

# HIS INDWELLING PRESENCE

Intimate Studies in the Things of the Spirit

by Norman B. Harrison, D. D.  
Pastor, Bible Teacher and Evangelist

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG HIS PEOPLE

**“My presence shall go with thee”** (Exodus 33:14).

The hungering of the human heart after God—how shall it be met? By man's seeking after God, if haply he may find Him? Or by God's own gracious moving toward man in self-revelation? The first method, as man has pursued it, gives us the religions of the world. Of these the showing made by the cultured Athenians on Mars Hill is a fair sample. The second has produced the Christian faith, with its note of certainty and experience of reality.

That this latter method alone has the promise of producing satisfying results should, from the very premises in the case, be evident to all. That it has brought life and immortality to those who walk in its light, in the restoration of God to man and man to God, in mutual, indissoluble fellowship—this is a matter of record and experience.

The first chapter of man's spiritual history closed disastrously. It ended with man's relationship to God completely severed. The story is familiar: the simple test of allegiance which, if met on man's part, would have sealed to him the fellowship of God in perpetuity. But in the test he failed, doubtless little considering that in the act of disloyalty and disobedience he was forever renouncing the right and the power to fellowship with a holy God. That God so regarded it is evident from the scene's solemn conclusion: **“So He drove out the man.”** There are two reasons why that severance, once effected, should continue:

#### I. GOD'S HOLINESS.

In the presence of God the seraphim, unfallen and therefore unabashed by His holiness, nevertheless fall down upon their faces, as they cry **“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts”** (Isaiah 6:3). The smoke-filled house further betokens His unapproachableness (vs. 4). And man, merely glimpsing the glory, cries out:

**“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”** (Isaiah 6:5).

The sadness of the situation is in the fact that man seldom sees, even dimly, the holiness of God, and continues blindly unconscious of the awful chasm of separation.

## 2. MAN'S SINFULNESS.

**“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”**  
(Jeremiah 17:9).

Sin has left man in a state of ignorance of himself, with a peculiar incapacity for understanding himself and the forces at work in his life. The Bible is of supreme value in this regard, that it reveals man to himself, with utmost frankness and truthfulness, as is true of no other book.

Our Saviour, impelled in His coming to earth by a compassionate love for man, nevertheless takes occasion to castigate him in the most scathing terms:

**“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man”** (Mark 7:21-23).

Yonder is God, in unalterable holiness; here is man, in unchanging sinfulness: between the two, lodged in their very natures, a great gulf is fixed. God cannot bridge the gulf by any diminution of His holiness, thereby to accept man in his sinfulness; man, leopard-like, cannot change his spots. The situation seems hopeless.

**“But God”**—the thrill of knowing that God will not leave the situation thus! Rich in mercy, equally rich in resource, His great love finds a way. Prophetic of what His love will do is that scene upon Mt. Sinai when the just demands of law are counterpoised by grace and mercy:

**“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”** (Exodus 34:5-7).

And although the people had just then demonstrated their ill-desert by descending to the depths of idolatry, Moses, encouraged by these gracious words, makes bold to petition the Lord for His presence among them:

**“And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us”** (Exodus 34:8, 9).

### I. His Revealed Presence

A full study of the progressive revelation of His presence with His people discloses three distinct stages:

## 1. IN OLD TESTAMENT EXPERIENCES.

Abel, so closely following the debacle of the Fall, knew the way to restored fellowship with God, made use of it in a blood sacrifice, and **“obtained witness that he was righteous.”**

Enoch enjoyed a remarkably intimate experience of God’s presence. He **“walked with God.”** And he so **“pleased God”** that God was unwilling he should suffer sin’s penalty of death. God **“took him”** into His heavenly home in unbroken fellowship.

