

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis
LESSON LVI : PAUL'S PRAYER AND DOXOLOGY (3:14-21)

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 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, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 KJV)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 NIV)

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He may give to you, according to the riches of His glory, with might to be strengthened through His Spirit, in regard to the inner man, that the Christ may dwell through the faith in your hearts, in love having been rooted and founded, that ye may be in strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, to know also the love of the Christ that is exceeding the knowledge, that ye may be filled — to all the fulness of God; and to Him who is able above all things to do exceeding abundantly what we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, to Him [is] the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 Young's Literal Translation)

PAUL'S PRAYER

PAUL STARTS TO PRAY FOR HIS READERS BUT DIGRESSES:

¹ *For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the Gentiles ...*

PAUL RETURNS TO HIS PRAYER:

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,*

PAUL SETS FORTH HIS PRAYER WITH THREE REQUESTS FOR HIS READERS, THE FIRST BEING FOR GOD TO GRANT THEM SOMETHING:

¹⁶ *in order that (hina) he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory,*

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #1 (an infinitive is a verbal noun, a verb not restrained by number or person)

to be strengthened (infinitive) with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #2

¹⁷ *and that Christ may dwell (infinitive) in your hearts through faith —*

TWO PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPIAL FORMS (a participle is a verbal adjective):

being rooted and grounded in love,

PAUL'S SECOND REQUEST ALSO HAS TO DO WITH STRENGTHENING BUT USES A DIFFERENT WORD THAN ABOVE:

¹⁸ *in order that (hina) you may be able, may be empowered*

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #1

to comprehend (infinitive) with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #2

¹⁹ *and to know (infinitive) the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*

PAUL'S THIRD REQUEST FORMS A CLIMAX TO HIS PRAYER:

in order that (hina) you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (a liturgical formula of praise to God)

PAUL BEGINS WITH THE MENTION OF THE ONE TO WHOM GLORY IS ASCRIBED ...

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,*

BUT HIS ELABORATION ON THE POWER OF GOD BECOMES LENGTHY ENOUGH THAT PAUL FINDS IT NECESSARY TO BEGIN THE DOXOLOGY AGAIN WITH THE REPETITION OF THE ONE TO WHOM THE PRAISE IS ADDRESSED:

²¹ *to him be glory in the congregation and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

PAUL'S FIRST PRAYER PETITION (vv. 16~17a)

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,*

¹⁶ ***in order that (hina) he may grant you,** according to the riches of his glory,*

***to be strengthened** with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*

¹⁷ *and that Christ **may dwell** in your hearts through faith*

v. 17 — **that the Christ may dwell through the faith in your hearts (YLT)** — κατοικήσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν [katoikēsai ton christon die tēs pisteōs en tais kardiais] — **PARALLEL TO THE PRECEDING PHRASE?** — “The prayer that the readers may be strengthened inwardly through God’s Spirit is explained and amplified by the following clause: ‘that Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith.’ Several EVV render these words as the purpose (or result) of the preceding (cf. the NIV’s ‘so that’ [see also NASV, ESV]), and give the impression that Paul wants the readers first to be empowered by the Spirit so that subsequently Christ may dwell in their hearts. Although this interpretation is syntactically possible, it is unlikely. The language of the two clauses is parallel, and the experience of the Spirit’s strengthening activity is the same as that of Christ’s indwelling (cf. 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rom 8:9,10; Gal 4:6). ‘In your hearts’ is equivalent to ‘in the inner person’ of v. 16, while Christ’s indwelling defines more precisely the strengthening role of the Spirit in v. 16. His indwelling is not something additional to the strengthening. To be empowered by the Spirit in the inner person means that Christ himself dwells in their hearts.... This second infinitival clause, introduced by [‘to dwell’], is syntactically parallel to the first clause [‘to be strengthened’, v. 16b] and dependent on the verb [‘he may give’]. The second clause, however, does not spell out the goal or result of the strengthening; rather, it elaborates and explains the first. So most commentators.... [‘In your hearts’, v. 17a] is equivalent to [‘in the inner person’, v. 16b], while Christ’s indwelling parallels the role of the Spirit in v. 16. His indwelling is not something additional to the strengthening, but is a further definition of it.” [O’Brien, 258] “Since no particle links this verse to the preceding it is probably parallel to it, yet also clarifies it. The parallelism is seen in the two διὰ [dia, ‘through’] clauses (faith and the Spirit are also linked in 1.13) and in ‘inner person’ and ‘heart’. **The two verses express the same idea; v. 16 would have been more easily understood in the Hellenistic world; v. 17 is more Semitic.**” [Best, 341] Note these translations do not see these as parallel but that Christ’s dwelling (v17) is a result of the Holy Spirit’s work (v 16):

