

The Body as the Dwelling Place of God

“God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not us” (II Corinthians 4:6,7).

Whether body or building or temple or city, the ultimate reality of life is that humans are designed to be eternal abiding places of God. The most essential building blocks of the universe are invisible units of energy. In effect, the universe was created out of nothing—*ex nihilo*. The source of that energy was a “Word” from God—He spoke the universe into existence. That Word was Christ, *“In the beginning was the Word (Logos) . . . and the Word was God.”*

So then what is the place of humans? Why did God create them? What is their purpose on the earth? If God existed for eternity as a Spirit Being, why at a point in time did He find it necessary or important to create a material universe with space/time inhabitants? Was He not complete within Himself? These are very deep questions and probably not ones that we can fully answer until we ourselves are glorified. However, there are certain statements in the Scripture that indicate something of our place and purpose. The key word is “glory.” The text quoted above indicates that God, who brought forth the universe, has sent forth His Spirit into hearts, in the presence of Jesus Christ, to make us partakers of that glory.

But what does it mean to be filled with the glory of God? What does glory mean? Glory is another of those words that has been used so widely, with so many different applications, as to be almost unusable with any kind of precision. In reality, the word can only be sensed in the spirit, which, of course, is what the text says. The spirit senses the meaning of God’s glory. The Psalmist says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God and the Firmament showeth His handiwork”* (19:1). The reality of the universe is that it is composed of energy. God is the source of that energy. All that the universe is, in all of its magnificence and incomprehensible power, is the manifestation of God. It is not itself God as the Pantheists would have us believe, but it is God’s power extended to a material existence. The Prophet Isaiah reaches for words to describe his own moment of revelation—*“I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim . . . and one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory”* (Isaiah 6:1-3). And still our mind cannot comprehend His glory. God Himself must reveal it to our spirits. And so the text before us makes it clear. Our spirits sense what the glory of God is, but our minds are unable to grasp it. In fact, we beggar it when we try to define it. Jesus Christ is the Life and Light of the universe *“He is the image of the invisible God, the first emerging of all creation; because by Him were created all things in heaven and upon the earth visible and invisible... all things were created through Him and for His sake. And He is before all things and all things hold together in Him . . .”* (Colossians 1:15-17).

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels . . . According to Peter in his second Epistle (1:4) the believers are actually *“partakers of the Divine nature.”*

Becoming partakers of the Divine nature does not mean being “good like God.” The word “nature” is the Greek word φύσεως (*phuseos*) which has to do with His essential Being and not with His characteristics. Many are confused by the exhortation in Matthew 5:48—“*Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*” Some people assume that that means we should behave as God would behave—an impossibility. The Greek word for “perfect” is τέλειος (*teleios*), which means “consummated” or “fulfilled.” God is fulfilled in the sense that He is all that His Deity implies. When we possess Christ, we are all that our human persons are intended to be as identified with God. To repeat an analogy that we have used before, an automobile is intended to transport passengers. It is fulfilled when it accomplishes this purpose. It may have many flaws in the body and the engine, but that is incidental, to its main purpose. Just so, our central purpose is to be vessels or abodes of the Spirit of God. As humans, we may have many flaws, but insofar as we possess Christ, we are fulfilled as God is fulfilled. To put upon humans the burden of perfection (as many groups do) is to fall into the error of the Pharisees—to put upon them “*burdens grievous to be born*” (Matthew 23:4).

Possessing the glory of God transforms the spirit, but not the flesh. Paul continually reminds us of this throughout his Epistles. “*In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing*” (Romans 7:18). To the Philippians he said—“*We are (they) . . . (who) have no confidence in the flesh*” (3:3). To the Corinthians he said, “*I had no rest in my flesh . . . without were fightings, within were fears . . .*” (II Corinthians 7:5). Even Jesus said, “*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Matthew 26:41). But such has been the experience of believers from the beginning. All efforts at human perfection inevitably succumb to the overwhelming inadequacy of the “clay pots” which we are. One day these “earthly cocoons” will be discarded and then we shall have glorified vessels as God has ultimately intended for us. “*It doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” (I John 3:2).

That the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. However perfect the flesh may aspire to be, it can never be a substitute for the power of God in our spirits. That is the only power by which we can become “dwelling places of God.”

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