Abraham’s life is the unfolding of God’s gracious purposes in and presence with, a man whom He has sovereignly called into covenant relation with Himself. Leaving his native country and kindred at the divine bidding, he learns the lessons of faith and trust, of obedience and confidence. The Lord meets him, converses with him, binds Himself to him and his posterity with solemn oath, and that in perpetuity. The fellowship develops into such intimacy that he comes to be known as the **“Friend of God.”**

Jacob, least deserving of the divine presence, deceiver and supplanter that he was, is met as he fares forth into life’s adventure by the Lord appearing to him, reassuring him, promising to him His presence and prospering:

**“And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not”** (Genesis 28:15, 16).

Joseph, sinned against by his brethren and sold into slavery, is nevertheless sustained by an unseen hand. In the house of Potiphar it is said of him: **“And the Lord was with Joseph . . . And his master saw that the Lord was with him.”** Falsely accused, as was Another greater than he, and cast into prison, the record is: **“But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy and gave him favour.”** And when the sceptre of power is placed in his hand, that presence is with him in wisdom and prospering.

Moses, coming from the wilderness, is given the needed lesson of the Lord’s presence, not only with him personally as leader, assured in the words, **“Certainly I will be with thee”** (Exodus 3:12), but also with the people whose cause he is being called to espouse. The burning bush, burning yet unconsumed, a phenomenon Moses could never forget, is a picture of the indestructibility of God’s people, however severe their trials, by virtue of His presence in their midst. (The same indestructibility attaches to the Church by virtue of the Lord’s presence—Revelation 1:10-18).

This brings us to a new development in the vouchsafed presence of God: not merely with individuals, but with a company whom He chooses to call His people. And they are His, not merely because He calls them such; He makes them such in all reality—He redeems them. And once He has redeemed them to Himself, He comes and claims them for Himself by His living presence in their midst. The Passover of Exodus 12 is followed immediately by the Presence of Exodus 13:

**“And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people” (Exodus 13:21, 22).**

This is something new. Henceforth in all their journeyings they are not to go alone. His presence in their midst unifies them, leads them and guides them.

Yet they narrowly escape the withdrawal of His presence, threatened through the grievous sin of the golden calf and averted only by “grace” extended through Moses’ intercession. To the Lord’s declaration, **“For I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people,”** Moses makes his plea for “grace” and receives the gracious assurance: **“My presence shall go with thee.”**

And now, with the giving of the Tabernacle the Presence becomes a settled, covenanted reality. By its gracious provisions of approach each individual may free himself from the barriers of sin and enter into assured fellowship with his God, in the way of His appointing. What a great day for Israel when the Tabernacle was finally set up, embodying God’s every requirement as to sinful man’s access unto Himself, and the Shekinah glory of His vouchsafed presence among His people came and filled the house (Exodus 40:33-38). Glorious as far as it went, but only a type of what we of the New Covenant were to experience in surpassing reality.

## **2. IN THE PERSON OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

Jesus’ virgin-birth is declared to be in fulfillment of the promise: **“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel”** (Isaiah 7:14); and Matthew adds, **“which being interpreted is, God with us”** (Matthew 1:23). The Old Testament experiences of His presence among His people are but anticipations of the day when He becomes incarnate, dwelling among them in human form. The Shekinah glory finds its antitype in His blessed person:

**“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14).

The Greek word for **“dwelt”** is *“tabernacled.”* All the meaning and intent of the Tabernacle as the meeting-place of God and man find their fulfillment in the person and presence of His Son. Never out of most intimate communion with His Father, nay, the Father was “abiding” in Him; yet always in close fellowship with man. He was the true temple; in Him God dwelt among men.

## **3. IN THE TRANSITION FROM “WITH” TO “IN.”**

The first step is coextensive with Old Testament revelation and experience of God. The second step takes us through the Gospels, the record of **“God manifest in the flesh.”** And now the third step carries us on into the Acts and Epistles, wherein the life of the believer is set forth, historically and doctrinally, as indwelt by the very presence of God.

