

Where God Dwells (Part 2)

Pastor Cliff Bergman - Pinawa Alliance Church

Website: PinawaAlliance.com

Email: office@PinawaAlliance.com

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John 14.15 - 31

In John 14 we are confronted with the incomprehensible truth that God dwells in followers of Jesus Christ. Pause for a moment and consider Who it is Jesus says dwells in His followers – the God of creation.

Colossians 1:16–17 (ESV) ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that the same God who created the universe and holds it all together, chooses to dwell in those who love Him. In the vast expanse of space, we are nowhere near the size of a pinhead – yet God is interested in us and is aware of us and knows every detail about us. That certainly stretches our thinking beyond the boundaries of our earthly existence.

In Old Testament times, it was first the Tabernacle, and then the Temple which symbolized God dwelling among His people. Then, in the fullness of time, Jesus left the glories of heaven to dwell on earth as God incarnate in the flesh. As Jesus prepared for His return to heaven, on the eve of His crucifixion He told His disciples that following His death, resurrection, and ascension He would send the *Spirit of Truth* Who would be another *Helper*, also referred to as a *Comforter*, *Counselor*, and *Advocate*; He would come alongside of them.

Living victoriously in the world, a world hostile to Jesus Christ, necessitates being filled with the *Spirit of Truth* who is given exclusively to followers of Jesus Christ to be with them forever. Lest there be any doubt about who would receive the *Spirit of Truth*, three times in this very brief passage Jesus repeating their distinguishing features. He said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (14:15). He added six verses later, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (14:21). He reiterated similar qualities in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Those who love Jesus Christ and display their love for Him through obedience to Him receive the Holy Spirit. I mentioned last week an observation made by Don Carson, a former professor of mine, “loving Jesus, obeying Jesus, and having faith in Jesus constitute elements of an indivisible whole”¹ By contrast, there are those who believe the delusion that one can accept Jesus as Savior while making accepting Him as Lord, optional. They want the assurance of heaven while

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 60.

following their self-directed will on earth. However, Jesus can't be divided up so people can pick and choose what part of Him they want to follow, like choosing what to eat at a banquet buffet line. People who genuinely believe the Gospel not only choose to place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation, but they also seek to walk with Him throughout their earthly sojourn. And as they realize the supernatural gift of salvation they have received and the cost it represents, they can't help but love God who first loved them and tangibly displayed that love by sending His Son to redeem them.

The Indispensable Ingredient of Love for God

The central theme throughout the Bible is the love of God for those whom He created and the necessity for those whom He created, to reciprocate that love to Him. The command God gave through Moses is foundational for life and indispensable in honoring God. Jews refer to it as the *Shema*, the Hebrew word for *listen* or *hear*.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (ESV) ⁴“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

This “injunction to love was based on the precedent of God’s love, which had been shown to the Israelites principally in the Exodus.”² Throughout the Old Testament, God’s redemption of His people from enslavement in Egypt and His miraculous delivery of them through the Red Sea is evidence of His unfathomable love for His people. Just as God’s love for His people was demonstrated through tangible acts by Him, it only follows that those who love God will also demonstrate their love for Him, specifically by following His direction on how they should conduct their lives. The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6.4-9) goes on to detail how love for God and His commandments are to be woven into the fabric of people’s lives.

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 (ESV) ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Not surprisingly the critical importance of people’s love for God is also expressed in the New Testament. Jesus echoed the words of Deuteronomy 6.5.

Matthew 22:37–38 (ESV) “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”

Genuine, heartfelt, and all-encompassing love for God is the centerpiece around which our life is to revolve. How people view God and the depth of their love for Him is reflected throughout their lives. Those whose hearts and souls and minds are stretched beyond their capacity to comprehend God and His unfathomable love which compelled Him to send His Son Jesus Christ

² Peter C. Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament – The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

to die for them, will reflect that in their passions, priorities, and practices. Their view and love for God will shape the entire trajectory of their lives. While those who hold to an impoverished view of God will accompany that with impoverished love for God and it too will shape the trajectory of their lives.

The Indispensable Result of Obedience to God

Our view of God and our love for Him is foundational and that is the point in Deuteronomy 6 where God commands people to love Him and then to express that love through obedience to Him. Not only is it for God's glory, but for our good. Unfortunately, while many correctly view God as a God of love, they mistakenly interpret that to mean God needs to meet their expectations, but they are free to disregard His expectations. People's love for God and the depth of it dictates their choices.

