

*Series: The Upper Room Discourse*

## **John 14:15-31**

# **God's home in us**

by Scott Grant

### **An awesome sight**

The temple of the Lord had been completed, and the priests brought the ark of the covenant, which symbolized the presence of the Lord, to its place of rest in the most holy place. As they left, a glorious cloud filled the entire temple, again symbolizing the presence of the Lord. The Lord was indeed dwelling among his people, symbolized by his presence in the temple. It was an awesome sight (1 Kings 8:6-11).

An even more awesome thought is that just as the Lord filled the temple with his presence, he fills us with us presence. Each believer in Jesus Christ is a temple inhabited by the Lord. His glory fills our temples.

The New Testament transforms the concept of the temple, which is where God dwelt. The transformation takes three different spiritual forms. First, God dwelt with Christ. Second, God dwells with his people corporately. This is the emphasis in John 14:1-14 - the spiritual temple that we inhabit. Third, God dwells in each believer. This is the emphasis in John 14:15-31 - the spiritual temple that each of us *is*, the house that the Lord inhabits. We not only dwell in God, but God dwells in us. The transformation of the temple is illustrated in the following chart:

### **WHERE GOD DWELLS**

<b>Temple</b>	<b>Christ</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>Individual</b>
1 Kings 8:13	John 1:14	John 14:1-14	John 14:15-31
	John 2:19-20	Eph 2:19-22	1 Cor 6:19
	Col 2:9		

Echoes of the temple reverberate through all of John 14, but particularly in verses 15 through 31. Concepts formerly associated with the physical temple are used throughout, indicating that something new is taking shape: The Spirit will be "with you" (verse 16); the Spirit "abides," or dwells, with you (verses 17, 25); the Spirit will be "in" not the temple but "you" (verses 17 and 20); the disciples will "behold" not the glory cloud but Christ (verse 19); God will be disclosed not in the glory cloud but in Christ (verse 21); the Father and the Son will make their "abode," or dwelling place, not in the temple in an individual (verse 23); and the believer, not the temple, will be the place of God's peace (verse 27, Haggai 2:9).

So each of us is a temple in whom the Spirit of God dwells, which raises the question, "What is the Spirit doing in there?" Jesus answers that question in John 14:15-31 by telling us that the Spirit is all about creating and encouraging relationship with God. The subplot in this passage concerns "the world," which is mentioned six times, and its relationship to the Spirit. The Spirit seemingly has nothing to do with the world, at least until verse 31, the last verse.

### **Relationship through the Spirit**

John 14:15-20:

*(15) If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (16) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever, (17) that is, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold him or know him. You know him, because he abides with you and will be in you. (18) I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (19) After a little while the world will behold me no more; but you will behold me; because I live, you shall live also. (20) In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."*

The structure of the entire passage is evident in verses 15 and 16. The refrain of obedience out of love appears in verses 15, 21, 23 and 31. In each case but the last one, Jesus follows the obedience-love pairing with consideration of the Holy Spirit. So love and obedience are linked to the Holy Spirit. Immediately after discussing love and obedience in verse 15, Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit in verse 16.

In verse 15 we see that obedience to Jesus is contingent on love for Jesus. The root of obedience is love for Jesus. But we get it backward. We often live as if obedience is the root. If we find ourselves being disobedient, we try to correct the problem by being obedient. But disobedience is simply indicative of a root problem: Love for Jesus is somehow lacking. We might then respond by trying to muster obedience in order to prove our love for Jesus, but that's just as backward. That's trying to create a flower to prove the presence of a root. But only the root of love for Jesus can produce the flower of obedience.

We don't need help with obedience; we need help with love for Jesus. So Jesus tells the disciples that the Father will give them "another Helper." He is "another" in addition to, and in the same manner of, Jesus. His purpose is to be "with" them forever. This is temple language, for the temple was symbolic of God's being "with" his people in relationship. Verses 15 through 20 are rife with the language of relationship. The Helper, then, creates and encourages our individual relationships with the Lord. He "helps" us love Jesus, which results in obedience to Jesus.

Jesus identifies the helper as "the Spirit of truth." This is the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead. What "truth" is Jesus talking about? In John 14:6, he said he himself was "the truth" - the only trustworthy way to the Father. That speaks of relationship with God. Given that the flow of thought here concerns the Spirit's creating and encouraging our relationship with God, his ministry, then, concerns the truth of our relationship with God. That's why Jesus calls him the Spirit of truth.