Our Lord Jesus, upon the eve of His death and subsequent departure to the Father, pointed His disciples forward to this step. Speaking of sending the Holy Spirit, He said: **“For He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”**

And Paul directs the attention of believers to the fact that this indwelling, the goal to which God was looking forward in Old Testament days, is now realized in them:

**“For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”** (II Corinthians 6:16).

As this step brings us to the very heart of our theme, the inner experience of God which is the gracious possession and privilege of every believer, we forbear to comment further at this time. Since, however, we have now come for the first time to distinctively Christian ground, God’s perfect sin-remedy, we must ask ourselves what has taken place that a sin-hating God, who drove the sinner from His presence, would, or could, take up His abode in man. The answer plunges us into the very heart of Christian doctrine.

## **II. Our Union With Him**

Following the fact that Christ died for us, and preparatory to His coming to live in us, the most far-reaching change possible in our position before God has taken place—something that completely alters His way of looking upon us and of dealing with us. He no longer sees us as sinners because He sees us **“in Him.”**

Our being **“in Him”** must ever and always precede His being “in us.” In ourselves we are alienated from Him, something foreign to Him in nature as well as practice; in Him we are a part of Him, something akin to Him, such as He can claim as His very own, move into and rejoice over. Expounding this to His followers, Jesus said, **“Abide in Me, and I in you,”** indicating this sequence:

- 1. OUR POSITION IN HIM—“Ye in Me.”**
- 2. OUR POSSESSION OF HIM—“I in You.”**

The entire modus operandi of the Christian faith is wrapped up in these two super-significant phrases. We simply must ponder them, pray over them, and make their meaning our own, as the gateway to the understanding and experiencing of things Christian.

## **OUR NEW POSITION IS THE KEY TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

**“In Christ”** is the dominant note in the symphony of redemption. It is a sine qua non—that without which no Christian life is possible. **“Apart from Me ye can do nothing”** because apart from Him we are nothing. Lacking in life and laden with sin, we are and ever must be. But **“in Him,”** engrafted into Christ, as branches of the Vine, we have His nature and life; we participate in His position; we cease to have a separate existence, are incorporated into His very being and must forevermore be identified with Him.

This was made possible only by a blessed interchange of position.

- He took our place that we might take His.
- He became the Son of Man that we might become sons of God.
- He partook of our flesh-and-blood natures that we might become “**partakers of the divine nature.**”
- He was made “**sin for us**” that we might be made the “**righteousness of God in Him.**”

It is evident that our union with Him is reciprocal in its operation—a give and take. By virtue of our position “**in Him,**” He gives us all that He has of life (which is eternal), of holiness, of riches, of acceptance with the Father. And He takes from us all that we have of sin, of condemnation and death, of poverty and misery.

As Luther puts it:

“All that Christ has now becomes the property of the believing soul; all that the soul has becomes the property of Christ. Christ possesses every blessing and eternal salvation; they are henceforth the property of the soul. The soul possesses every vice and sin; they become henceforth the property of Christ.”

Thus the great Christian doctrines—Justification, Sanctification, Adoption, Security, Fruitfulness in Service—rest in and grow out of the fact that we are “**in Him.**”

### **OUR POSSESSION IS THE KEY TO CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

What our being “**in Him**” makes possible to us, nay, reckons to us as ours, His coming to be “in us” makes actual, works out in us, ingrains into our character and conduct.

- He only is pure; He alone in us can produce purity of life.
- He only is holy; He alone in us can make holiness an attribute of human life.
- He only is faithful; He alone in us can make us faithful.

Christian life is not the imitation of Christ—that were impossible; but His implantation, to the end that He may reproduce Himself in us—the *out*-living of an *in*-living Christ.

The vine secures its own type of life in the branches—no attempt to mold or shape the fruit to a set pattern. The life inherent in the vine suffices to reproduce itself in each minute characteristic.

Just so with Christ in us; He is urgent that we “abide” in Him, for our loyalty to His indwelling presence is the key to a true Christian experience —Christ realized in character and conduct.

