When we put our faith in Jesus Christ and invited him into our hearts, it is the person of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ), not really Jesus, who came to dwell in us. Jesus is enjoying better accommodations in heaven. But, to fully appreciate this new reality, I’m afraid you’re going to need to be visited by the “Ghost of Israel Past,” as we take an historical digression through Scripture.

We begin in a strange place with a rather strange passage. Let’s look at the book of Acts, the last verses of chapter one. The disciples must choose a replacement for Judas, the weasel who ratted on Jesus:

So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then, they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:23-26)

So, what in the world does this have to do with the Holy Spirit? I’ll tell you later. For now, just cut and paste this passage on your mental clipboard. Sit back, while I tell you a story:

OUT OF EGYPT

It’s about 1446 B.C. and as the Israelites venture out of Egypt to find the land God has promised to them, they stop at Mount Sinai, where God’s presence dwells. This fact was impressed upon the people by rumblings, smoke, and fire that came from the mountain. At Mt. Sinai, God tells Moses, the Israelites’ leader, his presence will leave the mountain. He will go with them to the Promised Land. God reveals to Moses that a portable temple known as the Tabernacle, or the Tent of Meeting will house his presence. Chapter upon chapter, then, describe the exact instructions for making this Tabernacle given to Moses. The descriptions are worth a careful read ... just not by me (They are extremely detailed!).

That which will distinguish this wandering nation from all nations of the world is that with them goes the very presence of God. They will be known as the “people of His presence.” As they camp along the journey, equally symbolic, the Tabernacle is always erected in the very midst of the tribes and clans of Israel—God’s presence is in their midst. Now, when they first erect the Tabernacle, they do not have to wonder long if God’s presence is, in fact, in their midst. In Exodus 40:34–35, we read:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Was it always that smoky in the Tabernacle? No, this happened only at the inaugural erection of the Tabernacle. God gave them a visual aid that his
presence was truly among them. It was quite a thing to conceive that the God of the universe “tabernacled” or “dwelled” among men. When I picture this scene, I imagine going to sleep at night in my sleeping bag and jammies, looking over at the Tabernacle, glowing like a nightlight, knowing nothing in the world could possibly harm me as I slept.

THE TEMPLE

Now, if you were paying attention you, will remember that I said that the Tabernacle was like a portable Temple. It was constructed a good bit like an enormous tent. God’s place of dwelling among the Israelites would remain in this portable housing for about 450 years until King David’s son, Solomon, built a more permanent structure, the actual Temple. Let’s look at that next:

It’s now about 980 B.C. Solomon hears a voice saying, “If you build it, he will come.” No. Sorry. Wrong story. Solomon doesn’t hear that at all. But, God does tell him to build the Temple in Jerusalem as the permanent dwelling place for the Lord’s presence among His people. Solomon builds it, and on Inauguration Day, or the day of dedication for the Temple, the same amazing phenomenon happens again. Once again, there is no doubt in anyone’s mind that God’s presence has filled the Temple. As we read:

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.” (2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

The Temple was the hub of Israel. It was the symbol of God’s presence dwelling among them. Everyone traveled to the Temple several times of year, because this is where the presence of God dwelled.

Here’s where the story could get confusing, if you’re not paying close attention. Several hundred years later (about 600 B.C.), due to continued disobedience to God, the Israelites are exiled from their land by invading Babylonians. Jerusalem is ransacked and Solomon’s Temple is demolished. In their exile, preachers, called prophets, tell the Israelites that they will once again be restored to their land. They will again enjoy the presence of God in their midst. Sure enough, 70 years later, through God’s miraculous provision, the Israelites are enabled to return to their homeland, Israel. Their first order of business is to rebuild the Temple, the symbol of God’s presence.

