

Incarnation – God dwells in believers.

1 Cor. 3:16 & Jn. 16:5-15

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



The question of what is real is a uniquely relevant question in our current modern moment with the continued advancement of technology and the ability to be connected. Over the last year, I have heard repeated questions about professional sports being “scripted.” Or, if we look at the top podcast genres of 2023, true crime, history, and science are all in the top five. Why is this significant? Because we are hungry to understand what is truly real when it comes to the mysterious. Especially if you dig under the surface, you will find many episodes in those three genres are discussing conspiracy theories and odd events. With the rise of AI, there is a consistent conversation around the ethics of how we are to use AI and what its limitations should be. Why? Because it has the power to create fake content that can appear to be truly real. It doesn’t take us long to consider all of the ways this could go wrong for us as individuals and as a society. The question of what is really real is as relevant now as it has ever been. But it is not a new question. In fact, it is a question that we have been asking for millennia. It is a foundational question in philosophy and in religious experience. It is a question that early Christian believers asked. “How can I know that I am saved?” Paul and the other New Testament authors would answer this question over and over again. Paul would tell the Ephesian church they can know they are saved because the Holy Spirit is indwelt in them. This is an important truth for them and us. In Advent, we remember the arrival of the Messiah, God with us. But, we also remember that God did not just dwell with us for a short time; he dwells with us permanently from the first moment of faith and through eternity. The simple truth is this: **eternal life is a now-and-then thing, not just a then thing.**

1. Indwelt with the Spirit of God

a. What is the goal or the essential pursuit of Christianity?

- i. Here is how one church father answered that question: Irenaeus put it, “**He became like us so that we might become like him.**”¹

- 1. Can we trust him on this? → Consider his discipleship.
 - a. Jesus discipled John (Apostle).
 - b. John (Apostle) discipled Polycarp.
 - c. Polycarp discipled Irenaeus.
- 2. Irenaeus has a direct connection to an eyewitness account of the teachings of Jesus. He is being discipled from a primary source.

¹ Against Heresies, III.10. via EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 137). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition

- ii. **Often in our modern age we answer this question differently than Irenaeus did. We often answer along the lines of morality (progressive and conservative and spirituality).**
 - 1. Here are some ways we answer this question:
- iii. To become a moral person or to feel better about myself through morality? → No.
 - 1. This is called, therapeutic moral deism, and is essentially where we make feeling good about ourselves through a perceived morality the object of worship (i.e., God). → This is idolatry.
- iv. To become a better person? → No.
- v. To have some mystical access to the divine or to unlock the divine that is already contained within? → No.
- vi. To have assurance that we will have a positive and blissful eternal experience? → No.
 - 1. I.e., “Fire insurance.” – That is our primary motivator to follow Jesus is simply to not go to hell.
- vii. **The singular goal of Christianity is to become like Christ.**
 - 1. **Romans 8:29 - "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."**
 - 2. **2 Corinthians 3:18 - "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."**
 - 3. **Philippians 2:5-8 - "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"**
 - 4. **1 John 2:6 - "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."**
 - 5. **Ephesians 5:1-2 - "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**
 - 6. **Colossians 3:10 - "and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."**
- b. **Holy Spirit indwelling is true of all believers.**
 - i. **The Holy Spirit is indwelt in all believers so that we would have the power to live as Christ.**
 - 1. Jn 16:7 – “⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”
 - 2. Jesus tells us that it is to our advantage that we have the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. This section in the gospel of John is often called the *Farewell Discourse*. That is, this is the part of Jesus' final words and instructions to his disciples before his crucifixion, resurrection, and ultimately, ascension.
 - 1. I.e., Jesus is preparing them for life after the cross.
 - 2. **Here Jesus is assuring his disciples that though he will be leaving them physically, he will be forever with them spiritually through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit.** The Spirit, this other Counselor, unites us with Jesus the Son and so draws us into a personal relationship with God as our Father. In

this way the barriers of space and time are overcome, and the life of the one man, Jesus, touches our lives today. God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit.²