In our Position in Him we are made manifest to God; we are holy and complete in Him. In our Possession of Him He is manifest to men; He lives out His life through us. As we are accepted in Him, so may He be magnified in us.

### III. Seven Satisfying Relationships

Restored to full favor as His people, it remains for us to gather from the whole range of revelation the mighty spiritual uplift, inspiration and encouragement that are ours in and through the various relationships into which our covenant God is pleased to admit us.

In linguistic usage the preposition, the smallest of words, indicates the relationship existing between two objects or persons. As the relationship changes, the preposition changes. For example, a book with reference to a table. Now the book is above the table; now it is on, in, under the table; now it is removed from the table.

As we search the Scriptures for their reassuring statements of the relationships He is pleased to sustain toward us, let us not fail to remind ourselves that we are the sinners who, by nature as well as by practice, deserved perpetual banishment from His presence. What we were and what we are—herein lies the great contrast that exalts His glorious grace. Our search rewards us with the following:

#### 1. HE IS WITH US.

**“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness”** (Isaiah 41:10).

**“And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [age]”** (Matthew 28:20).

He who hath said, **“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,”** is with us all the days, in all situations, under all circumstances, with the greater yearning and the more tender solicitude as He sees us pressed with burdens, perplexed with personal problems, or shrinking from impending evil. Lo, I, all authority Mine—am—with—you.

#### 2. HE IS ABOVE US.

**“Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord He is God in Heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else”** (Deuteronomy 4:39).

**“Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”** (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

And He is there, above, with a gracious purpose on our behalf—**“now to appear in the presence of God for us.”**

However high and strong our spiritual enemies may seem to be, He is above them all, in person, in position, in power. He is there, caring for us (I Peter 5:7; Read Psalm 121).

### **3. HE IS BENEATH US.**

**“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms”** (Deuteronomy 33:27).

When, as we say, the bottom seems to be falling out of everything, it is only that we may cease to trust in things and settle down into the security of everlasting arms that are there, always there, to receive us. The new experience of Him more than repays. Child of His love, tense almost to tears, cease to struggle and nestle down in the strength of His arms. They are beneath.

### **4. HE IS BEFORE US.**

**“And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people”** (Exodus 13:21, 22).

**“And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice”** (John 10:4).

Are we confronted with untried experiences from which we shrink with foreboding? Must our feet take a pathway strewn with thorns or jagged stones? What comfort to know that His blessed feet have found and felt them first, for He goeth before (Meditate anew on Psalm 23).

### **5. HE IS BEHIND US.**

**“And the Angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them”** (Exodus 14:19).

**“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”** (Psalm 23:6).

Does the enemy, in subtlety, steal upon us from behind, there is our faithful God, interposing His own presence between us and the impending peril. What we cannot see, He sees. If as Shepherd He goes before, as **“Goodness”** and **“Mercy”** He goes behind. He leaves no room for want or fear.

### **6. HE IS AROUND US.**

**“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them”** (Psalm 34:7).

**“As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever”** (Psalm 125:2).



We are told that **“The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe”** (Proverbs 18:10). Abiding in Him we have the strong walls of a fortress completely around us. And even more than the fortress is the peace which He instills into the heart of him who there takes refuge. When we refuse to worry, bringing every interest into the citadel of prayer, He promises that His peace, passing all understanding, shall guard, stand sentinel, like a cordon of soldiers, around the heart and mind, refusing entrance to every would-be intruder. Truly there is no God like our God.

**“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart”** (Psalm 32:10, 11).

## **7. HE IS WITHIN US.**

**“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”** (Galatians 2:20).

Of all associations short of glory this is the superlative. That the Son of God should come, by His Spirit, to live within the human breast, in union with our spirit—this staggers the intellect to comprehend. Yet how it satisfies the hunger of the heart!

The fact that He dwells within, so well-nigh unbelievable, with the gracious purposes enfolded in that abiding Presence—all this is the entrancing story that awaits the telling.

May the Spirit Himself persuade us of its truth and lead us into its experienced reality.

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