

The Harvester



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To Serve The Lord



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HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING (PART 1)

By Brian R. Kenyon

The manner of Holy Spirit indwelling has been a subject of much controversy. However, Christians can disagree on certain issues such as Holy Spirit indwelling, yet remain in friendly fellowship with one another. Only when a person's view contradicts plain Bible passages and/or principles should it become a matter of fellowship.

As Gus Nichols said long ago, when it comes to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, there are only three options: either (1) the Holy Spirit "really and truly" (which necessarily means personally and literally) dwells in the faithful Christian; or (2) the Holy Spirit dwells in the faithful Christian some other way (such as figuratively or representatively), or (3) the Holy Spirit does not at all dwell in the faithful Christian (155). There are no other options!

The third option can be easily eliminated. The fact of Holy Spirit indwelling is beyond dispute among those who know that God exists and that the Bible is His inspired word. The Bible plainly declares that the Holy Spirit indwells the faithful Christian (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7). However, since the Bible does not explicitly state the details as to how the Holy Spirit indwells the faithful Christian, the manner of Holy Spirit indwelling has been the topic of much discussion. This article presents the case that the Holy Spirit indwells faithful Christians personally and literally in a non-miraculous way.

DEFINING TERMS

In order to appreciate this position, certain relevant terms must be defined. Someone may wonder why, for example, the terms "personal" and "literal" are in this view of Holy Spirit indwelling. First, consider the term "personal." If the Holy Spirit actually indwells the faith-

ful Christian, it must be in a personal way since the Holy Spirit is a person and the Christian in whom He dwells is a person. Because the Holy Spirit is a spirit-person and not a flesh-and-blood person, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not something that is verified with the senses. Because it is not empirically verified, however, does not render the indwelling of the Holy Spirit impersonal.

Second, consider the term "literal." As mentioned above, many passages state the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7). Since the Bible plainly teaches it, the Holy Spirit must either indwell the Christian literally or He must indwell the Christian figuratively (which for the purpose of this study will include the representative view). There is no middle ground! The term "literal," therefore, is used because, as will be shown, there is nothing in the contexts of these passages that demands a figurative meaning. If the indwelling is not figurative, then it must, by necessity, be literal.

Third, although the term is not part of the formal argument (presented later), consider the term "non-miraculous." Again, if the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian (and He does, at least in some way), He does so either miraculously or non-miraculously. Again, there is no middle ground! While it is true that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit involved the ability to work miracles, wonders, and signs in the first century (Acts 2:4-12; 6:6-8; et al.), it is not the case that all Holy Spirit indwelling must involve the miraculous wonders and signs. Not even in the first century did everyone have the ability to work miracles, wonders, and signs. Furthermore, lest one think that the Holy Spirit could not possibly indwell a Christian without it involving the miraculous, consider the human spirit.

All Bible students know that humans have a spirit that is given by God at conception (Eccl. 12:7; Zec. 12:1; Mt. 10:28; Jas. 2:26). God's initial creation of humanity with a spirit was clearly miraculous (Gen. 2:7). However, the procreation of humanity with a spirit in accordance with natural law established at creation is non-miraculous. If a human spirit can dwell in the individual non-miraculously, then why cannot the Spirit of God dwell in a human non-miraculously? Additionally, if all faithful Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (as this writer believes), and if the miraculous age has ceased (which it has, 1 Cor. 13:8-13), then Holy Spirit indwelling must necessarily be non-miraculous.

Fourth, while not necessarily an immediate factor here, the meaning of the statement, "The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian through the Word," must be given some attention. Both the one who believes in a figurative indwelling and the one who believes in a literal indwelling can rightly make that statement. The one who believes in a figurative Holy Spirit indwelling means by "through the Word" that the Holy Spirit is not in the Christian at all, but is represented by the Word being in the Christian just as, for example, constituents are not actually in Washington DC, but are representatively so "through" their Congressman. The one who believes in a literal, non-miraculous Holy Spirit indwelling means by "through the Word" that the Holy Spirit enters into the Christian's heart "through" obedience to the Word and remains in the heart along with the Word of God just as, for example, water enters into a house "through" the plumbing and remains by the same. The indwelling Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit are thus inseparable, yet they are distinct entities.

