

GOD

We want Christ to Dwell in our Hearts (Ephesians 3:17)

God loves us. His love is so great that it is impossible for the natural man of just body and soul to fully comprehend the magnitude of its dimensions. But God's great desire is for the members of His family, those of us who are born again of His spirit, to fully know and appreciate His love, so we can manifest it to others and experience even more the greatness of the more than abundant life that He has made available to us.

How can we hope to comprehend the greatness of God's love? The answer is in the Book of Ephesians, Chapter 3.

This entire chapter is a parenthesis, a figure of speech used by God to emphasize what came before. In this case, the parenthesis expounds on the Great Mystery that no matter what our previous background, when we confessed Jesus as lord and believed in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we became members of God's family, part of the Body of Christ. God made this available because of His love.

Verses 14 through 21 of Ephesians, Chapter 3 are a central pivotal prayer, linking the Doctrinal portion of this epistle to the Practical part which is to follow, and it is in this prayer that we see God's desire that we fully comprehend His love. We need to manifest God's love in our lives so that we can walk the way it says we are to walk in the chapters that follow.

We'll read this prayer first, then we will focus our attention on verse 17, which contains a great key that will allow us to fulfill God's desire.

Ephesians

- 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father (*the rest of the verse is not in 5 of the 7 major critical Greek texts and should be omitted*),
- 3:15 Of whom (*the Father, God*) the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
- 3:16 That he (*God*) would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man;
- 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
- 3:18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;
- 3:19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.
- 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
- 3:21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Verse 19 says that we are to know (know experientially – the Greek word is *ginōskō*) the love of Christ, which passeth (surpasses) knowledge (worldly knowledge). It's not possible for

natural man of just body and soul to know and manifest God's love just by using his five senses. But God doesn't just want us to "know" this love.

There's a figure of speech in the previous verse (verse 18) that we should look at. This figure of speech is called ellipsis, and involves the omission of a word in order to emphasize concepts referring to that word. In this case, the word omitted is the pronoun "it", which refers to love. Knowing this, let's insert the pronoun so we can get a better idea of what God wants us to understand about His love. We'll start with the second half of verse 17:

- 3:17b ...that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
3:18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth (*of it*), and length (*of it*),
and depth (*of it*), and height (*of it*);
3:19a And (*Even*) to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...

God used this figure of speech, omitting the pronoun "it", to emphasize the dimensions of His love: breadth, length, depth, and height. In most critical Greek texts, the word "height" actually comes before the word "depth".

There is also a second figure of speech in this verse, and that is polysyndeton ("many ands"), giving further emphasis to each of these four dimensions of God's love.

Why does God want us to be able to so fully comprehend His love? The rest of verse 19 says: "...that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." We know from I John 4 verse 8 that God is love, so we are to be filled with the fullness of God's love.

How are we supposed to be able to comprehend the seemingly incomprehensible magnitude and dimensions of God's love? Consider verse 17:

- 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

We see from the first part of this verse that in order for us to be rooted and grounded in love, which will then enable us to comprehend what God wants us to comprehend, we need Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. We need to take a closer look at what it means to have Christ dwell in our hearts. This is the key that will unlock the door to our understanding.

We know from Colossians 1:27 that as born-again members of God's family we have Christ in us already, so there must be something more to having "Christ dwell in our hearts".

The first word in verse 17 is "That", which would be better rendered "In order that". So, first we need to look at the previous verse to see what we need so that Christ may dwell in our hearts; then we will consider what having Christ dwell in our hearts really means.

- 3:16 That (*in order that*) He (*God*) would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by (*through*) His spirit in the inner man;

In order for us to have Christ dwelling in our hearts, we need to be “strengthened with might” through God’s spirit in our “inner man”.

God’s spirit in our “inner man”, as we know from verses like I Peter 3:4 and II Corinthians 4:16, refers to the gift of holy spirit that we received when we got born again – that “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. The word “strengthened” in verse 16 is the Greek word *krataioō*, which means “to make strong to the end of making an impact” (its root is *kratos*). The word “might” is the word *dunamis*, used for inherent potential power.

How can we be “strengthened with might” through the holy spirit that we have? According to Jude 20, we do this by praying in (by way of) holy spirit, which is speaking in tongues. I Corinthians 14:4 says “He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth (builds up) himself.” Speaking in tongues is the only way that we can build up, or strengthen, that holy spirit that we have residing in us, and according to Ephesians 3:16, we need to have our spirit strengthened with might in order to have Christ dwell in our hearts. We need to speak in tongues much!

We won’t take the time to go there, but Colossians, Chapter 1, beginning in verse 9, contains a prayer very similar to this one in Ephesians, Chapter 3. If the Book of Ephesians was the same as the epistle to the Laodiceans that the Colossians were told in chapter 4 to read, then they would have learned these great truths twice, thus establishing them in their hearts.

Now we’re ready to consider what it means to have Christ dwell in our hearts, the thing we need that will enable us to fully comprehend God’s love.

