

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

August 2017

Presence is a delicious word because it points to one of our truly great gifts. Nothing else can take the place of presence, not gifts, not telephone calls, not momentos. Nothing. Ahh, but when we get a visit from a loved one. When we are ill, we don't need soothing words nearly as much as we need loved ones to be present. What I'll miss the most of my mom will be her "presence". What makes shared life - games, walks, outings, concerts, and so many other things - so pleasurable? Presence.

God has made us this way, in His own image, because He, Himself is a personal, relational being. The great problem with the fall is that we lost not only our vision of God but also our relationship with Him, and so, no longer knew His abiding presence. The coming of Christ in the New Testament changed all of this forever.

Paul makes it clear in his writings that he understands the Spirit's coming as fulfilling three related expectations: (1) the association of the Spirit with the new covenant; (2) the language of "indwelling"; and (3) the association of the Spirit with the imagery of the temple. By fulfilling both the new covenant and the renewed temple motifs, the Spirit becomes the way God Himself is now present on planet earth. The Temple was always understood as the place of God's dwelling, the place of His glory. For Paul, the Spirit is how God presently dwells in His holy temple. Such dwelling takes place both in the gathered community, as one might well expect given the Old Testament background of this usage, and especially in the heart of the individual believer.

In keeping with the rest of the early church, Paul recognizes the death of Christ as instituting God's new covenant with His people (see 1 Corinthians 11:25). He also sees the Spirit as the way that covenant is realized in and among them. As the result of his own - and others' - experience of the Spirit, Paul understands this role especially in terms of Ezekiel 36:26-27 and 37:14. Paul combines motifs from these two passages in such a way that in the coming of the Spirit into the life of the believer and believing community God fulfilled three dimensions of the promise:

1. God would give His people a "new heart" – Jeremiah's "*heart of flesh*" to replace that of stone (Jeremiah 31:31-33) - made possible because He would also give them "*a new spirit*" (Ezekiel 36:26). This theme finds expression in 2 Corinthians 3:1-6, where the Corinthians are understood to be the recipients of the new covenant in that they were "*inscribed*" by the "*Spirit of the living God*" on "*tablets of human hearts*" (v₃). Paul himself is the minister of this new covenant, which no longer has to do with 'letter' but with the Spirit who gives life (v₅₋₆). This same understanding lies behind the similar language in Romans 7:5-6, as well as the "*circumcision of the heart by the Spirit*" in

Romans 2:29, which echoes Deuteronomy 30:6 in terms of fulfillment. Please look the Scriptures up so as to better understand.

2. This, “new spirit” is none other than God’s Spirit, who will enable God’s people to follow His decrees (Ezekiel 36:27). As is evident in Romans 8:3-4 and Galatians 5:16-25, the Spirit’s fulfillment of this theme is Paul’s answer to the question of what happens to righteousness if one does away with observance of the Torah (the Old Testament law).
3. God’s Spirit means the presence of God himself, in that by putting “*my Spirit in you...you will live*” (Ezekiel 37:14). Again, Paul picks up this theme in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6. As the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit provides for God’s people the one essential reality about God. “*The Spirit,*” Paul says in the context of the new covenant, “*gives life.*”

Similarly, the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:8 is expressly that of Ezekiel 36-37. Any rejection of holiness on the part of the Thessalonians is a rejection of the God who “*gives His Holy Spirit into you.*” It is the presence of the holy God Himself, by His Holy Spirit, whom they reject if they reject Paul’s call to holy living. We may conclude that for Paul, Christ has made the new covenant effective for the people of God through His death and resurrection; but the Spirit is the key to the new covenant as a fulfilled reality in the lives of God’s people.