‘that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love’ (NASV)

‘I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love’ (NIV)

‘that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love,’ (ESV)

Comments from one who does not take v. 17 as parallel with v. 16: “The connection is with the preceding clause: ‘to be strengthened, etc., so that Christ may dwell, the latter words having at once a climactic and an explanatory force, and adding the idea of permanency to that of strengthening.” [Vincent, Word Studies in NT] “The purpose of the strengthening by the Spirit is now given, ‘that Christ may dwell in your hearts.’” [Wuest, 88]

THE WORK OF CHRIST AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OFTEN EQUATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY) — “Sometimes it is God who is said to dwell in the hearts of his people, sometimes the Spirit of God, sometimes, as in Rom. viii. 9, it is the Spirit of Christ; and sometimes, as Rom. viii. 10, and in the passage before us, it is Christ himself. These varying modes of expression find their solution in the doctrine of the Trinity. In virtue of the unity of the divine substance, he that had seen the Son, hath seen the Father also; he that hath the Son hath the Father; where the Spirit of God is, there God is; and where the Spirit of Christ is, there Christ is. The passage in Rom. viii. 9, 10 is specially

instructive. The apostle there says, 'The Spirit of God dwelleth in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his; and if Christ be in you,' &c. From this it is plain that Christ's being in us means that we have his Spirit; and to have his Spirit means that the Spirit of God dwells in us." [Hodge, 128f] "Vv. 16f again contain the raw bricks which eventually led to Trinitarian doctrine. God gives through the Spirit and Christ indwells." [Best, 342] Note some verses alternating between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ:

'But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.' (Rom 8:9,10 NKJV)

'And so it is written, The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.' (1 Cor 15:45 NKJV)

'Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' (2 Cor. 3:17 NKJV)

'And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father!' (Gal 4:6 NKJV)

'DWELL' DEFINED — *"The infinitive κατοικήσαι [katoikēsai, 'dwell'] is from κατοικέω [katoikeō], which is composed of οικέω [oikeō], meaning 'to live, dwell' or 'to take up one's abode,' and κατά [kata], which when used in regard to place means 'down'; hence, the word means 'to dwell, reside, live, inhabit, colonize, settle down.'* In the LXX it occurs 643 times and in the canonical books it appears 583 times. It translates fourteen Hebrew words, but nearly 500 times it translates [yāshab], meaning 'to sit, remain, dwell' (Gen 11:2, 31; 13:12; 2 Sam 7:5, 6; 1 Kgs 8:27). In the NT it is used forty-four times, mainly in Acts and Revelation and only three times by Paul (Eph 3:17; Col 1:19; 2:9). It is used intransitively, meaning 'to dwell, reside settle (down)' (Matt 2:23; 4:13; Acts 1:20; 2:5; 7:2, 4, 48); and transitively, meaning 'to inhabit' (Acts 1:9; 2:14; 4:16). In the present context it is used intransitively, meaning 'to dwell, settle down.' It seems that κατοικέω [katoikeō] is a little more intensive than οικέω [oikeō], although the latter also frequently translates [yāshab] in the LXX. However, Paul normally uses οικέω [oikeō] (Rom 7:17, 18, 20; 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 3:16; 7:12, 13; 1 Tim 6:16) or ἐνοικέω [enoikeō] (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 6:16; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 1:5, 14) to express the idea of dwelling (neither term is used elsewhere in the NT). Thus κατοικέω [katoikeō] connotes a settled dwelling, as opposed to παροικέω [paroikeō], a temporary sojourn (Luke 24:18; Heb 11:9)." [Hoehner, 480] From Vine's Expository Dictionary:

οικέω [oikeō] — 'to dwell, to inhabit as one's abode'; the root from the word for 'house'; this is the word used most often by Paul

ἐνοικέω [enoikeō] — lit. 'to dwell in'; another form of the word, used often by Paul

παροικέω [paroikeō] — lit. 'to dwell beside, among or by', then 'to dwell in a place as a stranger, sojourner'