JOEL'S PROPHECY OF THE SPIRIT AGE

It is important to the study of Holy Spirit indwelling to note one major truth concerning Joel 2:28-32. Although the details specified concerning the communication of God's will were limited to the first century, the application of this prophecy is to the entire New Testament age. It is not the case that there are two sets of "last days" (cf. Acts 2:16), the first being the miraculous age and the second being the rest of the Christian age. Rather, there is only one set of "last days," a reference to the entire Christian age. That age involved in its infancy the miraculous (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13). Therefore, the outpouring of the Spirit is a blessing that affects the entire Christian age, not just the first century.

Joel's prophecy comes in a section concerning "the day of the LORD," which was blessing for God's people but judgment for God's enemies (Joel 2:18-3:21). In 2:18-32, Joel promised blessings to God's people. As is typical with Old Testament promises of blessing, Joel first spoke of physical blessings that his contemporaries would experience; namely, the complete reversal of the locust damage (Joel 2:18-27). However, Joel spoke of even greater blessings that would come, those of a spiritual sort, involving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32). "Afterward" established the chronological order in relation to the promised physical blessings (Joel 2:18-27). "In those days" (Joel 3:1) pointed to the final dispensation of human history this side of eternity (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). Joel 2:18-27 referred to the restoration of old physical damage,

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whereas 2:28-32 referred to the “inauguration of a new era in God’s dealing with his people” (cf. Acts 2:16-41) (Hubbard 68). “Pour out” denotes a generous scope of blessing. “Upon all flesh” shows that all would benefit from the Spirit’s outpouring. “Prophecy ... dream dreams ... see visions” refer to the whole teaching and forms of revelation (Hailey 54). God’s gracious blessing in sending His Spirit is the overall focus of the prophecy, not the specific work of prophesying, dreaming dreams, and/or seeing visions.

Joel went on to show that the greater blessings of God’s Spirit result in judgment to those who reject Him (Joel 2:30-31 cf. Deut. 28:15f). “Blood, fire, and pillars of smoke” give a picture of judgment (cf. Isa. 13:9-11; Ezk. 32:1-8; Mt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12). Although Jesus came to save the world, those who reject His message will be judged (Jn. 3:17-19; 12:47-48). However, even in the midst of judgment, God would provide an escape: “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32). “Whosoever” lets the reader know that the offer is available to all. To “call on the name of the LORD” is to exclusively commit to God through obedience to His will (cf. Acts 2:21, 37-38, 41, 47; 22:16). This deliverance would be in “mount Zion” and “Jerusalem,” prophetic references to the spiritual dwelling place of God and His people (Obad. 17; Heb. 12:22-23).

Notice how “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32) connects this prophecy with the entire Christian age, not just to the first century. God’s pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh is congruent with the time when “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.” Since the promise of “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” is still relevant (Acts 2:21), and will always be throughout the Christian age (Rom. 10:13-15), God’s pouring out of His Spirit is still relevant, at least in some sense.

A LOGICAL ARGUMENT

Having defined some terminology and examined the relevance of Joel’s prophecy, consider the following argument that proves the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian in a personal, literal, and non-miraculous way.

1. All Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements that are to be taken literally.
2. The statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and Galatians 4:6-7 are Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning.

3. Therefore, the statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and Galatians 4:6-7 are statements which are to be taken literally.

It must be recognized from the onset that according to the rules of logic, this syllogism is valid (having the form AAA-1). The soundness of the argument depends upon the truthfulness of its premises. If premises one and two are true, the conclusion must necessarily be true. In order to prove this argument unsound, one must prove either or both of the premises to be false.

PROVING PREMISE 1

Most who read this article will have no problem agreeing with the major premise: “All Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements that are to be taken literally.” Of course, whether or not one agrees, the premise is still true. If language has any meaning at all, this premise must be true. Sound hermeneutics are built upon this principle. If this premise is false, then people can make the Bible teach whatever they want it to teach. Only when the context demands a figurative meaning should a statement in the Bible be viewed as figurative. Most brethren adhere to this hermeneutic principle in every aspect of Biblical interpretation, except, for some reason, when it comes to Holy Spirit indwelling.

CONCLUSION

In Part 2 of this study, an examination will be made of premise 2 in the above argument. Paul demands that God’s people “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). This means to examine the evidence without bias and base conclusions on that evidence. Let us be content with what the Bible teaches. 🙏

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Correction: In the June 2017 *Harvester* article, “On These Two Laws Hang Much Needless Division,” the author incorrectly stated in the first paragraph that he wrote in the appendix of a lectureship book. The chapter actually appeared in the main part of the book, not in an appendix. We appreciate the individual who checked that out and let the editor know.

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