

The Believer's Heart as Christ's Home

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn your Bibles to a passage that has colored my thinking this morning.

! And it is preparation for the text that we'll study together. So turn in your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Corinthians 2, where the apostle, I'm going to pick up there if I could in verse 12, says, When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance of death to death.

To the other, a fragrance of life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

[1 : 19] I want you to turn now to Ephesians chapter 3.

There are many truths in the scripture which drive me to the point of wondering about my sufficiency.

In fact, the truth of the matter is, is I don't know when I open the book that I'm not struck by, who is sufficient for these things? But I feel a little bit like the boy who's cried wolf so many times that people don't believe him.

You know, if I were to say to you this morning, this is probably one of the best passages in the Bible, he'd probably just snicker. Because you've heard it so many times.

I have to confess that I took small comfort. I remember when I was reading John Boyce and he said that actually, he said, a pastor should probably feel that way every Sunday. Because the word is priceless, every word of it.

[2 : 41] But having said that, this is one of the best passages. And I don't say it lightly. You'll hear me say that again next month and I'll probably say the same thing.

But I tell you, this text is sweet, beyond imagination. And I would appeal to you, I would plead with you here at the very outset, I want you to say to yourself, just quietly, I think I might work at memorizing that.

Would you do that? Just say it to you. That is not really binding. That's not a contractual statement. But it kind of gets you moving. It gets you a little bit of motivation. I think I might work at memorizing that.

Say it to yourself. Don't let your wife know or your friend know. But go ahead and just, I think I might memorize it. Say it. Say it. Go ahead. Just quietly to yourself. Before the service is over, I'm not going to lead you in saying it publicly and have the deacons jot down the names of all of you and say it's a four-week performance bond here.

But this is a wonderful text, and it is at the heart of the rich blessings that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can't help but go back and remind myself that so many of the things that I pray for, and I would imagine that you pray for, are not of the same quality of the things that Paul is praying for here.

[4 : 06] Hey, it's okay to pray for sickness and job and all those kind of things, but here's Paul in prison in great affliction, and he says, for this cause, this is why I bow my knee to the Father, that you would be strengthened with his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in you, that you might be rooted and grounded, and that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and height and width and depth of the love of Christ, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

So we are in the midst of this prayer where the apostle is praying for people that he dearly, dearly loves, and he is praying for the most essential thing that they need.

It's the power of the Spirit in their life, working in a believer that they might have Christ dwell in them. So we have some questions that we want to ask ourselves as we work our way through this passage, and first of all, we need to recognize what this passage is not talking about.

You look at that statement there in verse 17, it says, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And we have to ask ourselves, well, what does that mean?

And we understand the Bible truth that we have been taught and should have fairly established in our heart that from the moment of salvation, the believer has what?

[6 : 05] Christ in you, the hope of glory. And so I want to remind you of what we find over in Romans, and let's turn there just for a moment to remind ourselves of the truth that genuine conversion transforms the believer from being a child of Satan to being a child of God, and along with that transformation comes the reality that the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and by Christ.

Look there, if you will, at Romans 8, verse 9 and 10. You may want to underline it. You may want to study it later on your leisure, but look at what it says there. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.

If, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you, anybody who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. You've ever bumped into people who say, well, actually, the Spirit comes in subsequently.

Later time, there's a second work of grace. There's a time where you have this spiritual kick, and as a result, you have some dramatic outflow, and, well, that's proof of the fact that you have the Spirit. No, here's the truth. From the moment of our conversion, the Spirit of God comes and dwells in the believer, and that is one of the distinct, undeniable blessings of salvation.

[7 : 20] Verse 10, But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. And so we recognize that this Scripture makes it quite clear that salvation brings Christ into our life as our Lord and Master.

And that's one of the reasons that we can expect genuine conversion to result in change. Our lives begin to change because there's a new life in us, and there's a new person in control and working in our heart.

And as a result of that, over time, we begin to see more and more of that change. I have to tell you, I wish that it all took place instantaneously. How many would join in saying, I wish the moment I came to faith, the whole matter of transformation was settled, and I had no more problems with my anger or my lust or my covetousness, my selfishness, my arrogance, whatever.

Wouldn't it be nice if it was all cured immediately? But it's not. But oh, what a privilege to know that we who have Christ in us have the power of the Spirit of God working in us.

And since Christ is in the genuine believer, we can say that He dwells in every Christian. So what is Paul talking about here? Look back, if you will, go to Ephesians again, and it says, so that Christ may dwell.

