**Your Heart, Christ’s Home**

**Ephesians 3:17**

**January 31, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. We find ourselves again this morning studying Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3, and we are specifically considering his request that the Father would strengthen them with power in the inner man.
      1. As we noted last week, this is no time for weakness, this is no time for cowardliness, this is no time for laziness in our Christianity.
      2. What we need is the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
      3. We need to be strengthened within by the Spirit of God in accordance with the riches of His glorious might.
      4. We are engaged in spiritual warfare, as were the Ephesians, and we need divine power to overcome and achieve victory because the Christian life is a life that no one is able to live in their own strength.
      5. We need the power of God.
   2. The question should inevitably arise at this point, *Why?*
      1. Why does it matter how we fight this warfare?
         1. Why is it important that we defeat sin in our lives?
         2. Why should we care about overcoming the world and the flesh and the devil?
      2. And there is the answer that is always correct: We should care because we want to live for the glory of God.
         1. And that is true; we do want to glorify God in our lives.
         2. The great and chief end of man is to glorify God.
         3. But that’s only half of the answer to that great catechism’s opening question.
      3. It goes on to say that not only is our chief purpose for existing to glorify God but to enjoy God forever.
         1. We were created to have fellowship with Him
         2. We were created to be in relationship with God so that we are both glorifying Him and enjoying Him and His presence in our lives.
      4. In verse 17 of Ephesians 3, we see the goal Paul was aiming it when he prayed the Ephesians would have strength in the inner man by the power of the Spirit.
         1. The result of this prayer being answered is Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith.
         2. That is to say, the result of being empowered by the Spirit of God to live the Christian life in the power of God for the glory of God is so that we might have a heart where Christ is at home.
         3. We want to be empowered by the Spirit to defeat sin because we want to be near to Christ.
         4. We want deep and abiding fellowship with Christ.
         5. The goal of spiritual power is not merely to rout our spiritual foes but to draw near to our glorious King.
   3. Now, this small statement in v. 17, which really is only half the verse, is so vital we must take the time to consider it this morning.
      1. It is something I think that many Christians have never given much thought to.
      2. It is to many reading this verse a very confusing statement since Paul is writing this to people who are already Christians.
      3. We often hear people summarize becoming a Christian with the phrase, “Ask Jesus into your heart.”
      4. And so it might come as quite a shock to us when we read v. 17, that Paul is praying that Christ would dwell in the hearts of people who are already believers.
      5. Isn’t Christ already there?
      6. Why would Paul pray this for Christian people?
      7. And what is the significance of this prayer for us today?
   4. To understand this statement, I want to answer three basic questions this morning about v. 17. Let’s start with…
2. What is the indwelling of Christ?
   1. We have to start here because, as I said, I think many Christians would be surprised to find Paul praying that Christ would dwell in the hearts of people who are already Christians.
      1. A book came out several years ago entitled, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*.
         1. The premise of the book is how to know that you are a Christian.
         2. If you’re like many people who grew up in a Christian family, you might have prayed a prayer or asked Jesus into your heart many times growing up, unsure if or when He did.
         3. The typical mindset in evangelical Christianity is that we ask Jesus into our hearts when we are converted, not after, because once you are saved, now He is there, dwelling within you.
      2. Part of the problem is that this way of describing conversion, of asking Jesus into your heart, is not really the best way to talk about becoming a Christian, biblically speaking, and so when we come to a phrase like this in Eph 3:17, we are predisposed to misunderstand it because we have been misusing a biblical concept for many years in how we think about salvation and Christianity.
         1. Much of this comes from what Jesus said to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3:20, where Jesus said to the Laodicean church…
            1. Maybe you’ve seen the tract with a picture of a door without a doorknob on the outside, and outside the door a man is standing who is supposed to represent Jesus.
            2. And the tract has the idea that the unbeliever must open the door from within as Jesus helplessly stands outside and waits to be allowed to come into the heart.