It is that association between love for God and obedience to God that Jesus emphasized in His comments to His disciples and to all of us who read His words some 2,000 years later. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, ESV). So important is this truth, Jesus repeated it two more times:

John 14:21 (ESV) Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

John 14:23 (ESV) Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

And lest there be any misunderstanding, Jesus addressed the flip side, "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words" (John 14:24a, ESV). It is apparent that genuine love for God isn't some sentimental or superficial love which has little or no bearing on how one conducts their life, but it is to be woven into the fabric of their lives and directs how they use their three T's – time, talents, and treasures. Our love for God is reflected in our passions, priorities and practices. In the Old Testament it is the Exodus and God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea that especially highlight His love. In the New Testament, it is God's love for the world which moved Him to send His Son to leave the glories of heaven and come to earth to become a man for the purpose of dying on the cross for our sins that highlights His love. Jesus' love for His Father and for us is manifest in His unfaltering obedience to His Father's will. Genuine love is manifest through observable action. For the follower of Jesus Christ, love for Him and obedience to Him are inextricably linked together.

Just in case anyone misunderstands and concludes a person can be saved, or merit a place in heaven with God, as a result of doing works or good deeds, such a conclusion is absolutely false. The Bible is clear; no one ever has, or ever will be saved by their works, or good deeds, no matter how meritorious they may be. No one can earn a place in heaven! There is only one way to heaven and that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Eph 2.8-9). Salvation is a free gift from God which is offered to all and exclusively given only to those who personally place

their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation. However, while works will not save anyone, they are the indispensable result of being saved. Those who genuinely love the Lord Jesus Christ will obey Him and seek to keep His commandments just as He emphasized in His words to His immediate disciples and to us.

The linkage between faith in Christ, love for Christ, and obedience to Christ is expanded on throughout the New Testament. Paul reminded the Ephesians, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” (Ephesians 4:1, ESV). To the believers in Rome, Paul wrote,

Romans 6:12–13 (ESV) ¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

The result of being saved by God is a desire to live in a God-honoring manner. Because of their love for God, followers of Christ seek to know His will and obey it. They “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” (Eph 5:10). The primary place where His will is discovered is the Bible. The *Spirit of Truth* Whom Jesus promised to His disciples, and Whom He has given to all His followers, has a fundamental role in uncovering God’s will for His children.

The Indispensable Role of the Holy Spirit

Understanding and following the will of God and being Spirit-filled are interlocked as we can see in Ephesians 5 where we are told,

Ephesians 5:15–17 (ESV) ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Since the days are evil, we need to look to the Lord to direct us and fortunately the provision of the *Spirit of Truth*, Whom He promised on the eve of His death, makes it possible. Paul continued in his instruction to the Ephesians, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” (5:18). As a point of clarification, this verse is not referring to the initial indwelling of the Holy Spirit, something Jesus’ disciples experienced on the Day of Pentecost and afterwards believers received when they were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the family of God (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Since this passage in Ephesians is directed to believers, this is something applicable to those who are already indwelt with the Holy Spirit, yet they are told to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit is contrasted with getting drunk with wine. Drinking wine which contains alcohol progressively puts one under the influence of alcohol, while those who walk wisely and seek to understand what the will of the Lord is, are to be under the influence of the Spirit. The root verb translated *be filled* in verse 18 is *plēroō* and is in the *present tense* which tells us that this filling is to be continuous; it isn’t a singular experience, nor is it intended to be

sporadic, but rather it is to happen as a normal course of life. Further, the verb is an *imperative*; it is something every believer is to do; it isn't reserved for a select group of Christians who are considered to have a corner on the Holy Spirit.

There is however, a very important piece of information about being filled with the Spirit which is not readily apparent in our English translations, and which has led to a number of distortions about this verse. The verb translated *be filled* is in the *passive voice* which means it is not something we do, but rather it is something we allow to be done to us. In this case the *filling of the Spirit* is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. It is, however, dependent on something we need to do, but contrary to the claims of some, it is not contingent on asking to be filled, or attending some Holy Spirit encounter session led by someone who claims to endow people with the Holy Spirit. Since being filled with the Spirit is to be continuous, it is not surprising that the role every believer has is also ongoing and continuous. The filling of the Spirit is dependent on the willing submission of people to be filled, and that willing submission is reflected in their obedience to Him. Thus, the injunction here is to remove anything that hinders the Holy Spirit from filling us – that is our part, identifying and addressing sin and disobedience. Sadly, some people are seeking the infilling of the Spirit, and many claim to be Spirit-filled, yet ignore serious and persistent sin in their lives. Sin and the infilling of the Spirit are opposites.