[8 : 44] Well, hold it. I thought He was there already. He is. But this is something that Paul wants us to think about carefully, and he nuances or he kind of uses a word that helps us understand this.

What does dwelling mean? I want you to recognize there's a difference between a guest and a homeowner. The Greek word that is used here is a word that is actually talking about the distinction between the two.

A guest is someone who is welcomed at the door and greeted and told that you want them to feel as comfortable in your home as possible, and we will spare no expense or effort to make you feel comfortable.

But let me tell you something. The guest ought not to be in the fridge drinking milk from the jug. When my children were growing up, and I can tell this story safely because the individual's not present, we often had some of the young people over to the house.

They were involved in various things, and I'll never forget, he is now a surgeon practicing somewhere within the 500-mile radius, so you don't want to think too much about it. But I remember Judith came to me and said, what is he doing drinking out of the jug?

[10 : 01] What? I went in and said, hey, listen, we're glad you're here, but stop. You know, a guest is treated with courtesy. But when they're sitting at the dinner table, it's not their place to suggest the next menu.

Am I right? I mean, they ought to limit themselves to saying, man, this is the best meal I've had in a long time and really appreciate you cooking, blah, blah, blah. But don't bring up what you'd like to have for breakfast.

And top it all off when the guest needs a toothbrush. Don't go in my bathroom, run hot water on mine, and go ahead and use it. You see, there really is a difference between a guest and the owner of the home.

And the difference lies to a large degree on the fact that the owner is the one who has control and has authority. And when Paul speaks of Christ dwelling in the believer's life, he's speaking of Christ having practical control of our life and being the center of it.

So I want you to think about that with me. Christ being the one who has control and directing our life rather than being someone who we... Well, it's a good thing you're here, and we're glad you're here, but no.

[11 : 23] This word that says that Christ would dwell in your heart means we consciously and deliberately confess his lordship and his daily control in all that's taking place.

Let me have you turn to another passage to maybe add a little bit of understanding, insight to this matter. Turn back to Romans 6, verse 11. Romans 6, verse 11, it says, So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions. Paul is talking to the believer, and he is challenging the believer to live a life that is no longer under the terrible mastery of sin.

How do we go about doing that? Not by a mere fact of self-will, and there's not a one of us here that on one occasion or another has not said, All right, all right, I'm going to stop that.

It's done. And what happens to our well-intentioned efforts on our own to deal with sin problems? How many of you discovered that when you go about launching on your own just kind of arbitrarily, I'm going to do that, we end up often just actually having more problems than we ever anticipated.

[12 : 45] It's not just a matter of self-will. There's more at work, or should be more at work, in the life of the believer in dealing with indwelling sin. And so, you see, what Paul is drawing our attention to here in this passage is that sin no longer has authority in the believer's life.

Prior to conversion, follow me, you couldn't help but sin. You were a slave and under the mastery of sin, and it was just as natural for you to sin as it is for a cat to pounce on a mouse.

It was just hardwired. Conversion delivered you from that slavery and has made it an ability for you to say no. And we find in this passage that Paul says, you have to consciously consider yourself dead to sin.

Now, what does that mean? To reckon or to count the fact that sin no longer has the right to control you, and you have the liberty of saying, I'm not going to do that because I am not under your domination or your dominion.

The term that we find here, the term consider, is a legal or an accounting term, and it's talking about reckoning or accounting something to be true and then acting accordingly. And so, in the passage in Romans, Paul is saying, listen, you have to recognize the fact that you're no longer in control of sin or you're no longer controlled by sin, and you have the right of saying no, and so live accordingly.

[14 : 26] By the same token, what we have here in the Ephesians passage, and you go back there, if you will, with me, to Ephesians 3, verse 17, Paul is telling us that we have to live according to the fact of Christ being the one who is in control of our life.

And the point that he is making is this, is that we are to live as though Christ is most important and the one whose interests are in control of our life.

Now, think about that with me just for a moment. When we say, when Paul is praying, I want you to have the power of the Spirit of God inside so that Christ may dwell in your heart, he is saying, you need the Spirit's enabling that Christ might be the one who actually is supremely important and the one whose interests are actually in charge of your life.

It's understandable why Paul would pray that way, isn't it? When you stop and think about your own life, you need the Holy Spirit's help. You need the Holy Spirit's power so that Christ would dwell within and so that we might sense him as being more than an invited guest in a formal part of our domain.

Let me speak here in practical terms of what this looks like a little bit for us. For one, when Christ dwells within, we're persuaded of his personal presence and his supremacy.