            3. That picture comes from a misunderstanding of this passage.
         2. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus is not speaking to people who are pagans but to professing Christians.
            1. He is speaking to those who think of themselves as already saved.
            2. Some of them were and some of them were deceived, but the point is that this is not an evangelistic text written to unbelievers but a rebuke to professing Christians who were not living a humble and obedient Christian life.
            3. In fact, in v. 19 of this passage Jesus seems to indicate that He is telling the Laodiceans these things because He loves them and wants them to repent of their drift toward worldliness.
         3. We need, then, to get rid of the notion that praying that Jesus would dwell in your heart is something related only or even primarily to conversion.
      3. So what is this indwelling of which Paul speaks?
   2. To answer that question, I want to clarify it by showing you first of all some things that it is not.
      1. I hate to begin with the negative, but sometimes we must do so to make sure we clear up any misunderstandings or areas of confusion; we want to be very clear about what this is and what it isn’t.
      2. First, this indwelling is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
         1. We read about this baptism in the Spirit, or by the Spirit, in 1 Cor 12:13…
         2. This speaks of something that takes place the moment you are saved.
         3. You are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ the very second you repent and put your faith in Christ.
         4. One significant difference between what Paul talks about in Eph 3:17 and what he talks about in 1 Cor 12:13 is that in the baptism by the Spirit we are baptized into the body of Christ, but in Paul’s prayer in Eph 3:17, Christ comes to dwell within us.
         5. And so we must not equate Eph 3:17 with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that moment we believe and are put into the church of Christ, the body of Christ.
         6. These are different things, different experiences, different works of God.
      3. Second, this must not be confused with what Paul spoke of in Eph 1:13, when he talked about how we have been sealed with or by the Holy Spirit.
         1. When we believed the gospel, we were given the Holy Spirit to dwell within us.
         2. Part of the reason God has done that for us is to give us assurance that we belong to Him and will be redeemed on the last day.
         3. The Spirit is the guarantee of our future inheritance.
         4. When we see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives – love, joy, peace, and so on – that is God’s assurance to us that we are truly saved, that we truly belong to Him, and that He will fulfill all of His promises to us.
         5. The sealing of the Spirit guarantees the presence of God in our lives, and it is a glorious reality for every believer.
         6. But we must insist that Paul is not speaking of the sealing of the Spirit in Eph 3:17 because that has already happened for the Ephesians.
         7. He does not pray that the Spirit would seal them.
         8. Why would he pray that?
         9. It’s already done.
         10. They have the Spirit dwelling within them already, so Paul must have something else in mind in Eph 3:17.
      4. Third, we need to add that this is not to be equated with the ongoing ministry of the Spirit in our lives, the indwelling of the Spirit.
         1. The Holy Spirit is present in us all the time if we are believers.
         2. In fact, the characteristic mark of the Christian is the presence of the Spirit in our lives.
         3. If we do not have the Spirit dwelling in us, we do not belong to Christ.
         4. Someone might ask, “Well, what about when I sin? Does the Spirit leave me when I sin?”
         5. Absolutely not!
         6. That’s why Paul can say in Eph 4:30…
         7. The Spirit does not come and go because He is the seal of your redemption, so He is always dwelling within you.
         8. Therefore, do not grieve the Spirit as He indwells you at all times, but seek to live a life that honors the Lord.
         9. And so there is this sense in the ministry of the Spirit in our lives where the Spirit is there whether we are causing Him joy or causing Him grief.
         10. We’ll talk more about the distinction between Eph 3:17 and the ongoing ministry of the Spirit in a few minutes.
      5. Fourth, this is not the same thing as the corporate indwelling of the Spirit in the church as the body of Christ.
         1. We saw in Ephesians 2:22 that we are the dwelling of God in the Spirit.
         2. That statement there refers to the church corporately, as the body of Christ.
         3. It is not speaking to us as individuals but to us collectively.
         4. We all as the body of Christ are the dwelling place of God.
         5. There is both the personal indwelling of the Spirit, which I just mentioned above, and the corporate indwelling of the Spirit of God in the church, and Eph 3:17 is not talking about either of those things.