- iii. **16:1** – Jesus explains why he is telling them these things → “That you won’t fall away...”
 - 1. The greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy. The reason Jesus has said *All this* (i.e. 15:18–27) is *so that you will not go astray* (*skandalisthēte*; cf. note on this verb in 6:61; cf. Mk. 14:27–31). The danger was real when John wrote these words, though elsewhere he develops a theology to account for defection while maintaining the security of the believer (1 Jn. 2:19).³
- iv. **A guarantee of our salvation. → I.e., Proof that God is good for it.**
 - 1. Eph. 1:13-14 - ¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
 - a. Gentiles as well as Jews, having *heard* and *believed*, have been *sealed*. In the ancient world the seal was the personal sign of the owner or the sender of something important, and thus, as in a letter, it distinguished what was true from what was spurious. It was also the guarantee that the thing sealed had been carried intact.⁴
 - b. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's seal. The experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives is the final proof to them, and indeed a demonstration to others, of the genuineness of what they have believed, and provides the inward assurance that they belong to God as children (cf. Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6).⁵

2. Indwelling – Corporate Life

- a. **Paul rebukes the church in Corinth both corporately and individually.**
 - i. Paul's first letter the Corinthian church addresses many issues that they were having both as individuals and corporately.
 - 1. The city of Corinth was at the heart of an important trade route in the ancient world. Like many cities that thrive on trade, Corinth had a reputation for sexual immorality, religious diversity, and corruption. The church that Paul planted there (Acts 18) floundered under all of these influences and began to divide over various issues.⁶
 - ii. With that, Paul will offer several rebukes and exhortations.
 - 1. Remember, an exhortation is not merely an encouragement, but it also includes a calling up to righteousness.

² EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 168-169). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 530.

⁴ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 64.

⁵ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 64.

⁶ See notes via - *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co.

- iii. ***Don't you know*** introduces a mild rebuke and is a device Paul uses ten times in this letter (and once only elsewhere). It introduces a question on a matter which ought to be common knowledge.⁷
- b. **One of Paul's first rebukes - Christian faith (and life) is not exclusively or primarily an individual pursuit. (v.16)**
 - i. When Paul refers to "you are God's temple" this is both a personal and a corporate reality.
 - 1. **Believers are *God's temple*, which makes it clear that Paul is addressing the whole church, not teachers only.** There is no article with *temple* in the Greek, but this does not imply that there are several temples (though Godet renders 'a temple of God', saying 'The Church of Corinth is not the universal Church'). It simply puts a certain emphasis on their character as God's temple. There are two Greek words for 'temple', *hieron*, which includes all the temple precincts, and *naos* (used here) which denotes the shrine proper, the sanctuary. It points to the very presence of God. This is brought out explicitly with the assertion that *God's Spirit lives* in the Corinthian believers. The expression 'the Spirit of God' is not common. It emphasizes the connection of the Spirit with the Father and underlines the deity of the Spirit. The Spirit is God as he dwells in his church. The words are sometimes applied to the individual believer, but the thought is rather that the whole community of believers is God's shrine. ***Temple* is singular, but *you* is plural; the reference is to the church (the individual is also God's temple, as we see from 6:19, but that is not the thought here).**⁸
 - 2. Again, we will see Paul advance the idea of the believer being the Temple in 6:19, specifically in regards to sexually immorality.
- c. **The community of God.**
 - i. Paul's rebuke here is primarily of the corporate nature. And he advises them and us to take seriously the nature of the corporate gathering. We are not all individuals doing individual things. We are part of a redeemed and transformed community that is to demonstrate the beauty and grace of the abundant life of Christ.
 - 1. **Warning** – Often this idea gets expressed as is we are to experience the "fullness of heaven here on earth." Paul warns us against that utopian idea in 13:12, where he tells us that on this side of heaven, we see through a mirror dimly.
 - 2. **Instead, this redeemed community is one that is to be able to work through our differences, disagreements, and offenses with peace, patience, and self-control.**
 - a. **Imagine if this is what the church at large was known for?**
 - ii. Paul's rebuke here is not just about the reputation of the church but it is also about the spiritual life of the church.
 - 1. As we read through his letter, we will see that he addresses the importance of orderly worship and serving one another so that we might be built up to maturity in Christ. → **Again, the idea of "I don't need the church..." is absolutely false. We need each other to be spurred on in maturity and Christlikeness.**
 - a. There are 59 "one another" commands in the NT.

