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REGENERATION & INDWELLING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD

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Thirty seven years ago Lewis Sperry Chafer, discussing the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, wrote the following words:

Of the present ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the believer -- regeneration, indwelling or anointing, baptizing, sealing, and filling -- nothing indeed is said with respect to these having been experienced by the Old Testament saints, excepting a few well-defined instances where individuals were said to be filled with the Spirit. Old Testament saints were invested with these blessings only theoretically, and without support of the Bible, by those who read New Testament blessings back into the Old Testament.¹

Nine years ago Leon Wood, in the Preface to his landmark work, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, stated:

Some have doubted that true spiritual renewal existed prior to the founding of the church at Pentecost, and few have believed that the Old Testament could have included such New Testament truths as the "indwelling," "sealing," or "filling" of the Holy Spirit. The question is considered in the following pages, where it is maintained that all these truths were experienced by Old Testament saints. They did not call their experiences by these names, nor could they have defined them,

but their existence is witnessed in the lives of true believers.²

These quotations fairly delineate the issue between two strongly differing points of view concerning the work of the Holy Spirit during the Old Testament period. It should be noted that the differences between these positions go far deeper than the question of the number and kinds of ministries the Holy Spirit carried on during the older dispensation; they concern the very nature of Old Testament salvation itself, with regard both to the accomplishment and the application of salvation during that dispensation.

Which of these views is correct? The former? The latter? Neither? In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which of these views "is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture"?³

This paper addresses the question, **Were all Old Testament believers regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit?** As projected, this study will examine recent opinion on these issues, propose tighter definitions of these ministries, and attempt to establish the claim **that all Old Testament believers experienced these ministries, at least in some sense.** As to the plan of the study, we will take up regeneration first, and then proceed to indwelling.

However, before we examine the question of these ministries as they relate to Old Testament saints, there are certain truths that must be set forth as preliminary principles essential to the study as a whole.

PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

The first of these principles may be stated in the following manner: since the Fall of mankind, human beings have been saved by grace through faith, upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ. Among evangelical Christians, dispensationalists have sometimes been accused of advocating more than one way of salvation, especially in regard to Old Testament saints. Roy L. Aldrich, Visiting Bible Lecturer at Dallas Theological Seminary for a number of years, stated that this is an "ultradispensational" teaching, and not characteristic of dispensationalism. In an article entitled "An Outline Study on Dispensationalism," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* of April 1961, he also states that "Orthodox Christian theology is in general agreement that there is only one plan of salvation for all dispensations."⁴ In the Doctrinal Statement of Dallas Theological Seminary the following assertion appears: "We believe that according to the `eternal purpose' of God (Eph 3:11) salvation in the divine reckoning is always `by grace, through faith,' and rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ."⁵

The second principle may be stated in the following words: the benefits of Christ's redemption can be applied before that redemption is accomplished. This principle addresses the problem of the time element in salvation, which is basically this: how can spiritual blessings which are based upon the time-space facticity of Christ's death and resurrection be applied before these events occur? In connection with our topic it can be framed in this fashion: how could Old Testament believers be regenerated or indwelt by the Holy Spirit until Christ died, rose, ascended and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? One answer is that none of these blessings could come to any Old Testament believer until Christ actually accomplished redemption in time. The problem with this

answer is that it would exclude Old Testament believers from some of the benefits of Christ's atonement, but include them in others, even though the time problem is the same for both kinds of benefits (unless one posits another basis of salvation than that of Christ's shed blood). A second answer to this problem is that Christ's redemptive work was certain in God's eternal purpose, and thus atonement benefits could be applied before the atonement was actually accomplished in time, and especially to Old Testament saints. If the time problem is resolved in this second way, then the door is opened to the potential application of all of the benefits of Christ's redemption to the believer under the older dispensation, the only qualification pertaining to those benefits which are inherently impossible to apply or those which are specifically denied to the Old Testament believer by scriptural statement.

