

“Who Dwells Within You?” (Ephesians 3:14–21)(6.6.21)

Over the last two weeks, and into the next weeks, we are exploring God the Holy Spirit and the respective ramifications. When I have quoted Bill Bright’s thoughts from his book, *The Holy Spirit – The Key to Supernatural Living*, there is a natural response that we likely share. Really? What can this mean? If this supernatural life is part of being a Christian, why have I personally seen so little of it? My friends...that is a very good question.

Maybe Bill Bright is deluded. Maybe he is some type of exception to the rule. Can the average Christian really live a supernatural life? Well, let’s get a second opinion. What does the Apostle Paul say about the Christian life?

Ephesians 3:14–21 (NIV84) *A Prayer for the Ephesians*

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you **with power** through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸**may have power**, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that you may be filled to the measure of **all the fullness of God**.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to **his power that is at work within us**, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Who Dwells Within You?”**

INTRODUCTION:

As part of my continuing education, I am taking a course called “Worship and the Sacraments.” One of the books is titled *Worship as Theology – Foretaste of Glory Divine* by Don E. Saliers. Hear this quote from the book:

“Theodore Jennings claims that “If prayer has any basis at all in what we feel about God, it has that basis not in our sense of God’s presence but in our sense of God’s absence. He concludes that the only human basis for praying, at least of petition, is in our godlessness and god forsakenness. **“If God is fully present with us, prayer is neither necessary nor possible.”**”

Saliers continues: “This point of departure goes against the natural assumptions of piety. Most of the training we receive in church and Sunday school assures us that God is always “near.” But from the perspective of the wider ranges of biblical and spiritual traditions, this is only half true. The pathos of human existence raises the question of absence and presence. Perhaps more pointedly, the pathos of human existence is the question of God’s absence and presence.”

Last week’s scripture, adamantly proclaimed that God the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer. Bill Bright, in *The Holy Spirit – The Key to Supernatural Living*, repeatedly demonstrates that this presence of the Holy Spirit will dramatically change lives **lived by faith**. And, today’s scripture, in dramatic fashion, not only establishes the power of God the Holy Spirit within us; but, also says that Jesus Christ will dwell in our hearts **through faith**.

Now I do not deny that some of our prayers are based on our perceived absence of God; but, I push back against Theodore Jennings assertion that God is NOT fully present with us. The question is who, of the Godhead, is within us. Then, what are the implications that come from the answer to the question, “Who Dwells within You?” And then, we must wrestle with why this God-filled-life is not “normative” for Christians.

BODY:

1) “Who Dwells within You?” Last week’s scripture from 1 Corinthians 3, told us that we are the tabernacle or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul was the author of that letter and also today’s letter

to the Ephesians. Here he says, the Holy Spirit works in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts. Is Paul confused? Is he telling the two churches different things? No.

John Stott explains it like this: "For Paul never separates the second and third persons of the Trinity. To have Christ dwelling in us and to have the Spirit dwelling in us are the same thing. Indeed, it is precisely by the Spirit that Christ dwells in our hearts, and it is strength which he gives us when he dwells there. Moreover, the experience of 'Christ in you' was a part of the 'mystery' and so of the privilege of Gentile believers. The Holy Spirit cohabits with our spirit while the indwelling Christ is in our soul (which consists of our mind, personality, heart, emotions, and will). Because we are also triune, this **"dual" communion** is possible."

At the same time, we must remember that God the Father will not be separated from the Son. Jesus teaches this truth to His disciples. John 17:20–23, 26 (NIV84)

²⁰ "My prayer is not for [these disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

The Apostle John wrote in his first letter: 1 John 3:23–24 (NIV84) ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. And in the next chapter: "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" ([1 John 4:16](#)).

One old time preacher explained this Trinitarian indwelling like this: "Therefore, when the apostle speaks of Christ dwelling in our hearts, he refers to the Spirit's indwelling, for Christ dwells in his people by his Spirit. But there is a distinction in the modes of this indwelling: the Father dwells in us by love ([1 John 4:16](#)); the Son by faith ([Ephesians 3:17](#)); the Spirit lies hid in the heart, working the faith in the one case and the love in the other."

Take a moment and contemplate the significance of being a reservoir of God the Father, God the Son – Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. If we would believe the word of God, have faith and trust in our LORD, we would see that Bill Bright is absolutely correct in his call to supernatural living. Then as Jesus said, John 7:38 (NIV84) ³⁸ "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

2) Let us continue to look at the implications of these promises. Paul prayed that we might be strengthened with power. Paul prayed that we might have the power together with all the saints to be able to grasp the unfathomable scope of God's love. Paul declares that God's power is at work within us. Three times in this short portion of scripture Paul emphasizes that the Christian life is one lived in and by the power of God. Is that consistent with your faith journey?

We have established beyond a shadow of a doubt that the scriptures, God's holy inspired word, promise the Divine presence within. That is why God the Father and our Lord Jesus say over and over, "I will be with you till the end of the age. I will never leave you or forsake you. The kingdom of God is within you; it is near at hand. And Paul sums it up: It is in God that we live and move and have our being."