For the disciples, the Spirit was to be given but had not been given yet. He was given to them on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21). For each believer today, the Spirit was given when he or she believed in Jesus Christ. So the Spirit of truth dwells in each believer now.

In verse 17 Jesus introduces the subplot of "the world," which cannot see or know the Spirit. The question is, "Can the world know God?" The apparent answer for now is no. The world is contrasted with the disciples, who know the Spirit presently because he abides, or dwells, "with," or beside, them. The Spirit dwells beside them because the Spirit dwells in Christ, who is dwelling beside them (John 14:25). The Spirit will be "in" them on the day of Pentecost.

Jesus says he will not leave the disciples as orphans. He is leaving them; that much is true. He was leaving for the Father (John 14:12). But he will return to them. This is a reference to his coming to them in the person of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Through the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son have taken up residence within us (John 14:23). The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11) and "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9).

"Orphan" is a poignant, relational word. It creates sorrowful images of children without parents. In that Jesus says he will not leave the disciples as orphans, he says that he will return in the context of intimacy, to care for them as a parent cares for his or her child. The Holy Spirit in us creates and encourages this intimate relationship with Jesus.

When Jesus returns to the Father, the world will behold him no more. But the disciples will behold him, and they will behold him in an entirely different manner than they are beholding him now. They will behold him in the person of the Spirit.

This beholding has something to do with living, for Jesus immediately says that "because I live, you shall live also." Jesus tells them that he is living presently, but they "shall" live. Evidently, they are not living now. This obviously cannot mean physical life. It must mean spiritual life. In fact, Jesus himself will define life in a strictly spiritual sense only a few moments from now (John 17:3). They will live spiritually when the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in them. And Jesus defines spiritual life in John 17:3 as knowing the Father and knowing him. Spiritual life concerns being related to God and relating to him. The Spirit gives life (John 6:63, 2 Corinthians 3:6).

Why is it that we live spiritually because Jesus lives spiritually? It's because we have been baptized, or placed, into Christ by the Holy Spirit, and we are now clothed with, or surrounded by, Christ. (Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 12:13). We have been united with Christ. That means what's true of Christ in his humanity is true of us. If Christ has the Holy Spirit in him, that means we do as well. So we have the Holy Spirit living in us as an implication of the Holy Spirit's having placed us into Christ.

Jesus says in verse 20, in fact, that the disciples - and by extension, us - are "in" him. This expands the circle of intimacy. Before the Father and the Son were "in" each other (John 14:10-11). We get in on this intimate union between the Father and the Son through our union with Christ. This is not a union we have to create or maintain; it is a simple fact brought about by the Spirit in response to our initial faith in Christ. We see in verse 20 that we are in Christ and that he is in us, and that he is in the Father. Thus we are in the Father as well, in the Father's house (John 14:2). All this happens in the Father's house, the expression of the spiritual temple that includes all believers.

It is clear from these verses, then, that the Spirit is concerned with relationship - relating us to God. Words and phrases such as "with you" (verse 16), "know" (verse 17), "abides" (verse 17), "in" (verses 17 and 20), "orphans" (verse 18) "behold" (verse 19) and "live" (verse 19) all concern relationship. The Spirit of truth tells us the truth that life is all about relationship with God.

Obedience to the commands of Jesus depend on our love for Jesus. But the Helper, the Spirit of truth, helps us love Jesus by continually telling us the truth that life is all about a relationship with God and by encouraging that relationship.

The Spirit here can be compared to a matchmaker - not the kind that is out for a profit but the kind that knows exactly what, or, rather, who we need. We need God, and the Spirit gets us together with him.

## Love through the Spirit

John 14:21-24:

*(21) "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will disclose myself to him." (22) Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord what then has happened that you are going to disclose yourself to us and not to the world?" (23) Jesus answered and said to 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 abode with him. (24) He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."*

Again, we see obedience to Jesus linked to love for Jesus. But something else is added here: love from the Father and love from Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that someone who loves him will also be loved by the Father and by Jesus.