The third principle may be stated as follows: an epistemological mystery is not necessarily an ontological mystery. This principle addresses the problem of the concept of "mystery" in the New Testament, which is really twofold: (1) is a mystery something totally unknown in past ages or only dimly and partially known? (2) if a spiritual reality was not revealed at all in the Old Testament, or not revealed as clearly in the Old Testament as in the New, does it follow that that spiritual reality did not exist in the Old Testament period? If we adopt the hermeneutical principle that non-revelation of a truth equals non-existence of the corresponding reality, what does this do to the concept of the progress (or unfolding) of revelation in Scripture? What does this principle do to such timeless truths as that of the Trinity, for as Warfield points out, "Whether there really exist traces of the idea of the Trinity in the Old Testament . . . is a nice question."⁶ If we reject the principle -- "not revealed, therefore nonexistent" -- then the possibility is opened that Old Testament believers experienced a number of blessings which were not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament.

The fourth principle is simply this: the Holy Spirit is that Person of the Trinity who implements the purposes of God in every age. In the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity we stress both oneness of essence and plurality of Persons; and we also distinguish essential equality and economic subordination. Although Father, Son, and Spirit are equally God, yet they do different things in the outworking of the Plan and Purpose of God. To employ a very imperfect analogy, in moving the great ocean liner of the Purpose of the triune God toward its goal, the Father functions as captain, the Son functions as chief executive officer, and the Spirit functions as the crew. The captain gives orders; the chief executive officer goes to carry out the orders and to see that they are completed; and the crew does the work and fulfills the tasks assigned to them.

Although all three Persons of the Trinity are active in the divine works of creation, providence, redemption, and judgment, nevertheless they do different things in the carrying out of these works. In the work of redemption, for example, the Father initiates redemption by sending His beloved Son into the world, the Son accomplishes redemption by becoming incarnate and by making an atonement for our sins, and the Spirit applies redemption by uniting us to Christ and to the benefits of His atoning work. Throughout the Bible it is the Holy Spirit who implements the plans of the Trinity. He is the one who does the work, as far as carrying the purposes of God into effect. He is the one who gets the job done, in the sense of bringing it into actuality. Although He is not merely a power or an influence but a real, living Person, nevertheless He is the power of God, the one who exerts energy and exercises efficiency to move the purposes of the godhead toward fulfillment in every age.

Now, having enunciated these principles as preliminary to our study, let us proceed to the ministries of regeneration and indwelling, particularly as these relate to Old Testament saints.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRY OF REGENERATION DURING THE OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD

Recent Opinion on the Question

Since the term "recent" is somewhat relative, I will arbitrarily define the recent period as beginning with the publication in 1948 of Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology* and continuing until the present. Since I began this paper with a quotation from Chafer, and since when I finish this paper it will be the present moment, this definition of recent does not seem unreasonable. In any case, let us briefly survey some recent writers on the subject.

Rene Pache, in his book, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, states:

Before Jesus was glorified and before Pentecost, the Spirit was not poured out on all flesh . . . In the Old Covenant, His work in the heart of men was therefore altogether different from what it is now . . . Christ having not yet died and been raised for sinners, the Spirit could not raise them up with Him. He could not make them members of the Body of Christ, which did not then exist; consequently, He could neither baptize them into one Body (1 Cor 12:13), nor live eternally within them. The Spirit had to find hearts purified from sin before making them His temple. Christ, being without sin, was the first in whom the Spirit made His abode, and if He now lives within us, it is because of the blood of the Lamb which cleanses us from all our sins. But the atonement was not yet accomplished for believers under the Old Covenant.⁷

William Barclay, in his work, *The Promise of the Spirit*, states:

The Old Testament . . . tells us that the Spirit is not only God's agent in creation; the Spirit is also God's agent in re-creation. . . . The Spirit is God's creating and God's re-creating power both in the world and in the individual life. . . . Every man needs to be made new; and he can be made new if he opens himself to the re-creating power of the Spirit of God.⁸