      6. I say all of that because it’s very possible that after I explain what this is, some people would say, “Well, it’s really no different than…” one of the above options, and it’s important you keep in mind these distinctions and not confuse how God is at work within us.
   3. What, then, is Paul talking about in Eph 3:17?
      1. Let me put it like this: the dwelling in your heart Paul has in mind in this verse is something that as a Christian we should seek because it is the experience of close, personal fellowship with Christ.
         1. Christ dwelling in our hearts has to do with our relationship with Christ, our fellowship with Christ.
         2. Maybe we could put it like this: this dwelling pertains to our enjoyment of Christ in our lives.
         3. Do we have this intimate, personal fellowship with Christ where we know that He is within us and we experience His presence with joy?
      2. Maybe it would help to contrast it with the ongoing indwelling of the Spirit in our lives.
         1. The Spirit is always in us working in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ.
            1. He is not in us more some days than others.
            2. There is a consistency and a constancy to the Spirit’s indwelling presence in our lives.
            3. And yet Paul can say in Eph 5:18 that we must be filled with the Spirit, right?
            4. That is something different than to have the Spirit dwelling in you.
            5. That is to have everything in our lives come under the power of the Spirit, and to have the Spirit control our hearts.
            6. The Spirit is always there as the seal of our redemption, and He is always working in us, but sometimes we are controlled by the Spirit and sometimes we give in to the desires of the flesh, right?
            7. There is a different experience of the Spirit.
         2. And so it is with Christ in this verse.
            1. Of course Jesus is always within us as believers.
            2. But there is a sense here where it is more than just His presence Paul is asking God to give the Ephesians.
            3. He is asking God would give them an enjoyment of His presence, a genuine fellowship with Christ, a constant awareness and joy that He is there, within them, taking up residence in their hearts.
            4. And we all know that this experience with Christ is not static.
            5. Some days we feel the fullness of His presence in our lives, and other days it feels like He is far away, and we long for the joy of being near to Him.
   4. Understanding that Paul has in mind not just the presence of Christ in some academic or theological sense, but an experience of Christ’s presence in our lives, I think we need to go on to ask…
3. How do we experience this indwelling?
   1. I want you to notice, first of all, the word **dwell** in v. 17.
      1. There are a number of Greek words that are translated *dwell* or something similar in the English translations.
         1. One word simply means to reside without any specific indication of how long or in what way.
         2. Another word has the implication of someone who dwells somewhere temporarily, like at a hotel or an inn.
         3. But this word in particular means to settle down or to make a place one’s home.
         4. It’s a combination of two Greek words, one that means to live or settle and one that means down.
         5. And so it has the idea of settling down and creating a home.
      2. And this is what Paul is driving at here: He is praying these believers would be empowered by the Spirit with the result that Christ would be able to settle down and make their hearts His home.
   2. The connection to verse 16 is so important in understanding how this works.
      1. First, the main request Paul makes is that these believers would be empowered by the Spirit of God, and we saw that this indicated empowered to live obedient lives, to walk worthy of their calling.
      2. And the goal of this empowered obedience to God’s Word is that Christ would be at home in their hearts.
      3. For Christ to be at home in our hearts, we must be evicting sin from our hearts.
      4. Christ and sin cannot peacefully co-exist.
      5. Christ will never feel at home in a heart that allows sin to share the lodging.
      6. And we need the power of the Spirit to overcome our sin; it’s not something we can do in our own strength, by the power of the flesh, because the flesh is bent on sin.
      7. We must have the power of the Spirit operating in us if Christ will ever be at home in our lives.
   3. Paul specifically calls attention to the heart in this verse.
      1. The heart to Hebrew mindset was the center of one’s entire being.
         1. The heart directed the life.
         2. We see this in Matthew 15:18-19, when Jesus said that what we say comes out of our hearts, and what we do arises from within our hearts.