Love for Jesus is not a condition for being loved by God, for John clearly states that God loves all, even those who don't love him (John 3:16). Note the verb tenses place this love from the Father and from the Son in the future. Again, this is a reference to the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples will receive a particular expression of the already-existing love of God. This is evident because the Father and Son's future love is in the same series with Jesus' future revelation of himself to those who love him. As we have seen, this revelation to them is connected with his returning in the person of the Spirit ("I am coming to you" - verse 18; "... but you will behold me" - verse 19). A similar series of three future events in verse 23 culminates with the Father and the Son's making a dwelling place in the one who loves

Jesus - another reference to the indwelling Spirit.

The Father's love for us and Jesus' love for us, then, are expressed through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. Earlier we saw that the Spirit creates and encourages our relationship with God. Now we see even more clearly what kind of relationship with God it is: It's a love relationship predicated on his love for us. The Spirit, then, shows us how much we are loved by the Father. He shows us how much we are loved by Jesus. He opens our eyes to see God's heart for us.

The Holy Spirit can be compared to a mail carrier. He delivers God's letters to us every day. A combination of emotions often rises within me as I approach my mail box. On the one hand, I'm hopeful for good news. On the other hand, I'm wary of bad news. What kind of mail does the Spirit deliver? From the looks of things in verses 21 through 23, they're love letters. Passionate love letters. God writes us love letters, and the Holy Spirit delivers them. If I knew that a love letter from God was awaiting me each time I approached the mail box, my heart would be filled with anticipation. The Holy Spirit is delivering such messages constantly.

As we see more of the depth of God's love for us, we fall more deeply in love with him. What of necessity follows after love for God? Obedience. The Father's love for us and the Son's love for us encourage a deepening love for Jesus. And only those who love Jesus keep his commands.

Note that in all this, obedience is contingent on love for Jesus (verses 15, 21 and 24). Much is often made of the "power" of the Holy Spirit enabling the believer to obey. Much is made of it in scripture as well. But when power, or ability, is treated in a way that circumvents love, there is no power. Clearly in these verses, love is power. We have the power to obey because we love Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us power by giving us love for Jesus. He gives us love for Jesus by showing us how much God loves us. The Spirit of truth tells us the truth of God's love for us. Thus we see the linkage of truth, love and power.

If you're like me, you fall into this trap: When stuck in patterns of disobedience, and miserable because of it, I pray, "Lord, help me obey!" That's a prayer for power without love. That's a prayer that avoids relationship. It's a legalistic prayer that betrays a fleshly motive: I want to obey in order to meet a standard that, once met, will make me feel better about myself. Or so I hope. Where's love in all this? Nowhere. I'm not interested in love; I'm interested in performance. That's because, as I've come to realize, I'm afraid of love. I'm afraid of intimacy. I'm afraid of relationship - with God most of all. So I unwittingly contrive crafty prayers that make me think I'm doing the righteous thing. But it's far from righteous, for it has nothing to do with Christ's love, which I'm intent on avoiding. A better prayer, when stuck in patterns of disobedience, would be, "Lord, show me your love!"

Consider the two approaches to life represented in the chart on the next page. The first is spiritual, the second fleshly. In the spiritual approach, the Holy Spirit shows us the truth of Jesus' love for us, which creates love for Jesus, which motivates obedience to Jesus. In the fleshly approach, we desire obedience not because Jesus loves us or because we love Jesus but because we want to feel better about ourselves. Then we attempt to enlist the Holy Spirit in our self-oriented desire to feel better by asking him to empower obedience. Note how the false version of obedience in the fleshly approach moves us in the opposite direction of true obedience and as far away from both love from Jesus and love for Jesus as possible. The fleshly approach wants nothing to do with true love, which it is frightened of.

John, in his narrative, again returns to the subplot, "What about the world?" Judas, not to be confused with Judas Iscariot, bypasses the things Jesus said about love in verse 21 and seizes onto disclosure. Like us, he avoids love. In his messianic program, Jesus should disclose his identity to the world and begin ruling. Judas thinks that would make him feel better.

But what Judas needs is for Jesus to disclose himself to Judas. We don't need Jesus to disclose himself to the world. We think that would make us feel better. Maybe then everyone else will start behaving the way they're supposed to behave. Maybe then people will treat us better. Maybe then people will understand us. So we think. This approach is a different twist on the same fleshly approach as depicted in the chart above, only it focuses on others' obedience, not our own. We need Jesus to disclose himself not to them but to us. Our needs are relational, and they are God-oriented. We need to see the love of Jesus more clearly.

