

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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DOES EPHESIANS 3:17 TEACH THAT HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING IS FIGURATIVE?

By Brian R. Kenyon

The question in the title above would probably be answered by most people with something like, “Of course not! The Holy Spirit is not even mentioned in that verse!” Yet, there are some who claim Ephesians 3:17 teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells figuratively. Thus, an examination of this verse relative to Holy Spirit indwelling is in order.

REMINDER

A person’s view of Holy Spirit indwelling should not be a matter of fellowship unless his or her view violates plain Bible passages and/or principles. The Bible clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells the faithful Christian (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6-7; et al.), yet the exact manner is not explicitly stated. In earlier *Harvester* articles, the case was made, based on the fact that there is no explicit mention as to the manner of indwelling, that the passages must teach a personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling. That is, how else should a person understand “the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Rom. 8:9) other than “the Spirit of God dwell in you” when there is no God-inspired commentary that reveals “dwell in you” should be taken in a non-literal way? Refer to those articles for reasons why the terms “personal,” “literal,” and “non-miraculous” are used. The following argument was presented:

1. All Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning are statements that are to be taken literally.
2. The statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and Galatians 4:6-7 are Bible statements whose immediate or remote contexts do not demand a figurative meaning.

3. Therefore, the statements concerning Holy Spirit indwelling found in Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and Galatians 4:6-7 are statements which are to be taken literally.

The “word only” view of Holy Spirit indwelling was examined in the last issue of the *Harvester*. That view is a popular opposition to the personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling view. Another alternative view to the literal view of indwelling is that the Holy Spirit dwells in the same way as Christ and the Father are said to dwell. An examination of passages that are especially relevant to that view will be the subject of subsequent articles, beginning with this one on Ephesians 3:17.

CONTEXT

Ephesians 3:17 is often singled out to show that Deity dwells in the Christian “by faith,” not in any literal way. After all, proponents would say, Paul said that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” However, an examination of the context of that passages does not negate a personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The verse is actually found in a prayer of Paul:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶That he would grant you, according to

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the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19, KJV)

The purpose of this particular petition was “That [*hina*, ἵνα] he [the Father] would grant you [the Ephesians]” two blessings (Eph. 3:16a), each expressed with an infinitive. First, “to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16b). Second, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17a). In both phrases, “by” is from the Greek word *dia* (διά), which, when used with the genitive (as in Eph. 3:16-17), generally means “through, by means of, with” (Newman).

“THAT” CHRIST MAY DWELL

There are two basic views as to the relationship between these two infinitives. On the one hand, there are those who take the two infinite phrases as sequential, the second caused by the first. That is, the second (i.e., Christ’s dwelling in the heart by faith) results from the first (i.e., the Holy Spirit’s strengthening the inner man). A. Skevington Wood, for example, says that “the result [of the Holy Spirit strengthening the inner man] will be that Christ takes up his residence in the hearts of believers” (51). Lipscomb writes, “The Spirit strengthens the inner man by causing Christ to dwell in the heart through faith” (63-64). English translations that introduce the second phrase with “that” (KJV, NKJ, ASV) or “so that Christ may dwell ...” (NAS, ESV) take this view.

In other words, it is because the Holy Spirit is strengthening the inner man (Eph. 3:16) that Christ is able to dwell in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17). Without the Holy Spirit’s strengthening the inner man, there would be no Christ dwelling in the Christian’s heart by faith!

On the other hand, there are those who take the two infinitive phrases as being parallel. That is, both phrases are equally subordinate to the main request, “That he [the Father] would grant” (Eph. 3:16a). Peter T. O’Brien, for example, says that “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” (258). In other words, God’s Spirit in the inner man and Christ’s dwelling in the heart by faith are both what Paul was praying God would grant to the Ephesians. While no major translations indicate this strict parallelism, Bratcher and Nida translate the two phrases, “for you to be made strong ... and for Christ to dwell ...” (85). In both views, “Christ” is sometimes regarded not as the second person of the Godhead but as a metonymy representing the characteristics of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:5).

