

## **Ephesians 3:17a, Part 2**

0218

So that speaks to us of Christ in us in a way that is a lifelong formation process.

I pray, I bow my knees, that according to the riches of his glory, you may be strengthened with power through the Spirit in your inner in your inner man, so that Christ may really dwell in your hearts through faith. That's what Paul's getting it here.

Now I hate to use that word: 'really,' I mean, it sounds so, sophomoric, you know, 'really,' it's not, that's not a very technical, or academic kind of word. And that's probably why our translators don't use it.

But I don't know how better to express what Paul's saying. He's saying: that Christ may really find a home in your heart, that Christ may really find a permanent, comfortable, residence in your heart. Paul is not speaking here of something that has to do with salvation. Paul is not speaking evangelistically here. He's not asking that power would, the strengthening power would come so that they may be converted and the Spirit would come in and dwell them. He's not speaking salvifically. He's speaking communally, he's speaking of fellowship, he's speaking of the depth and the quality of fellowship in their heart.

He's not saying: I hope Christ comes to take up residence in your heart. He's saying, I hope that Christ, I pray that you that you're strengthened in your inner man, so that Christ may really find home in your heart.

So that's the sense that Paul's getting that's the basic mean, that's where we have to start. We have to start by understanding what the words are communicating to us, and then we look at that, and then we want to take that idea. Now we want to flesh that idea out biblically.

We want to really get at this idea that does the Bible speak to us about some type of greater indwelling of Christ? Does the Bible really speak to us about some sense in which the presence of Christ in our heart becomes stronger and more forceful and more dominant in our life?

Is this something that the Bible teaches us that the Christ who has found a home in our heart still has ways of finding a greater home in our heart or a more comfortable home in our heart? And so that's what we want to look to the Scriptures right now to see, is this something that the Bible presents to us? This, let's use the word 'homemaking'—the homemaking work of God.

Now, in using that word, there's sort of an image that I'm not trying to communicate, and that's the image of Jesus wearing a little apron or frilly apron and doing the ironing at your house. Instead, what I want to get at is this idea that Paul is praying that Christ would make a deeper, more comfortable, more lasting, more dominant home in your heart.

This, by the way, is the only passage in all the Bible that speaks of asking Jesus to make a home in the heart. That's a phrasing that we hear a lot: ask Jesus to come into your heart. We've heard, we've all heard that said, not here in our context, because we avoid that phrasing. But that's a phrasing that you've heard a lot. This is the only place in Scripture in which there is a request of Jesus to dwell in the heart. So we need to understand this one and understand it closely and understand it carefully.

So let's think about this homemaking, work of Jesus in our heart, to make a home into our heart. Does the Bible teach us that there is a sense in which God is more comfortable in the hearts of some than others? And I think that the Bible does hold this out for us.

Let me start with the example of way back and our scriptures all the way back to Abram and Sarai, later to be known as Abraham and Sarah. So you remember the story of Abraham and Sarah, we won't go back through the story but Genesis 18, and Genesis 19 is where is where this story occurs.

Genesis 19, is where God goes and destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. Just prior to that in Genesis 18, God makes a visit, prior to doing that, remember who he visits? He visits Abram, or then he's known as Abraham.

And God comes to Abram. And there are three people, there, there's God, and then what's described as two men. Now we know those two men to be divine men, so to speak, or angelic beings.

So here's God with two angelic beings, and they come to Abram. Now, what form is God in? What does he look like?

We can know here that this is the Son of God, this is the second person of the Trinity, because anytime that we see a manifestation of God, it is always the second person of the Trinity, because the Son of God is the visible manifestation of the God we can't see.

So Jesus shows up in the Old Testament, though we don't call them Jesus, because 'Jesus' is his human name that's given to him when he takes on humanity. Before he takes on humanity in the Old Testament, he still makes appearances. He's not Jesus, He is the Son of God. He's the second person of the Trinity. And this is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, who comes to Abraham, in Genesis 18.

