does not hesitate to suggest they imitate him. It is as though he enunciates principles, but gives the practice with it. He is saying, 'Don't labour at trying to work out what happens in practice. Simply remember what we did. That will be it.' This seems like a high claim, but it is really the simplicity of practice.

Whilst the Greek verb *mimeomai* is here used, it does not carry the modern idea of *mimic* although *mimic* derives from it. *Mimic* is a humorous or mocking repetition of an act or person. Paul is speaking about the very nature of things, that is, a child imitates its father, a convert his teacher, and so on. So we should imitate Paul who imitates Christ. Some, however, see in Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* an attempt to do just what he did and so, somehow, achieve a spiritual level of living. In the imitation Paul is speaking of, he assumes regeneration, conformity to the image of God, and participation in Christ and his Spirit. In other words, imitation is not at all wrong if it issues from being inhabited by Christ and the Spirit, and of course, as well from dwelling in God, and He in us.

### **CHRIST'S INDWELLING MAN, ESPECIALLY BY THE SPIRIT**

If the rather clumsy word 'indwelling' can be excused, then we mean that man is not only a forgiven, justified and sanctified creature, but also that he is one in whom Christ dwells. We have seen some of the Scriptures which point to this fact. The *locus classicus* is Galatians 2:20, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'. Again in Colossians 1:27, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. 'Christ in you' could have a corporate meaning, 'Christ in your midst, among you', but we

cannot exclude the thought of, 'in each of you'. Again in John 14:16–23 we have the promise of Christ that the Holy Spirit will dwell in the disciples and that the Father and the Son will come 'and make our home with him'.

What, then, does it mean for Christ to dwell in us? How can the risen man Christ, ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of God, actually dwell in the hearts of (redeemed) men and women? Is this a mystical dwelling, and if so, is it an actual dwelling? What, for example, does Paul mean when he says, 'you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together' (2 Cor. 7:3; cf. 6:11) and 'I hold you in my heart' (Phil. 1:7)? He surely means we think of you, experience you in the place of our love, thinking, and feeling. In this sense Christ must also be in our hearts. However Paul must mean more than that. Christ does not dwell according to the rise and fall of our feelings, remembrance, and so on. There must be some *objective dwelling* in our hearts.

How can this be? When it happens, what, then, is it? The interesting fact is that Jesus tells us to abide in him, and Paul's famous phrase 'in Christ'<sup>2</sup> is the real basis of the Christian life. *In Christ* everything happens—election, regeneration, the new man, victory, accomplishment of all things, labouring, witnessing, resurrection—in fact the whole gamut of Christian experience in this life, and the resurrection from the dead. To be in Christ is to come under the entire impress, power and assistance of Christ. How then can one be 'in Christ'? The answer is that whatever *the mode* may be does not so much matter as *the fact*. If a man is not in Christ then he is nothing and has nothing. The final authentic (true) things will be filled

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<sup>2</sup> For this whole subject see James Stewart's famous treatment, *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1954).

up by Christ, reconciled by Christ and united by Christ, so not to be in him is to be outside this grand finale to creation's total events!

To be in Christ simply means to partake of him in every way commanded and available to the believer. The interesting truth is that one cannot be 'in Christ' without the Messiah being *in him*. Jesus said, 'Abide in me, and I in you' (John 15:4). Jesus spoke of the oneness of the Father and the Son: 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that *they also may be in us*' (John 17:21). We take it then to be in Christ (or for that matter 'in the Spirit' or 'in the Father') is to have relationship with the Father, or the Son or the Spirit or all together. For Christ to be in (each one of) us is to have mutual relationship. All that is Christ objectively becomes ours subjectively when he is in us, as also we are in him.

This may sound like a lot of words, put together to reason a reasonable situation. Yet the text of Scripture makes no bones about it. We are either in Christ, and Christ is in us, or we are not in Christ and Christ is not in us. We will see this clearly from Romans 8:9–11, a little later. Here we must make the statement, 'When Christ dwells in man, then man does not so much imitate him, as he lives out the life of the indwelling Christ—if he will!' We add what we will amplify—'and this only by faith and the Holy Spirit!' If, then, one seems to imitate Christ, it is because he is living out that which is within him.

### **The Spirit's Ministry Regarding the Indwelling**

In another study we have seen that the Spirit dwells in regenerate man. Scriptures concerning this are: John 14:17; Romans 8:9–11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 4:4–6 and 2 Timothy 1:14. The Spirit is often referred to as

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAN AS PERSON (4)

‘the gift’ and we wonder where that ‘gift’ will be if not in the heart and life of the believer as these references seem to suggest. Contrary to popular belief we do not so much receive Christ (cf. John 1:12; Col. 2:6) as we believe on him and receive the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:22; etc.).

