

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

God's Presence and Your Sanctification

Scripture: John 17:22–23; Philippians 2:13

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The Lord's presence in the lives of His people is a major theme throughout redemptive history. He is not aloof or distant. In fact, this reality is so important in the mind of God that He takes the name *Immanuel*—God with us—upon Himself.

And that reality of His presence with His people informs and defines His work in our lives. We see this clearly in Paul's description of the process of spiritual growth in Philippians 2:12–13,

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

The phrase, "God who is at work *in* you" points us to His presence in believers' lives and helps us understand His role in our sanctification.

God with Us

The preposition "in" is often featured in Paul's writings as he records the beloved truth that Jesus Christ dwells *in believers* (cf. Romans 8:9–10; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27). The Lord Himself spoke of His indwelling presence:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:22–23)

David understood and gloried in the reality of the Lord's continual presence with him: "You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:3). The Lord was David's Shepherd, who never forsook or neglected him or failed to protect him and abundantly provided for his needs (Psalm 23).

In ways that are far beyond human comprehension, God indwells His people, both as individuals and collectively in the church. Jesus promised the disciples and all future believers:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17; cf. Acts 1:8)

Remembering God's Presence

Perhaps because of their immaturity and worldliness, Paul reminded the Corinthians of that truth at least twice. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16), he asked rhetorically. Later he added, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

In fact, Paul leaned heavily on the presence of God in him when describing his own ministry: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). He understood his ministry as the fruit of Christ’s promise to His disciples prior to His ascension:

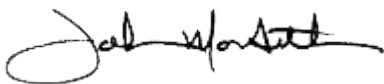
And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The author of Hebrews similarly understood that it is the Lord who “equip[s] you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight” (Hebrews 13:21). Our good works are not our own—they are the product of God’s work through Christ and His Spirit in us.

False Gods Fall Short

False gods differ in many ways, but they all share the common traits of remoteness, transcendence, and aloofness. With them there is no comfort in sorrow, help in affliction, or empowerment for living. Just like the Pharisees, false religions “tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matthew 23:4). Man-made religions impose arbitrary standards and impossible expectations without providing the power to achieve them.

The God of the Bible is just the opposite. He loves. He cares. He takes up residence in the life of the believer. He is not an overbearing despot who makes demands on impotent people who are unable to comply, and then crushes them because of their non-compliance. Instead, He comes to live *in them*, supernaturally supplying grace and mercy and the means so that they can live lives of obedience.



(Adapted from [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians](#).)

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