

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR CHRIST'S DWELLING

Ephesians 3.17-21: God's glory and our joy depend on Christ's dwelling

Theme: If you desire to be filled with the fullness of God, and to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, Christ must dwell in your heart.

We are finishing out study of Ephesians 3 by looking at Paul's prayer for the saints.

- Always keep in mind the “cause” for Paul's prayer: (Eph 2.19-22) Our edification (growth in holiness).
- (v14-16) Remember, too, that Paul first prayed for our *strength* (we need put for the diligent, disciplines, daily *effort* to grow in godliness by learning the Bible and doing what it says).

Today: (v17-19) We are going to focus on Christ's dwelling place in our lives.

- Understand the structure of the text: This passage “cascades” from one idea to the next.
- Paul prays for two main things:
 1. (v16) *That* we would be strengthened in the inner man, and...
 2. (v17) *That* Christ may dwell in our hearts.
- Those two things (which result in us being rooted and grounded in love) give us the *capacity* to:
 1. (v18) We will be able *to comprehend* something very important.
 2. (v19a) We will be able *to know* the love of Christ.
- And when we live according to that comprehension and knowledge...
 1. (v19b) We will be filled with God's fullness (joy!), and...
 2. (v20-21) We will glorify God in Christ both on the earth (now) and (later) in eternity.
- It all begins with growing in strength and Christ dwelling our hearts, then everything else “cascades” from that like water down a riverbed... all the way to glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

Last week we spent all our time talking about how to be strengthened in Christ, and today we are going to spend the majority of our time talking about Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith...

I. (v17) Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts

A. Paul is speaking to and praying for Christians.

1. He is praying for the saints that already have the indwelling Spirit of Christ in them.
2. Therefore, we know he is not praying for their salvation; he is praying for their edification (and that requires that Christ *dwell* in their *hearts*).

B. Your heart is the center of your life, the source of all your thoughts, words, and deeds.

1. (Gen 6.5) Your *thoughts* come from your *heart*—that secret, inner place you keep all to yourself.
2. (Mat 12.33-37) Your *words* come out of your *heart*—your words reveal a little bit of that secret life you keep all to yourself on the inside.
3. (Mat 15.19) Your *deeds* are a direct result of what you have stored up in your *heart*.
4. (Prov 4.23) And that is why the Bible says that your heart is the source (the origin) of your life—of all your thoughts, words, and deeds.

C. Does the Lord Jesus Christ dwell in your heart?

1. This speaks of a heart full of light and goodness vs. a heart full of darkness and wickedness.
2. This speaks of a personal relationship of willing submission and obedience to Jesus Christ.
 - a) Many professing Christians today talk about having a “personal relationship with Jesus,” and yet they live their lives according to their own desires.
 - b) Any “personal relationship with Jesus” is a personal relationship with a King, a Ruler, a Master. It is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (He is the Master, we are the slaves).
 - c) So, we shouldn't deceive ourselves into thinking that we have a “personal relationship with Jesus” if we refuse to follow Him (to willingly, gladly, joyfully submit to Him and do what He says—submit to and obey His Word).
 - (1) Without this, we are not “walking with Jesus” in a “personal relationship.”
 - (2) Rather, we are walking in the opposite direction in self-centered rebellion.
 - (a) “I will live my life the way I want to.”
 - (b) “I will serve and worship God the way I want to—the way that seems best to me.”
 - (c) Every man, then, does that which is right in his own eyes, not that which is right according to God's Word.
3. So, we should ask ourselves: Does Christ dwell in my heart?
 - a) (John 15.1-10) Does the Lord (the King; my Master, because I am his servant) dwell in the center of my life, ruling over my thoughts, my words, and my deeds?
 - b) (Rev 3.14-17) Or, is He outside while I dwell in my heart—while I run my life how I want?
 - (1) (Rev 3.18-19) There is a solution to that problem...
 - (2) (Rev 3.20-21) There is a very practical solution that comes with a pretty good promise.
 - (a) It begins with hearing the Lord's voice!
 - i) Most Christians today prefer not to do this (preferring rather to “hear” that “inner voice” of “God's prompting” or simply wait for a dream or a vision).
 - ii) Most pastors today refuse to hear the Lord's voice, too (preferring rather to “hear” the latest fad from the latest church-growth or leadership-development guru).
 - iii) And then we wonder why our churches are full of people singing, dancing, and clapping their hands... while the Lord is on the outside knocking to get it!
 - iv) Are we any different? Are you different? Am I? Or, does Christ dwell in us?
 - (b) We must hear His voice first (His words), but then we also have to open the door.
 - i) We have to open the door of our inner, secret, dirty life and allow Christ to come in and dwell there.
 - ii) That means He'll be doing some house-cleaning, and that means His dwelling our hearts requires willing, joyful, committed, consistent submission and obedience to the Lord's words that we are “hearing.”

