

**“The Indwelling Spirit”**  
**1 Cor. 3:1-23**  
**May 19, 2002 “Pentecost”**  
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**Text Comment**

I intend to preach twice from this text. This morning, being Pentecost, I want to pay attention to that dimension of its teaching that is summed up in the statement in v. 16 that the Holy Spirit *lives in believers*. Next Lord’s Day, I want to treat the famous problem of degrees of godliness and faithfulness that is raised in the chapter.

Remember where we are now. Paul has been contrasting the wisdom of the world – Greco-Roman philosophy presented with oratorical polish – that so fascinated and attracted the Corinthians, with the true wisdom of God, so unlike the world’s thinking, so contrary to its expectations and its tastes. The world’s wisdom looks and sounds impressive but is, in fact, an empty and fatal falsehood; the wisdom of God may seem much less impressive, but it is the truth of God and the instrument of the power of God’s spirit. The changed lives of these Corinthian Christians are the proof and demonstration of both its truth and its power. The world cannot see this wisdom, will never embrace it, unless the Spirit of God shows it to them as he showed it to those who became Christians in Corinth.

Now, as chapter 3 begins, Paul returns to the problem of division in the Corinthian church that he first introduced in 1:10-12. Clearly the matter of the right understanding of wisdom and the distinction between the world’s wisdom and God’s wisdom lay at the bottom of these divisions, which is why Paul took up that subject first.

- v.1 These people have the Spirit of God and their eyes have been opened to see the wisdom of God, but they are not acting like it! A grown man cannot become a boy again, but an adult man can certainly act childishly. That is the idea. They thought of themselves as “spiritual” but they were acting like people of the world. In fact, they were acting like “dueling disciples of the Sophists.” [Witherington, 132]
- v.2 The suggestion seems to be that some were accusing Paul of only having given them milk, while Apollos, who much more closely fit their image of a philosopher/orator, had given them meat. Remember, it is clear from all that Paul says here and in chapter 16 that Apollos was as unsympathetic to this party spirit as Paul was.
- v.4 It is interesting that the “Christ” party and the “Peter” party mentioned in 1:12 fall away from view. It becomes clear that the major division was created by competing loyalties to Paul, who founded the church, and to the brilliant Apollos who followed him in Corinth.
- v.5 That is, Christians don’t “belong” to their teachers; the teachers are simply the Lord’s servants.

- v.7 It was neither Paul nor Apollos who made them Christians, but God himself. How foolish then to put their emphasis on men and forget their obligations to God who gave them life. The world tends to foster the idea of certain men as “big-shots,” but the gospel places all men under the Lord.
- v.9 Paul joins himself to Apollos as fellow-workers. They are the furthest thing from competitors for the loyalty of their followers.
- v.10 Paul turns his attention away from himself and Apollos to those who are now responsible for the church and for the mess of wood, hay, and stubble that is piling up in the church’s life because of this false thinking and the divisive spirit that came from it.
- v.11 The Corinthians are, however unwittingly, putting worldly *sophia* or wisdom in the place of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church and the Christian life.
- v.12 The first three materials endure fire, the last three do not, which is the point that Paul is soon to make.
- v.13 The “day” is a reference to *the* Day, the last Day, the Day of Judgment, or, as it is called in 1:8, “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- v.14 Hard as it is sometimes for us to reconcile these two themes, Paul does not hesitate, over and over again in his letters, to speak of both the utter graciousness of salvation and of the expectation of reward for obedience in the judgment of the Lord.
- v.15 Paul is unambiguous in his warning. If the current thinking continues, if the current behavior is not checked, the church will be destroyed. Paul clearly sees these people as believers, but is warning them that there is much to lose in their present course of action and that if they persist in it, the best they can hope for is to be “pulled out of the rubbish heap just in the nick of time.” [Donfried, cited in NICNT, 144] This represents, of course, a timely warning for us and for the contemporary American church about the folly of seeking to build the church according to the principles of worldly wisdom, whether those principles come from popular psychology or Madison Avenue marketing or the current fashions in managerial technique. [145]
- v.16 Here the emphasis falls on the church as the temple of God, not each individual believer; in 6:19, however, the individual believer is the temple of the Spirit. The alternation between the corporate and individual perspective and responsibility is characteristic of Paul.
- v.17 Just as their view of Christian ministers was false, so is their view of the church itself. It is God’s temple, not a structure such as the world can build and woe to those who, by their divisions, destroy that temple.
- v.18 In the final section Paul sums up the argument so far.