Biblically, the word “heart” refers to the seat of the personal life. The heart was regarded as the center of consciousness, thought, or will. Proverbs 4:23 says “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” All true believing comes from the heart.

God places great emphasis on the heart. Consider the Gospel of Mark, 12:30:

Mark

12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

According to one source, this verse could be more accurately rendered as: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart – that is, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

According to Matthew 6:21, our hearts are where our thoughts are: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.” Matthew 12:34 says “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” We know from Romans 8:27 that God searches the hearts. Hebrews Chapter 4, verse 12 says that the Word of God is a discerner, or critic, of the thoughts (emotions) and intents (reasonings) of the heart. Romans Chapter 5, verse 5 states that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

In Ephesians, Chapter 3 verse 17 it says that we are to have Christ dwell in our hearts, in the seat of our personal life. Surely this is much more than simply having Christ in us.

To fully understand what this verse is telling us, we need to look at one more word, and that is the word “dwell”.

In the Bible, more than one Greek word has been translated “dwell”. In some places, the word is *menō*, which simply means “to remain”, to stay”, or “to abide”. It’s used in places like I John 4, verses 12 and 15 in the sense of God in Christ in the born-again believer.

The word translated “dwell” in Ephesians Chapter 3, verse 17 is a different Greek word, and its meaning implies so much more than simply being present in us. The Greek word is *katoikeō*, which means “to settle down in a fixed dwelling”, and even “to saturate”. It basically means “to make oneself at home”. The root for this word is *oikos*, which means “house” or “home” but can also mean “household”.

Here’s one way to get a better picture of this. *Menō* would be kind of like just inhabiting a room but not really relaxing and making the place your own. On the other hand, *katoikeō* would be like coming into your house and totally making yourself at home, “kicking back”, putting your feet up, and enjoying a good meal or a cup of tea.

The word *katoikeō*, translated “dwell”, can be found in numerous places in the Bible, including the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. While the word often refers to simply making oneself at home in one’s house or in a city, it is also used in reference to believers dwelling together, and also of God’s dwelling place.

For example, the word *katoikeō* is used in Psalm 133, verse 1, which says: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

One use of the word *katoikeō* that you might be familiar with is in Psalm 23, verse 6:

Psalms

23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell (*make myself at home*) in the house of the Lord forever.

In Old Testament times, before the Day of Pentecost, “the house of the Lord” was the Temple (actually the Tabernacle during David’s time when the Psalm was written, before the Temple was actually built; then it was the Temple).

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, Jesus, at the age of twelve, was found by Mary and Joseph in the Temple in Jerusalem, amazing the religious leaders of the time with his understanding of the scriptures.

Luke

2:49 And he (*Jesus*) said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not (*didn’t you know*) that I must be about my Father’s business?

In the Aramaic Peshitta text, which provides a more accurate rendering of this verse, it reads: “Do you not know that it is necessary for me to be in the house of my Father?”

Today, in the Grace Administration to which we belong, God doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands, as it says in Acts 7:48. Instead, I Corinthians 3:16 tells us that we, the born-again believers collectively, who make up the Body of Christ, are the temple of God, God’s dwelling place. So, we truly will dwell, make ourselves at home, in the house of the Lord (the Body of Christ) forever.

Let’s return to Ephesians, Chapter 2:

Ephesians

2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ (*Christ Jesus in the text*) himself being the chief corner *stone*;

2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through (*in*) spirit.

Ephesians 3:17, and the great central pivotal prayer of which it is a part, is part of a parenthesis emphasizing this great truth of these verses, which pertains to the Great Mystery.

We want Christ to dwell in our hearts. In order for him to dwell there, we first have to “let him in”:

Revelation

3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

If Christ is going to come in and “eat with you”, that implies more than just entering; it indicates making himself at home.

Let’s look at two final usages of this word *katoikeō*, translated “dwell”, to better grasp the impact of our focal verse. Both are in Colossians:

Colossians

1:19 For it pleased *the Father* that in him (*in Christ*) should all fullness dwell.

2:9 For in him (*in Christ*) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead (*the head, God*) bodily.

These verses state that God’s fullness dwells in, or makes itself at home in, Christ. Keeping this in mind, look again at Ephesians, Chapter 3, and we can put it all together:

Ephesians

3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
3:18 may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height,

3:19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

We just saw in Colossians that all the fullness of God dwells in Christ, so when we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts, we are filled with all the fullness of God.

As we speak in tongues much, our “inner man”, that holy spirit within us, is strengthened with might, with the impact being that Christ dwells in, makes himself at home in, our hearts, saturates our personal life. Then we are able to comprehend, to fully understand, the magnitude of the dimensions of God’s great love, and we are filled with all the fullness of God.

As we manifest this love, not only will our lives be even more than abundant, but we will have a great impact on the lives of others also.

- Dr. Rick Batt