κατοικέω [katoikeō] — 'to settle down in a dwelling, to dwell fixedly in a place'; only used 3x by Paul

From other commentators:

"κατοικεῖν [katoikein, 'dwell'] normally indicates a settling in or colonizing tenancy which has a beginning and continues without interruption." [Best, 341]

"Christ may dwell — emphatic; abide, take up His lasting abode" [Alford, 110]

"Settle down and abide. Take up His permanent abode, so that ye may be a habitation of God." [Vincent, Word Studies in NT]

PAUL IS NOT TALKING ABOUT OUR SALVATION — *"[I]t is not a reference to Christ's indwelling at the moment of salvation (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:3, 5; Gal 2:20; cf. Col 1:27). Instead, it denotes the contemplated result, namely, that Christ may 'be at home in,' that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in believers' lives. Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct."* [Hoehner, 481] *"At first sight it seems strange for Paul to pray that Christ may dwell in the hearts of believers. Did he not already live within them? In answer, it is noted that the focus of this request is not on the initial indwelling of Christ but on his continual presence."* [O'Brien, 258f] *"In the context of this passage the connotation is not simply that of being inside the house of our hearts but of being at home there, settled down as a family member. Christ cannot be 'at home' in our hearts until our inner person submits to the strengthening of His Spirit. Until the Spirit controls our lives, Jesus Christ cannot be comfortable there, but only stays like a tolerated visitor. Paul's teaching here does not relate to the fact of Jesus' presence in the hearts of believers but to the quality of His presence."* [MacArthur, 106] *"The personal presence of the Lord Jesus in the heart of the believers is not in view here. That is taken for granted.... The expanded translation is; 'that Christ might finally settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts.'"* [Wuest, 88]

IN YOUR HEARTS — *"The sphere of Christ's continuing presence is 'your hearts', which, as we have seen, is equivalent to 'your inner being' (v. 16). The 'heart' here, as elsewhere in Ephesians, is employed in its customary Old Testament sense of the centre of one's personality, the thoughts, will, emotions, and whatever else lies at the centre of our being. If Christ has taken up residence in our hearts, he is at the centre of our lives and exercises his rule over all that we are and do."* [O'Brien, 259] *"As in the OT, [so also in Paul's other letters and] now here in Ephesians, the heart is understood as the center of the personality, the seat of the whole person's thinking, feeling, and willing. [Paul] has talked of believers' having the eyes of*

their hearts enlightened (1:18), and he will go on to speak of unbelievers' hardness of heart (4:18) (cf. also the references to the heart in 5:19; 6:5, 22)." [Lincoln, 206]

'INVITING JESUS INTO YOUR HEART' — *"'Christ in the heart' is a popular notion in certain traditions of piety. It is interesting to note, therefore, that it is found in this particular formulation only here in the NT. What is its significance in [Paul's] prayer for his readers? Its force is that the character of Christ, the pattern of the Christ-event, should increasingly dominate and shape the whole orientation of their lives."* [Lincoln, 207] Years ago I would go on visitation with a retired Baptist pastor who had a unique perspective on the 'asking Jesus into your hearts for salvation' prayer. He would effectively give the gospel (including the full demands for repentance) and when finished, he would ask the one to whom he was witnessing if they believed. If they responded that they believed, *he would explain to them they were saved.* It is not that there would be no prayer but it was more a prayer of thanksgiving and praise rather than 'asking Jesus into your heart.' While surprised at first, I came to respect that mind-set. *While his approach may sound unusual, is it not scriptural? Can anyone give a text demanding the sinner 'ask Jesus into their hearts?'* [see Appendix A]

'BELIEVING IN CHRIST' IS MORE THAN MERE MENTAL ASSENT — *"Justly, therefore, does Paul affirm that the persons who are endowed by God with spiritual vigor are those in whom Christ dwells. He points to that part in which Christ peculiarly dwells, in your hearts, — to show that it is not enough if the knowledge of Christ dwell on the tongue or flutter in the brain."* [Calvin, Ephesians]

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD? — *What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit or Christ 'living within our hearts?' Omnipresence teaches us the Lord is in all places all the time (Ps 139). That means when we speak of His presence in relation to the doctrine of Omnipresence, Christ is even in the hearts of unbelievers! So what does Scripture mean when it speaks of 'Christ dwelling in our hearts?'*