And if you remember the story, what happens is they come, and then in typical ancient eastern fashion, there's a meal prepared. And they sit down for a meal. Now think about that for just a moment: of God, sitting down to table with Abram. What a fantastic picture that is, God, and to have his angelic beings sitting down to share food, like we just did, to share food with Abram.

There's this picture here of just community, and fellowship. And if I could use the word, comfort comfortableness, in the sense that Abraham has made God comfortable to be there with him.

Not that God is uncomfortable, ever, God's not a man. And not that God needs to be made comfortable. But there's just the sense in the passage that God is comfortable sitting here and talking with his child, Abraham.

Now, the following passage, in Genesis 19, is the hellfire and brimstone passage when the fires falling from the sky and destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, but before that happens, remember what happens before that is Lot has to be rescued from Sodom, right, remember?

So what's interesting in the passage is: God—the Son of God—and the two angelic beings come and share table with Abraham. But who doesn't go to Sodom? The Son of God doesn't go to Sodom. Instead, the two angels are sent to Sodom, because they have to rescue another child of God, by the name of Lot. We know him to be a redeemed Child of God, because the New Testament tells us he was.

However, there is this sense that, although the Son of God was very comfortable, to enter into Abraham's tent, and share fellowship with Abraham, he nonetheless was not comfortable to go to Sodom and share table with a lot, who himself had made himself to be very comfortable in Saddam. Because his lifestyle, and his life reflected the values of Saddam much more closely than the values of God. And so there's the sense that although he's going to be rescued, God himself doesn't go there.

Now, that's a stark reality that shows us that, that at least in the sense that it's implied in that passage, is that Abraham was a man that God was comfortable to share time with, to share His tent with, to share table with. And Lot, at least at that point, was not a man that was so comfortable for God to come and to share table with.

So that's one place that we see this. I see this in other places in the scriptures as well. For example, look with me at John, chapter 14, in verse 23. Jesus answered to him, now Jesus here is answering Judas, not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple—which by the way, wouldn't that just be the worst?—to be a disciple, that was the other Judas?

So he's answering the 'other Judas,' and he says, If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him. And we will come to him and make Our home with him.

So let's look at this very carefully. Because what Jesus is not saying here is, Jesus is not giving an evangelistic response. In other words, Jesus is not saying to Judas, not Iscariot, he's not saying: This is how I will come to dwell on your heart. If you love Me and keep My commandments, then I will dwell on your heart. That's not what Jesus—Jesus is not saying: this is how you receive life. This is how you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and Instead, Jesus is not saying, This is how conversion happens, Jesus is saying, This is how communion happens. This is how fellowship happens: if you love me. And if you keep my commandments, then what Jesus says is the fellowship will be sweet. There will be comfort for me to live in the home of your heart. I will find a settled place there. I won't just abide there, I won't just live there, I won't just exist there, I will find a settled home there, a comfortable home there, in your heart.

Or look at me in Revelation chapter three and verse 20. This is also another passage that's quite frequently misunderstood to be an evangelistic passage, which is to say, this is how salvation happens. Because we've all heard that Jesus stands at the door of your heart knocks. And if you let him in, then he comes in—Revelation 3:20. Right?

But that's a that's a misunderstanding of the passage. Because the context of the passage is clearly the context in which Jesus is not inviting lost people to open the door of their heart to him. Instead, Jesus is speaking to His church. Specifically, he's speaking to the church of Laodicea. And to the church of Laodicea, Jesus says: Behold, I stand at the door—not the door of your heart—but Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone opens the door, then I will come in, and I will—as the King James says—sup with him, or eat with him or fellowship with Him.

So Jesus is saying, or he's writing here to the church at Laodicea: there is a door that, in a sense, is closed to me. And you have the ability to open that door. And if you open that door, the fellowship will be sweet.