- v.22 These five things – world, life, death, present, future – are seen here as “the ultimate tyrannies of human existence,” and, in Christ, the Christian can vanquish all of them.
- v.23 Forget this silly “I am of Paul; I am of Apollos.” Who cares about that. You are “of Christ and Christ is of God.” That is what matters and that alone!

Now, you get Paul’s point. These Christians have been saved by the grace of God, by the cross of Jesus Christ, and by the illuminating, renewing, recreating work of the Holy Spirit within them. Blind to the truth about themselves and God and salvation, the Holy Spirit used the preaching of the Apostle Paul to open their minds and hearts to the truth and draw them to Christ and salvation. They had long lived in complete and utter darkness following the wisdom of the world. They had been delivered from that darkness into light by the power of the Holy Spirit. That being so, it was obviously a capital and senseless error for them to be returning to the world’s way of thinking and acting, as if they had not been granted God’s wisdom, as if the world’s way had not been exposed as a fraud.

His whole argument reduces to this: you people have the Holy Spirit, he dwells within you and among you, his power is at work in your lives; he has made you different from the world, he has rescued you from the world and its enslavement to sin; what in the world, then, are you doing imitating the world and its way of thinking and its way of behaving? You have been given this precious, precious gift and you are frittering it away. You are returning to a futile way of thinking like a dog returning to its vomit. Do not think you can build the world’s house on Christ’s foundation. It cannot be done. Nor can you build Christ’s house on the world’s foundation. The foundation and the house must go together. Christ must be the beginning *and* the continuation of our lives as Christians.

The fact, the power, and the principle of the gospel – the grace of God and the cross of Christ – by which you were saved in the first place must now be your way of life. As you became Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit, so now you must live in that same way, walking by the Spirit, keeping in step with him. And, you can be sure of this, the Holy Spirit will lead you in a very different way than the world will lead you.

When you stop to ponder all this you realize what deep things we are being taught. What high mystery all of this is. For clearly we are being reminded that the Holy Spirit himself, the third person of Almighty God, lives in and among us. God’s powerful presence is with us immediately and directly. If we ponder that fact with real seriousness and give our hearts to it, if we take that fact, that truth to heart and live by it every day, what a difference it must make. God the Holy Spirit is so much with us that Paul can speak of his living among us or in us and of our being his temple. A temple is a place where the presence of God is to be found. The Mighty God who brooded over the waters at the creation is in us and with us. The Spirit who fell upon the world with tongues of fire at Pentecost, who transformed the world by his power, and who created the church out of nothing, that same Spirit is immediately present to our *own hearts* and is in our midst as a congregation of Christians. He is here and involved and active, effecting and changing our lives with his mighty power.

But, true as that is, it is also true that we can live and act *as if the Spirit were not present*, as if we were not his temple, as if he did not live in and among us. How can *that* be? How can we have God in us and it not appear that we do? I cannot say, but it is undoubtedly true. The Holy Spirit is in us and with us, but not so as to take away our liberty to grieve him, to disobey him, to rebel against him – as these Corinthian Christians had done – not so as to take away our liberty to live so as to make his influences virtually invisible to anyone else. To live by the Spirit, then, does not mean simply to have the Spirit in you. It means to walk in obedience to him, to direct our lives according to the reality of the Spirit’s presence with him. And how is that to be done?

It is, you know, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, that the Lord Christ carries on his work in the world and especially in his people. When we ask how it is that the Spirit does his work – which then will tell us how we are to cooperate with the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit and live by the Spirit – we notice that in the New Testament the Spirit and his work is described primarily in three ways. [The following outline from James Denny, *Studies in Theology*, 158-162]

I. *First, he is characterized in the teaching of the Lord Jesus and throughout the NT as “the Spirit of Truth.”*

This is the point that Paul has made in other words already in chapter 2. It was by the Spirit that these Corinthians came to know and understand and embrace the truth. This is the Spirit’s work. It was his work to provide us the Bible, the creation of which over all those centuries, was his work. He superintended the process by which many different men, making use of their own gifts and mediating the truth through their own personalities, wrote down what he wanted to be communicated to the world forever. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is the very Word of God. And, it is because of the Holy Spirit that we *know it* to be the very Word of God. Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, so said Paul at the end of chapter 2. We cannot know the truth that sets us free apart from the Spirit of God. It is only by the Holy Spirit that the reading and the preaching of the Word of God becomes the life-transforming voice of God himself.