Leon Morris, in his book, *Spirit of the Living God*, holds that the Old Testament looks forward to a **renewal** of the inner life of men by the Spirit.⁹ In relation to the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the New Testament believer, he claims:

But the Spirit does not simply convict men and leave it at that. He brings life; He can be called "the Spirit of life" . . . He "quickens" men . . . H. J. Wotherspoon trenchantly says, "Nothing

was added to the Church by Pentecost -- no new truth, no new institution, nothing of apparatus; but only life itself."10

J. Dwight Pentecost, in an article on "The Godly Remnant of the Tribulation Period," published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, states:

While we agree that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, and that He will be taken away, yet we must recognize that the Spirit is omnipresent. He will cease His particular ministry of indwelling the body of Christ, but that does not mean He will be inoperative. Before Pentecost the Lord told Nicodemus that a man must be born again by the Spirit (John 3:5-6). If a person could experience a new birth before the Holy Spirit began to indwell the body, certainly one could after He ceases that particular ministry.11

Roy L. Aldrich, in an article entitled "An Outline Study on Dispensationalism," in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, tells us that:

Critics of dispensationalism usually fail to recognize that most dispensationalists would approve of the following: (1) That there is only one plan of salvation for all dispensations. (2) That the new birth is characteristic of all dispensations.12

J. Barton Payne, in his *Theology of the Older Testament*, asserts:

This definition of regeneration as being "in Christ" by no means, however, eliminates the doctrine of the new birth from the Old Testament. There is but one, unified testament of God's sole plan of salvation, through which Christ offers a redemption that is equally effective for the saints of both dispensations. . . . our Lord Himself bore witness to the reality of the doctrine of regeneration within the older revelation; for He countered the perplexity over the new birth that characterized the well-intentioned but still Pharisaically blinded Nicodemus with the question, "Art thou the teacher of Israel and understandest not these things?"13

Roy L. Aldrich, in another article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* entitled "A New Look at Dispensationalism," affirms that:

Perhaps both sides of the dispensational debate could also agree that the new birth is characteristic of every period since the fall, even though this doctrine is not as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New. It was before the inauguration of the church age that the Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:15).

Old Testament saints are clearly declared to be in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28-29) and therefore they must have experienced the new birth. The Scriptural truth of man's sinful nature would make the new birth a necessity before there could be entrance into the kingdom of God.¹⁴

John J. Davis, in a thesis presented to the faculty of the graduate school of Grace Theological Seminary, stated:

Not all soteriological discussions by dispensationalists are devoid of an explanation of the essential elements of salvation as they relate to both the New and Old Testaments; but the greater majority of expositors that have written on this subject reject the idea that the essential elements of salvation were part of the believer's experience in all ages. This is especially true in regard to regeneration. . . . It will be shown later that regeneration in the Old Testament not only can be held by a dispensationalist but is more and more being defended as the proper approach to Old Testament soteriology.¹⁵

Incidentally, John J. Davis went on to become vice president of Grace Seminary.

Charles C. Ryrie, in his book entitled *The Holy Spirit*, does not mention regeneration in relation to Old Testament believers, either pro or con. Since Chapter 2 deals with regeneration and Chapter 6 deals with "The Holy Spirit in Relation to Man in the Old Testament," this omission would appear to be significant!¹⁶

Charles W. Carter, in his work, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Wesleyan Perspective*, states:

Important as was the function of the Spirit in the original creation of the natural world . . . there remained for Him an even more important work. That was to be the re-creation and restoration of man from the wreckage sustained in the Fall. This re-creative work of the Spirit in man's salvation was to be realized through His conviction of man, His wooing him back to God from sin, and His regeneration of the repentant, believing sinner, plus his sanctification and ultimate glorification. . . . The work of the Spirit is both physical and spiritual, both creative and re-creative in the Old Testament, as well as the New, in nature as well as in man.¹⁷