Now, does anybody remember what the problem with the church of Laodicea was? Remember the seven churches in Revelation and each one had a problem? Anybody remember what the problem with the layout of Laodicean church was? They were the lukewarm church—did somebody say it?—they were the lukewarm church. They were the ones that were neither hot nor cold. And Jesus says: if you're lukewarm, I spew you out, not meaning that I reject you unto hell. But meaning, our fellowship can't be there. You can't have this lukewarm heart towards me, and we have the sweet community, the sweet fellowship. So therefore, I stand at the door and knock. And I'm knocking for fellowship, I'm knocking for true community, I'm knocking, as to use the words of Paul in Ephesians three, verse 17, to really find a home in your heart, to really find a comfortable abode in your heart.

Now, one other place that this—this may be a stretch, but I'm gonna throw this out there you can decide on your own—one other place that perhaps we see this is in Luke chapter one. And verse 45. And blessed is she and the she there is Mary, Mother of Jesus, Blessed is she, who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

So this passage here the angel is calling Mary blessed, and she's blessed because she believed. Now what happens to Mary? Literally, the Son of God enters her, and in a physical way—not entering her heart—but in a physical way—the community there—Is there closer community than a mother bearing a son?

So perhaps that is a, even a metaphor for us showing to us here is this woman that the scriptures say blessed beyond all women, is this woman who had such close fellowship with the Son of God.

So I think the scriptures are, at least in those senses are pointing us to this reality that there is a home making, that Jesus seeks to do in our heart a—to use Paul's word, again—really, really dwelling deeply and profoundly in your heart in a way that's comfortable, and permanent and lasting, and directive and controlling.

So now, let's take that. And let's think for just a little bit about what I call here, the malleable aspect of Christ's indwelling. So I'm trying to be really careful here because there's dangerous ground on both sides. The indwelling of Christ is something that cannot be undone. If you are a regenerate person, if you are a converted person, and then the Spirit of God has entered your heart—chapter one, verse 13, of Ephesians—and you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit—that is not malleable. That is not undoable. The son of (or I'm sorry), the Spirit of

God, God's Spirit does not enter into people in a redemptive way to leave them, he takes up abode with them, and that is forever.

So in a sense, the indwelling of the Son of God, or the indwelling of the Spirit, is not something that we even have the ability to change. But there is another sense in which the presence of Christ in our heart is something that—if I can use the phrase, maybe—wax and wane, or grow and diminish, specifically in terms of power, and dominance, and influence, and community and fellowship, that is an aspect that can wax and wane.

Now, what can cause that to diminish? Or what can cause that to be prohibited? Or roadblocked? Well, the Scriptures tell us, among other things, our sin can do that. Take a look with me at first Corinthians chapter six, verses 15 through 17. Paul, writing here to the Corinthians says: Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ, shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?

So here Paul is saying, when you in your body, if you're indwelt by the Spirit of God, and you join yourself with a prostitute, there is a sense in which you are joining Christ to that prostitute. And certainly in joining together in that sin, that is something certainly something that, as Paul is going to say to the Ephesians, later on in chapter four, verse 30, that will 'grieve the spirit.'

We can grieve the spirit, we can tax the spirit, we can engage in sinful behaviors, and sinful activities and sinful thought patterns. And sinful attitude patterns, that have the ability to roadblock, if you will, the dominance of the Spirit in our life, the effect, the working of the Spirit in our life.

Ann that community is diminished, that fellowship is diminished. And this is what Paul's praying against: I pray that you'll be strengthened with power through the Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ will really, really dwell in your hearts.

Or think with me of John chapter 15, verse seven, Jesus says: If you abide in Me, and My words, abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it'll be done for you. So think of what Jesus is saying there. He uses this conditional word, if, if you abide in me and I abide in you, and my words abide in you, then, there's this result. And the result is this type of powerful, supernaturally powerful prayer. So we can equate that with a close community, a close fellowship with the Lord.

So this homemaking work of God, this homemaking work of Jesus in our hearts is something that closely aligns with a couple of other things in the gospels that we read about. First of all, is the supper, the communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's table.

The Lord's Table, is one of the two ordinances of the church, that the church practices on a regular basis, that Jesus himself instituted. And these two ordinances are the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Supper. And both of them correspond to the Christian life. The baptism corresponds to the beginning of the Christian life, the initiation into the Christian life. But the Supper coordinates to, or corresponds to the ongoing Christian life, or the day to day Christian life.