⁷ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 71.

⁸ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 71.

- b. We are not to dismiss the need for corporate life so quickly.
 - iii. Paul's warning in v. 17 → What is my perspective on the corporate gathering and body?
 - 1. The seriousness of the divisions at Corinth is seen in the light of this understanding of the church. Because it is *God's temple* anyone who fails to react rightly towards it is guilty of no light sin. The repetition of the verb *destroy* shows that the punishment is not arbitrary; it 'fits the crime'. **To engage in making divisions is to destroy the divine society and thus to invite God to destroy the sinner.**⁹
 - a. It is no light thing to have a casual attitude towards the scared nature of the church.
 - 2. **"True holiness may begin between God and the soul, but it finds full expression in community with other people."**¹⁰
 - a. This forces us to ask the question – What is my perspective on the importance and the nature of the corporate gathering?
 - i. Do I believe that God is dwelling in our midst?
 - ii. Do I believe that it is something that I can occasionally take in as I think I need?
 - iii. Do I need other believers in my life to help encourage, exhort and sharpen me?

3. Indwelling – Formation

- a. Paul's rebuke – You bear individual responsibility.
 - i. Yes, his primary remarks in this section are about the corporate life. But, the corporate life is made up of individuals. And so his words land on individuals and speak to individual actions.
 - ii. The whole challenge that is in Corinth can only be overcome by submitting to the work of God through the Spirit of God. And thankfully, the Spirit is not far off, he dwells within.
- b. **"It is to your advantage..." (Jn. 16:7)**
 - i. **"The Holy Spirit is not just a distant force; it is the transformative presence of God within us, working to shape our character and draw us closer to Christ."** – Dallas Willard
 - ii. **A word of caution - It must be emphasized that our union with Christ does not mean that we somehow become God—that we are joined to the divine being in the sense that we are divinized by absorption into the Godhead such that Creator and the created are indistinguishable.** It is a spiritual union that is the work of the Holy Spirit—"we were all baptized by [or "in"] one Spirit so as to form one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).²⁶³ In this "Spirit-baptism"²⁶⁴ the Holy Spirit bridges the chasm of space and time. He takes what happened then—the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—and brings its saving power into our lives now, by uniting us in a spiritual way with Christ.¹¹
- c. **How do we know the Spirit is working in us?** → The *fruit* of the Spirit, by contrast, give a sure sign of transformed *character*. When our deepest attitudes and dispositions are those of Jesus,

⁹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 71–72.

¹⁰ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-art-of-one-anothering>

¹¹ EFCA. *Evangelical Convictions*, 2nd Edition (pp. 182-183). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

it is because we have learned to let the Spirit foster his life in us. Paul confessed: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). The outcome of Christ living within us through the Spirit is fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). ... Both gifts and fruit are the result, not the reality of the Spirit’s presence in our lives. **What brings about our transformation into Christlikeness is our direct, personal interaction with Christ through the Spirit.** The Spirit makes Christ present to us and draws us toward his likeness. It is as we thus “behold the glory of the Lord” that we are constantly “transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18, NASB). – Dallas Willard