This order is important. Ephesians 3:14–19 speaks of our hearts being strengthened by the Spirit so that *Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith*. The indwelling of Christ is by: (i) the Spirit; and (ii) faith. This cuts away any mysticism as such. Some, of course, speak of ‘faith-mysticism’. However Jesus had said, ‘I will not leave you desolate [comfortless]; I will come to you’ (John 14:18). He is saying, ‘I will come to you through the Spirit’. This accords with his words at the close of Matthew’s gospel, ‘I am with you always to the close of the age’. It also accords with the fact that the Spirit will lead into the truth of the Son and Father (John 16:15). In other words, the other Comforter (John 14:16) is the one who alone can bring Christ to his people, when he has ascended. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul says, ‘he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him’, and this could, presumably, be translated, ‘one Spirit with him’. John also says, ‘by this we know that *he abides in us* [that is], *by the Spirit* which he has given us’ (1 John 3:24). In 1 John 4:13 he says, ‘By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit’. This is a most valuable verse when compared with John 15:4, for *how would we know he abides in us, and we in him, apart from the Holy Spirit?*

All of this prepares us for the passage of Romans 8:9–11. A close study of this passage teaches us that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit) then *he does not belong to Christ*. Why not? Because *to have the Spirit indwell is to have Christ indwell*, and *not to have the Spirit*

*indwell is not to have Christ indwell.* It is best said, ‘*First the Spirit and so Christ*’. The test of the Spirit indwelling is not Christ’s indwelling but vice-versa. This accords perfectly with Galatians 3:26 and 4:4–6. Christ brings redemption and sonship, but *sonship is not fulfilled until the Spirit of His (God’s) Son* enters our hearts. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, but for purposes of our sonship, the Spirit of His Son must come since *our sonship derives from his Sonship*. But notice clearly, this sonship comes only through the Spirit of (his) Sonship.

Another way of saying it is that Christ could not be the Messianic Son on earth apart from the Spirit. Now the Spirit is never apart from the Son, or, better still, the Son always comes to us through the Spirit. *How* this happens is not for us to say, nor need we know. Those depths are not for us to plumb. The Spirit teaches, guides, controls, and many other things *as he wills*. We receive the impact; that is what matters, and curiosity as to modes is not called for!

In general terms—leaving aside for the moment the matter of Christ’s indwelling of us—Christ and the Spirit are as one. This was well said of the Father and the Son. It may well be said of the Father and the Spirit as registered in Matthew 10:20 (cf. Luke 11:13; 24:49; John 14:15f.; Acts 1:4). However, just as no man can say, ‘Jesus is Lord!’ but by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:36, 10:36), so Jesus says what he wills through the Spirit. In the book of the Revelation, John is in the Spirit, and Jesus dictates letters to the seven churches, yet Christ admonishes them, ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’, that is, what is written in the letters.

We may now come to our conclusion regarding Christ’s indwelling by the Spirit: (i) Christ’s indwelling is a fact as the various Scriptures show; and (ii) his indwelling is not merely a localised total presence of him in his glorified form, and so an

objective presence to sight, but Christ communicated to us by the Spirit who is the revelator and the communicator, the teacher, and the counsellor. Christ's dwelling by faith (Eph. 3:17) is a dwelling not by sight, but by faith. This is also seen in 1 John 4:4 (cf. 1 John 5:4). Likewise Christ's indwelling by the Spirit is personal, efficacious and real, but is known only through the Spirit. If we may say so, it is not a presence which grows or diminishes by the rise or fall of our *feelings* concerning it, for we know nothing of the mode of the indwelling but simply of the *instrument*, that is, the Holy Spirit. We should look again at 1 John 3:24 and 4:13 and contexts. Faith will accept and live by this indwelling. The Spirit will brace and strengthen us for it and in it, and bring the results of that, namely the increase of love, and our being filled unto all the fullness of God.

Another word may be said before we move on to the purpose and goal of Christ's indwelling of us, as persons and his people, by the Spirit. Whilst Ephesians 5:18 exhorts us to go on being filled with the Spirit (or just 'spirit'), Colossians 3:16 in the context of a passage very similar to the Ephesian passage says, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'. There may be no difference from the 'word of Christ' to 'the Holy Spirit', or, again, 'Christ'. These are inseparable, even though again we may be baffled as to modes. Romans 10:14–17 says we cannot believe until we hear the word (of Christ), and then we believe. Faith, the word, Christ, the Spirit—all of these are closely linked. In practice we seek to know they indwell us; that is, we are filled by these things, and not the emptiness of things other than them. In this sense we can experience the things of faith, the word, Christ and the Spirit.