"The omnipresent and infinite God is said to dwell wherever he specially and permanently manifests his presence. Thus he is said to dwell 'in heaven,' Ps. cxxiii. 1; to dwell 'among the children of Israel,' Num. xxxv. 34; 'in Zion,' Ps. ix. 11; with 'him that is of an humble and contrite spirit,' Isa. lvii. 11; and 'in his people,' 2 Cor. vi. 16." [Hodge, 128]

"[T]he inhabitant Christ is he who dwells in the highest heavens, who dwells in the Father, and the Father in him, in whom all fulness dwells, the fulness of the Godhead, and the fulness of grace; so that those in whose hearts he dwells cannot want any good thing, must be in the greatest safety, and enjoy the greatest comfort and pleasure; and this inhabitation of Christ prayed for is not to be understood in such sense, as he dwells everywhere, being the omnipresent God; or as he dwells in the human nature; nor of his dwelling merely by his Spirit, but of a personal indwelling of his; and which is an instance of his special grace: he dwells in his people, as a king in his palace, to rule and protect them, and as a master in his family to provide for them, and as their life to quicken them; it is in consequence of their union to him, and is expressive of their communion with him, and is perpetual; where he once takes up his residence, he never totally and finally departs: the place where he dwells is not their heads, nor their tongues, but their hearts; and this is where no good thing dwells but himself and his grace; and where sin dwells, and where he is often slighted, opposed, and rebelled against: the means by which he dwells is faith; which is not the bond of union to Christ, nor the cause of his being and dwelling in the hearts of his people; but is the instrument or means by which they receive him, and retain him, and by which they have communion with him." [Gill, Commentary on Whole Bible]

Is Jesus Christ here amongst us? The doctrine of omnipresence says 'yes, Jesus Christ is here.' Revelations chapters 2,3 says 'yes, Jesus Christ walks in the midst of His churches.' So when we pray for His presence to be with us, we are not denying these truths but rather we are asking for God manifest His presence amongst us. We are asking for God to have HIS way!

'CHRIST DWELLING WITHIN THE BELIEVER' DOES NOT FORCEFULLY DOMINATE THE BELIEVER'S OWN PERSONALITY — *"Believers have faith in Christ; this relationship eliminates any idea of a Christ-mysticism where the personality of believers would be absorbed into that of Christ. Instead obedience always remains an essential part of the relationship; the Christ who enters does so, not merely as a guest, but as Lord."* [Best, 342] "Just as faith has played its part in believers' appropriation of the salvation (2:5, 8) and access to God (3:12) that have been accomplished for them, so also it is 'through faith' that Christ's dwelling in the heart remains a reality for them. Faith involves a relationship of trust between two parties, and so there can be no implication that the notion of Christ living in the center of a believer's personality means the absorption of that individual personality or the dissolving of its responsibility. This is clear also from the original formulation of this sort of relationship by Paul himself in Gal 2:20, where, on the one hand, he can state, 'It is no long I who live, but Christ who lives in me,' but, on the other, immediately explains this by saying, '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.'" [Lincoln, 206f]

THROUGH FAITH — *"This indwelling is 'through faith' — that is, as they trust him he makes their hearts his home. The implication of the apostle's prayer, then, is that the more the Spirit empowers their lives the greater will be their transformation into the likeness of Christ, a point that will be developed throughout the second half of this letter."* [O'Brien, 259] *"Jesus enters the house of our hearts the moment He saves us, but He cannot live there in comfort and satisfaction until it is cleansed of sin and filled with His will. God is gracious beyond comprehension and infinitely patient. He continues to love those of His children who insist on spurning His will. But He cannot be happy or satisfied in such a heart. He cannot be fully at home until He is allowed to dwell in our hearts through the continuing faith that trusts Him to exercise His lordship over every aspect of our lives. We practice as well as receive His presence by faith."* [MacArthur, 107]

