

## The Indwelling Spirit

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The New Testament makes clear that the Holy Spirit dwells in God's people. But the *way* in which that indwelling takes place is widely misunderstood.

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*“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).*

*“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (Jn. 6:63).*



The Holy Spirit dwells within the child of God. That is a Biblical fact (see Rom. 5:5; 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; etc.). This has led many people to claim that the Holy Spirit guides them in some mysterious way to a better knowledge, or deeper insights, or wiser decisions in their lives.

How does the Holy Spirit enter our hearts? What does He do once He takes up residence there? Let's open our Bibles and learn.

Some texts describing the work of the Spirit are referring to miraculous powers that were common in the early church (see Gal. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12-14). Unless we claim miraculous gifts today (a subject for another time), the indwelling Spirit that people claim today does not involve supernatural gifts. We're not discussing that.

Let's start by adding an interesting twist to the subject. The New Testament also teaches that *Jesus Christ* dwells in us (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), and that *God the Father* dwells in us

(Eph. 4:6; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:12). Now we are faced with explaining how the entire Godhead fits in the heart of the Christian. Hmmmm.

And guess what? This indwelling process works in reverse, too: We dwell in God, in Jesus, and in the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:13; Col. 1:28; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 5:16). How does *that* work?

Let's add another layer of confusion. In addition to the Spirit of God, the Bible also speaks of people who are filled with “the spirit of harlotry” (Hos. 5:4), or “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor. 2:12), or “the spirit of bondage” (Rom. 8:15), or “the spirit of jealousy” (Num. 5:14), or “a spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7). One would be hard pressed to argue that these are supernatural forces that Satan injects directly into our brains to capture us (these texts are not describing demon possession, which is another phenomenon altogether). Rather, these malignant spirits are *attitudes* or *mindsets* that corrupt our decision-making—faulty mental frameworks distorted by fleshly passions and evil influences that assail us throughout our lives. God's redemptive mission is to root out all these destructive spirits and replace them with His Spirit.

Which gets us closer to understanding the nature of the indwelling Spirit. Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life”—an obvious reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in revitalizing our life—then He adds, “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (Jn. 6:63). There it is! The words of Jesus are the medium by which the Spirit makes His abode in our hearts.

The process is not hard to understand. As we allow the words of Jesus to penetrate deeper into our hearts, our thinking is gradually reconstituted. The old corrupt thought patterns are torn down and replaced by thoughts of faith, hope, love, kindness, patience, joy, etc. We are transformed from the inside out by the Holy Spirit (and the Father, and Jesus) dwelling in our hearts.

All these texts describing somebody “dwelling in” somebody are simply metaphors describing *a deep spiritual connection* with someone. This connection is not the result of a supernatural blood transfusion, but through us baring our hearts to the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). That's why we also read of the word of God abiding in us (1 Jn. 2:14; Col. 3:16), or the truth abiding in us (2 Jn 2). It's all the same experience of divine grace—but one that requires an exercise of the will to receive.

— David King