

The Harvester



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To Serve The Lord



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WHAT ABOUT THE “WORD ONLY” VIEW OF HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING?

By Brian R. Kenyon

As long as a person’s view of Holy Spirit indwelling does not violate plain Bible passages or principles, it should not be a matter of fellowship. The fact of Holy Spirit indwelling is so clearly taught that those who claim to follow God and His word accept the fact (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7). However, the manner in which the Holy Spirit indwells continues to invoke much discussion. In the previous two *Harvester* articles, the case was made for a personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this article, an evaluation will be made of the “word only,” or representatively through the word, view of Holy Spirit indwelling.

Given the fact that Holy Spirit indwelling is clearly taught and nothing in the passages presented demand a figurative meaning, it seems to this writer that there are three main reasons why people would object to a personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. First, they do not see how it is possible for Deity to indwell mortal humans, but since when is our complete understanding of God’s workings a prerequisite for their being true? For example, who can fully understand why immersion in water contacts Christ’s blood and washes away sin? Why then do we know it is true? The Bible says so, just like it says the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian! Second, some think taking a personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling view will put one in the same camp as denominationalists who claim to speak in tongues, miraculously heal, etc. Such simply does not follow, but does perhaps reveal how the “word only” view became so popular among some. Could the “word only” view be a pendulum swing to the opposite extreme from a miraculous view? That is, “No Holy Spirit is actually in a Chris-

tian” is an opposite extreme of “All miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit are in a Christian.” The truth, of course, lies between the extremes. Third, some may reject a literal indwelling in order to please others who hold to a different view, such as a well known “stalwart of the faith,” a preaching school, etc.

“WORD ONLY” ARGUMENT

A common objection to the personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the counterposition that the Holy Spirit indwells representatively, or figuratively, through the word of God. As mentioned in the July *Harvester*, the meaning of the word “through” in the statement, “The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian through the word,” depends on the view of the person making the statement. Both the one who believes in a figurative indwelling and the one who believes in a literal indwelling can rightly make the 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 there “through” their Congressmen. The one who believes in a literal 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.

Representative indwelling through the word of God states that in “whatever sense the Spirit dwells in the Christian, he does so through the word of God, the truth” (Winters 90). However, Winters does admit that “no Scripture can be quoted that specifically states this, but I believe that this is precisely what all of them taken together teach” (90). Guy N. Woods notes that many passages speak of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, but says that such passages do not declare the “manner or mode” of indwelling. He continues by asking this rhetorical question: “Is it possible to learn from a passage merely declaring that the Spirit is in us, how he thus dwells? It is not” (*Questions* 276). It seems even they recognize that what they or others say about the manner of indwelling is a judgment and cannot be forced upon one as a test of fellowship.

However, they sometimes violate their own insistence. For example, Woods states that the reason why Scripture “asserts that the Holy Spirit dwells in the followers of the Lord” is to “evidence the fact thereof ... not the manner or mode of its accomplishment.” He then states that those who attempt to answer the “manner or mode” of Holy Spirit indwelling from the “fact” of the Spirit’s indwelling “assume whatever mode or manner of indwelling that suits their pre-arranged system or philosophy.” In this discussion Woods asks and answers the following questions based upon the statement “through his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11, ASV): “What do we learn from this statement? ... Does this say that his indwelling is literal? No. Personal? No. Direct? No” (*Questions* 277). Interestingly enough, Woods did not ask in his series of questions, “Through the word?” If he did, his answer would have to be “No.” By insisting on the “manner and mode” of Holy Spirit indwelling to be “representatively through the word,” it seems that Woods went beyond what

the passage actually said—the fact of indwelling.

Although there are many variations of the “representatively through the word” view, consideration here will be given to the argument presented by Woods (*Questions* 277-278). After denouncing the view that the Holy Spirit personally indwells the Christian, Woods states that “The Scriptures assert, with equal emphasis and clarity that the Father, and Christ, the Son are in us” (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Jn. 4:15; Col. 1:27). Then he adds that “no thoughtful person from thence concludes that there is an actual, literal, personal, bodily indwelling of God the Father, or of Christ, the Son, in us today.” Woods formulates his arguments to deny a personal indwelling of the Spirit by noting Paul’s rhetorical question to the Corinthians, “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13, ASV). From this question he notes that the Corinthians were “not so foolish as to think that each group in Corinth could have a little portion of Christ in their midst.” He says, this is “precisely what is claimed for the Spirit by those who contend for an actual, literal, bodily presence of the Holy Spirit in Christians today.” To further clarify where he is going, Woods states that “it seems certain that God, Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell in exactly the same manner,” which he says is “through the word of truth.”

To put Woods’ thoughts in a syllogism, the following argument emerges:

1. All personal Holy Spirit indwelling requires dividing Deity into “little portions.”
2. No Holy Spirit can be Deity divided into “little portions.”
3. Therefore, no Holy Spirit indwelling is personal indwelling.