Intimately related to the Divine presence theme and the new covenant passages in the Old Testament are the many texts in Paul’s writings that speak of the Spirit as dwelling in or among the people of God. This theme is found first of all in the texts that locate the Spirit within the believer. The Spirit is spoken of as being “*in you/us*” (1 Thessalonians 4:8, 1 Corinthians 6:19; 14:24-25; Ephesians 5:18 [in the imagery of “filling”]). The location of “in you/us” is the “heart” (2 Corinthians 1:22; 3:3; Galatians 4:6; Romans 2:29; 5:5). This in turn becomes the language of “*dwelling in*” (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 2:22)

Two of these passages (1 Corinthians 14:24-25 and 2 Corinthians 6:16) are especially instructive in that Paul cites Old Testament text that speak of God’s dwelling in the midst of His people, which Paul now attributes to the presence of the Spirit. When pagans turn to the living God because their hearts have been exposed through the prophetic Spirit, Paul speaks of this in the language of Isaiah 45:14, “*Surely God is among you*”.

Similarly, in the temple imagery of 2 Corinthians 6:16, which presupposes the presence of the Spirit in the life of the community from 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul understands God to be present among His people. In making that point, he draws on the language of the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 37:27; “*I will dwell among them and they shall be my people.*” This last passage points towards the ultimate expression of the language of indwelling - in the imagery of the temple.

It is especially with temple imagery that Paul designates the Spirit as the renewed presence of God among His people. This imagery occurs four times in Paul’s writings, three times in keeping with its Old Testament precedents where God dwells in the midst of the people by means of tabernacle and temple, and once in keeping with the promised new covenant (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), where the “*temple*” is now the body of the believer, “*who is in you, whom you have received from God.*” Here is how the living God is now present with His people expressed most

clearly in Ephesians 2:22 “*the church is being raised up to become a holy temple in the Lord, built up together as a dwelling for God by His Spirit.*” Here lies the significance of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Paul’s introductory “*do you not know that.....*” followed by “*you are the temple of God,*” plus the argument in context, make clear that the Spirit as fulfilling the temple/presence of God motif is the rich history that Paul has in mind. In context, he is arguing with those who are in the process of destroying the church in Corinth by their contention over leaders in the name of (merely human) wisdom. Man, does that sound like your church? Perhaps, nothing truly is new under the sun! In response Paul moves from words about the folly of their making “lords” of merely human servants in verses 5-9, to words of warning in verses 10-15 toward those currently leading the church in this disastrous direction, and finally to words that address the church itself in terms of who they are as the people of God in Corinth - namely God’s temple.

Paul’s use of this temple imagery begins in verse 9. Their foundation (Christ crucified) had been laid by the apostle, but at the time of Paul’s letter the superstructure was being erected with materials incompatible with that foundation (wood and straw, referring to their current fascination with wisdom and rhetoric). They must build with enduring materials (gold, silver, costly stones = the gospel of the Crucified One), imagery taken from the building of Solomon’s Temple (1 Chronicles 29:2; 2 Chronicles 3:6). Then in verse 16 Paul asked rhetorically (wasn’t expecting an answer), “*Do you not know what kind of building you are? God’s temple in Corinth!*” As a gathered community, they formed the one temple of the living God, God’s alternative to Corinth’s countless pagan temples; and what made them His alternative was the presence of the Spirit in their midst.

But the Corinthians were in the process of dismantling God’s temple, because their strife and fascination with wisdom meant the banishing of the revealing and unifying Spirit from their midst. Hence this strongest of warnings: the people responsible for the destruction, would themselves, be destroyed by God. He will do this precisely because His temple, the place of His presence, is holy; and “you the church are that temple.” The gathered church is the place of God’s own personal presence, by the Spirit. This is what marks off God’s new people from “*all the other people on the face of the earth*” (Exodus 33:16).

There is not a more important word in all the New Testament as to the nature of the local church than this one! The local church is God’s temple in the community where it is placed: and it is so by the presence of the Spirit alone, by whom God has now revisited His people. It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul sees the expulsion of the incestuous man from their corporate fellowship (they are not even to eat with him) as ultimately leading to his salvation (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Being put outside the place of God’s presence will apparently lead to his repentance, so that he may be saved, by being once more among the people of the Presence.