And so think about the imagery of the Supper. The Supper—that occasion in which we take a bread, and we take of juice or wine—and we are figuratively consuming the Lord, in such a way that we are, in a metaphoric kind of way, we are saying that we feed upon the Lord. And we do this, as Jesus says, on a regular basis.

So this corresponds to this close fellowship that Jesus, that Paul was praying for here. But this is also something that those who heard Jesus teach of this, found this to be a very hard teaching.

From John chapter six, Jesus says, I'll just sort of condense this passage, Jesus says: Whoever doesn't feed upon my body and drink of my blood has no part of me. And that passage concludes by many of those who heard Jesus, then stopping to follow Jesus because the saying was too hard.

So this aspect of this spiritual feeding upon Jesus, that Jesus puts into physical terms, some found this too hard to follow. And so they then stopped following Jesus.

This also corresponds to what happens in the upper room in John chapter 13. What happens on the night of Jesus's arrest, of course, was the footwashing. And we remember the story—the footwashing—where Jesus says specifically here, he has this conversation with Peter. And he says to Peter says to him in his sort of self righteous, self reliant sort of way, Peter says, You're not gonna, you're not gonna wash my feet Jesus. And Jesus responds to say, if I don't wash your feet, you have no part of me. And then Peter, and his overexuberant sort of way: well, okay, then not just my feet, but give me a bath. And Jesus says: no, no, I'm not talking about a bath, for you are clean, but not all of you.

So, what Jesus is getting at there is the same sort of thing, the same sort of regular returning to him for this infusion, if you will, of spiritual reliance and spiritual strength and spiritual, if you will, feeding off of Jesus.

So this understanding of this homemaking, this spiritual homemaking process, is a process or this activity of the Lord, this spiritual homemaking, is something that, as I said before, we want to be very careful to understand. We want to be careful not to misunderstand, because the Scriptures say to us that there is an indwelling of the Lord, there is an indwelling, of the Spirit of Christ, that is a once and for all, and eternal, lasting indwelling that occurs, and if you want to call that a persevering indwelling.

But then there is another type, that the Scriptures speak about. So let's, let's look with me at Galatians chapter two in verse 20. Here's one place that I think that this becomes apparent for us. Galatians two and verse 20, here's what Paul says: I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.

So that speaks of an occurrence, of a happening. I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer Paul who lives but it is now Christ who—and there's the dwelling language—lives in men. So that speaks of something that has occurred, that doesn't occur on an ongoing basis. It's not something that Paul does every day. He's not crucified with Christ every day in that sense.

But then he goes on to say, in the remainder of his thought, he says: And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. So there you see, put right together, these two

aspects, the aspect of conversion, regeneration: I have been crucified with Christ, the old Paul is dead, I'm a new creation in Christ. Yet there is this daily ongoing thing that happens by faith, that is that I'm going to suggest is the same thing that Paul is praying for to the for the Ephesians, that Christ would really, really dwell in your hearts by faith.

But another place that comes through I think a little bit more clearly is Galatians chapter four and verse 19. Here Paul says this: My little children, for whom I am again, in the anguish of childbirth, until Christ is formed in you, until Christ is formed in you. So that speaks to us, of Christ in us in a way that is a lifelong formation process. In a sense, in which is not just a do indwelling that occurs at the point of faith and repentance and, and conversion, but in the sense that this formation of Christ in us is a lifelong process.

Likewise, Paul says, a similar thing in chapter four and verse 13, of the letter to the Ephesians. Here's what he says in verse 13: Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So there's an aspect in which (chapter one, verse 13): when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed you were sealed. There's that aspect. But then there's also the aspect of: until you attain the fullness of Christ, the full measure of mature manhood in Christ. Or to the Galatians: until Christ is fully formed in you.

That is something that happens when we see him. When we are finished with this life, and the remaining sin is removed and we are glorified as we see him, that fullness of Christ is attaining then, but Paul is speaking of this as an activity in our life of a really finding his home in us are really deeply finding abode in us.