Paul's second prayer in **Ephesians 3.14 – 21** is very helpful in understanding the relationship of obedience and the filling of the Holy Spirit. The first part of his prayer is that followers of Christ might be *strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being* (3.16). He prayed people would be strengthened by the Spirit of God with the immeasurable greatness of God's power in the depth of their being. There is a "*so that*" part attached to the prayer, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (3:17). What does it mean for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith? Remember, this is a prayer for Christians. It means that Christ will find a ready and comfortable welcome in us. Making Christ comfortable obviously means that we are receptive to Him and therefore we don't clutter our lives with passions, priorities, and practices that are in conflict with Who He is and what His will is. That doesn't mean that for Christ to dwell in a person's life they first need to become sinless – that's not going to happen this side of eternity. But it does mean that His followers address those things that they become aware of as they read and study His word and which are in conflict with Who Jesus is and what He has said. Thus, Jesus can be welcomed by a new believer who has not yet become aware of some things he or she needs to address, but who is actively addressing those things he or she is aware of. While the very same thing in someone who has been a believer for many years is an example of disobedience and will stand in the way of Christ comfortably dwelling in them.

As we read the Scriptures and gather with the Church to hear from God through His Word and interact with fellow believers, God reveals His will to us. And as we are strengthened with the immeasurable greatness of God's power, we receive the enabling strength to press forward with following God's will – setting aside choices that are displeasing to Him and embarking on those that please Him. God provides the faith to trust Him and follow His will even when the benefit of

doing so is not readily apparent and may not be apparent for years, or perhaps decades down the road. In the meantime, He strengthens us with the immeasurable greatness of His power so that Christ will be comfortable in our lives.

The linkage between what Paul prayed for and the 5th chapter of Ephesians is unmistakable. We are strengthened with the immeasurable greatness of God's power so that we will do our part by eliminating that which hinders being filled by the Holy Spirit. Our part is obedience – His part is filling us. You can also see the cyclical part to this as a Christian matures as a follower of Christ. As a believer recognizes an area needing attention to make it more comfortable for Christ to dwell in them, the Spirit of Truth responds by filling them, which in turn results in more house cleaning, and more filling, and so on. That is the process of sanctification – becoming holy in practice.

The second half of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 expands further on this. It is a prayer that followers of Christ will be strengthened to comprehend, or lay hold of, or grasp the boundless love of Christ (3.17b-19a). This supernatural love of God understandably exceeds human comprehension. And here is another tie between love and obedience. Paul prayed that believers in Ephesus might grasp the boundless love of Christ "*so that*" they might be filled with the fullness of God (3.19b). In this case, God's children need to lay hold of the boundless love of Christ, which they are enabled to do by the Spirit, so that God might fill His children with His fullness. Think of it! God's children containing the uncontainable fullness of God as He dwells with His children. Being Spirit-filled is dependent on obedient living, a point evident from Jesus' words to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion.

Notice the three-fold result detailed in Ephesians of being Spirit-filled:

Ephesians 5:15–21 (ESV) ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Having been saved, our love for God results in a desire to walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called, which prompts us to seek out what pleases the Lord. Recognizing that we live in the world which is unreliable as a pattern to follow, we seek to understand and follow the will of the Lord. Instead of being under the influence of the world, we choose to rid our lives of those passions, priorities, and practices that conflict with the Spirit of the Living God dwelling in us. As we do that, the *Spirit of Truth* fills us and three of the results are listed in Ephesians 5:

1. Joining with others in worship of God using scripturally sound songs of praise, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart," (5:19). I cannot over emphasize the importance the

Bible places on worshipping God. In the Old Testament worshipping God was the non-negotiable and litmus test, so to speak, to being blessed. The direction the kings of Israel took regarding worship was central in determining whether they were commended or regarded as evil by God. The same priority is evident in the practice of believers in the first century Church.

Gathering with other believers to worship God should be a passion of ours and deserves our highest priority, wherever it is possible to do so. This is foundational – those who love the Lord will not only worship God privately, but wherever possible, will also gather with God’s people to worship Him corporately. It is a step of obedience and evidence of being Spirit-filled (Heb 10.19-25). It is true that people gathering with believers on Sundays is not a guarantee a person is even saved since it is something that can be faked, but its absence is a reason for grave concern.

Two other evidences of being Spirit-filled which are listed in Ephesians 5 are:

2. An attitude of thanksgiving (5.20).
3. An attitude of submission (5.21).

The promise Jesus made to His disciples, and which extends to future generations of followers is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit will reside in them as their love for Him prompts them to obedient living. As incomprehensible as it is, God has chosen to dwell in His people. One day, we will experience the ultimate when we see God face to face. Until then, let us follow God’s instruction as best as we can in the strength of His Spirit, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

The following song, *Behold Our God*, performed by the California Baptist University Choir and Orchestra will surely facilitate your worship of the God we serve.

Behold Our God - Performed by the CBU University Choir and Orchestra

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV8bv4QuDtM&ab_channel=CBUMusic

And on a more reflective note, may the song, *Speak, O Lord*, be your prayer to God.

Speak, O Lord - Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubRIJj8xkds&ab_channel=TroyWalliser