[15 : 56] We are persuaded of his personal presence and his supremacy. It's amazing how often we find ourselves living with kind of an absent sense of the presence and the significance of Christ in our life, and we all go through that.

We make decisions often, and we don't think much about, well, how does this affect Christ? What does he think about it? I use a comparison here. One of the things that I greatly appreciate about a husband-wife relationship is that that oneness means that when a husband considers something, guess what else he is considering?

How is this going to affect, hello, my wife? I know of one couple where, whether it is the husband or is the wife, when I have been involved in asking a question, would you think about doing such and so?

The first thing out of either of those, that couple's mouth, is this, well, let me talk with my husband, let me talk with my wife. Perfect expression of oneness where, hey, we're together and we ought to weigh this and think about it carefully in relationship to how does it affect us.

And so if Christ is dwelling within, there should be a sense of his presence and a sensitivity to his presence and a recognition of, hey, you're here and I don't want to do that.

[17 : 23] Turn over in your Bible just for a moment to a classic illustration of that. 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth and he is addressing in this particular case the matter of sexual immorality.

And now let me tell you something. In the city of Corinth, sexual immorality was about as rampant as it is here in our day. Well, you think it couldn't get any worse than it is today.

But it was no worse, no better. You didn't have the internet where every time you fired up the thing to look at MSN or CNN or whatever else, you have over on the side the immediate temptations that one click can put you in spiritual trouble.

Am I right or wrong? One click. Well, in those days, prostitution was formalized as a religious issue. Now, can you imagine the culture that gets to the point that you do spiritual good by engaging with immorality with a prostitute?

That's what Corinth was like. And Paul writes to the church and he says, hey, listen, you back up and think about this. And so his argument plays out in these verses, but it comes to a head here in verse 19.

[18 : 38] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God? You're not your own. Guess who is inside you? Who? The Spirit of God.

Christ dwells within me. And the thought that Paul is bringing to the table here is, what are you thinking about? How do you think the Spirit of God feels when you engage in looking at that pornography?

I know some individuals who have said, well, what I'm going to do is I'm going to put my computer in the family room. That's probably not a bad idea because in the family room, you have a higher probability of somebody walking in and seeing something if you're on the wrong place.

But let me tell you something. There's someone more important than your children or your wife who is always on sight. Who is that? It is Christ. And He's within us.

And when it says, let Christ dwell within, it is saying, listen, recognize that He who is your Lord and Savior abides within. He's there to control.

[19 : 46] I want you to recognize also that when we think about this matter of Christ within and His presence and the sensitivity of His presence, I want you to look at another passage in which we see this play out. Turn over in your Bible to probably one of the more commonly lifted passages out of context.

Now, I don't think it does great harm in its lifting, but let me have you look at Revelation 3, verse 20. By the way, who was Revelation written to? And the answer is to churches.

Verse 20 says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me. I don't think there's a problem using it to encourage people to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, but the predominant focus of this passage is written to believers and saying, hey, listen, don't push Christ out.

Don't put Him on the periphery, on the margin. What had happened in the church there is that they had distanced themselves from Christ in their carnality and there Christ was appealing to them that the intimacy of their communion would not be hindered and He appeals to them, hey, open the door, let me in.

There are some of you here this morning that the truth of the matter is is you haven't sat down with Jesus and had sweet communion for weeks and months at a time. Do you understand what I'm saying?

[21 : 09] The last time you had devotions that really meant anything other than grabbing a daily bread and maybe taking a millisecond to read one of the verses and then I've done my part, months have passed.

And Christ is saying, listen, we have this relationship. What's happened? I'm your Lord and Savior and here you've pushed me out and well, I know I'm too busy, right?

Oh, try that with your wife and see how long your relationship endures with that kind of abuse. For Christ to dwell within really means that you are living with an intimate awareness of His presence and His supremacy.

Can I stress that again? To have Christ dwell within means that you are living with an intimate awareness of His presence and His supremacy. There's another thing that goes with Christ dwelling within and that is that we are genuinely affected by His Word.

We're genuinely affected by His Word. His Word is not just a set of ramblings of some ancient itinerant guest lecturer in Palestine.

[22 : 23] His Word is our life. His Word is what we rely upon for wisdom and counsel. His Word is what corrects the carnality of our flesh. His Word is what brings His encouragement in adversity.

His Word is what lifts us up when our heart is struggling. Oh, does our mind go to places it shouldn't go? And the answer is yes, all the time.

I like the song we were singing. Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, oh, take and seal it. Do you know how He seals it?

