



PART 1: Connecting with God

CHAPTER 5

Unprecedented Advantage

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised His disciples an unprecedented advantage. He said,

*“It is **to your advantage** that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”*

(John 16:7 NKJ)

Jesus fulfilled this promise by sending His Spirit to escort us beyond previous thresholds in history. Filled with the Spirit, our advantage extends beyond what apostles and prophets experienced long ago. We are standing on the shoulders of some and drafting behind the momentum of others. Patriarchs and matriarchs connected with God in extraordinary ways—but they are not the final standard to which we aspire. Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, and Paul did not set the boundary for our relationship with Christ. Ancient relationships do not dictate what God offers us today.

Throughout human history, our Heavenly Father has been expanding the opportunity to know Jesus and encounter His presence. Advantages for this season have yet to reach their zenith. Our union with Christ in this age offers special benefits. By His Spirit, we gain special wisdom and revelation along with insight and discernment. Ultimately, we may connect with God beyond what Adam and Eve experienced in Eden—before sin separated them.

Progressive Revelation

This is not as good as it gets—the best is yet to come! We have barely scratched the surface in knowing Jesus. A progressive revelation of Him seeks to emerge as God extends Himself toward us in spirit and truth.

The birth of Christ shattered every preconceived notion for divine interaction. After thousands of years of waiting, the presence of God arrived in person. He offered an unprecedented occasion for humans to experience the truth. Jesus did not use a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a glory cloud, dream, vision, or angel. He shattered every conventional norm in time and space for a divine connection. All at once, Jesus made connecting with God possible through natural senses. He boldly declared, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”.¹

Sinful men, women, and children saw God in a human body. Some heard His voice, touched His skin, and like us, experienced a mystical connection with His body and blood through Holy Communion.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus announced the advent of another new season. The memory of one season change had barely begun to formulate when Jesus announced the arrival of the next season. His parting message reverberates with immense significance. Jesus said,

*“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (Acts 1:7-9 NKJ)*

The last statement that Jesus uttered before ascending into heaven links an epoch season-change with an expanded opportunity to connect

¹ John 14:9 ESV

with God for strength. Jesus finalized His physical presence on earth with that keynote address. We now live in a fundamentally different world today because our Heavenly Father changed the season. By connecting with the Holy Spirit, we plug into a unique power source—unique in scope and unique in distribution.

When God opened this heavenly threshold, He enabled regular people to connect with the Holy Spirit on a massive scale. The resulting power shift changed the spiritual climate throughout the world. It restrained evil, which may have escalated beyond our worst nightmare. By receiving the Holy Spirit, redeemed sinners receive supernatural power to exert a far-reaching and unquenchable influence.

When our Heavenly Father institutes a season change, He shatters social norms and transforms religious traditions. With characteristic enthusiasm, Jesus rose from the dead to announce a bold new season. Until that moment, connecting with God was a highly selective and rather exclusive affair. Personal encounters in any form were exceedingly rare. Occasionally God revealed Himself in visible form, appearing as a theophany to: Adam (Genesis 3:8); Abraham (Genesis 17:1-4, 9-10, 15-16, 22; Genesis 18:1-3, 10); Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30); Moses (Exodus 3:2-6); Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15); and Daniel (Daniel 3:22-25).

Second-hand encounters through angels and prophets were slightly more common. However, the long season of connecting with God from a distance was over. As the disciples watched Jesus depart from a narrow window in time, a fresh opportunity emerged. Communion with God became an inner reality confirmed with supernatural power.

The season that we now occupy, offers a profound connection opportunity with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Residing within and living throughout, Christ literally abides in us by His Spirit.

the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col 1:26-27 ESV)

After Jesus ascended into heaven, our Heavenly Father adjusted the parameters for divine interaction. The presence of the Holy Spirit now offers power from within. This current season extends unprecedented possibilities in knowing and being—in knowing the truth about God and in being the person that He made us to be, so we can go and do His will around the world.

A Better Connection

When Christ ascended into heaven, He did not place our relationship at a disadvantage. Instead, Jesus said, *“It is **to your advantage** that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper [Parakletos] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”*²

According to the Greek Lexicon from “BibleStudyTools.com”, Parakletos means, in its widest sense:

a helper, succourer, aider, assistant of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom.³

Jesus announced the beginning of an exciting new relationship—one without physical limits or scheduling constraints. His human body abandoned the boundary of being in one place at a time. A comprehensive connection with Jesus transcends our natural senses. The presence of the Holy Spirit now dwells within individuals everywhere and at all times.

On separate occasions, Jesus’ disciples received the Holy Spirit both within and upon their being. Our relationship with Jesus now involves both an internal presence and an external reality.

² John 16:7 NKJ

³ Greek lexicon based on Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary plus others; <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/parakletos.html> (accessed 6-22-12)

After His resurrection, Jesus breathed upon His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-22 NKJ). Before His ascension into heaven Jesus expounded further by saying, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8 NKJ). On the day of Pentecost, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4 NKJ).

Since that initial outpouring, God has been filling ordinary people with His glorious presence. Redeemed sinners now experience the presence of Christ from within. As participants of His divine nature, we are no longer curious spectators. The anointed Christ lives within us as “*the hope of glory*”.⁴ The developing fruit of the Spirit validates His ongoing presence while select gifts of the Spirit confirm His power.

This season-change altered our connection with God dramatically. Pouring out His Spirit on Pentecost enabled redeemed sinners to begin participating in feats of power beyond anything they had experienced before. He empowered weak people with extraordinary strength for an extraordinary cause. Immediate opportunities for spiritual intimacy emerged as the Holy Spirit filled individuals with His presence.

We no longer rely exclusively on types and shadows to connect us with God. Though helpful, metaphors and allegories take a back seat to intimate communion. We are not beholding to a favored prophet or privileged priest to connect us with our Heavenly Father. Because God is omnipresent, the risen Christ does not confine Himself to a sacred temple filled with exclusive religion. Rather than offering limited access to a high priest once a year, Jesus occupies everywhere—He is always available to everyone.

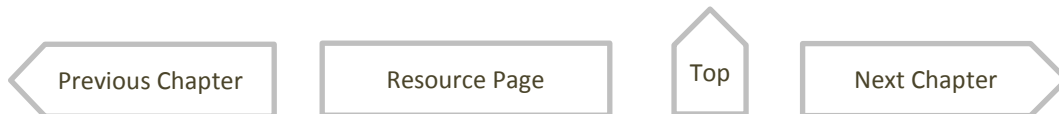
Each human heart redeemed by Christ now serves as the Holy of Holies. God’s presence lives within us—literally not figuratively or symbolically. Paul sums up our triune connection with this blessing:

⁴ Colossians 1:27 NIV

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13:14 NKJ)

We need not accept inferior substitutes for the Holy Spirit's matchless ability to communicate. We are not obligated to settle for trickle down religion or second hand revelation. Jesus said, *"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow **from within** him."*⁵

No one communicates the truth as well as God does. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are surpassing ancient precedents for connecting on His terms. Individuals like Enoch, Moses, and Elijah grew extremely close to God. However, on this side of the cross, we can grow closer. On this side of the resurrection, we can connect more often. On this side of the ascension, we can connect more intimately. As children of God, we are privileged to possess an important advantage. Jesus activated this advantage after He ascended to His Father.



⁵ John 7:38 NIV