Judas wants to know: "Lord, what then has happened that you are going to disclose yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answers the question in the order it was addressed: "us," then "the world."

He'll disclose himself to the one who loves him, as evidenced by that person's obedience. He'll disclose himself through the Father's love for the person and will come with the Father to dwell in that person. Each of the disciples are in this category. For them, this disclosure will take place when the Spirit comes. For believers today, this as already happened and continues to happen, as the Spirit shows us more of Jesus.

But Jesus will not disclose himself through the Spirit to the person who does not love him. Thus the line of demarcation between disciples of Jesus and the world is drawn along the line of love. Disciples love Jesus. People of the world do not. So the world is shut out, excluded from the Spirit and therefore excluded from God, because it doesn't love Jesus. For now.

### **Instruction through the Spirit**

John 14:25-29:

*(25) These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. (26) But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (27) Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (28) You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. (29) And now I have told you before it comes to pass that when it comes to pass, you may believe."*

Jesus is speaking with his disciples while abiding, or dwelling, with them. Again, this is temple talk. God dwells with his people. Another name for Jesus is Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Soon he will not be dwelling with them, when he goes to the Father. When he returns he will dwell in them through the Holy Spirit.

Again, discussion of the Holy Spirit ensues after a discussion of obedience stemming from love. The Spirit here is seen as a teacher. It's important that we understand who he's teaching first. The Spirit teaches the disciples, later to become the apostles. He will also call to the apostles' minds what Jesus said. The result of this will be the epistles and the gospels - the word of God. So the Spirit teaches us through the word of God, which he breathed out through the prophets and apostles. He is the Spirit of truth, and the truth is in the word. And the Spirit is in us, enabling the truth of the word to penetrate our hearts. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:15, "he who is spiritual appraises all things," meaning the one in whom the Spirit dwells can relate the word of God to life.

The Spirit here can be compared to a teacher. We've all been to enough schools to know that there aren't that many really good teachers. When we find one, we rejoice. The Holy Spirit is the best teacher. He has the best subject matter: God. And he has the best teaching tool: the word of God.

Connected with the gift of the Spirit is peace. Jesus says he is leaving them with peace. Earlier he said he will not "leave" them as orphans, a reference to his coming to them in the Spirit. This peace Jesus gives, just as the Father gives the Spirit (John 15:16). So this peace is also related to the Spirit's ministry in us. Jesus calls this peace "my peace," which is not like the world's. What's the difference? Peace is connected with the Spirit, and the Spirit is about relationship. The peace of Jesus is a relational peace; the peace of the world is a circumstantial peace. We find peace, or well-being, in an intimate relationship with God. The only peace the world knows is a fragile peace that crumbles when the winds of change blow.

Then Jesus tells them, "Let not your heart be troubled," just as he did in John 14:1. Their troubled hearts then, as now, relate to his impending departure. The answer then was to understand that Jesus was leaving only to prepare a dwelling place in the Father's house for them. That was about relationship with God that would ensue on the Day of Pentecost and which has ensued for us. It's also about relationship here, in verse 27, for in the next verse Jesus talks about "coming to you." The answer to a troubled heart is a

relationship with God. That doesn't mean a relationship with God eliminates troubles; on the contrary, troubles lead us into relationship.

Relationship with God also addresses a particular kind of trouble: fear. The impending departure of Jesus caused the disciples to be afraid of loss. When Jesus is arrested, it will cause them to fear for their lives. Fear of all kind tends to grip us - fear of loss, fear of death, fear of losing control, fear of intimacy. But fear loses its foothold in the face of a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus, which the Holy Spirit creates and fosters.

Then Jesus returns to love again - the disciples' love, or lack thereof, for him. The construction of the conditional clause in verse 28 suggests that they were not, in fact, loving him. This is the first suggestion in the discourse that this is the case. Up until now, there seems to be no question that the disciples love Jesus. Now, in some way, their love for him is apparently lacking. It doesn't concern their overall love for Jesus per se; it concerns their specific response to his impending departure and return. They pick up on the "departure" part but miss the "return" part. When Jesus comes to them again in the Spirit, he will be with them in a much more personal, intimate manner than he is with them now. He will dwell in them, not beside them.