Having established his case against personal Holy Spirit indwelling, Woods gives his view of how the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian. He appeals to Galatians 3:2 which says, “This only would I learn from you, Received

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ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (ASV). Woods paraphrases the meaning of Paul’s rhetorical question as follows: “You did not receive the Spirit by the works of the law; you did receive the Spirit by the hearing of faith.” He correctly observes that “faith” is here a “synecdoche for the gospel . . . the entire system of salvation.” Therefore, they received the Spirit “through the Christian system.”

Woods concludes that since the “system of faith” was made available through the preaching of the word (cf. Rom. 10:17), then it follows that “as the Galatians received the word of Christ into their hearts and were influenced thereby they were, to this extent, led by and influenced by the Holy Spirit which gave them the word” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Woods continues, “When the Holy Spirit is allowed to control the thoughts and direct the life of the person thus influenced, the Spirit dwells there — dwells there by means of the word which motivates the life.” Along these same lines, Woods says in another place that since the New Testament “contains the whole of our duty today, making us complete and completely furnishing us unto every good work,” it follows that “the Spirit dwells in us as we are influenced by him through his instrument—the Word of Truth—and in no other sense” (*Questions, Volume Two* 201).

EVALUATION OF THIS ARGUMENT

Although the syllogism formulated above from Woods’ thoughts negating a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is in a valid form, one may call into question the soundness of these premises. To quote a verse which expects a negative answer to the question, “Is Christ divided?,” and equate that with the idea that Deity cannot be divided into “little portions” to be distributed among the Corinthians is to give the question of Paul a meaning he never intended. In First Corinthians 1-4, Paul was admonishing the Corinthians about the divisions that existed among them (1 Cor. 1:11). Some were apparently following after men rather than the Lord. Hence, Paul’s question, “Has Christ been divided?,” was not a question of whether Christ’s physical body had been cut in “little portions” to be distributed. Rather, it was a rhetorical question that expressed the impossibility of Christ being separated from His body, the church. The Corinthian church was divided and needed to know Christ and His body, the church, could not be divided (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10).

To imply that the Holy Spirit cannot be divided into “little portions” (as if He were a pie) is to communicate an apparent misunderstanding of the spiritual nature of De-

ity. Although Christ came to this earth and dwelt among humanity for a short period of time in history, Deity is not limited to time and space. To claim that Deity cannot be physically divided into “little portions” is to claim the obvious, for it is logically impossible for a spiritual being to be physically divided. However, the Scriptures do teach that Deity, though omnipresent, can be in one place more than another. For example, the psalmist knew the omnipresence of Deity when he said:

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, And thy right hand shall hold me. (Ps. 139:7-10, ASV)

Yet, more often than not, when Scripture speaks of the Father, it speaks of Him as dwelling in heaven (cf. Mt. 6:9; 7:11; Jn. 17:1). One might then ask, “Where is Deity? In heaven? Sheol? The uttermost parts of the sea?” The fact is that God is everywhere He chooses to be. God is omnipresent. To limit where God can or cannot be is to confine Deity to time and space as if he were human. If God as a Spirit, therefore, chooses to dwell in His children, who then can say it is impossible?

In response to the Holy Spirit indwelling a Christian only through the word “representatively,” Gus Nichols states that those who hold such a view claim that “the word is really and actually in us;” however, when those of such opinion are finished explaining their view, they “do not think the Holy Spirit is in us in any real sense” (166). Although they frequently deny it, those that hold the “representative indwelling through the word” view basically equate the word of God with the Holy Spirit. Such statements as “the rich indwelling of the word of God in the heart of the Christian is the indwelling of the Spirit of God” (Wallace 424), along with charts that say “every effect or emotion that the Holy Spirit generates within us, the Word of God engenders” (Merideth 199), convey the idea that the word of God and the Holy Spirit refer to the same thing.

However, it must be noted that the word of God is not the Holy Spirit, although they are inseparable. “The word of God, the truth, is an instrument which the Holy Spirit employs. The instrument should not be mistaken for the agent” (Black 57). The fact that the Holy Spirit is the source of God’s written word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12) does not mean that the Holy Spirit and the words of the Holy Spirit are the same. There is a difference between the two, just as there is a difference between our words and our spirits.

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CONCLUSION

Because the Spirit of God is received *through* the word of God does not mean that the Spirit of God is received *as* the word of God. Concerning Galatians 3:2, there is no doubt that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit “by the hearing of faith.” However, it must be noted that just as “faith” is a synecdoche for the Gospel, “hearing” can likewise be a synecdoche for obedience to the Gospel (cf. Rev. 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29). This is in harmony with the context of Romans 8:5-8 where Paul taught that only when a person lives “according to the Spirit” does that person have the Spirit dwelling in him or her. How one receives the Spirit (obedience to the Gospel) does not necessarily answer the manner in which the Spirit dwells. The next article in this series will examine why the indwelling of the Father and the indwelling of the Son are not the same as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 

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