THE REBUILT TEMPLE

So, they rebuild the Temple (now about 520 B.C.), but with little resources. It’s a pretty scrawny looking Temple. It looks more like a movie theatre than a house of worship. Nevertheless, they dedicate their new Temple just as Solomon did. But, low and behold ... nothing. No sparks. No smoke, not even caps. This disappointment, along with more messages from the prophets, inspired expectation that there was another Temple yet to come. A future Temple, more glorious than even Solomon had constructed would come. When the Messiah came, he would be the one to rebuild the Temple and God’s Spirit would be poured out in an abundance that they had never experienced or could imagine (Haggai 2).

THE COMING OF CHRIST

We now flash ahead to 32 A.D. Israel is once more dominated by another foreign power, the Roman Empire. Jesus, the Messiah, had come. He was crucified and resurrected. Many probably wondered that, if he had been the Messiah, why was there no new Temple? Why were the Israelites not liberated? Why was God’s Spirit not poured out in overflowing measure like the prophets had foretold? Now, think back to that passage we began with:

So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:23-26)

These are the final verses in the first chapter of the book of Acts. The timing is right after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The disciples are casting lots to see who would replace Judas. This was a common way of discerning God’s will at the time. Then, we read Acts, chapter two. Here, God’s Spirit is poured out like a fire hydrant. Everyone starts acting crazy and
everyone thinks those affected are crazy. But, they’re not. We read:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

From this point on, if you were to go ahead and read through the book of Acts, you will see a whole new dynamic. Throughout the rest of the book of Acts, we read “and the Spirit told them to go here,” and “the Spirit led them here,” and the disciples were “filled with the Spirit,” and “spoke in the Spirit.” People were being healed. The disciples were preaching powerful messages, and people believed that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah. It was apparent that God’s presence was once again powerfully in the midst of his people. His protection, wisdom, direction, power was all back, and in ways more powerful than ever experienced in the history of God’s people.

Now, if you’re a Jewish Christian—like the disciples—you’d be ecstatic. The anticipation of the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit, throughout the Old Testament, is a hallmark of the Messiah’s reign. You would finally be able to tell your neighbors, “Hah! Told you so! Jesus is the Messiah, skeptic breath.” But you would also have one big question: Where is the new glorious Temple the Messiah was going to build to house God’s Spirit?

Then, it dawns on you that you are the new temple. God’s presence dwells within you. His Holy Spirit is inside of you!

Now, I know that was a terribly long story. But, you simply must appreciate this amazing truth: God dwells in you! And, by gosh, if I have to teach you 1,500 years of Jewish history to make you see it, I’ll do it. Yes, we are different from non-Christians because of what we believe. But, what also separates us is that God resides within us.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

So, what does it mean that the Holy Spirit lives in you? Are there implications? I hardly know where to begin, so let’s start where the Bible does:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)

To the apostle Paul, the most obvious implication of this truth is that because God now resides within you, sexual immorality is out of the question. Viewing pornography, from Paul’s perspective, is like showing an adult slide show or movie on the walls of the Temple. Are you nuts?! In this passage, Paul basically says, “You know the sexually immoral things you’ve been doing? Well, God’s not just simply aware of them, but you are dragging his holy presence into the mud with you. God lives in you, and you’d better think twice about what you do with your body. It doesn’t just belong to you, now. It’s his home.” It is true that Jesus suffered terribly for your sins, but Paul’s point is that the Holy Spirit is currently suffering because of your sin when you engage in ungodly activities. As Christ suffered with and for your sins, the Holy Spirit now suffers with and for your sin.

Grace, encouragement, forgiveness, imperative commands, and rebuke are all things we need to hear at different times to spur us on in our commitment to purity. Abstaining from sexual impurity falls under the category of imperative commands: Stay away from it! But, as this article has tried to show, it is so much more than simply staying away from it. Attached is a powerful reason why: you are the new temple. You are the new place where God’s presence resides. As God’s dwelling place, don’t bring impurity into the Lord’s presence.*

* Some of the concepts found in this article are from Gordon Fee’s work, “God’s Empowering Presence.”

Chapter excerpt taken from “Flesh” (CruPress).