Thy Word is a lamp into my feet and a light always. Beloved, if we are going to have Christ dwell within, there has to be something happening with His Word in our heart that makes His Word of more significance than something peripheral that we look at on a very occasional basis.

turn over in your Bible, if you would, to Colossians. We're in Philippians. Well, we went to Revelation, but just go to Colossians 3, verse 16. Colossians 3, verse 16, it says this, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[23 : 51] Let me have you think with me just for a moment about that little statement there. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. That's saying that Christ's Word is the occupying force in your life.

and that Christ's Word is the thing that dominates and affects your thinking.

It governs where you look. It governs how you respond when you're put out. It deals with the attitudes of your heart within the inner man. How many of you realize that Shakespeare had it right, that one may smile and smile and still be a villain?

And we are all fairly good at smiling and smiling and being pretty villainous sometimes in our own thought life. Am I right or wrong? But beloved, when Christ's Word dwells within with richness, it ends up dealing with those errant, aberrant thoughts quickly.

I like that. I desperately need it. Do you understand that? my mind will go left of center quicker than I can imagine.

[25 : 13] But as I grow in the Lord and as more and more Scripture begins to possess my heart, then the Word of God dwells in me richly and begins to capture those imaginations and bring them into captivity to the supremacy of Christ.

Do you understand that? Paul says, this is my prayer. This is the thing I'm praying to the Father for, that the Spirit would strengthen you in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith.

There's another piece in this that I want you to think about. when Christ is dwelling in our heart, it ends up that we grow in our love. That we grow in our love.

We, by nature, are fairly adept. We're good at loving one person. Guess who that is? Who is it? I saw him in the mirror this morning. He recognized that his hair was in trouble and so he actually stooped to using spray to hold it.

There are fewer and fewer pieces to keep in place and spray as more and more desperate. I looked at him. I said, dude, what happened to all that stuff? That's who I love normally.

[26 : 35] But when the Spirit of God is at work in my heart, there's something that begins to happen in terms of my relationship with Christ and with others.

Look over, if you would, to John chapter 17. Oh, by the way, let me throw this out. This is a sidebar. Do you know what a sidebar is? It's a little discussion on the side.

I am praying about preaching on John. I've started reading through John again and again and that's usually a hint that's where I'm going. I'm thinking about it. But, oh, what a book.

I think it would be my magnum opus. By the way, I didn't write it, so if you're wondering what I mean, I have to go to Charlotte's Web. Here we go. I'm sorry.

John 17, verse 23, here we are. I in them and they in me, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me.

[27 : 43] That the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me. may be one, may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

Then in verse 26, it says, I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

can I tell you something about longevity and ministry? One of the undeniable things you learn when you stay around for a while is that people require loving.

And one of the things I've learned is that at the end of the day you're better served to love those who God has in front of you rather than wishing that God would bring someone else.

because when someone leaves, guess what? The someone else who shows up is still just as much of a person to love as the person who left. So it's best to love the ones God gives you and stay with it and work at it.

[29 : 21] And can I tell you a little secret? If marriage is two sinners in a canoe, then church is lots of sinners in a bigger canoe. And the more we get to know each other, which is God's plan in relationship, I want you to understand that, the more conscious and intentional must our commitment to love become.

It's easier just to kind of walk in, sit somewhere towards the back, kind of listen to the music, walk out. That doesn't take much love. For anybody.

But buddy, when you anchor in and you become invested and you become involved and you become spent for the testimony of Christ and ministry, you're going to find that the people you're working with are just downright squirrely.

And you need the grace of God. They think that of you too, by the way, just in case you're wondering. And you're going to need to have Christ dwelling in you or it's not going to work. Can I say that again?

You're going to need Christ dwelling in you or it's not going to work. And when you decide you're going to pack off and move to another place, the same kind of people live there as lived here. I'll never forget moving from a small rural church in northeastern Ohio.

[30 : 49] Ohio. And I remember actually moving from Columbus. I was a member here at Maranatha and I remember going up there to northeastern Ohio and thinking, you know, this is a little rural community and I'm going to imagine that sin is not on steroids out here in the middle of nowhere.

I'd been there about three or four months and one dear lady decided that she'd had enough of her husband's pornography and she snuck up behind him and blew his brains out with a revolver. I could just go on and tell you one thing after another and I thought, whoa.

And then I came to Columbus and guess what? Nobody's here shot anybody so I'm going to have the real thing for that. And don't think I'm suggesting it. But you know what?

People are people. How many of you figured that one out? And we need the ministry of the Spirit of God within us that we would love each other the way Christ wants us to love each other.

It takes His work in us. And finally, what part do we have to play in all of this? I want you to think.