Edwin H. Palmer, in his book, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: The Traditional Calvinistic Perspective*, writes:

We find that in order to become a part of the church, one must be born again by the Holy Spirit . . . it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to the church . . . He establishes the church of Christ by regener-

ation. . . . It should not be thought, as some contend, that the Spirit founded the church at Pentecost and was not active in the church in the Old Testament period. . . . the church is one in both the Old and New Testaments, and it has always been the Holy Spirit who has introduced new members to the church, whether in the Old or New Testament dispensations.18

Leon Wood, in his work, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, asserts:

It is not difficult to show that Old Testament people did experience spiritual renewal. . . . The evidence that spiritual renewal, or regeneration, was true of such Old Testament people lies mainly in two directions. One is that these people lived in a way possible only for those who had experienced regeneration, and the other is the avenue of logical deduction that argues back from New Testament truth. . . . The first line alone seems sufficient, for what more telling evidence of regeneration could there be than the lives of these great Old Testament saints? How could such lives be accounted for otherwise? These people were born sinners, as any of New Testament time (Rom 3:23). Yet they came to display the very highest in faith and obedience to God. . . . Their lives were outstanding in faithfulness and dedication, and they are set forth in the Old Testament as examples to follow. Did they achieve such commendable lives by their own efforts? Did they have some resource in their own nature on which they could draw that people of New Testament time do not have? The answer, of course, is that they did not. But, if not, they must have experienced an impartation of new life, just as saints of the New Testament, and this means regeneration.

The other area of evidence is that of logical deduction on the basis of New Testament truth. This deduction runs as follows: The New Testament declares that all men are born lost sinners . . . and that this have been true since Adam in the Garden of Eden. . . . It states that Christ is the only way of salvation from such a state of sin . . . and that the benefit He provided in His work of atonement is solely through trust in Him. . . . It indicates that when one does this he experiences regeneration Since this is the only way of salvation possible for man, and since man has been in need of this salvation since the time of Adam, it must be that Old Testament people had to be, and were, saved, or regenerated, in the same way as New Testament people.19

Now having scouted opinion on the question of regeneration during the Old Testament period, let us proceed to the matter of definition.

A Proposed Definition of Regeneration

Although various terms and concepts have been used by the writers whom we have quoted, I would propose the following as a brief working definition: Regeneration is that ministry of the Holy Spirit by which He imparts spiritual life to one who is spiritually dead.

Why is regeneration necessary? Because the Scriptures teach that all natural descendants of Adam in the natural state are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, sinners, bondslaves to sin, at enmity with God, rebels against the Law of God, suppressers of the truth of God, unable to understand the things of God, unable to please God, and those who continually stand under the wrath and condemnation of God. The Bible uniformly portrays fallen man in all dispensations and ages as spiritually dead and morally depraved; and these two aspects of man's spiritual condition establish the necessity of regeneration.

The Bible presents the doctrine of regeneration under several aspects, but mainly four: a new birth, a new life, a new creation, and a new nature. Regeneration is a new birth, a spiritual rebirth, a being born into God's spiritual family, a becoming a child of God, a being begotten anew by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration results in a new life, a resurrection from the dead, a spiritual coming to life. The presence of spiritual life is detected by the presence of life functions, by awareness of spiritual activity and movement and spiritual appetites and drives, and by the experience within oneself of spiritual thoughts, emotions, desires, intentions, and decisions. Regeneration is also a new creation. It is a restoration, initially and progressively, of God's image and likeness in me. It means being restored to God-likeness, becoming more and more conformed to the perfect image of God in Christ. It means knowing God personally, and becoming a holy person, as He is holy. It means becoming a new person, and having a new outlook on creation and life. And regeneration also results in a new nature. In regeneration my nature -- what I am -- is renewed and renovated. The Spirit of God enables me to begin to put to death the expressions of godlessness and unrighteousness in me, and to begin to produce expressions of godliness and holiness in my life, with the result that the prevailing disposition of my character and conduct is that of righteousness.

