

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF INDWELLING

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The biblical concept of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is one thing. The human concepts of it are often another.
2. In this lesson our primary object is to establish what the Bible concept of it is, which will help pave the way to show what the human concepts are and why they are not in harmony with the Bible concept.
3. One of the greatest difficulties in reaching a meeting of minds on many issues, of which this is one, is a failure to properly define terms.
4. This to a great extent is the problem with the issue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There are several terms or expressions which need to be defined and defined properly.
5. Therefore, we shall start our study with

II. DISCUSSION

A. INDWELLING TERMINOLOGY

1. Direct Indwelling.
 - a. By this expression, often and commonly referred to as the “personal indwelling,” is meant God’s active and direct infusion of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into humanity (i.e., a human being; that is, a baptized believer) to the end that deity (because the Holy Spirit is God or deity) dwells within the physical body of a man or woman; a literal residence of God within – deity within.
 - b. To have a direct indwelling of God’s Spirit within us would be to have the actual, literal, personal presence of a divine being, one of the Godhead three, dwelling within one’s being.
 - c. Remember: This is what happened with Jesus of Nazareth. Humanity (for he was a man) was indwelt by deity resulting in “God-man,” for he was “God with us” – “Emmanuel.”
 - d. Jesus of Nazareth is the only case in biblical history wherein deity directly and personally dwelt within humanity and we call this the incarnation.

2. Indirect Indwelling
 - a. This expression, sometimes referred to as the “representative indwelling,” implies an indwelling that comes through an effort on the part of the believer to imbibe the personality of God into his personality resulting in the reflection of the characteristics of God in his life.
 - b. This is done through revelation, God enters into our lives through biblical revelation.
 - c. There is nothing from God that enters into the mind of man that does not come through revelation.
 - d. Man is a free moral agent, there is nothing in him that causes him to choose to serve God except his will to do so, and nothing in him that tells him how to serve God except the word of God. There is no still-small voice to speak to him from within.
 - e. Those things of God which may be said to dwell within the NT Christian dwell within him through, and only through, mental concepts drawn from biblical precepts; it is in this manner that God speaks to man, leads him, and dwells within him.
3. Immediate.
 - a. The term immediate conveys the idea of having nothing coming between, no intermediary or intermediation; not secondary or remote. Acting without the intervention of another object, cause or agency. Direct, directly or intimately touching or affecting. Synonym: direct. (*Web. Collegiate Dict.*, p.726.)
 - b. If we say God dwells in the believer immediately, we are affirming that deity directly, without the intermediation of his word, or the intervention of any other object, cause or agency, dwells “in person” within the believer. Deity is actually, literally, and absolutely within the human affirming the indwelling.
4. Mediate.
 - a. Mediate conveys the idea of acting by an intervening cause or agent, not direct; something gained or effected through an intermediate agency or condition, to act as the intermediary or medium in effecting or bringing about,

etc.; to be the medium for bring about (a result)...related indirectly.

- b. If we say that God dwells within the believer indirectly or mediately (e.g. by means of his word), we are affirming an indwelling which is effected by an intermediate agency. God dwells within us by means of his word, not personally or directly.
- c. This concept of indwelling opposes the idea that God actually enters into the human body; rather, by means of his revelation to man, God enters into man's thoughts and actions.
- d. God is present in our lives, but not "in person," he dwells within man by the agency of his word to man, i.e. through revelation.

B. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF "INDWELLING" IN THE GREEK NT

1. There are four different words for the concept of "indwelling" in the Greek NT: *Oikeo*, *enoikeo*, *katoikeo*, and *meno*.
 - a. *Oikeo* (*oy-keh-o*) is defined as, "to dwell, inhabit, to dwell in someone or something, to abide in."
 - b. *Enoikeo* () is defined as, "to dwell (in), of God or of spiritual things that take up their abode in or among men; to be present in."
 - c. *Katoikeo* (*kat-oy-keh-o*) means, "to dwell, to inhabit, to abide in."
 - d. *Meno* (*men-o*) is defined as, "to remain in, abide in, dwell in, continue in, to be present, to lodge, often spoken of that which abides or remains within."
2. All of these words carry the basic idea of dwelling or abiding within; there is nothing intrinsically mystical or miraculous about any of them.
3. The NT Scriptures speak of many concepts of indwelling:
 - a. The Scriptures speak of "sin" dwelling in us, Rom.7:17, 20, *oikeo* (*oy-keh-o*).
 - (1) Obviously, Paul is here speaking of sinful thoughts that ran through his mind; there is nothing mystical or miraculous about this idea.