As amazing as these truths are, wait, there's more. God is able to do immeasurably more...that means there is no human capability to establish a metric or standard to describe what God can do. God can do more than all we ask or imagine. Some of you likely have great imaginations, but God's reach is beyond. Think about the end of the universes as they continually expand. Think about infinity times infinity. That's our God.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he quotes the prophet Isaiah: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV84)

However, as it is written:

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived

what God has prepared for those who love him”—

One of my favorite old-time preachers, Alexander Maclaren, makes a great argument. The more we are filled by our Triune God, the more we can be filled. We keep growing into who we are designed to be. Maclaren says, “Oh! if we believed less in the power of our sin it would have less power upon us. If we believed more in the power of an indwelling Christ He would have more power within us.”

“The limits of that power will not be reached until every Christian soul is perfectly assimilated to that likeness, and bears all its beauty in his face, nor till every Christian soul is raised to participation in Christ's dignity and sits on His throne.”

A.W. Tozer wrote a devotion about a God-filled-life beginning with Jesus' words in John 16:13–14 (NIV84)

¹³ “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

If we are going to reproduce Christ on earth and be Christlike and show forth Christ, what is our greatest need?

We must have the Spirit of Christ!

If we are going to be the children of God, we must have the Spirit of the Father to breathe in our hearts and breathe through us. That is why we must have the Spirit of God! That is why the church must have the Spirit of Christ!

The Christian church is called to live above her own ability. She is called to live on a plane so high that no human being can live like that of his own ability and power. The humblest Christian is called to live a miracle, a life that is a moral and spiritual life with such intensity and such purity that no human being can do it—only Jesus Christ can do it. He wants the Spirit of Christ to come to His people—an invasion from above affecting us mentally, morally and spiritually!

The Holy Spirit brings the wonderful mystery that is God to us, and presents Him to the human spirit. The Spirit is our Teacher, and if He does not teach us, we never can know. He is our Illuminator, and if He does not turn on the light, we never can see. He is the Healer of our deaf ears, and if He does not touch our ears, we never can hear!

The Holy Ghost bestows upon us a beatitude beyond compare. He asks nothing except that we be willing to listen, willing to obey!”

3) Why is this God-filled-life is not “normative” for Christians? Let us also look at where Tozer ended, with a willingness to obey.

John Wesley taught that all sin begins in unbelief...Adam believed Satan instead of God. Satan said, “You will not surely die.” Actually, yes; that’s exactly what God said. In many places, Jesus connected obedience and faith. John 14:23–24 (NIV84)

²³ Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

Another reason is that this God-filled-life is not normative is because the teaching of the church has not adequately focused on God the Holy Spirit. Acts 19:1–7 (NIV84) *Paul in Ephesus*

19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

³ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism,” they replied.

⁴ Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other languages and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

Today, I believe that to one degree or another, God the Holy Spirit barely gets a mention. Our church here is without excuse. You have been repeatedly exhorted to live a life guided by God the Holy Spirit. We fail to apprehend the fullness of God’s promises because we are not truly living out our Christian walk in faith. Paul, speaking of Abraham: Romans 4:20–21 (NIV84) ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was **strengthened in his faith** and gave glory to God, ²¹ **being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.**

Most Christians do not “quite believe” what is clearly stated in God’s word, our Bibles. I love what Alexander Maclaren says on this scripture: “To begin with, let me say in the plainest, simplest, strongest way that I can, that that dwelling of Christ in the believing heart is to be regarded as being **a plain literal fact**. It is not to be weakened down into any notion of participation in His likeness, sympathy with His character, submission to His influence, following His example, listening to His instruction, or the like.” In my coursework that I mentioned earlier, the author, Salier, made an observation that really cut me to the quick. Saliers’ observation really hit home with me:

“We began this study by reflecting on the contemporary sense of the absence of God in our epoch. Certainly in an age of Holocaust and a media environment that renders evil banal by its television juxtaposition with seductively advertised consumer goods, the matter of experienced absence is close at hand. Practical atheism in everyday life, despite the language of prayer on Sundays and talk of Jesus in between, is made quite easy. One theologian has bluntly claimed. “People don’t learn to be practical atheists by getting too involved in the world; they learn it in church - in prayer they hear in church.”” Let each one of us stand warned. Know. Believe. Obey. Or maybe I should change the order. Believe. Know. Obey. By faith, lay claim to the supernatural life.

CONCLUSION:

Of course, while I did not plan it this way, today’s message is perfectly suited for a Communion Sunday. Did you catch that Jesus’ prayer in John 17 was for His followers to be one with each other and with our Triune God?

In today’s scripture, Paul acknowledges God the Father’s whole family. This family includes those already in heaven and those currently on earth. Paul understands that there will be Generations of the church. We see the expansiveness of Paul’s inclusion in his phrasing, “Together with all the saints.” As many of you know, Paul counts every disciple of Jesus as a saint. This universal church, this universal congregation of believers, is captured by Paul’s embracing all those generations For ever and ever! As we prepare our hearts to celebrate Holy Communion, let us fully appreciate the great blessing of this sacrament. It is a means of grace. God works through our active remembrance and participation in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. To God be the Glory!! Amen and amen. Let us pray.