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**WHAT IS THE INDWELLING; WHAT IS ITS  
RESULTANT ACTION, AND ITS GOAL?**

**Contingency Is Power, Is Reality, Is Action**

When we go thoroughly through the following Scriptures: (i) Acts 17:25, 28–29; Romans 11:36 (cf. 1 Chron. 29:11–12; Ps. 33:6); 1 Corinthians 8:6a; 11:12; Ephesians 4:6; and Hebrews 2:10; then (ii) 1 Corinthians 8:6b; Colossians 1:16 (cf. John 1:1–3) and Hebrews 1:2b; and then compare Revelation 1:8 and 22:13, we discover that all things are from God, and all through Christ, that is, the Son. Nothing exists but in contingency upon God, and *God as Father*, and at the same time upon him who is the Son. The Son is the mediator of *all things*. Both Father and Son depend upon the Spirit to bring man to relationship with God as Father and Son. This is so, creationally, but more so redemptively. In creation it was the natural order (Ps. 33:6; 104:30; Gen. 2:7; Acts 17:25). In creation the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord, of the Word, of the Son. In redemption he is the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son.

Hence, for the Spirit *to come upon* man gives him power. That power is that he makes man son to the Father (through Christ) and the subject of Jesus the Lord, Messiah of the kingdom (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9). *Jesus' power lay in his contingency, as Son, upon the Father, through the Spirit*. The redeemed person and fellowship has its power in like contingency. The power to be (contingent) son/s is the power to be true man, to be effective servants in doing the will of God. For the Spirit *to come upon* is no less, as from Pentecost, than *to enter and dwell in* man. Terms like 'come upon', 'fallen upon', 'baptised with the Holy Spirit' are the equivalent of 'were filled', 'received', and so on. When the Spirit-visited



man knows the impact of the Spirit he is committed to contingency, and contingency carries with it the demand and weight of doing the will of the Father which is no less than doing the will of the Son, the Lord. Where the will is done the power is present. This is the story of the book of Acts (cf. 1 Cor. 4:20; Rom. 14:17). The Spirit keeps causing the cry 'Abba!' which is the cry of doing the will of the Father (Mark 14:36; cf. Rom. 8:14–15).

### **Indwelling by Messiah Is Personal and Corporate**

Christ is not only in each redeemed person (Gal. 2:20) but also in his people as his body. He is the head. They are his members. He is present to each of them. By the Spirit he is with them, and among them. As Israel was the son of God (Exod. 4:22; cf. Hosea 11:1) so it existed corporately, although each true member of the covenant was a son (Deut. 14:1; etc.). When Israel's sonship passed to the Servant of God (Hosea 11:1; cf. Matt. 2:14f. and Mark 10:45 with Isa. 42:1 and Matt. 3:17), that is to say, Jesus, then the true Israel's sonship became corporate in the Son (Gal. 3:26–29; 4:4–6). Just as Jesus' own Sonship is Messianic (Matt. 3:17; Luke 4:17ff.; Acts 10:38), so *the corporate sonship of the church is nothing less than Messianic*. This theme we will see in later studies. However, we see at this point that Christ's indwelling is not simply to be the aide to some private, individualistic spiritual pilgrimage and growth. Any of that will be the simple and natural 'spin-off' of obedience to the plan of God in contingency upon Father and Son as the gift and working (within) of the Holy Spirit. For Christ to indwell is no less than for the Spirit to indwell, and for the Spirit to indwell means no less than we render sonship to the Father within the Sonship of the Son!

**CONCLUSION**

We say there is no privatised indwelling of Christ. His nature would not allow that. The Spirit energises our faith, and as Christ dwells by faith, and so by the Spirit (or, vice-versa) then life comes, the will is motivated, and our actions are energised as our wills conform to God's plan. In another way of saying it we mean Christ lives out his life, not as though he clothes himself with a believing person, or uses them as some passive channel or instrument, but rather draws their wills to obedience, and their lives and energies into participation with his own actions.

The matter of heart-devotion, of holiness of life, of piety of being must, as we have said, be the simple and natural spin-off of the relationship. The Spirit relates us to Christ. The relationship is not only to us, but also to us within us. This is why Paul could say, 'God revealed His Son in me', and Paul could pray for the deluded Galatians that Christ should again be 'formed within you' (Gal. 1:16; 4:19—lit. trans.), for this is his powerful and personal indwelling.

We need always to add, 'By the power and (indwelling) presence of the Holy Spirit'.