[32 : 01] Is Christ really, and this is a profoundly significant question, to you who are believers it ought to be one that you engage in considering periodically.

has your love gone cold? Can it do that? And what's the answer? Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But how significant is Christ to you in a personal and very real sense?

Oh, I'm not talking about the fact you show up. I'm not talking about the fact that you may participate. I'm talking about the fact that within the inner man, how significant is the sweetness of your relationship with Christ?

So what do you do? Number one, you pray. here's Paul in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14, for this cause I bow the knee.

And if Paul prayed for the power of the Spirit of God to work in the inner man so that Christ could dwell in the hearts of believers that he loved, it makes sense for you and me to be conscious and deliberate and persistent in praying about that thing taking place in our life and if you ask yourself the question this morning, so how am I in love with Jesus and is my heart affected by his glory and am I interested in his person and do I sense his presence and the answer comes back, I'm a little cold, then I would plead with you to get down on your knee and say Christ, it's not to be this way. [33 : 51] And I want you to do, here's the catch, are you listening? I want you to do whatever you think is best. but get me back to where I need to be.

Secondly, I would encourage you to have something to do with the right perspective and let me just recite a passage in Colossians chapter 3, just reference it very quickly here, but in Colossians chapter 3, it says, if then you be risen with Christ, can anybody finish it off for me?

Set your affections on things which are above. love. I am struck by an unbelieving world.

Judith and I are, my honey is actually going to run a 5K. I'm going to be in a deacon's meeting, so I understand that. But she says she's going to walk some and run some.

But we're going all around these different parks, and I've got to tell you, I am struck by how addicted our culture is to athletics.

[34 : 59] I see believers who are at the altar too. Beloved, set your affections on things that are above where Christ dwells.

Third, persistence. Persistence. Prayer, perspective, and persistence. Can I tell you something?

Something that is really important to you, you will ask for again and again and again and again and again. Isn't that right? If it's important, we will ask until we wear out the ear of God.

Christ will not dwell comfortably in the heart of the believer that can't find time for communion and prayer. Christ will not have much influence in the life that is consumed by the world and the affections of this world and things that distract the heart from the things of God.

You ask yourself, when was the last time that I honestly found pleasure? I'm talking about pleasure in your quiet time with the Lord. That's an indicator of where your heart really is at.

[36 : 17] Do you understand that? I've said it so many times that I know it's redundant but I get up way before my wife does, daughter does. My wife, I have a wonderful time with the Lord but I also like Judith and I have all kinds of little ways to make her want to get out of bed.

Do you know why I do those things? I like her. I want her around. And I don't mind jacking up the thermometer and temperature to kind of make the heater go off and she's sitting in there sweating in bed and she thinks, well, okay, it's the hint.

And I drop the blinds, you know, because suddenly light, that's the thing I like about the summertime, you know, that it gets lighter earlier. It's harder to sleep in. You know, she, make the room dark.

I said, no, the room is light, you know. But it's because, so, beloved, where's your relationship with Christ? When was the last time?

When was the last time that you found satisfaction in your time with the living God and Savior of your life? He does not deserve to be treated with just kind of some functional duty that you obligate yourself to accomplish and then move quickly on because there are other important things to do.

[37 : 39] persist in pleading, persist in reading, persist in pursuing.

And you know what? Christ will dwell in you, in the inner man, and satisfy you far more than any other thing or person in this life.

Let's pray. Without anybody looking around this morning, I want to ask you a quiet question that you think about in your own heart.

where is your love for Christ? Is he of preeminence?

Does he dwell as the supreme and significant one in your heart and life? Or is your heart and the ambitions of your soul consumed with every other thing?

[38 : 59] I would plead with you this morning if the Spirit of God is convicting you that you quietly attend to that where you sit. And if it would be of help to you, I would encourage you to raise your hand and say, Pastor, that's me.

I need to rededicate my heart to pursuing Christ and having him dwell within. And I put myself on notice, yes, this morning, yes, yes.

I want Christ to have first place. Yes. Anybody else? Anybody else? If you're here this morning and you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, yes, yes.

I would plead with you that this morning is the day to repent of your sins and trust in the living God who sent his son, Jesus Christ, to be your Savior. And if that's the need of your heart, you need salvation this morning, would you slip your hand up where you are and just say, I need Jesus as my Savior and put your hand back down.

Father, you know our hearts. You know our needs. Do not let our arrogance and our pride interfere this morning with the sweet blessing that comes with humility.

[40 : 17] rekindle our affections for Christ. We ask it in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.