Now armed with these definitions of regeneration and the various aspects under which it is presented, let us proceed to the question at issue.

Old Testament Experience of Regeneration

If it be admitted that all men born of ordinary generation in the Old Testament period were unregenerate in their natural state; if in the same breath asserted either that Old Testament believers were not regenerated by the Holy Spirit, or that no positive assertion can be made concerning Old Testament regeneration; then certain problems arise in regard to New Testament statements about the unregenerate state when compared to Old Testament characterizations of the state of the Old Testament believer.

For example, the New Testament states that the unregenerate man perceives the things of God as foolishness and does not receive them (1 Cor 2:14a); whereas the Old Testament believer is said to delight in the Law of the Lord (Ps 1:2), to meditate in it day and night, to hide God's Word in his heart (Ps 119:11), to love God's Law (Ps 119:97), to take God's testimonies as an heritage forever (Ps 119:111), to rejoice in God's Word (Ps 119:162), and to eat God's words (Jer 15:16). The New Testament states that the unregenerate man's understanding is darkened and characterized by ignorance, and that he cannot know the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14b); whereas the Old Testament believer is said to have light and understanding through the entrance of God's words (Ps 119:130), to be enlightened and made wise by the testimony of the

Lord (Ps 19:7-8), and to understand all things (Prov 28:5). The New Testament states that the unregenerate man is an enemy of God (Rom 5:10) and at enmity with God (Rom 8:7a); whereas the Old Testament believer is spoken of as loving the Lord (Ps 116:1), blessing the Lord and praising Him (Ps 34:1), magnifying and exalting the Lord (Ps 34:3). And Abraham is called the friend of God (Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23). Again, the New Testament states that the unregenerate man is not subject to the Law of God, and is not able to be (Rom 8:7); whereas the Old Testament believer is spoken of as keeping God's Law, seeking His precepts, inclining his heart to perform God's statutes (Ps 119:44-45), loving God's commandments above gold, and esteeming His precepts to be right (Ps 119:112-13). Furthermore, the New Testament states that the unregenerate man cannot please God (Rom 8:8); whereas the Old Testament believer is spoken of as pleasing the Lord (Prov 16:7) and though faith pleasing God (Heb 11:5-8,20-23,31-33).

Now frankly, I find these contrasts between New Testament statements about the unregenerate state and Old Testament statements about the state of the Old Testament believer to be irreconcilable. **There is abundant evidence that Old Testament believers manifested great faith, exemplified sincere repentance, pleased God, and brought forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (imperfectly, of course, as we do today).** If all natural descendants of Adam are spiritually dead, and if the only way they can become spiritually alive is through regeneration, the Old Testament saints had to be regenerated in order to become spiritually alive. If only those who are spiritually alive can manifest spiritual life, and if the Old Testament believers manifested spiritual life, then Old Testament believers must have been spiritually alive. When John J. Davis concludes that "It would seem . . . that there is no real ground for denying regeneration to a saved individual in any age,"²⁰ his conclusion would appear to be entirely warranted.

Now having considered the Holy Spirit's ministry of regeneration during the Old Testament period, let us move on to our second area of concern.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRY OF INDWELLING DURING THE OLD TESTAMENT PERIOD

Recent Opinion on the Question

In this brief survey of recent writers on the subject we will begin with Lewis Sperry Chafer. In his *Systematic Theology* he claims:

The fact that the Spirit indwells every believer is peculiar to the age of grace. . . . under the law, there was no abiding character to the relationship between the Spirit and individuals upon whom He came (Ps 51:11). The Spirit came upon them, or departed, according to the sovereign purpose of God. Under grace, the Spirit is not only given to every believer, but he never withdraws.²¹

Rene Pache, in his book, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, states:

Before the cross and Pentecost the Spirit could not do in men what He is doing now. . . . He could neither baptize them into one Body . . .