It would seem that Jesus' way of questioning their love for him would eventually generate a response such as this: "What's he talking about? Of course we love him. That means that if we love him, and we do, what he's telling us about going to the Father and coming to us is somehow good news because we get to be with Jesus, the one we love, in a more intimate - and eternal - way. Let us therefore do as he says: Rejoice!"

They should rejoice not only because Jesus is going to the Father but because "the Father is greater than I." The last reference to the Father was in verse 26, where Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be sent by the Father in the name of Jesus. In verse 16, Jesus said he would ask the Father to give them the Holy Spirit. Jesus derives his authority from the Father, so the Father in general is greater in authority and specifically greater in authority in the sphere of sending the Spirit (although in John 15:26, Jesus says he himself sends the Spirit as well). Jesus is going to the Father, who will send the Spirit. The reason to rejoice, then, is that Jesus will be with them in the person of the Spirit, who will be sent by the Father.

If their love for Jesus is in some way lacking, he'll help them along. Beforehand, he tells them "it" will happen so that when it happens, they may believe. He's helping their faith - giving them reason to believe him and love him. "It" is his going and coming. When he went to the Father, just as he said he would, and when he returned in the Spirit, just as he said he would, the disciples were helped along in their faith and in their love for Jesus.

But what of the world?

### **Testimony through the Spirit**

John 14:30-31:

*30) "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in me;  
 (31) but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go from here."*

The ruler of the world, Satan, is coming, so Jesus is leaving. Satan influenced Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus, culminating in the execution of Jesus and his departure. Lest anyone gets the idea that Satan's arrival is the cause of Jesus' departure, Jesus says that Satan "has nothing in me" and therefore has no ability to influence Jesus. Jesus is not of the world, so the ruler of the world has no claim on him (John 8:23, 18:36). In fact, Jesus makes it clear in verse 31 that his decisions are based on obedience to the Father and nothing else. He's leaving, through the cross, in obedience to the Father. Satan is simply a pawn, an unwitting agent in God's plan of redemption.

Jesus is obeying the Father's commandment in order that the world may know that he loves the Father. "Commandment" is singular. In the context, the commandment concerns his departure, which means the

cross. His departure through the cross is a witness to the world regarding his relationship to the Father - that he is the way to the Father. So the world, apparently excluded from God earlier in the text, now has a glimmer of hope.

But how does the world see that hope? Jesus says, "Arise, let us go from here." This probably means that Jesus and the disciples left the upper room at this point. But John, the author, has a fondness for conveying spiritual truth in physical descriptions. Such was the case in John 13:30, where he recorded that it was night - a reference to both physical and spiritual night. For the disciples, "going from here" means going as Jesus goes - in obedience motivated by love for God. Earlier, Judas asked Jesus why he was going to disclose himself "to us" and not "to the world." Here, in the context of a witness to the world regarding the way to the Father, Jesus says, "Let *us* go from here." Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, will disclose himself to the disciples, and the disciples are the ones who will disclose Jesus to the world. They are the ones who will preach the gospel in word and deed. When they did, the world took notice, and the world was changed.

Note that verse 31 returns once again to the theme of obedience motivated by love, bracketing it with verse 15 and making John 14:15-31 a literary unit. Each time love and obedience have been mentioned, treatment of the Holy Spirit has followed. By now we expect it. We see love and obedience in verse 31, but where's the Spirit? The Spirit is in "us," who go from here. The Spirit takes up residence in us. Each of us is a temple, and a mobile one at that. We carry the Spirit of God with us wherever we go. That's how the world can know God.

The Spirit here can be compared to a broadcaster who spreads the news of Jesus Christ to the world. The Spirit's medium for his news is the people in whom he dwells.

### **The relational Spirit**

The Spirit creates and encourages our relationship with God; the Spirit tells us how much we're loved by God; the Spirit instructs us about our love relationship with God; and the Spirit uses us to testify to the world. Notice that each aspect of the Spirit's ministry concerns people's relationship with God. The Spirit is relational.

The Spirit of truth teaches us the truth about God's love for us, creating love for God that manifests itself in obedience. Our obedience, motivated by his love for us and our love for him, is God's witness to the world.

- SCG, 1995

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