         3. That means that the heart directs the desires.
         4. And that ultimately means that the heart directs the will, because what we desire will govern the decisions we make and the things we pursue in life.
      2. By saying that he is praying they would have the Spirit’s power so Christ would dwell in their hearts, Paul is saying that he is praying that Christ would have sway over every desire, every word, every thought, every decision, every action in their lives.
         1. He wants everything about these Christians to be so determined by the Word of God and conformed to the will of God that Jesus feels right at home in them.
         2. Author Robert Munger wrote an entire book about this subject, picturing the heart of a Christian as a house which Jesus enters and makes His home.
            1. Jesus enters the library of the heart, which Munger compares to the mind, and He finds all kinds of worthless books and periodicals that have to be discarded and replaced with the Word of God.
            2. He then goes into the dining room, and Jesus finds all kinds of lustful appetites in the heart that have to be replaced.
            3. So He replaces things like materialism, pride, and lust with meekness, humility, and love.
            4. He walks into the living room and finds all kinds of worldly friends and activities taking place, all of which need to be replaced by godly influences and godly activities.
            5. He goes into the workshop and finds only toys are being made, and then He moves into the closet, where He finds many hidden sins, and room by room Jesus goes through the house and cleans out every room.
            6. Only after He has cleaned out each room is Jesus able to settle down and be at home in that heart.
         3. We talk about wanting close fellowship with Christ, but are we willing to part with the things that offend our Lord?
            1. Are we willing to make our heart a home where Christ can settle down?
            2. Are we willing to evict the sin in our lives so that it no longer feels at home in our hearts because our hearts are now the home of our gracious Savior?
            3. Brothers and sisters, examine your hearts this morning.
            4. Are there areas in your hearts that would make the Lord uncomfortable?
            5. Are there areas in your heart where Christ does not feel at home?
            6. Are there rooms in your heart where you keep the door closed and locked because you don’t want Jesus to look in there?
            7. See, your heart is meant to be Christ’s home, and that means that not only is He welcome in every room in your heart, but He is at home in every room in your heart.
            8. That’s when you experience this close fellowship with the Lord, when you have complete and total openness with Christ, nothing hidden, nothing closed off, no doors locked, but everything wide open, He is free to enter anywhere and what He finds will be pleasing to Him.
         4. Of course, this is a constant battle for us, and that’s why Paul first prays that we would have the power of God in us, because we need to bring these things that displease God to Him, seek His forgiveness, seek His holiness in our lives, confessing our sins and asking Him to enable us to forsake them.
   4. When we experience this indwelling, we end up with a remarkable relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
      1. We end up being able to say with Paul in Gal 2:20…
         1. We see that Christ lives in us.
         2. It’s not just that He is residing there as a tolerated guest, but that He is now alive in us and living His life through us.
         3. We have this close experience of fellowship with Him so that we can say with full conviction that He loved me and gave Himself up for me.
         4. Can you say that this morning of Christ with such certainty as the Apostle Paul?
      2. We can rejoice with Paul and the Colossians in Col 1:27, when Paul says the mystery now revealed to us is Christ in us, the hope of glory.
         1. Do we have this overwhelming sense of joy that Christ Himself is in us?
         2. We have talked often about how we are in Christ as we have studied Ephesians, but do we recognize that He is also in us?
         3. And His presence in our lives brings us the hope of glory!
         4. Not some flimsy type of wishful thinking, but a certain and sturdy hope that He will come again in glory and glorify us with Himself someday.
      3. Brothers and sisters, we should long for this kind of fellowship with the risen Lord, that we might not only intellectually know that He is in us, but might experience and enjoy His presence in our lives as we seek to honor Him by the power of God.
   5. Now, lastly, I want to ask…
4. What is the role of faith in this indwelling?
   1. Paul says that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith.
      1. When we see things like **by faith** we must immediately in our mind think of the opposite, that this is not by works.
