

It All Begins with God—"In" [#3]

By Bob Young

A first step toward developing faith is to recognize God—God is! A second step is to know God as he is, to understand his nature. In the Old Testament, God revealed himself by his actions more often than by giving us descriptive words and phrases. As has been the case since the beginning of human existence, we struggle to understand God. How is it that something so fundamental so easily escapes us?

In this series of studies, we are seeking to begin with the basics. We purposefully skipped over much of the Old Testament history to begin with the Nativity, the Incarnation: God With Us. The coming of Jesus to this earth to share our humanity should be seen as God revealing himself. We summarized the ministry of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, in the Pauline words of Romans 8:31: God For Us. If God is "for us," who can stand against us?

An overview is always helpful. Old Testament. Everything begins with God. In the beginning, God. In the beginning, the Word. Eternal existence, no beginning, no end. Above and beyond human concepts of space and time. Above matter, speaking matter into existence. Creative power, creative genius, sustaining the universe. This is God; this is Jesus pre-incarnate.

Then, the Incarnation. At the Christmas season, many think about Jesus and the beginning of his physical life on this planet. This is "God with us" as described in Matthew 1:23. The baby in the manger is popular, non-threatening, lovable. But the story of Jesus' life among us is not complete unless the story of his birth leads to the story of his death. Easter, as a religious event, even more popular than Christmas. Who doesn't want to be saved? Who cannot sympathize with a suffering Savior? Who is not touched by the passion of Christ? God demonstrates love, he clearly shows how much he is for us.

I wish I understood more fully the significance of eternal existence—the One who is the very image of God, for whom all things were created, the One who now sustains and has always sustained this physical creation (Col. 1; Heb. 1). I wish I understood better the "God with us" dimension of Jesus' coming. I wish I understood better how powerful is Jesus' presence right now before the throne of God, the clear declaration that God is for us. I think clearer understanding of "with" and "for" will be helped as we unpack the third dimension of God's presence in my life.

God In Us. I want to understand what it means that he is "in" us or "within" us. This, for me, is a genuine Wow! God in me! Incredible. How can it be? What does it mean? What are the implications?

Seven well-known texts show us different dimensions of "God in us."

Here are the passages:

John 14:23. Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Romans 8:9-11. (9) You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (10) But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

1 Corinthians 3:16. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (20) for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Ephesians 2:22. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Eph. 3:17. ...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love.

Col 1:27. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

2 Timothy 1:14. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

What should we see? What conclusions should we draw? Here is a summary.

- Before he left the earth, the promise of Jesus to his followers was that God and Jesus would take up residence in those who keep his words. (The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father, and by Jesus, to fulfill this promise.)
- The Spirit (of God, of Christ) lives in Christians; that we have the Spirit of Christ is evidence that we belong to Christ and Christ lives in us, and also serves as promise that we will be resurrected.
- Christians collectively are the temple (dwelling place) of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us.
- The church is the dwelling place of God through the Spirit. The Spirit's presence in our lives is evidence that we are God's temple, God's dwelling place.
- Christ dwells in human hearts by faith.
- Christ in us is the hope of glory.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in Christians.

It is beyond the simplicity of this study to spend the time required to distinguish the Father, Son, and Spirit. In the concept explored in this study, God in us, all three are mentioned as living in us. (We will come to a more detailed study of Jesus and of the Spirit in coming months.)

Practical applications.

Since God is "in" us, "within" us, how shall we then live?

Four truths can be distilled from these seven passages. We as Christians are called to live....

- In the Word. Paying attention to, obediently keeping, his words (guarding the sound words)
- In the s(S)pirit. Meditating on and focused on spiritual things, maintaining the attitude of Jesus.
- In relationship. As belonging to God, as belonging to Christ, in his presence
- In expectation. Expectantly, hopefully, our hope of glory.