

## "CHRIST IN OUR HEARTS"

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Ephesians 3:17a

These words are a short extract from a prayer which Paul offered on behalf of the Ephesian Christians. Think of it's being answered for anyone! Yet it is no exclusive privilege, limited to a favored few. It is but the common heritage of Christian benediction, accessible to all. We may offer it, and God may answer it for ourselves and for our friends.

The Christian life begins when a man or woman, boy or girl, receives Jesus Christ into the heart as Saviour and Lord. It is maintained by the continued indwelling in the heart of the same Lord Jesus who now irradiates every part of the life with His own gracious presence. This prayer, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," certainly denotes a relationship very intimate and personal, and implies that the Lord Jesus is the very center of one's vital existence.

The rightful home of the Master is the heart of the believer. This is the very essence of the Christian message -- Christ lives within the soul of the believer. The greatest blessing of man is to possess in his heart the living Christ. This relationship between Christ and His followers is set forth in the Scriptures in many places. This fact can be known only by experience. Jesus said that the relationship was as real as the relation of the branch to the vine. Life-giving and life-sustaining power flowed from the trunk into the branches, so with Christ and the Christian. Here is the very apex of the pilgrimage of the human soul on earth, that Christ may dwell within.

### I. The Best Dwelling Place.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts."

Paul did not pray that Christ might dwell on the lips of his Ephesian friends. It is often true that Christ dwells more on the lips of men than in their hearts. Frequently children are taught his name from their earliest years, and almost all their favorite hymns bring the name of Christ upon their lips. Christ is on their lips in sunny childhood, in eager youth, in busy maturity, and in failing old age. Yet Paul does not pray that Christ may dwell on the lips of his converts.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is not even for the great boon that Christ might dwell in their minds. With a true instinct he fixes on something else, and prays that Christ may dwell in their hearts. The word "heart" conveys much more in the Bible than it does in ordinary speech today. Let us therefore do a little digging in the Word of God and try to explore its meaning.

The first instance of the word "heart" in the Bible comes in Genesis 6:5, which reads, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." To the Hebrew, the heart is something with which he thinks. For us, this is the function of the brain. But to him the heart was the center of all those thoughts and motives and reasonings which make man what he is. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 24:3 In the Scriptures, then, the heart is the seat of the intellect; it is that with which we think or conceive.

In Genesis 6:6 we read, "And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." Here the word is used in a different sense. When God saw the wickedness of man, His heart was moved. That tells of emotion. In this instance it was an emotion of grief or sorrow, but it might equally be one of joy and satisfaction. All these strong feelings are located in the heart. It is as a center of the emotions that we chiefly think of the heart today. There are many examples of this usage in the Psalms: "My heart shall rejoice," -- that refers

to joy; "My heart melteth like wax," -- that refers to fear; "My heart was hot within me," -- that refers to impatience and anger. So the heart is also the seat of the emotions.

In Genesis 8:21 we are told that, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." That is clearly another way of saying that the Lord decided not to curse the ground again. In other words, the heart is the seat of the will and purpose. In Acts 7:23 we read of Moses that "It came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel," that is, he made up his mind to go and see them.

In the Scriptures, then, the heart is the seat of the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Of course, these three activities of the heart are closely knit. They flow over into each other. We see a thing and think about it. We allow our intellect to take stock of it. The thing pleases us, and so our emotions are called into play. We desire to have it and get up to take hold of it -- that is the will coming into operation. But it is useful to separate these three phases in order to see how full of meaning is the Bible word translated "heart". As used in the Scriptures, it included thought and feeling and will. Thus Paul prays that Christ may dwell within and so become the light of the intellect, the strength of the will, and the master of the motives and affections. The ideal held before the Christian is that Christ shall rule at the very source of character. The heart is the incubator in which are hatched the ideals, motives, and desires which shape character and determine destiny. The heart is the region of affection and desire, the place where thought springs up and purposes are formed, and the region in which future actions have their birth. What the pilot is to the ship, what the main-spring is to the watch, what the acorn is to the oak, so is the heart to the life of man.

## II. The Best Occupant.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

Here is the sum and substance of Christianity. The best dwelling place for the Master is not in some beautiful church or cathedral on the Sabbath day, but in the receptive heart of His follower every day. The word "dwell" used here has the meaning "to settle down and abide," or "to take up one's permanent abode." The inner life of the Christian is to be a permanent habitation of Christ. Paul is praying that Christ may become in a real sense a permanent occupant in our hearts, not just an occasional visitor in some moment of religious enthusiasm, nor as a wayfaring man who turns aside for the night, but a permanent resident. "Let Christ make His home in your hearts," When on trial before the Emperor, Ignatius, the venerable bishop of Antioch, was asked what his surname Theophorus signified. He reply was, "One who has Christ in his heart."