- d. What does Jesus tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit?
 - i. **Convict:** (v.8) – The world of their (our) sin, Christ’s righteousness, and the coming judgment.
 1. A general description of the Counsellor’s role *vis-à-vis* the world is given in 16:8: *When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.* The word the NIV translates as ‘convict of guilt’ (*elenchō*), was used by Greek moralists in relation to the conscience, and in the LXX with forensic overtones, as it has here. When the Counsellor proves the world wrong ‘in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment’ it could lead either to repentance and salvation or hardening of heart and condemnation, depending upon the response of those proved wrong. The Spirit’s conviction would be effected through the ministry of the disciples (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24–25).
 2. When the Counsellor proves the world wrong ‘in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment’ it could lead either to repentance and salvation or hardening of heart and condemnation, depending upon the response of those proved wrong. The Spirit’s conviction would be effected through the ministry of the disciples (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24–25).¹²
 - ii. **Guide:** (v. 13) – Believers into truth.
 1. What they could not bear then, they would need to understand afterwards. Therefore, Jesus promised, *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.* **The Spirit is here referred to with the masculine pronoun ‘he’ (*ekeinos*), underlining again (cf. 15:26) the personhood of the Spirit—he is not just a force.**¹³
 2. His role is to testify to Jesus: *He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.* As Jesus did not speak independently of the Father, so the Counsellor will not speak independently of Jesus. What he hears from the Son he will tell the disciples: the significance of the things ‘yet to come’, i.e. the significance of the events soon to befall Jesus, and perhaps his return at the end of the age.¹⁴
 - iii. **Declare:** (vv. 13, 14, 15) – I.e., He will make it known to you...
 1. This is repeated by John and that is something that we should not miss.
 - a. The Holy Spirit does not act on his own accord. He operates as a member of the Trinity. And as such he has the same heart, will, and intention as

¹² Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 325.

¹³ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

¹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

the Father and Son. In fact, it is not that the Father, Son, and Spirit all happen to agree on heart, will, and intention, it is that they inseparably have the same heart, will, and intention.

- b. This means that the holy Spirit will never ask you to do something that violates the Word of God or the will of God that is made clear in the Scriptures. Nor, will the Holy Spirit ask you to do something that would not bring glory to Jesus.
 2. Underlining that the Counsellor does not act independently, Jesus said, *He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you*. Just as Jesus' purpose was to bring glory to the Father, so the Counsellor's role is to bring glory to Jesus. This he will do by taking what belongs to Jesus and making it known to his disciples. Jesus then explained, *All that belongs to the Father is mine*. In several other places it is made clear that all that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus (3:35; 13:3; 17:7, 10). However, here the emphasis is upon the knowledge the Father has, for Jesus went on to say, *That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you*. The knowledge the Father has also belongs to Jesus (cf. 15:15), and the Counsellor will take that knowledge and make it known to the disciples. Once again, this is not an absolute statement, meaning everything God knows will be revealed to the disciples. It relates to the significance of the great saving events that were about to unfold in the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁵
- iv. **Glorify:** (v. 14) – He works to make sure that Jesus is seen correctly.
1. Just as Jesus' purpose was to bring glory to the Father, so the Counsellor's role is to bring glory to Jesus. This he will do by taking what belongs to Jesus and making it known to his disciples.¹⁶
 2. We glorify God by participating in his righteousness and in right worship.
 - a. If the life of the Father is made available through the Son and imparted through the Spirit, am I living in a way that demonstrates that I am a new creation?
 - b. This is why we ask the question:
3. **Life-defining Question: Is the Spirit flowing through me?**
- a. **A disciple is...**
 - i. **Character: Dependent upon the Holy Spirit**
 - ii. **Competency: Actively trusting and obeying**
 - b. **Demonstrated by:**
 - i. I depend on the Holy Spirit, versus my own efforts, to make it through each day.
 - ii. I am joyful and at peace, despite my circumstances.
 - iii. I act and decide with wisdom, rather than impulsively and out of my own desires.
 - iv. All areas of my life are surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to do with them as He chooses (friends, career, job, health, loved ones, entertainment, recreation, etc.).

¹⁵ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.

¹⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 327.