- (2) It is something that is naturally understood and explained.
- b. Paul also speaks of “the will to do evil” dwelling in him, Rom.7:18, *oikeo*.
- (1) There is nothing mystical or unnatural about such an indwelling as this; it is completely explainable and understandable as a natural phenomena of human nature.
- c. The Scriptures speak of “Satan” dwelling in the city of Pergamos, Rev.2:13, *katoikeo* (*kat-oy-keh-o*) – reside, inhabit.
- (1) Here John is not implying that Satan had personally revealed himself somewhere in the city, or taken up literal residence there; but rather, he is speaking of Satan’s presence in the thoughts and actions of the ones in Pergamos committing sin.
- (2) Satan indirectly dwelt within them through their sinful thoughts and actions and consequently, through them, he could be said to dwell within the city.
- d. John speaks of “dwelling in darkness,” Jno.12:46, *meno*.
- (1) Here John used “darkness” as a metaphor for “sin.”
- e. We also see the expression “dwelling in light,” 1Jno.2:10, *meno*.
- (1) In the one instance he is speaking of those who are living in sin and in the other of those who are living in the midst of revelation from God (i.e., “light”).
- f. In a similar manner, Peter speaks of “righteousness” dwelling in the new heaven and new earth, 2Pet.3:12, *katoikeo* (*kat-oy-keh-o*).
- (1) Righteousness will dwell there indirectly through the actions of those who inhabit the city of God, i.e., those who receive eternal life.
- g. The Scriptures further speak of “the word of Christ” or “the word of God” dwelling or abiding in us, Col.3:16, *enoikeo* (); Jno.5:38; 8:31; 15:7; 1Jno.2:14,24, *meno*.

- (1) Here one sees a very natural concept, i.e., that of words or thoughts dwelling in one's mind, an intellectual activity.
 - (2) A word is a sound or symbol which stands for an idea or concept; it is the idea or concept which is put within the mind by means of the sound or symbol, hence the word (sound or symbol) does not actually dwell there at all, only the idea of concept.
 - (3) This would be considered and "indirect indwelling" of the word of God, and is not a difficult thing to grasp at all.
- h. John also speaks of "truth" dwelling or abiding within us, 2Jno.2, *meno*.
- (1) Here again we have an intellectual activity or, perhaps, we could say, psychological phenomena, wherein propositions accepted as true are received and stored within the "mind," which is itself an intangible entity.
- i. It is interesting to note that John also speaks of the reverse of this idea by speaking of our dwelling or abiding within the "teaching" or "doctrine" of Christ, 2Jno.9, *meno*.
- (1) The idea here is not that of a direct or literal indwelling, such a living in a room wallpapered with Scripture.
 - (2) Rather, the idea is that of an indirect indwelling; i.e., that of our living our lives in obedience to the teachings of Christ.
- j. The apostle Paul speaks of "faith" dwelling within, 2Tim.1:5, *enoikeo* ().
- (1) In 2Tim.3:14,15 it is easily determined "where and how" faith is received as well as "where and how" it dwells within us.
 - (2) "But abide (*meno*) thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

- (3) It was from learning and accepting the teachings of the sacred writings that faith was acquired, and it was within his thoughts and actions that faith dwelt.
- (4) It was in indirect indwelling, i.e., faith came through or by means of the word or sacred writings and dwelt within him in the same way.
- k. The Scriptures also speak of “the love of God” dwelling within us, 1Jno.3:17; 4:16, *meno*; and Jesus speak of abiding or dwelling in “his love,” Jno.15:9,10, *meno*.
 - (1) How does someone else’s emotions dwell in us?
 - (2) Obviously, he is speaking of our having a love in us that is like his love; the expression Jesus uses is metaphoric; and the expression concerning our dwelling in his love is simply to be understood as an exhortation to maintain the kind of relationship with him essential to being a recipient of his loving act of salvation.
 - (3) A similar expression is found in Jno.15:11 concerning the indwelling of Christ’s joy within the believer.
 - (4) These teachings are not to be understood as a promise of an infusion of supernatural or mystical emotions. An emotion is a physiological reaction to a psychological stimulus.
 - (5) For one to be filled with joy or love, his mind must first be filled with thoughts of joy or love, which then creates the physiological reaction we call an emotion.
 - (6) It all begins, however, and is effected mentally.
- l. The Scriptures speak of “God” dwelling in the temple of Jerusalem, Mt.23:21, *katoikeo* (*kat-oy-keh-o*).
 - (1) However, Stephen’s comments in Ac.7:48 and Paul’s in Ac.17:24 teach that God does not literally or personally dwell in literal temples; hence, he was not literally or personally dwelling in the temple at Jerusalem.
 - (2) How, then, could it be said that he was dwelling there? His presence was there because his name was there, but his presence was representative.