‘BELIEVING IN CHRIST’ (JUSTIFICATION / SALVATION) IS NOT THE SAME AS ‘FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST’ (SANCTIFICATION) — *“What a remarkable commendation is here bestowed on faith, that, by means of it, the Son of God becomes our own, and ‘makes his abode with us!’ (John 14:23.) By faith we not only acknowledge that Christ suffered and rose from the dead on our account, but, accepting the offers which he makes of himself, we possess and enjoy him as our Savior. This deserves our careful attention. Most people consider fellowship with Christ, and believing in Christ, to be the same thing; but the fellowship which we have with Christ is the consequence of faith. In a word, faith is not a distant view, but a warm embrace, of Christ, by which he dwells in us, and we are filled with the Divine Spirit.”* [Calvin, Ephesians] “There are two essential conditions of this indwelling of Christ, — a rational nature, and, so far as adults are concerned, faith. The former is necessarily presupposed in all communion with God. But it is not with every rational nature that God enters into fellowship. The indwelling of Christ includes more than the communion of spirit with spirit. It implies congeniality. This faith produces or involves; because it includes spiritual apprehension — the perception of the truth and excellence of ‘the things of the Spirit’ — and because it works by love; it manifests itself in the exercise of complacency, desire and delight. *The most beautiful object might be in the apartment of a blind man, and he not be sensible of its presence; or if by any means made aware of its nearness, he could have no delight in its beauty. Christ dwells in us by faith, because it is by faith we perceive his presence, his excellence, and his glory, and because it is by faith we appropriate and reciprocate the manifestations of his love. Faith is to this spiritual communion, what esteem and affection are to the fellowships of domestic life.*” [Hodge, 129f]

Appendix A: More Than ‘Asking Jesus into Your Heart’

I quote these two articles to present alternative thoughts to the modern gospel presentation. I am not saying it is wrong to have sinners pray to ‘ask Jesus into their hearts’; after all, there are verses speaking of ‘receiving Jesus’ (e.g., *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* – John 1:12,13 NKJV). This is also not an endorsement for every comment made in the following articles. But I believe the articles are good and make a point needing to be made. Enjoy.

Personal Evangelism 101: Reveal Christ — John 1:15-26; John 4:25-26; John 4:39-42

by John MacArthur

When it comes to evangelism, we often hear about “asking Jesus into your heart” or “making a decision for Christ.” But condensing the whole process of repentance and faith into a short — and often unbiblical — phrase like that trains us to emphasize the wrong things in evangelism. Instead, we need to emphasize biblical methods and models of what it means to preach the gospel.

To that end, we’ve been examining Christ’s interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well, looking at their conversation as a model for our own personal evangelism. We’ve already seen how the Lord initiated the conversation, identified her spiritual need, offered God’s mercy, confronted her sin, and exhorted her to reject her false worship. Today we’ll look at the wonderful conclusion of their conversation and see how Christ revealed the truth about who He is and what He came to accomplish.

We’ll pick up their discussion in John 4:25, as she responds to Christ’s exhortation to reject her false worship. “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.’”

As we previously discussed, the Samaritan religion was a hybrid of the Pentateuch and pagan idols and rituals adopted during the Assyrian captivity. It’s not clear exactly what this woman believed prior to her divine appointment with Christ. What is clear is that she held on to at least some kind of Jewish Messianic theology — possibly based on Genesis 3:15 or Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

Regardless of what specific prophecy she was referring to, she knew *something* about Messiah. She knew the Messiah is God’s anointed One who would come to fill the earth with righteousness and truth. She’s just been told she needs to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). And implied in her response is the understanding that she won’t know the full truth until it’s revealed in Messiah’s arrival.

That makes Christ’s response to her in John 4:26 all the more glorious: “Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am He.’” There is no “He” in the original text — this is an *I AM* statement, where Christ self-applies the name of God. In essence He’s saying, *The one speaking to you is the I AM*. She’s asking for the truth and He unveils that He is in fact the Truth incarnate.

When they first began talking, she was completely ignorant and completely disinterested in who He was and what He had to say. After a few short minutes, she wants forgiveness for her wretched life, she is repentant, and she’s hungry for God’s truth about eternal life.

We don’t know what else was said between Christ and the Samaritan woman, but it’s safe to assume the conversation didn’t abruptly end there. And we do know from further into John’s gospel that her repentance was real and that she was converted. In fact, John goes on to explain how her salvation was the first of many conversions in her community.