nor live eternally within them. The Spirit had to find hearts purified from sin before making them His temple. . . . In discussing later regeneration, baptism, indwelling, and sanctification, we shall have further evidences of the totally new work done by the Spirit since Pentecost.²²

John F. Walvoord, in his work, *The Holy Spirit*, writes:

In the dispensation of grace the Holy Spirit undertakes to indwell every Christian from the moment of regeneration. . . . Throughout the entire Old Testament period up to the Day of Pentecost no such universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is observed. . . . nevertheless God is His sovereign will and according to His own purposes selected individuals in the Old Testament to whom were given the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.²³

Walvoord goes on to say:

The fact that the Holy Spirit indwelt some saints in the Old Testament can be conclusively established. . . . Several features of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament are quite distinctive from the same ministry in the age of grace. It will be noted, first, that the coming of the Spirit to indwell individuals has no apparent relation to spiritual qualities. No record is found of regeneration in these cases as necessarily antecedent to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. . . . A second important factor quite distinct from indwelling as known in the New Testament Church is that indwelling was a sovereign gift usually associated with a special call to service, and it had in view enablement for a specific task. Indwelling was not a universal privilege. Only a few were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and these were known for their distinctive gift, and sought out as leaders and prophets, and were usually marked men. A third important distinction found in the Old Testament doctrine of indwelling was that it was in many cases temporary. While the New Testament saint need never fear loss of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, however He may be hindered in His ministry by sin, the Old Testament saint knew the presence of the Spirit was a special privilege which could be withdrawn at will even as it was given.²⁴

Charles C. Ryrie, in his book, *The Holy Spirit*, says:

Although the Spirit did indwell men in Old Testament times, it was a selective ministry, both in regard to whom He indwelt and for how long. Can this relationship be summarized in any simple way? Yes, for the Lord summarized it by telling His disciples that up to that time the Spirit had been abiding with them, though on and after the day of Pentecost He would be in them (John 14:7). . . . Although in the Old Testament

there were clear instances when the Spirit indwelt men, His ministry could not be described generally as a ministry of being in men but only with them. Many things may not be clear in this contrast between "with" and "in," but a contrast is clear.²⁵

Arthur W. Pink, in his work, *The Holy Spirit*, asserts:

It is a great mistake to say, as many have done, that the Holy Spirit was never in any believer before Pentecost. . . . That the Holy Spirit indwelt saints under the Legal economy is clear from many considerations; how otherwise could they have been regenerated, had faith, been enabled to perform works acceptable to God? The Spirit prompted true prayer, inspired spiritual worship, produced His fruit in the lives of believers then . . . as much as He does now. . . . All the spiritual good which has ever been wrought in and through men must be ascribed unto the Holy Spirit.²⁶

Charles W. Carter, in his book, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Wesleyan Perspective*, states:

Though there were certain individuals in the Old Testament who experienced the Spirit's indwelling presence in their lives, this experience was the rare exception . . . a few special individuals in the Old Testament experienced it as a pledge of what was to come, but all the believers on the Day of Pentecost and until the end of the age became the heirs of this great divine provision.²⁷

Leon Wood, in his work, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, states:

Evidence that this spiritual renewal included regeneration, indwelling, sealing and filling exists . . . in the lives of the Old Testament saints They must have been indwelt by the Spirit, because they remained children of God all their life (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, and the rest), and the New Testament is clear that this is made possible only by the continued indwelling of the God's Holy Spirit.²⁸

Having briefly reviewed recent opinion on the subject, let us move on to definition.