But, if that is the Spirit’s work, to reveal the truth, to disclose to us the mind of God concerning man, sin, the way of salvation, the divine will for human life, *then it becomes our work to live according to that truth, to take it to heart, to live it out day by day, to make our lives biblical in every way*. It was said of John Bunyan that he was “bibline,” that you could prick him anywhere and he ran Bible. His thoughts, his words, his deeds, were controlled by the truth of the Word of God. Well, that is the first thing it means to walk with the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit, or, as Paul speaks here in 1 Cor. 3, to live in faithfulness to the fact of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

For us the Word of God must be the bottom line; when it has spoken, God has spoken; the discussion is ended. Our law, our wisdom, our happiness, our fruitfulness as human beings – it is all to be found in keeping the Word of God that the Holy Spirit has first provided for us and then opened our eyes to see and our ears to hear. That is what it means for us really to believe that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and to honor his presence among us and his work in us. To take his Word to heart and live by it down to the last detail. Of the Bible the faithful Christian says, paying honor to the Holy Spirit’s presence in and with him or her,

Think of it carefully,  
 Study it prayerfully,  
 Deep in your heart let its oracles dwell.  
 Ponder its mystery,  
 Slight not its history,  
 For none ever loved it too fondly or well.

The Holy Spirit gave you this precious gift. Now make full use of it!

I tell you, the answer to every question you have, to the extent that there is an answer to be given in this world; the correction of every error in your life, the direction, the encouragement, the instruction, the inspiration you need to live faithfully before God and man in this world is found in the Word of God, and it is found, it can be found nowhere else. What is the world's problem? It does not know where the truth about things can be found. It does not know that the Bible is the very Word of Almighty God!

Here is the great early Christian preacher, John Chrysostom.

“Listen carefully to me, I entreat you.... [P]rocurer books that will be medicines for the soul.... At least get a copy of the New Testament, the Apostle's epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If you encounter grief, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take from them comfort for your trouble, whether it be loss, or death, or bereavement over the loss of relations. Don't simply dive into them. Swim in them. Keep them constantly in your mind. The cause of all evils is the failure to know the Scriptures well.” [Cited in Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 96]

It is when we do this that the Spirit who is in us and with us completes his happy and holy work in our lives. Let it be said of you and let it be seen in you, what Alexander Moody Stuart said of Rabbi Duncan: “More than any man I ever knew, he trusted every word, revered every word, and loved every word in the book of God.” The Holy Spirit will bless you for that, I guarantee you. When you love the Word of God and embrace it, you love and embrace Him.

*II. Second, the Holy Spirit is characterized in the NT as the Spirit of holiness.*

That too is an emphasis of Paul here in our text. We may miss that emphasis because of the NIV's translation in v. 17. Just after saying that the Holy Spirit lives in us and, by that means, we are God's temple, Paul goes on to say that this temple is *holy*. That is his word. The NIV renders it “sacred,” but the normal translation would be holy. The Spirit makes us holy, he separates us from the world, he consecrates us to God and to God's use, he purifies us. We are the holy temple of God in all the wide, rich biblical uses of that word “holy.” Here, of course, as so often in the Bible, our being “holy” means that we must not be like the world, we must be different, distinct. We must reflect the nature and character of our holy God. That is just what these Christians were not doing. But the Holy Spirit in and with us makes that wonderful and mighty thing actually possible! Just as no one can be good without God, so no one can be holy

without the Holy Spirit working in and for him. It is the Spirit's grand mission in a Christian's life to make him or her holy.

For everything that it means to be holy we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Had the Spirit not come to these Corinthians they would never have come to see and acknowledge their sin and guilt before God, they would never have humbled themselves before God. That is holiness. They would never have aspired to mortify their sins and to put on righteousness and purity as God requires. That too is holiness. Their lives would never have radically diverged from the lives of people around them as they had so profoundly under the influence of the preaching of Paul as it was made powerful and effective by the Holy Spirit. That too is holiness. All those wonderful things that we associate with holiness, godliness, and goodness are the things that Paul calls, in Gal. 5, "the fruit of the Spirit."

But we are called upon not to wait for the Spirit to work those holy things in us, but to put them on, to practice them, to seek them, to study them, to love them, and to see them more and more become the characteristics of our own lives. "Work out your salvation in fear and trembling," Paul says in another place, "for it is God *who is in you...*" He means, of course, the Holy Spirit.

Think, for example, young people, of the old and, sometimes today it seems, outdated virtue of purity. God is pure. The Holy Spirit is pure. He has planted the seed of purity in our hearts by his work within us. Now it is for you not simply to labor to remain pure in thought, in speech, and in behavior – to struggle to guard your thoughts, your words and your deeds from that which is impure – *and what a struggle that is! What courage, what strength, what perseverance that requires!* But, still more, to ponder purity as the Holy Spirit teaches it to you in the Word of God until you love it, until you desire it, until you hunger and thirst for it. You love pure water, you love to see a hillside covered by pure white snow, you love the sense of being clean after you have had a shower; how much more beautiful and pleasing a pure heart, a pure mouth, a pure hand. That is what it means to practice the presence of the Holy Spirit and to walk with the Holy Spirit: to love and practice what pleases him; to reflect in your life the holiness of the God who is in you and with you.

