

# **The Commonality of the Indwelling Christ**

## **The Need**

Any believer who hungers to know Jesus better will encounter books written by believers who were born in different times and cultures. Christian views tend to take on the flavor of the times. Believers from past generations lived in a different world and even used the English language differently. This can make it difficult to understand their writings. Even so, it seems as though those ages produced saints of great substance.

Culturally, times have changed. We see the world differently than believers of one hundred years ago. The church world has changed too—at least in the West where there has been a departure from the bedrock truth of Christ and Him crucified. We have traded its manifold wisdom for more transitory Christian ideals (cf. Eph. 3:10).

The state of the modern church world has created a vacuum that has left many believers (such as yourself, perhaps) looking for something more satisfying—some spiritual truth with more longevity. To satisfy our longing hearts, we must turn to those who have the spiritual food and drink we crave—those who have gone before us, who have truly and deeply known the Lord.

The truths these believers present have long been long held by the church and confront the extraneous beliefs that have sprung from our own culture, era, and denominations. Believers immersed in modern church culture may be shocked to realize that some of what they hold to be the essence of Christianity is, in fact, peripheral. It is not easy to critique one's own church culture!

## **Navigating the Unknown While Searching for Christ**

While reading various writings from different backgrounds, it is possible to come across an author or subject with which we disagree. This brings us to a crossroads: Will preference for our Christian culture's way of doing things win the day as we take our Bibles and go home in a huff? If so, we cut ourselves off from two thousand years of saints and the wisdom they have to offer. That is a lot of wisdom and a lot of saints. Or will we, in our quest to know the crucified and resurrected Christ, remain open as we navigate unfamiliar writings? If we do remain open, what are we to do when presented with ideals and doctrines we cannot accept?

The answer is at once both simple and complex. On one hand, Christ is simple, so fundamentally simple. If we are looking for Him alone, it should not matter who the bearer of the message is. The Spirit within the believer will bear witness to those who are declaring the true Christ.

On the other hand, our need to see more of Christ renders the process complex. The soul of man is the abode of the self-love which has plagued our existence from the beginning. Our preferences and sensibilities blind us. If we are governed by the insensitivities and prejudices that spring from self-love, differences between us and the messenger will blind us to the Jesus we need to see.

### **Repeating the Error of the Pharisees**

*“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”*

– Matthew 15:11

Believers tend to be suspicious of and avoid those whose declarations of Christ seem unfamiliar. By embracing a suspicious stance toward brothers and sisters of other denominations and ages, we repeat the error of the Pharisees. They believed that interaction with “unclean” people and things would render their own persons unclean. Jesus countered that it is the things which proceed out of the mouth and heart that defile a man (cf. Matt. 15:1-11).

Jesus ate with sinners, touched lepers, mingled with unclean multitudes, and was loved by prostitutes. Yet, His holiness remained unstained. Now, Jesus lives in you. As a believer indwelt by the very Spirit of God, there is nothing you can touch that will make you unclean. It is not another individual’s faulty belief system that defiles but the attitudes and motives of one’s own heart. Pride welling up from within will defile long before another saint’s doctrinal shortcomings.

When we are offended by the doctrinal errors and cultural limitations of others, we ought to consider: Maybe our own traditions and preferred doctrines are getting in the way of seeing them as members of Christ. Unclean things proceeding from our own hearts will skew our view of other imperfect (though true) believers. We cannot get past their “unwashed hands” and fault them for handling unclean things. But all the while we overlook the heart of the matter: They are just as much in relationship with Christ as we are and might even have something to say if our hearts are open enough to listen.

### **Not Suspicious but Discerning**

*“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”*

– Matthew 7:20

Instead of judging a person by their doctrine, Jesus instructs us to judge them by their fruit (cf. Matt. 7:15-20). According to Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, and against such there is no law. In other words, a person cannot be guilty in God’s eyes if they regularly express these evidences of the life of Christ within. Believers who manifest these traits of the divine nature are acceptable as mouthpieces because they are already expressing the heart of God in their actions and attitudes.

This does not mean that every word they wrote was gospel truth; it just means that they should not be dismissed outright. It is the responsibility of the reader to weigh the writings and determine what is Christ and what is simply the vessel of Christ.

What, then, are we to do with doctrines we are certain are incorrect? This author does not espouse ecumenicalism or the embracing of all doctrine without discernment. Rather, we embrace the commonality of the indwelling Christ. He lives in every believer that has received the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of background or doctrine. Where Christ lives, there can be fellowship. Where fault in doctrine has been expressed, there can be forgiveness.

Did not Jesus die for our sins? Did He only die for unbelievers? Does not His blood continually cleanse us from all sins within the Christian sphere (cf. I Jn. 1:9)? Or did He overlook our limited capacity to move beyond the boundaries of personal doctrine, culture, and era? The human frame is frail; every one of us—author and reader alike—is prone to misunderstanding, prejudice, and failing to see from the other person’s frame of reference. Is it really surprising that some of these saints of God have been mistaken at times? Are we willing to deny the grace to others that we ourselves so desperately need?

No one will agree with everything they read—nor should they. This author certainly does not. The point is not to agree with everything but to look for Christ and find Him while graciously overlooking that which falls short of Him. The doctrines of all these authors certainly do not agree but each man or woman found on these shelves has known—truly known—Christ in one facet or other. If we are willing to look—and overlook—we will have embarked on the exciting journey of knowing the Lord.

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