A Proposed Definition of Indwelling

As background to such a definition, I believe it is necessary to review the scriptural teaching concerning the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is present everywhere in all of His perfections. He fills space and transcends it. He occupies the same space that the matter and energy of the universe occupies. He is not excluded from any bit of space by any physical object or by any finite person. He is present in every mountain, tree, flower, and

human being in this world. That this is not Pantheism but Christian Theism may be shown by a quotation from Charles Hodge. He writes:

Everywhere in the Old and New Testament, God is represented as a spiritual Being . . . as everywhere present, and everywhere imparting life, and securing order; present in every blade of grass, yet guiding Arcturus in his course, marshalling the stars as a host, calling them by their names; present also in every human soul, giving it understanding, endowing it with gifts, working in it both to will and to do.²⁹

The implications of the Spirit's omnipresence for the concept of indwelling are tremendous. In the sense of space, the Holy Spirit is always present in every human being's body. In the sense of space, the Holy Spirit is just as present in the unregenerate person's body as in the regenerate person's body! And this has always been true, from the moment of mankind's creation until the present moment!

For the Holy Spirit to indwell a human being, then, cannot mean simply to be present in the space a believer's body occupies, since the Holy Spirit occupies all of space. So if "indwelling" is taken to mean that when a person is an unbeliever, the Holy Spirit is "outside" his or her body, but when a person becomes a believer, the Holy Spirit comes "inside" his or her body, that concept of indwelling is erroneous.

What, then, can "indwelling" possibly mean? I would propose that the difference between the way the Holy Spirit is present in the unbeliever and the way He is present in the believer is one of personal relationship. The relationship the Holy Spirit sustains to the regenerate person is radically different from the relationship He sustains to the unregenerate person. And the most basic difference in these relationships is that the Holy Spirit is savingly related to the believer, but is not savingly related to the non-believer.

If the Holy Spirit is present in both the believer and non-believer, but does not indwell the unbeliever, then "indwelling" takes on a technical meaning. But let us extenuate this meaning further. The Holy Spirit is not welcome in the unbeliever's "house," but is an intruder, an undesirable alien, a squatter. The Holy Spirit is welcome in the believer's "house," and is a beloved friend, an honored guest, a resident. The Holy Spirit is present in the unbeliever, but is not "at home" in him, as He is in the believer. To the unbeliever the Holy Spirit is a stranger and an enemy; to the believer He is a trusted Helper and a Friend. To the unbeliever the Holy Spirit is a restrainer and convincer of sin, a disturber of the peace; to the believer He is a Sanctifier, an Assurer of salvation, a Consecrator, and a Comforter.

I would further propose the concept that indwelling involves the sustaining of the spiritual life imparted at regeneration. Thus I would define indwelling as that relationship which the Holy Spirit sustains to the believer subsequent to regeneration, in which He helps, rules, consecrates, assures, comforts, sanctifies, empowers, and sustains the life imparted at regeneration. Indwelling is thus the Holy Spirit's continuance of that new relationship and ministry begun in regeneration.

With this definition in hand, let us look at the controversial question.

Old Testament Experience of Indwelling

Although there are some seven Old Testament references which could be cited as support for Old Testament indwelling, they are not conclusive. For the sake of the record I will mention them: Gen 41:38, Num 27:18, Isa 63:11, Ezek 11:19, 36:26,27, and Hag 2:5. However, I believe a stronger approach to the question can be made in two directions: first, by connecting our proposed definition of indwelling with the Old Testament experience of regeneration; and second, by carefully examining John 14:16-17.

If indwelling is not a movement of the Holy Spirit in space from the outside to the inside of the believer's body, but is rather a change of relationship which is begun in regeneration, involving the sustaining of the spiritual life imparted in regeneration, then two questions must be asked: (1) Were Old Testament believers regenerated? (2) Could Old Testament believers, by their own abilities and powers, sustain spiritual life in themselves? If they were regenerated, and if they could not sustain spiritual life in themselves, then they must have been indwelt by the Spirit of God. For just as human beings cannot sustain their own physical life, but are totally dependent upon God for every heartbeat and every breath, so those who have been made spiritually alive cannot sustain their own spiritual life, but are totally dependent upon God for every spiritual heartbeat and breath. But this is nothing else than the Holy Spirit's ministry of indwelling, in which He enters into saving relationship with the believer and sustains the life imparted in regeneration.