And why should anyone refuse his heart as the permanent dwelling place for Jesus Christ? Has He not fulfilled His promises to all who have trusted Him? Is He not the One who turns all our sunsets into sunrises? For Him to abide within means peace instead of turmoil, purpose rather than aimlessness, and hope instead of despair. When Christ dwells in the human heart, He dwells there as a living power, molding us, making us faithful in our daily business and strong for whatever we may be called upon to do or to endure. He abides there as an undying joy, and as an immortal hope. In proportion as He rules in the heart, conforming the life to His own likeness, the affections are safe; for He provides an infallible standard. He satisfies the craving for a perfect love and sets great purposes before His lovers. Even in the fierce fight, He gives peace from the turmoil of contending voices without, and from the tumult of conflicting feelings within. He makes His presence felt by the trust He inspires, the love He arouses, and the strength He infuses, just as the sun's presence is felt in the seed when it begins to germinate in its dark tomb beneath the earth.

Christ does not come as a sojourner or as a wayfaring man, who turns aside to tarry for the night, but as a constant dweller He abides with us. Herein lies our security for the continuance, the power, and the comfort of this life. When Christ comes to dwell in the heart He liberates it from the power of Satan, reconciles it to God, weans it from other things, strengthens it, satisfies it, and fills it with the hope of glory. Therefore, it is exceedingly important that He permanently dwell in our hearts as the object of trust, of affection, and of allegiance.

### III. The Best Host.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

Faith is the gracious host who opens the door for Him. It is faith in Him, and in His leadership of our lives, which results in glad obedience to His will for us. It is ours to give a warm welcome to Him in our hearts as the nearest and dearest friend we have.

Faith is the key to unlock the door to the heart for Christ to dwell therein. What the friendly atmosphere in a home is to a guest, so the heart warmed by the presence of a trusting attitude is for the abiding Christ. Faith at the beginning of Christian life is not sufficient. We must live day by day in the confidence of His love and leadership. "The just shall live by faith." Genuine faith is not easy for some of us in these days of turmoil and uncertainty. Faith does not grow strong by thinking on the things which change but upon the changeless verities of God. When a man believes in Jesus Christ a wedlock takes place, and Jesus Himself becomes the man's ideal and dwells in his heart.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in Thee I find."

In the light of all these things it is important that we learn three facts.

#### 1. Christ Must Control Our Minds.

Paul said, "Let this mind be (literally, think this) in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5. His thoughts are to be our thoughts, His outlook on the world is to be our outlook, and His judgment of others is to be our judgment. Do you see things as He sees them -- in your recreations, in your personal life, in your home life, in your business life, in your work, or in your religious life? Or are you easily taken in with the shams and subterfuges of a world which "loves the darkness rather than the light."?

It is a revolutionary experience to have the mind of Christ. It will revolutionize our standards of life and transform our sense of values. It will give us firmness and choice in a world which is groping blindly after lost standards and lost ideals. But we must "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2Corinthians 10:5. If He is really our Saviour and Lord then He must control our minds.

#### 2. Christ Must Dominate Our Emotions.

In Philippians 1:8 Paul said, "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the inward parts of Jesus Christ." The center of Paul's affection is the inward parts of Jesus Christ, whose love for the believers at Philippi has overflowed into Paul, so that Paul's love for them is simply an extension and application of Christ's love. In 2 Corinthians 8:16 Paul thanks God who has "put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you."

Now see what this means for us. There are people whom we find it hard to love, there are duties which are difficult and irksome, however necessary they may be. We may well shrink back, until we realize that our emotional reactions as Christians are no longer to be on the human plane. It is Christ's own love and steadfastness which has come flooding into our hearts, so that in Jeremy Taylor's quaint phrasing,

"Our loves and hates are married to His," and we become the instruments of the Divine reaction to sin and need and care.

3. Christ Must Direct Our Intentions.

The heart is the center of volition, of choice, and of decision. What is it that impels us to action day by day? Our own desires, or the constraining will of Christ? The mark of a true Christian is that he, like his Master, can say: "I delight to do Thy will, oh my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." Psalms 40:8. His whole life will be one of loving submission and obedience to his heavenly Father's will.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" -- let us not talk glivly of having received Christ into our hearts as if that carried with it no obligations on our part. It means that He must take possession of our thoughts, our feelings, and our desires if we are to be wholly His. It means that the center of our lives is no longer to be found within ourselves, but in Him who binds us so closely to Himself that it can be truly said that He dwells in our hearts through faith.