      2. Christ is not at home in our hearts based on our works, based on the external things we do or say.
      3. Christ is at home in our hearts by faith.
   2. That means that we trust the promise of God to be with us, to strengthen us, to empower us to godly living.
      1. There is perhaps no passage in Scripture with more concentrated examples of this than Hebrews 11, where we see how people by faith lived in obedience so that they lives honored the Lord.
      2. I love what the writer of Hebrews says about Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26…
         1. Moses had a choice to make, didn’t he?
         2. He could choose the passing pleasures of sin, or he could choose to suffer with the people of Israel.
         3. For anyone without faith, that is a no-brainer, because no one wants to suffer when there is pleasure as the other alternative.
         4. But Moses saw that the pleasures of sin are fleeting because he trusted the promise of God not only to reward those who trusted Him but to punish the wicked.
         5. And so by faith Moses knew that God existed, and that God rewards those who seek Him, so he rejected sin and walked in obedience.
      3. We all face this decision multiple times a day in our lives.
         1. Will we trust the promise of God and act in obedience, or will we reject what God says and believe the lies of sin and walk in disobedience?
         2. When sin makes a promise, we must reject that promise by faith, knowing that sin is a liar but God’s Word is true.
         3. And so the way that Christ comes to be at home in our hearts is when we learn to develop a consistent pattern in our lives that says God’s Word is to be trusted, God’s Word is true, and sin is to be rejected and evicted from my life.
         4. We do that by faith, and as we do, Christ is at home in our hearts.
      4. I remember when I was a very young pastor, just maybe two years out of seminary, a man in the church rejected the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
         1. And this man was very knowledgeable about the Bible.
         2. He was well-read and had a memory that was unbelievable.
         3. But he took a position that said we are justified by grace and by the works that grace produces, which is a denial of the true gospel.
         4. And so we had a meeting set up with his family, Randi and me, and another family at the church that had been influenced by his teaching and thinking.
         5. And I was, in my flesh, rather intimidated by this whole situation.
         6. I knew what I believed was accurate, but I was concerned that this other family would not see it because of how influential and convincing this other man was.
         7. When we drove to his house, I remember praying and trusting the Lord with the meeting, knowing that God would defend the truth of His Word.
         8. And it was such a rich time of fellowship with Christ in my heart as we drove to this man’s house and rested in God’s power to win the battle.
         9. This man, who was so convincing, so smooth, never seemed to misspeak and could remember and point out every mistake you made in speaking, suddenly was bumbling, incoherent, and said so many foolish and blatantly unbiblical things, that I almost didn’t have to say anything at all.
         10. He sadly left the church and persisted in his unbelief, but this other family recognized the error, and prayers were answered.
         11. I tell you that as an illustration of how trusting God in a difficult situation, a situation that otherwise might produce anxiety and fear, resulted in an incredible fellowship with Christ in the heart.
         12. See, Christ is at home in our hearts when we put our full confidence in Him in every situation of life.
         13. And this faith comes by the power of God given to us through the Spirit in the inner man.
5. Conclusion
   1. We all as believers want to be courageous.
      1. We want to be powerful in the Lord.
      2. We want to be mighty in the Spirit.
      3. We want to have great faith that can move mountains.
   2. But here’s the question: Why do we want that?
      1. Do I want to defeat the enemy more than I want to fellowship with the King?
      2. The goal of a strong faith is a strong relationship with Christ.
      3. The reason I want to overcome my sin by faith and have Christ at home in my heart is because I want to know Him.
      4. Fellowship with Him, enjoying Him, is the great goal of my life as a follower of Christ, and I know that sin stand sin the way of that fellowship, of Him being at home in my heart.
      5. And so no matter the temptation, no matter the trial, no matter the difficulty, the goal is to trust Him by the power of the Spirit, because as I do that, He finds His home in my heart, and we dine together, we fellowship together, and I get to enjoy the presence of my Savior.
   3. Brothers and sisters, is this the controlling objective of your life: To know Christ, to enjoy Christ, to have Christ find His home in your heart?