- (3) You see, folks, *this* (Laodicea) is the spirit of our age. This is the *dispensational failure* that we must overcome.
- (a) Think about Israel's failure, judgment, and removal (“rapture”) from the land.
 - (b) Israel was not removed from her stewardship because she gave herself to paganism.
 - i) The Jews didn't shed their clothes and run off naked into the jungles to be tree-worshipping cannibals.
 - ii) Israel maintained certain aspects of their religion while at the same time *refusing* to submit to and obey God (the refused to *follow God as Lord*).
 - (Jer 2.8) The pastors and preachers forsook God's Word.
 - (Jer 2.11) The people turned from following God.
 - (Jer 2.13) It's no different than today: God's people are “serving God” according to their *own desires*.
 - iii) And what does God say to a generation of lukewarm “believers” like these?
 - (Jer 1.2, 4) “Hear me! And turn back to Me... Follow Me and Me only!”
 - (c) (Rev 3.19) We need to *choose* to *be zealous* in our “personal relationship” with Christ.
 - i) Let the King in! Jesus dwelling in your heart is the Lord living in your secret life, ruling over all your thoughts, words, and deeds.
 - ii) It is the Lord Jesus Christ ruling and King and Master over the house, and you willingly and gladly submitting to Him and obeying Him (because He is good!).

D. Review: Paul prays for the “cause” of our edification—our growth in holiness, in Christ-likeness.

1. (v16) We need to be diligent and disciplined in our “exercise program,” learning and obeying the Word of God.
2. (v17) But, just as as important is our “personal relationship” with Christ.
 - a) All that follows in Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 depends on this!
 - b) Open the door of your heart and let Christ dwell there!
 - (1) It's a filthy place... It's a dark place...
 - (2) But, if you will willingly submit to Christ and following, even in your *heart*, He will clean you up.
 - c) And then, when Christ has your *diligence* (so you will be strengthened) and your *heart* (as *His* dwelling place)...
 - (1) You will be rooted and grounded in love (you will be strong, stable, and growing!).
 - (2) And that will result in a new capacity you didn't have before...

II. (v18-19) Paul prays that we may be able

A. (v18) Paul prays that we may be able to comprehend...

1. Notice that Paul gives *four* dimensions here, not just three.
 - a) The physical world has three dimensions: length, breadth, and height.
 - b) The *fourth* dimension is the *spiritual* dimension: depth.
 - c) You see, God has a plan for the physical world—the earth.
 - d) But, He also has a plan for the spiritual world—the heavenly places.

2. The natural man cannot comprehend the spiritual world—the things of God.
 - a) But, if we are *diligent* in learning and applying the Scripture, and if we allow Christ to *dwell* in our hearts (ruling over every area of our lives)...
 - b) ...we will gain a new capacity to comprehend God's plan on earth and in heavenly places:
 - (1) We will understand our purpose and our mission as followers of Christ.
 - (2) And we'll also understand that living for God, according to His Word, is all that matters.

B. (v19a) Paul prays that we may be able to know...

1. To know the love Christ... a love that surpasses all other knowledge.
2. (Eph 2.7) You see, it's a love that has *only and always kindness* toward us who are saved.
3. But you will never *know* His love (truly know it) until you give yourself to Him—to follow Him.

C. (v19b) But when you follow Him, you will grow in your comprehension of His plan and in your knowledge of His love, and...

- There is your joy! Because there is your filling with the fullness of God!

Conclusion:

(v20-21) Is this is God's glory in us, in Jesus Christ.

1. (v20) Context: Our edification (Eph 2.19-22 cf. 3.14-19).
 - God *can* clean up your wicked heart and make it to grow in holiness (in Christ-likeness).
 - He can! Even if you can't, and even if you don't think He can!
 - His power can work in your to make you more and more like Jesus Christ each and every day.
 - But, you need to *hear* Him and *respond* correctly to what He has said:
 - ✓ You need to be diligent and disciplined in learning and applying His Word (Scripture).
 - ✓ You need to allow Christ to dwell in your heart—you need to open the door, step aside, and let Christ rule ever area of your life (you obey what He tells you to do, and get the place cleaned up).
2. (v21) Do that, and God will be glorified.

The choice to be made by Christians today is the choice between Revelation 3.14-21 (Laodicea; me-church, my way, it's all about me) and John 15 (Christ *abiding* in us and we in Him).

- In Laodicea, every man does that which is right in his own eyes.
- In John 15, we keep the Lord's commandments as He dwells in our hearts (we, as willingly servants, gladly allow Him to “run the house” as the Master).

Christ wants to rule and reign over every thought, word, and deed, so choose this day whom you will serve:

1. Self: Which will end in judgment and shame.
2. God: Which will end in His glory and your eternal joy.