This emphasis is on the church of God’s temple, and therefore God’s alternative to pagan temples. Those in the church must come out from the idolatry and purify themselves from every defilement, because they are God’s temple.

In urging his readers in Ephesians 4:30 “*not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God,*” Paul uses the language of Isaiah 63:10, the one certain place in the Old Testament where the concept of the divine presence is equated with “*the Holy Spirit of Yahweh.*” This equation is the basis of Paul’s

warning. This presence - God's presence has now returned to His people, to indwell them corporately and individually so that they might walk in His ways. Paul urges the Ephesians not to repeat Israel's failure. They are not, through various sins of discord that destroy the "*unity of the Spirit*" (4:3), to grieve the God who is present among them by His Holy Spirit.

Thus, in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, God, has likewise taken up residence in the lives of His people by the same life-giving Spirit.

The context has to do with sexual immorality. Paul's concern is with the sanctification of the believer. Paul's letting them know that the God who created us in His image created the body as well as the spirit, since the Corinthians were suggesting that the human spirit was not affected by what happens to one's body, including having sex with prostitutes, but Paul was having none of that.

In this final moment of argument with them, Paul appeals to the presence of the Spirit in their lives in the context of the saving work of Christ. In "purchasing" them for God's glory, Christ also purchased their bodies, as evidenced by the Holy Spirit, whose temple they are because God now dwells not in the temples made by human hands, but in temples constructed by His own hands. Thus, they are not their own, to do with their bodies what they please. They belong to the God who purchase them through Christ's sacrifice and now indwells them by His Spirit.

In this text, as well as in 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6, lies the secret to Paul's personal holiness and to his understanding of the Spirit in his own life. The goal of this dimension of Spirit life is not simply contemplating doing right, but the right living the Spirit produces. In 2:17, Paul's arguing regarding the validity of his ministry - in contrast to the peddlers of another gospel - that he makes his claim as one who "*lives in the presence of God.*" This theme is picked up in 3:7 and carried through to the end by the contrast of his ministry with that of Moses. You see Moses was veiled when he came 'from' the presence of God, whereas he was unveiled when he entered the tent of the Presence. Believers are those who now turn to the Lord, who is here equated with the Spirit of the Lord, the key to God's presence in the present age. As with Moses, but now by the Spirit, we are unveiled as we enter the sanctuary to behold the glory of the Lord.

It is the play on veil and spirit that makes the argument so telling; the Spirit of the Presence has now removed the veil - most likely also alluding to the veil keeping people away from God's presence within the temple. The result is that by the Spirit's coming, the veil is removed, both from our faces and from the Presence, so that we can behold the glory of the Lord Himself in the face of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul enters the holy place. By the Spirit's presence one is now behind the veil in the very presence of God, not only beholding God's glory in Christ but also being transformed into God's likeness from one degree of glory to another. Here the ABBA-cry evolves into praises and adoration. Here too God's children are transformed from the likeness of their former "father" - the god of this world who still blinds the hearts of those who do not believe (4:4), into the likeness of God himself (3:18). We now bear His image in our, "already but not yet," existence. This is not the only thing Paul believes the Spirit to be doing in our present world, but it is very significant.

For Paul, the Spirit is not merely an impersonal force, or influence, or power. The Spirit is none other than the fulfillment of the promise that God Himself would once again be present with His people. This IS a BIG deal!!! Especially in terms of what it means for us individually and corporately as the people of God. The Spirit is God's own personal presence in our lives and in our midst; He leads us into paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He "is working all things in all people." He is grieved when His people do not reflect His character and thus reveal His glory, and He is present in our worship, as we sing "praise and honor and glory and power" to God and the Lamb.

It is for God's people of a later time like ours once more to grasp these realities by experiencing them, if we are truly to capture Paul's understanding. Perhaps, we need to understand and experience the Spirit as the personal presence of the Eternal God.

Pursue His Presence,

He's waiting

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