- (3) His word was there, the acts instituted for his worship were there, and his people in whom his name dwelt were there.
- (4) He could not be seen unless he was seen in the lives and actions of the people who constantly went there to worship him.
- m. The Scriptures also speak of “God” *dwelling* in us, 2Cor.6:16, *enoikeo* (); 1Jno.4:12,15, *meno*.
- n. Paul, similarly, speaks of “the Spirit of Christ” dwelling in us, Rom.8:9,10, *enoikeo*.
- o. As well as “the Spirit of God” dwelling in us, Rom.8:9,11, *oikeo* (*oy-keh-o*); 1Cor.3:16, *oikeo* with reference to the church as whole.
- p. In the writings of John we see the interchanging idea of Christ/God dwelling or abiding in us and our dwelling in them, Jno.6:46; 15:4-6; 1Jno.2:6,28; 3:6,24; 4:13, all *meno*.
 - (1) The question which rises here is how or in what sense does God, Christ, or the Spirit of God dwell within the believer?
 - (2) The answer is found in the writings of Paul, wherein he explains that Christ dwells (*katoikeo*, *kat-oy-keh-o*) in our hearts “through faith.”
 - (3) Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, i.e., it is “the acceptance of testimony,” Rom.10:17.
 - (4) Thus, Christ (or any personality of deity) dwells in us through or by means of his word; a representative or indirect concept of indwelling.
- q. As a consequent of the indwelling of God in our lives, John teaches us the “eternal life” dwells with us, 1Jno.3:15, *meno*; speaking obviously, of the promise of eternal life that dwells in us in the form of hope. See 1Jno.2:24,25; Tit.1:2; Rom.8:24,25.

III. CONCLUSION

1. In each of these references a very natural interpretation is warranted by the words, grammar, and context involved.

2. All of this has been said to make the point that the biblical concept of indwelling does not necessarily demand a mystical, miraculous or supernatural interpretation.
3. As a matter of fact, if one considers carefully the foregoing references, he will readily see that in every passage cited the indwelling concept has a very natural interpretation.
4. This is true not only with the indwelling of the word of God, truth, faith, etc., but also with the indwelling of God, Christ, and the Spirit of God.
5. The Spirit of God dwells within the child of God the same way any other thing of the realm of God (a biblical concept or precept) dwells within him; i.e., in the same sense in which truth, love, or hope dwells within him.
 - a. The Spirit of God dwells in us through our minds; i.e., through our thoughts and actions, and through our acceptance of his revelation.
 - b. We hear him through his teachings, we live out of those teachings and he is present in our lives.
6. The problem arises when we try to think of the indwelling of the Spirit in terms of a direct, literal or personal indwelling of deity; a divine being separate and apart from our being dwelling within our being.
7. This view is totally unsubstantiated by the teachings of the NT.
8. God dwells in us through our minds, his presence can be seen in the things we say and do.
9. Satan's presence in a person's life can be seen in the same way.
10. We needn't accuse a person of being possessed of an evil spirit because he is engaging in sin, neither is it necessary to assert that one is possessed of or indwelt by a divine spirit because he is living in accordance with the will of God.
11. God enters our lives through revelation, and he dwells in our lives through revelation; i.e., the revelation of himself and his will as inscribed in the writings called Scripture.
12. God has revealed himself to us through his word, when our lives reflect the nature and characteristics of God (i.e., the divine nature, 2Pet.1:4), then it can be said that he is present in our lives; but he enters our lives through biblical revelation, i.e., through he word.

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