Whichever of the above views is taken for the phrase, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17), it does not negate the personal, literal, non-miraculous view of Holy Spirit indwelling. The first view (which is reflected in most translations) actually supports the Spirit’s literal indwelling, but even the second view does not

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Do You Understand

The Biblical View of the Home?

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January 15-18, 2018

Brian R. Kenyon, Director

Monday

- 9:00 Family Beginnings (Gen. 2:18-25) Stephen Atnip
 9:40 Blended Families: Different from the Start Jerry Martin
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 Does OT Polygamy Justify Polygamy Today? Dan Stearsman
 11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Young People and Family

- 1:30 A Christian in a Non-Christian Home Forest Antemasaris
 2:00 What to Look for in a Spouse Ty Rhymes
 2:30 Why Abimelech Could Not Have Her (Gen. 20) Hiram Kemp
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Biblical Role of Wives Troy Postlethwait
 7:45 Wives Married to Non-Christians (1 Pet. 3:1-6) B. J. Clarke

Tuesday

- 9:00 Breakdown of the Home's Impact on Society Jason Hendrix
 9:40 Harmonizing the Home Bill Davis
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 Dealing with Adultery Logan Summers
 11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Extra Effort Families

- 1:30 Special Needs Children Cloyd B. Frock, Jr.
 2:00 Making Strides with "Steps" Teral Walker
 2:30 Rearing Children in Blended Families Elvis Galbreath
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Biblical Role of Husbands Bruce Harris
 7:45 Husbands Living with Their Wives (1 Pet. 3:7) Jimmy Clark

Wednesday

- 9:00 Sustaining Faith Through Unexpected Death Rick Kenyon
 9:40 Reeling in Rebellion Bill Davis
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 How the Love of Money Impacts the Home Jimmy Clark
 11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Home Wreckers

- 1:30 Divorce David Stearsman
 2:00 Pornography Jack Wilkie
 2:30 Selfishness Chad Tagtow
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Traits of a Successful Father Christian Torres
 7:45 Why Some Fathers Fail Terrance Brownlow-Dindy, Sr.

Thursday

- 9:00 Surviving Widowhood Dean Miller
 9:40 Turning Trials to Triumphs Bill Davis
 10:20 BREAK
 10:50 Biblical Principles on Training Children Melvin L. Otey
 11:30 LUNCH

Forum: Challenged Families

- 1:30 Inner City Families Rico Brown
 2:00 Single Parent Homes John L. Lewis
 2:30 Culturally Mixed Marriages Philip Vanwinkle
 3:00 BREAK
 3:30 Questions And Answers On Forum Topic
 4:30 DINNER
 6:30 Congregational Singing
 7:00 Is the Lord Building Your House? Hiram Kemp
 7:45 Christ: The Pattern for the Home Melvin L. Otey

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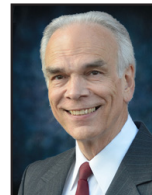
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deny it, especially if “Christ” is being used as a metonymy. One significant fact does, however, stand clear if “Christ” is being used as the second person of the Godhead: Christ’s indwelling is explicitly said to be figurative! In contrast, the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the faithful Christian is never said to be figurative!

CONCLUSION

The view from Ephesians 3:17 that says Christ’s indwelling the Christian’s heart figuratively (“by faith”) teaches that the Holy Spirit’s indwelling must also be figurative either assumes that Christ is the same as the Holy Spirit or assumes that because one member of the Godhead indwells a certain way, all members of the Godhead must indwell that same way. However, by what God-inspired teaching does a person arrive at either of those conclusions? Again, even Winters, who takes a figurative, “word only” view of Spirit indwelling admits that “no Scripture can be quoted that specifically states this” (90). Thus, Ephesians 3:17 does not teach that Holy Spirit indwelling is figurative.

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