From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done.” So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. Many more believed because of His word; and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of

the world.” (John 4:39-42)

The transforming work we see so vividly in John 4 is only accomplished by God. As believers, our job is to initiate evangelistic conversations, identify sinners’ spiritual needs, offer the surpassingly rich mercy of God to meet those needs, confront their sin, and exhort them to reject their false worship and turn to the true worship of the true God. And we can’t do any more than that. It’s up to the Lord to disclose Himself to them—to penetrate the darkness of their hearts and reveal His true nature to them. It’s a divine work that we cannot manufacture or duplicate. In terms of salvation, only God can reveal the life-transforming truth about His Son (cf. John 1:15-26).

Admittedly that means many of our evangelistic encounters may end without a clear resolution. How and when the Lord reveals Himself to people is beyond our control or influence. Our task is to look for opportunities to proclaim the person and work of Christ to the people we encounter, and to make the most of those opportunities. We have to trust the Lord to bring forth the spiritual fruit how and when He chooses.

From a results perspective, that might initially seem frustrating. But from an eternal perspective, it’s *liberating*. Our job is to faithfully sow the seed of the gospel. We leave the spiritual harvest up to the Lord.

<http://www.gty.org/blog/B130613/personal-evangelism-101-reveal-christ>, February 2, 2016]



Ask Jesus Into Your Heart — Revelation 3:20

by Cameron Buettel

One doesn’t simply invite himself over to the White House for a night in the Lincoln Bedroom, or into Buckingham Palace for tea with the Queen. No matter how earnest your desire or assertive your request, you will be denied access.

And that’s no surprise to most people. We understand that monarchs and heads of state require a certain level of exclusivity, and we generally respect those boundaries.

However, we don’t have that understanding when it comes to the Lord and His heavenly kingdom. Too many people assume their entrance into God’s family is a function of their own earnest desire. Phrases like “Asking Jesus into my heart” or “Accepting Jesus as my personal Savior” are emblematic of a mentality that carelessly reverses the roles in salvation. And that mentality is widespread in the church — today those phrases are some of the most common Christian clichés, ushering in what you might call the era of the alter call.

During my formative years as a Christian, I became so familiar with these expressions that I never seriously thought about their meaning. I always assumed the idea was biblical, since it seemed to echo Jesus’ words in Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

Knocking on the Door of Your Heart?

Jesus is not a jilted suitor shut out in the cold by those who reject Him. As Paul Washer once said, “If He wants to kick the door down, He’ll kick it down.” Additionally, the door does not represent the hearts of all people but rather the particular church that Christ’s message was aimed at. John MacArthur rightly points out:

Though this verse has been used in countless tracts and evangelistic messages to depict Christ’s knocking on the door of the sinner’s heart, it is broader than that. The door on which Christ is knocking is not the door to a single human heart, but to the Laodicean church. Christ was outside this apostate church and wanted to come in — something that could only happen if the people repented. . . . The Lord Jesus Christ urged them to repent and have fellowship with Him before the night of judgment fell and it was too late forever. [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) 140].

Not only is Jesus not waiting at the doorstep of your soul, He is also not waiting for you to offer an invitation, or even respond to His invitation. The language of Scripture is that of compulsion. Paul preached, “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). When the apostles preached the gospel their messages ended with the strong commands to repent and believe (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

Finally, while it is true that Jesus promises to reside in believers (John 15:4), a drastic change must happen before that can take place. The unbelieving heart is dead, hard, and cold to spiritual things. Before Christ can reside in one’s heart through the Spirit, He has to exchange the heart of stone for a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

When you stop to think about it, asking Jesus into your heart goes against the nature of the gospel, and begins one’s new spiritual life with a poor understanding of what has just occurred.

Who Needs Acceptance?

The sloppiness of modern evangelistic clichés is also painfully evident in the phrase “accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.” A

brief moment of reflection should be all that's needed to identify the problem. On the day of judgment, it is *we* who will need Christ's acceptance. To say that we accept Christ dangerously assumes that we sit in judgment and Christ stands on trial.

Our evangelistic terminology needs to reflect the knowledge of our proper place with respect to Christ when it comes to gaining *His* acceptance. Jesus clarifies who needs to accept whom when He says,

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:21-23)

There is an eternal difference between you accepting Christ and Christ accepting you. I've often argued that the thief on the cross was a very good theologian because he had no trouble recognizing who needed whose acceptance. Perhaps, like me, you bought into the cliché without thinking it through. Whatever the case, it's always dangerous to assume that Christian slogans equate with biblical truth.

Making Jesus Lord?

