

What Can You Expect?
Part III—The Permanent Presence of Christ

“That Christ may dwell [settle down] in your hearts through faith”
(Ephesians 3:17).

“The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations; but now is manifested to the saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope [expectation] of glory”
(Colossians 1:26,27).

Here is the greatest mystery of all time—the God of the universe extending Himself as Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, occupying the very spirit of His human creatures. It is hard for the human mind to grasp—nay, impossible! Only the power of His Holy Spirit within can enable the human person to comprehend it. In fact, it is not fully comprehensible by our human minds. Actually, it is a truth that only our inner spirits can fathom. When the human mind tries to describe it in theological propositions, it only comes up with the confusing concepts that have tended to shatter the unity of the Church for centuries.

But it is not necessary to reduce this great revelation to human theological concepts. In fact, it is really impossible. But how then do we appropriate it? We live in the reality of it, but we do not attempt to articulate it with the human process. We can speak of it, but we cannot really define it. It is like the concept of love. Sometimes the attempt to articulate it may in fact beggar the reality of it. It is one thing to say, “I love you”; it is another thing to say how or why or how much. In fact, Browning’s famous lines—“How much do I love thee? Let me count the ways,” reduces the vitality of the love to the artless prattle of human verbiage. Of course, that does not mean that we should never say, “I love you,” quite the contrary. In marriage, it is important to say that often. The all too common and inane exchange—“Why don’t you tell me you love me?” “But you know I do, because I work hard to support you”—will not do much for the emotional needs. To say, “I love you,” is like a caress with words. But to put the implications of that love into words is quite different. Of course, the old adage—“Actions speak louder than words” is also true. Words without action lack substance; actions without words lack significance.

And so it is with the presence of Christ within us. The meaning of that presence is beyond our human comprehension, to say nothing of articulation. However, we can make known our appreciation and our appropriation of that presence within the limits of our human understanding. But our expressions are much like those of the infant who lisps out expressions that are inadequate, to be sure, but are received for their intent. So our words are received by Christ in the context of our human limitations. The inscrutable and indescribable artwork of the child’s first valentine is yet received by the parents with great enjoyment, but it may not be suitable for framing. It is also understood that there is more to the child’s love than this.

To appropriate and appreciate the presence of Christ within us; to articulate, however inadequate, our petitions and praises; is an important response to His

presence within us. To enjoy a “spirit to Spirit” communion with Him is a vital and inevitable response to His presence. To try to reduce that experience, on the other hand, to adequate definitions and descriptions, is at best inadequate and breeds misunderstandings and divisions. We are certainly free to express ourselves in these matters, but must always recognize the risks. In view of the above comments we are led to say that the texts speak for themselves. What more can be said to enhance the reality of the very presence of God in us in the person of Christ and by the agency of the Holy Spirit? What is important is that we let the Spirit of God within each individual express Himself as He will through that individual, and avoid the attempt to classify and proscribe by human standards just what it is that Christ ought to do for each one. It is as ill advised as to try to tell individuals how their love ought to be expressed. What is an expression of love for one may actually be an offense to another. The communion that one has with Christ is a highly personal thing and must be expressed in keeping with the individual needs and personality. It is as impossible to set general standards as it would be to set standards for the expression of love.

Through faith. What does it mean to have faith? Will this, after all, be a condition for the coming of Christ to our spirits? What if one doesn't have faith? And how does one achieve it? To think in these terms is to fail to understand the meaning of faith. It is not actually a condition, but like the coming of Christ, is a gift of God. *“By grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God.”* If faith were a matter of human confidence, and therefore required the mustering up of one's own inner feelings of trust, then it would be a condition. But as we have discussed many times, that is not the meaning faith as it applies to God and to our spirits. Remember that faith is an energy process from God. It originates from Him and flows to us as the energy in our nervous system. The text says that Christ “settles down” in our hearts through faith. Faith is the channel through which the process takes place, and not the condition. As the energy of God flows through us, so flows the Spirit of Christ. Our human feelings about the matter have as little to do with it as they have to do with the flow of energy through the wires of our house. If the human had the responsibility or the capacity to develop the faith necessary for salvation, then faith would be of works and not of the grace of God. The human would have something to boast of and would have to be given credit for a certain share. The truth of the matter is that the human has no power whatever to participate in his salvation other than the simple act of turning to God. John, of course, makes this point quite clear in—*“As many as received Him, to them He gave the power [authority] to become the children of God”* (John 1:12).

What can you expect? You can expect Christ to come and settle down in your heart by employing the channel of faith which God has ordained. You can expect faith to be given you as part of the gift—the energy of God flowing through you and settling in your spirit. The way to achieve the presence of God in the spirit is simply to ask. You can expect the presence of Christ to be as permanent as God is permanent. *“He will never leave you nor forsake you.”* The presence of Christ within, like an artesian spring, gives vitality to our whole being and, though our human articulation is wanting, establishes a communion from spirit to Spirit that provides a continual source of strength and guidance, quite beyond the human capacity to understand and express.

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Next month *“Part IV—To Be Able to Lay Hold of All That God Has Intended For
You”*

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