### *III. Third, the Holy Spirit is characterized in the New Testament as the Spirit of power.*

Paul has said this too of the Holy Spirit's ministry already in this letter. In 2:4 he said that his preaching came with the demonstration of the Spirit's *power*. The Spirit makes good things happen in people's lives. By his sovereign and divine power he changes what otherwise could never change. He picked these people up, turned them inside out, set them down, and sent them off in a direction opposite what they had been following all their lives. They hardly knew what happened to them, so dramatic, so powerful the impact of the Holy Spirit upon them. He made them new creations with the same power by which he created the world in the very beginning. In Corinth he added for emphasis' sake, miracles and supernatural gifts, to demonstrate the divine authority of the Apostle Paul as he preached the Word of God.

He made these Christians' witness to their friends and family likewise powerful and effective. No doubt, like so many Christians after them, they went to tell their friends what had happened to them, how they had become followers of Jesus Christ, and they worried that others would

think they had lost their minds. And, instead, many heard them speak of the gospel, of their experience of Christ, and they were changed as well. The Holy Spirit used the simple words of these spiritual novices and made them powerful to effect the same magnificent change in others. And what does it mean to live by the Spirit and walk with the Spirit and to be true to the Spirit's presence in and with us but to depend upon that power, to count on its exercise, to pray that it be unleashed in us and through us to accomplish God's holy will.

I read recently of a Scottish woman who had been suddenly converted to Christ. She had not been a religious woman and so this was in every way a revolution in her life. She had a brother she loved and wondered how she could tell him what had happened to her. She was too embarrassed to tell him directly. She was seeing him off one day at the bus station and, as he was boarding the bus, she thrust a NT in his hand and said, "Here, read this; it will do you good." He was so surprised to get such a gift from his sister, that she would have been interested in the Bible, that he began to read it and couldn't put it down. He began to be troubled about his relationship with God and very soon he was a believer in Christ himself. That is the Holy Spirit!

Only the Spirit can humble us – proud as we are. As A.B. Simpson once put it, "The Holy Spirit is the only one who can kill us and keep us dead!" But, in the same way, only the Holy Spirit can lift us up and make us feel the freedom, the peace, the joy of our forgiveness in Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can make us love Christ with the passion with which he deserves to be loved. Only the Spirit can nerve and steel us to resist the devil and to put our sins to death. Only the Holy Spirit can sustain us in our trials and sorrows and make them a means of grace and growth to us and others. Otherwise sin will exploit them to harden our hearts. Only the Holy Spirit can keep us from puffing up with pride when we succeed and from becoming worldly when we prosper. All of this takes the Holy Spirit and his powerful working.

And so, the Christian who is walking with the Holy Spirit and living out of the reality of the Spirit's presence with him or her will always be looking to the Holy Spirit, so near as he is, for fresh applications of that power, for new exertions of that power in him or through him or her.

As always in the Bible, the indicative comes first – the Holy Spirit is in you and with you – and only then the imperative – therefore, live like it, live according to it, turn to him and walk with him, according to the truth he has revealed to you, aspiring always to the growth of that holiness that he has planted as a seed within you, and looking to him for the power to accomplish what you never could accomplish by your own strength.

The world knows nothing of this, cares nothing for the Holy Spirit, has no sense of need for him. In its blindness the world is sure that whatever it must do, it can do by itself. But what the world must become is Christian, and more and more Christian, and this cannot be done by any man by himself or by all men together. Only the Holy Spirit can make a man a Christian or make a man a better Christian.

The great preacher, Charles Simeon, once said,

“I must declare, from Almighty God, that whatever any man may think of his attainments or his virtues, he is not a Christian truly if his soul be not a temple of the Holy [Spirit].”  
[In Hopkins, *Charles Simeon*, 186]

Paul has said as much, and now, in chapter 3, he goes on to say that just as you could not become a Christian without the recreating ministry, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so you cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. But, having the Holy Spirit, *you must live the Christian life, a life that is distinctively Christian*, and you do that by walking with the Holy Spirit and practicing his presence.

It is the most remarkable thing that God himself lives among us and in each true believer. *That we know that* ought to be the controlling reality of our lives.