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MAKING CHRIST AT HOME IN YOUR HEART

Ephesians 3:14-17a

By

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Ephesians Lesson 22

Making Christ at Home in Your Heart Ephesians 3:14-17a

A sign in the entranceway of an English castle open to the public reads, "It is the duty of the host to make his guests feel at home. It is the duty of the guests to remember that they are not" (*Reader's Digest*, March, 1983).

With regard to Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts, the first part of that duty applies to us: we need to make Christ feel at home in our hearts. The second part does *not* apply to Christ, because He does not come into our hearts as a guest, but as the rightful owner. He bought us with His blood. When He comes to dwell in our hearts, He is taking possession of that which is rightfully His.

We often talk about "inviting Christ into your heart," but it may surprise you to learn that this is the only text in the New Testament that uses that sort of imagery, and it refers to Christ dwelling in the hearts of those who were already believers. It is not an evangelistic verse. In Revelation 3:20, Christ pictures Himself as standing at the door and knocking. He promises to come in and dine with anyone that opens the door. But the text never states that it is the door to your heart. And, He is speaking to those in the church of Laodicea, who already professed to be Christians. We may argue that they were not *genuine* believers. But in any case, they were associated with the church.

Our text is Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians (the first was in 1:15-23). He started to pray in 3:1, but he interrupted himself and went into a digression about his ministry on behalf of the Gentiles in light of God's purpose for the ages. Now, he comes back to his prayer, which runs through verse 19, followed by a benediction in 3:20-21. I plan to deal with the section (3:14-21) in three parts. If you think I'm going too slowly, I would defend myself by pointing out that Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who has been called the greatest preacher of the 20th century, took 17 messages (*The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* [Baker], pp. 106-315)! He also confessed that he could not recall any other Scripture in his preaching ministry where he was so conscious of his own inadequacy and inability

as this one (*ibid.*, p. 155). If you want more depth than I can offer, I refer you to his fine work.

Although there is debate on the structure of Paul's prayer, it seems to me that he offers two main requests, which are both prayers for power. The first (3:16) is that the Ephesians would be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. The second request (3:18) is that they would be able (have the power) to comprehend the incomprehensible love of Christ, so that they may be filled up to all the fullness of God. This is a prayer for their spiritual maturity, that they may be fully conformed to Jesus Christ.

If Paul's request seems humanly impossible, his benediction reminds us that God is able to do far more than we can ask or think, according to His power that works within us. And, he reminds us, all of these amazing blessings are not primarily for our happiness (although we will be supremely happy when they are applied to us), but rather for God's eternal glory. We should also note that this prayer is Trinitarian: Paul prays to the Father that Christ may dwell in their hearts through the power of the Spirit.

Limiting ourselves to the first part of Paul's prayer, there are three things you need to make Christ at home in your heart:

To make Christ at home in your heart, you need prayer,
power through God's Spirit, and faith.

1. To make Christ at home in your heart, you need prayer (3:14-16a).

Paul's prayers are models for us to pray for others and for ourselves. It is significant that although he was in prison when he recorded this prayer, he does not mention his need for deliverance. When he finally does get around to asking prayer for himself (6:19-20), he asks them to pray that he will be bold in making the gospel known as he should. I wouldn't have thought that Paul needed prayer for boldness, but he did! Briefly, note five lessons on prayer:

- A. Prayer should aim to bring God's purpose and promises into reality.

Paul begins, "For this reason..." This takes us back to 3:1, which looks back to chapters 1 & 2, but especially to 2:19-22. Paul

is saying, "Because God saved you by His sovereign grace and brought you as Jews and Gentiles into one new man, the church; and because you are being built together as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit; therefore, I pray." What he prays is that God would make real in their experience what is true of them positionally in Christ.

Sometimes critics will ask, "If God is sovereign and has ordained everything that comes to pass, why pray?" The answer is, because God has ordained prayer as part of the process by which He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). And, because there are examples in Scripture of godly men praying for what God has already said that He would do. God promised to restore the Jews to the Promised Land after 70 years of Babylonian captivity, but both Daniel and Nehemiah turned that promise into prayer (Daniel 9; Nehemiah 1). Even so, we should take the revealed purpose and promises of God and turn them into prayer.

B. Prayer should be offered with reverence and submissive intimacy before the Father.

Paul could have said, "I pray," but instead he says, "I bow my knees before the Father." He is not mandating a posture for prayer so much as he is revealing an attitude for prayer. The Bible reveals people offering prayer as they stand, sit, lay prostrate, and kneel. Kneeling revealed reverence, submission, humility, and adoration before God. The Greek word translated, "before," means, "toward," or "face to face with." Along with the word, "Father," it implies the intimacy of a child coming before his father, who will welcome and receive him in love. In that culture, "father" was not only a term of intimacy, but also of authority. The father sought the good of his family, and ruled the family as he saw best (Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 255).

