

Death, Immortality, and Heaven: No. 10

Intermingled Spirits

In this essay, we will assume that you consider the One God to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent -- all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere -- and that man has neither of those qualities. You will also agree that God is Spirit.

“God is spirit” (John 4:24). *“Now the Lord is the Spirit”* .. *“..this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”* (2 Cor. 3:17-18). David prayed, *“Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me”* in which literary parallelism he identifies the Spirit of God as the Presence of God (Psa. 51:11). At the same time David recognized that God is present everywhere and all knowing when he ponders, *“Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?”* (Psa. 139:7) and then elaborates on those thoughts. The Holy Spirit of God is certainly not new to the new covenant writings but the Almighty has manifested his Presence by demonstrations of his Spirit in all ages.

I pondered using the title, “Prepositional Concepts of Religion” for this essay. Due to our fleshly, earthly nature, we try to relate spiritual things by position using such prepositions as “in, into, through, with, by, above, up, and upon.” These must all be studied for less than literal meanings for spiritual relationships are not positional. Here we will introduce some exploration of that concept.

Is God located in some defined spot of the universe? Is he excluded from any part of it? Is there any life that derives from some source other than his presence? Is not God’s Spirit manifested in every conceivable thing whether we see it as animate or inanimate? Is not the Spirit of God in every living person? Here I am using prepositions! His Spirit is not IN us so much as our very spirit IS a manifestation of the Spirit of God.

Is the omnipresent God sharing his presence with an adversary personalized as Satan? Or has God “roped off” a territory for such a supposed being? Or, rather than evil being personalized, is not evil the abuse of the freedom God has given man? In man’s mind evil is conceived when he seeks selfish independence from God, for *“..each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death”* (James 1:14-15). Sin originates in us, for if a devil makes you do it, you are not responsible!

Let us now go on with our prepositions. As a disciple your life *“is hid with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3). We are in God when we are in Christ. We are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). In being baptized into Christ, we put him on: *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* making us *“all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal. 3:27-28). If his word abides in us, *“then you will abide in the Son and in the Father”* (1 John 2:22). Since the Spirit is God’s Spirit, then when we abide in the Father we also live in the Spirit.

The disciple is in God, his Spirit, and in Christ. Now we see a further mingling as they also live in us. *“But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of God does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you ...”* (Rom. 8:9-11). Referring to the corporate group in

Corinth, Paul reminds them, “*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*” And since they are a temple of God as a group, they also were temples individually (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:9). I hope you have noticed all these concepts being represented as positional. Physical things may be positioned literally, but prepositions can only point to figurative relationships in reference to spiritual matters. For example, being IN Christ denotes a spiritual relationship rather than a physical one, and the Holy Spirit being IN us points to a relationship rather than the Spirit being located somewhere in our physical body. These are expressions of mutual spiritual identification.

Jesus gave a powerful emphasis to a mutual identity and relationship -- the intermingling of the divine and the human -- in his intercessory prayer in John 17. Notice the conceptual spiritual relationships expressed in literal terms by literal prepositions: “*I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. ... that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one ...*” (John 17:20-23). These prepositions may describe a multiple vitamin tablet where various physical elements are intermixed but they may not be as clear in expressing a mutual identity and intermingling of Spirits/spirits as though they are positioned together physically.

In old covenant history, though God’s presence and relationship with his people were manifested in different ways, he was working no less with them then than he is with us today. In fact, some of the metaphors and prepositions employed in new covenant writings allude back to God’s relationship with Israel. He is the fire and cloud that was over them in the wilderness, the rock from which living water flowed, and the daily manna in their bodies that sustained them.

While in the wilderness Israel could meet the Presence in the tent of meeting (the tent of witness - Acts 7:44). As a settled people, the temple was the place of the holy Presence of the Almighty. Now the redeemed ones are the temple in whom his Spirit dwells -- the intermingling of spirits to which we have already referred. That being true, we are not to understand that to be a literal temple made either of stone or fleshly bodies of men and women. The concept is figurative.

Stephen’s hearers were not ready for such figurative meanings. He reminded them of the tent of witness in the wilderness which was brought into the land and used until the days of David. David then “*asked leave to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest’*” (Acts 7:44-50). Disclaiming the temple as being God’s dwelling place was blasphemy in their ears! They needed to hear no more! They attacked him like fierce, gnashing beasts and stoned him while he envisioned God and Jesus looking on. Will we receive the same reaction today if we suggest that literal fleshly bodies as figurative temples may not be “*the place of my rest*”? If God’s residence was not in the literal temple, can we rightly conclude that it is in a figurative temple?

By these thoughts we are not implying that the Spirit of God is inactive in our lives but that our entire being is encompassed by the divine in an intermingled identity.

Even the pagan Athenians were more receptive of the concept of a relational God than the Jews had been. Paul explained that God “*does not live in shrines made by man.*” But for those who would seek him in relationship rather than a place, he assured them, “*he is not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being;’ as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring’*” (Acts 17:22-33). So it is ill-conceived to “lift someone up to the Father in prayer,” for in God that person lives and breathes already. Because God made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, and since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything, he has a relationship with each person on earth. From this perspective Paul concluded that all persons are accountable to God in judgment.

God’s interaction with each person, whether saint or sinner, cannot be defined by prepositions which can only accommodate our physical senses. We will not labor in this essay to make all distinctions as to how God’s Spirit relates and manifests himself to the untaught, the unbeliever, the disbeliever, and the believer. We can be sure, however, that all are of concern to God for “*None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living*” (Rom. 14:7-9). “*But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:8).

This is a slight revision of FR 201 published two years ago. These inconclusive thoughts have been written, not as dogma, but as an invitation to search for deeper meanings. In thinking of death, immortality, and heaven as we have been doing, we must look beyond these prepositional concepts. We should think in terms of relationship with the One God. Guilt alienates us. Free of guilt, we are reconciled. Those who reject Christ live and die in alienation from life itself. Those who accept his grace live and die in full relationship with God and are then freed from mortality when the physical is left behind. It is not a positional matter so that we go to a place called heaven. It is a matter of continued and uninterrupted identity with the Spirit God free from the alienating effects of guilt.

Since we can have little true concept of Eternal Spirit, how can we have a true concept of eternal relationship with that God – which is what heaven is? []

(Cecil Hook: February 2004; revised February 2006)

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

NOTE: My booth in the Teague Center at the ACU Lectureship will be C-10. Since Leroy Garrett will be much involved in the Restoration Forum, he may not spend any time at the booth as I indicated before. Come by for a visit.