John 14:16-17 is usually adduced as strong support for the position that denies indwelling to Old Testament believers. A curious thing happens, however, upon closer examination of this passage and its teaching. In fact it is possible to read this passage in the same version in two entirely different ways, simply by emphasizing different words, and to come out with two quite different interpretations.

One way to read John 14:16-17 is as follows:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

But notice what happens when I take the same passage in the same version, and simply emphasize different words:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Notice how the first way of reading this Scripture emphasizes a change of location from the outside of Christ's disciples to the inside of them (which, if this is understood as movement in space, cannot be true, since the Holy Spirit has always been omnipresent); whereas the second way of reading this passage emphasizes the assurance that the Holy Spirit who is already dwelling with Christ's disciples will continue to dwell with them even after Christ ascends to heaven.

But how then shall we understand the language employed in John 14 and 15 and 16, where we read of the giving of the Spirit, and the sending of the Spirit, and the coming of the Spirit? We should not understand these expressions in terms of a new location in space to which the Holy Spirit is coming, but in terms of a new relationship into which the Holy Spirit will enter with Christ's disciples.

Let us attempt to put ourselves into the historical situation. In John 16:6-7 the Lord Jesus said:

But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I do away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Christ is about to depart from His disciples. They were filled with sorrow at the thought of losing their Master, of no longer having Him there with them. And they were filled with apprehension and fear; and felt almost lost at the prospect of being without their Leader. How could they carry on without His presence, without His direction and truth and example? And so Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to them as a Comforter, both to comfort them in their loss of His physical presence, and to help them in their need after His departure.

Now let us read John 14:16-17 once more, in the light of these considerations, and in an overly literal translation:

And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Comforter [or, Helper], in order that He may be with you always -- the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive because it is neither beholding Him or knowing Him. You are knowing Him, because He is remaining with you, and shall be in [or, among] you.

Now we are able to see truths in this passage which we perhaps have not been able to see before. Christ says that unbelievers have no experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit, but that His disciples have an experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Christ says that unbelievers are not able to receive the Holy Spirit, but that His disciples are able to receive the Holy Spirit; in fact, they have already received the Holy Spirit, and He is already remaining with them. Christ says that after His departure from them into heaven, His disciples will receive the Holy Spirit in the capacity of comforter and Helper, and that He (the Comforter and Helper) will remain with them and in (or among) them always. Thus our Lord was telling His disciples that the Holy Spirit, whom they already knew, whom they had already received, who was already remaining with them, would be remaining with them forever; and that since our Lord would soon be leaving

them, He was sending the Holy Spirit to them in a new relationship; namely, that of a Comforter and Helper after Christ's departure. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit, who was already related to them in various ways, who was already indwelling them and sustaining spiritual life in them, would come to them in a new relationship, to comfort them and help them after Christ's departure.

I would thus propose that Old Testament believers were both regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Old Testament saints, before they became saints, were spiritually dead and needed the Holy Spirit's impartation of spiritual life in order to become spiritually alive. And I would propose that the new life that was created in them by the Holy Spirit was also sustained in them by the Holy Spirit, and that He was personally and savingly related to them in various ways. And I would urge that this is nothing else than indwelling! There may have been differences in degree in Old and New Testament indwelling, but the essential reality is one that is common to believers under all dispensations and ages.

In this paper we have examined two ministries of the Holy Spirit -- regeneration and indwelling. We have surveyed recent opinion on the question of the presence of these ministries during the Old Testament period, have proposed definitions that attempt to express the precise nature of these ministries, and have tried to establish the claim that the Old Testament believers experienced these ministries. In a succeeding paper, the Lord willing, we will extend our study to include the question whether the Old Testament saints also experienced the Holy Spirit's ministries of filling and union with Christ.

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