Modern evangelistic outreach regularly follows the call to "accept Jesus into your heart" with the phrase "and make Him your Lord and Savior." Sadly, when I first encountered the language of contemporary altar calls, I never stopped to ask what Jesus' job description entailed before I "made Him Lord and Savior."

God's Word is abundantly clear on this point. Christ's Lordship has never been contingent on anybody's willingness to grant Him that title. Jesus *is* Lord. And your present belief has no bearing on that eternal reality. He is Lord of Christians, atheists, and everything else in the universe — whether they bow their knee in repentance or burn in a hellfire of regret:

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11)

According to Paul, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" (Romans 6:16) Using this Spirit-inspired logic, you don't need to *make* Jesus Lord of your life, you simply need to demonstrate that He *is* Lord of your life by submitting to Him in repentance, faith, and obedience.

The Altar Call and Its Wayward Offspring

There is nothing wrong with evangelism that impresses upon the sinner the urgency to repent and believe. But formulaic altar calls have spawned all sorts of reckless Christianese and faulty views of salvation. They are the tragic legacy of Charles Finney, a nineteenth-century evangelist who denied the sovereignty of God in calling and regenerating sinners.

Finney's desire to see greater numbers of converts at his meetings led him to invent the "anxious bench." Finney was convinced that revival hinged on the preacher and his methods. The anxious bench was one of Finney's favorite preaching tactics. It provided vacant seating at the front of the church where those who were worried about eternal matters could sit, be specifically preached at, and personally converse with the preacher after the meeting.

While you wouldn't see that exact pattern repeated today, the pragmatic principles are still at work in modern altar calls and evangelistic crusades. It was the walk to the front that set the wheels in motion. And humanly engineered means of producing converts have been rampant ever since.

Using Appropriate Biblical Language

In stark contrast, God's sovereign means of salvation have never changed. He draws the sinner through His call (John 6:44; Romans 8:28), convicts the sinner by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), regenerates the sinner by His power (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17), and sees the sinner through the lens of Christ's atoning work (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The preacher should never presume to take upon himself any of the Holy Spirit's responsibilities. Instead, God has chosen preaching as the means of proclaiming Christ crucified and calling for the response that *He* demands — repentance from sin (Acts 17:30-31) and faith toward Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 20:20-21).

Rather than asking sinners to accept Christ we should call them to plead for *His* acceptance. Rather than telling sinners to "make Jesus Lord" we should call them to submit to His lordship. And instead of calling sinners to a saving altar, we should entrust them to a sovereign Savior.

<http://www.gty.org/resources/Blog/B160120>; January 28, 2016]

Appendix B: Is Christ 'At Home' in our Hearts?



SOMEONE HAS RIGHTLY SAID, "THERE ARE MANY 'SEPARATED FROM THE WORLD' CHRISTIANS WHO ARE NOT 'SEPARATED FROM THEMSELVES' CHRISTIANS.

**MILES J. STANFORD
'PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH'**

“How infinite are the forms in which self appears. Some are occupied with good self. They pride themselves on their excellences. Others are just as much occupied with bad self. They are forever groaning over their imperfections, and struggling with the flesh as if they hoped in time to improve it. When shall we be convinced it is so utterly bad that it is beyond recovery? Our experience, upward, in the power of God, is just in proportion to our experience, downward, in ceasing from self. Is it, Reckon yourself to be weak in reference to sin? No, it is lower than that. Is it, Reckon yourself to be dying? No, lower still. ‘Reckon yourself to be dead — (Rom 6:11) — indeed

unto sin.’ Some believe they are very weak. But what does that imply? That they have some strength. But when a man is dead he has no strength. We must act on the fact that we are dead in reference to sin. We shall not then speak of difficulty as to resisting temptation in reference to ourselves. We shall take the lowest place, and say it is impossible. But we shall know that what is impossible with self is possible with God. We shall take our place on the resurrection side of the cross, and in so doing we leave behind the old self-life for the new Christ-life. To live in Him who is our Life, is to be in the power of God.” [Miles J. Stanford, *Principles of Spiritual Growth*, 63f]

“Many well-meaning Christians mislabel insecurity as humility, but there is a significant difference between the two. A humble person does not spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about his or her own flaws. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis gives a surprising description of a humble person when he states: ‘Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.’ A humble person does not need to undervalue or disparage himself. He is far too busy engaging in the world beyond his own self-drama.” [copied]