While we are invited to come to God as our loving Father, we should always do so with reverence and submission to His sovereign authority. He is *not* our "good Buddy in the sky"!

C. Prayer should be made in light of our new standing as children in God's forever family.

Next, Paul adds, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." The translation, "every family," is the way

that the Greek construction would normally be translated, but in my judgment, it goes against the context. Paul has been emphasizing the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ. Why would he interject this new idea of every family, which implies individuality, not unity?

I prefer the translation, "the whole family," which is permissible from the Greek (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 180, defends this view; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [Broadman Press], p. 772, concedes that it is possible, although he prefers, "every family"). This view fits the context. Paul was referring to all of the saints, whether in heaven or on earth. He used this expression to emphasize to the Ephesians that they were no longer Jew or Gentile, but that they all belonged to God's new family, or household (2:18), the church (Lloyd-Jones, p. 117). God's giving each family its name signifies His authority in bringing them into existence and exercising dominion over them (O'Brien, p. 265).

Thus when we pray, we should recognize that we belong to this great family, the saints in heaven and on earth. As God's children, even the most insignificant believer can come before Him with the same confidence that the apostle Paul did. But, I would add, you must be born into this family through the new birth. Otherwise, you do not have the family privilege of coming before the Father with your requests.

D. Prayer should bring us before the Father on the basis of His grace.

Paul prays that God "would grant" the Ephesians these blessings. The word means to give freely. It recognizes that we never should ask God for anything based on any merit of our own. Rather, we only receive from Him according to His grace.

E. Prayer should be made in light of God's infinite riches.

Paul asked God to grant them, "according to the riches of His glory." Some translate it, "His glorious riches," but I prefer, "the riches of His glory." God's glory is the sum of all of His attributes, or everything that makes Him glorious (Hodge, p. 181). He is "the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17). The universe declares the glory or splendor of His mighty power (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). Paul does not

ask God to give *out of* the riches of His glory, but *according to* those riches. If a billionaire gives you \$100, he gave *out of* his riches. If he gives you ten million dollars, he gave *according to* his riches.

The point is, God is not lacking in resources to meet our needs. As Paul prays (Phil. 4:19), "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Here (Eph. 3:16), Paul wants God to grant us "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Do you pray this for yourself? Do you pray it for other believers? To make Christ at home in your heart and for Him to be at home in the hearts of other believers, begin with prayer.

2. To make Christ at home in your heart, you need power through God's Spirit in the inner man (3:16b).

Paul prays for the power of the Spirit (3:16b-17a), "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." He is not talking about a dramatic, one-time experience, but rather an ongoing experience of God's power to change our hearts, as we walk in the Spirit every day, that results in Christ's taking up residence in us in a deeper, more conscious way than we experienced at conversion.

Why do we need this power in the inner man? Many reasons could be given, but here are three:

- A. We need the power of the Spirit because we all face problems that are beyond our power to resolve.

Jesus plainly stated (John 15:5), "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." We are totally dependent on Him, although we often forget this, as seen by our prayerlessness. Zechariah 4:6 reminds us, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord." It is good to ponder the question, "If God withdrew His Spirit from me, how long would it take me to miss Him?"

- B. We need the power of the Spirit because we never outgrow our need for His strength.

No one is born into God's family as a mature adult, or even as a teenager. We all start out as babes. As you know, babies are totally dependent on their parents for everything. Spiritually, even

when we grow to maturity, we never outgrow our need for the power of the Spirit in the inner man. Hudson Taylor said that when God decided to open inland China to the gospel, He looked around to find a man *weak* enough for the task (E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, p. 40). He said, "All God's giants have been weak men, who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them" (cited by Warren Wiersbe, *Walking With the Giants* [Moody Press], p. 61).

- C. We need the power of the Spirit because God changes our outward behavior by dealing with the inner person.

Paul's phrase, "the inner man" (3:16) is synonymous with the heart (3:17). He uses the same phrase in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." Those of us who are over 50 know exactly what he is talking about! Our bodies are wearing out! That should be a good reminder that our days on earth are limited and we need to focus on the inner, hidden qualities of the heart.

The battle against temptation and sin is a battle that is won or lost in the heart or inner man. Jesus pointed out that the outward sins that we see all come out of our hearts (Mark 7:21-23). You may be able to change your outward behavior through various techniques or methods that you learn in counseling or through a seminar. But if God doesn't change your heart, you are merely learning to be a better hypocrite! The Pharisees looked good on the outside, but Jesus said that on the inside they were full of uncleanness and lawlessness (Matt. 23:27-28). Genuine Christianity is not just a moral improvement program. God is in the business of changing our hearts—our motives, our attitudes, and our desires. For that kind of inner change, we need nothing less than the power of the Holy Spirit. Only He can make your heart the kind of place where Jesus is pleased to dwell.

So to make Christ at home in your heart, you need prayer and you need the power of God's Spirit changing the inner man.

3. To make Christ at home in your heart, you need faith (3:17a).

The aim of the Spirit strengthening you with power in the inner man is “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” It is clear that Christ indwells every believer through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20). If Christ does not live in you, you are not a Christian, no matter how religious you may be or how strongly you affirm the Christian creeds (Rom. 8:9-10).

So, why then in our text does Paul pray that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith? He was writing to Christian believers. The only conclusion is that Paul is talking about something more than Christ indwelling us at the point of salvation. He is talking about Christ being at home in our hearts. He is talking about having close fellowship with Christ. Let’s look at this from two angles:

- A. Christ comes to be at home in our hearts as we live by faith.

Biblical faith is not passive, where you “let go and let God.” Rather, it is an active reliance on God and His promises, often in the face of impossible circumstances. Charles Hodge (*ibid.*, p. 186) explains, “Christ dwells in us by faith, because it is by faith we perceive his presence, his excellence, and his glory, and because it is by faith we appropriate and reciprocate the manifestations of his love.”

Biblical faith is always linked with obedience. If you trust God, you obey God. To obey God, you must trust that His Word is true. Jesus spoke of the link between our obedience and His being at home in our hearts in John 14:23, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.” Christ is not at home with a disobedient Christian who keeps a dirty house.

- B. Christ comes to dwell in our hearts by progressively taking lordship over every area of our lives.

The verb that Paul uses refers to a permanent indwelling or residence of Christ in the heart. He means that we should welcome Christ into every aspect of our lives, so that there is no known area of our lives that we would be uncomfortable having Christ share it with us.

Perhaps no one has put it better than Robert Munger, in his little booklet, “My Heart, Christ’s Home” [IVP]. He tells of how

after Christ entered his heart, in the joy of that newfound relationship, he said, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. I want to have you settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to you. Let me show you around and introduce you to the various features of the home so that you may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together."

So, he took Christ into the study or library, which represents the things that the mind focuses on. The Lord had a bit of cleanup work to do there, getting rid of books and magazines, as well as some shameful pictures on the wall. They moved on to the dining room, which represented eating worldly fare rather than doing the will of God. Worldly pleasures do not satisfy in the long run. Our food should be to do His will.

From there, they moved to the drawing room, or sitting room. It had a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a bookcase, and a quiet atmosphere. They agreed to meet there each morning to start the day together. At first, they spent some wonderful hours there. But then, as pressures mounted, the time began to be shortened. Then, Munger got so busy that he started skipping these times. One morning as he was rushing out the door, he saw that the door to the drawing room was ajar. There was a fire in the fireplace and the Lord was sitting in there alone. He said, "Master, have you been here all these mornings?" "Yes," said the Lord, "I told you that I would be here every morning to meet with you." The Lord went on to explain that the problem was, Munger viewed the quiet time only as a means for his own spiritual progress, rather than as a time to meet and fellowship with the living Lord.

They moved on to the workshop, where the Lord showed him how He could work through him to produce good works. Then, the Lord asked about the playroom. He was hoping that the Lord wouldn't bring that up. There were certain friendships and activities that he just didn't feel comfortable inviting the Lord to join in. But finally he realized that he would have no joy unless the Lord remodeled that room of the house also.

He thought that the Lord had finally finished the remodeling and was comfortable living there. But then one day he came home to find the Lord waiting at the door. He said, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. There is something dead in here, in the hall

closet." Munger knew about that closet, but he had the key to it and wanted to keep it off limits. He certainly didn't want Christ to see what was in there. In fact, he was angry that Christ had mentioned it. After all, he had given the Lord access to the library, the dining room, the drawing room, the workshop, and the playroom. Now He was trying to pry into a small closet! He thought, "This is too much! I'm not going to give him the key!"

But the Lord said, "Well, I can't stay in here with that foul odor. I'll make my bed out on the porch until this is cleaned up. Munger says, "When you have come to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense his fellowship retreating from you. I had to surrender. 'I'll give you the key,' I said sadly, 'but you'll have to ... clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it.'" The Lord said, "I know you haven't. Just give me the key and authorize me to take care of it and I will." Finally, Munger signed over the title deed to the Lord and said, "You run the house!"

That's how God works in our hearts. He wants to move from room to room until every area of our lives is suitable for His dwelling place.

Conclusion

So the question I want to leave you with is, "Are you acting as a good host to Jesus Christ in your life? Are you making your heart a comfortable place for the holy Son of God to dwell? To do it, you must pray. You must experience the power of God's Spirit in your inner man. And, you must obey Christ by faith as you allow Him progressively to exercise His lordship over every nook and cranny of your heart.

Application Questions

1. How would following Paul's prayer as a model change the way you pray?
2. How (practically) can a Christian experience the power of God's Spirit in the inner man?
3. Some Christians say that we need self-confidence. Is this right?
4. Are there any hidden closets in your life that you haven't allowed Christ to clean out? How can we discover these areas?

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