

Rooted and Grounded

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3. Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 3.

Reading at verse 14. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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 have been rooted and grounded in love.

And I'd like to reflect for a little while with you on the words of verse 17. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you have been rooted and grounded in love.

Well, the last time I was with you in the prayer meeting, I promised that we would come back to this prayer.

You may remember that we reflected on the opening part of Paul's prayer. And we did so under three headings.

[1 : 40] First, how he prayed. And we saw how Paul approached God humbly, reverently, dependently, and with boldness.

That's how he prayed. What did he pray for? And I think I summarized it, although I elaborated on it, for more of Jesus.

And then thirdly, where he prayed for us to be strengthened with power in our inner being, in the inner man.

And I brought out, if I remember correctly, how the focus ought to be on our inner spiritual life.

And then a couple of points in conclusion, by way of summary, how the importance of prayer cannot be overemphasized.

[2 : 44] Nor the content of our prayer is also important. Praising God for his blessings. Asking that he glorify himself through our prayers.

Well, I'd like this evening to set a few thoughts before you from this next step in this prayer.

And the first thought I'd like to set before you, as Paul expands on being strengthened with power in the inner man.

He speaks of a permanent resident. He states, So that Christ may dwell in your hearts.

Now, given that those for whom he prays have already been brought near, it seems very strange on the face of it that Paul prays that Christ dwell in their hearts.

[3 : 53] The idea of Christ dwelling within the believer is a prominent strand of thought in Pauline teaching.

In the letter to the Colossians, he summarizes God's gift as Christ in you, the hope of glory. In speaking of his own personal life and the writing to the Galatians, he writes, I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And so that begs the question, how can Christ live in us?

Does the Bible not teach that for a period of about 40 days after his resurrection, he appears to his disciples and then he ascended to heaven?

How can he live in your heart or in mine if he is seated in heaven at the right hand of God? Well, the answer that we find in the scripture is that Jesus lives in his people through the work and activity of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 16] And that seems to me to be the point of Paul's prayer, that the Spirit strengthen us with power so that Christ would dwell in us.

And in this desire as expressed by the Apostle, it is, I think, worth mentioning that the word that is translated dwell.

The Apostle could have used a different Greek word to the one that he uses in this context. But if he had, if he had used the more common word to dwell, it can be translated merely as to visit. It is the term that is used of Abraham when he was a sojourner or pilgrim in the Promised Land. He was not a permanent resident.

But the word that the Apostle uses in this context is significant. And it's used sparingly in the New Testament.

[6 : 27] I think he only uses it two other times apart from this. And it means to take up permanent residence. So what he is saying here is, he is praying that Christ would take up permanent residence in our hearts.

The Apostle, as already stated, is he is not speaking about conversant experience. He is praying for those who are already believers. But what he is praying is that Christ takes up this position of permanent residence in their hearts.

That he rule over every part of who we are. And the word hearts here is equivalent to our inner being.

Now in the course of preparation for this evening, I came across something which certainly caused me much thought and which I believe is helpful to understanding what the Apostle is praying for. And I'd like to share it with you. It was an excerpt from a booklet, the title of which is My Heart, Christ's Home.

[7 : 48] And the writer in that booklet pictures the Christian life as a house. With Jesus going through the various rooms in the house.

Going through it room by room. Now the author is depicting it as a fairly large house. And one of the first rooms that he pictures Jesus going into is the library.

Which may be compared to the mind. And he finds there much that requires to be removed. Much that is unhelpful to the Christian walk.

In other words, he wants to replace all your DVDs, all the writings that you possess that take your mind away from focusing on Christ.

And he wants to replace these with the truth of his word. I wonder how many of us can identify with that.

[8 : 53] Then he goes into the dining room of the appetite. And he finds there all sorts of sinful desires.

He finds pride and greed and lust. And he wants to replace these with godly desires like humility and meekness and love.

Does that strike a chord? If Jesus went into the dining room of your appetite tonight, would he find that there was evidence of pride and greed and lust?

Would he find that there was a lack of meekness and humility and love? And then he goes into the living room or the sitting room.

And he finds in the sitting room worldly company frequenting this part of your life. He wants to replace that company with godly fellowship.

[9 : 58] Does that sound as if it's also very probable in your experience? No, you could expand on it, but there's one other room that this writer mentions.

He peers into the closet or the cupboard or maybe the junk room. And what does he find there? But secret and cherished sins that require to be brought out into the light and expelled from the house.

How accurate now do you think that writer's summation is of your heart and of mine? I thought it was very accurate when I read it first.

And I found it condemning me as I read this little booklet. And that's why I want to share it with you.

[11 : 02] Now, you could have expanded on other rooms in the house and expand on the analogy of the writer and speak of other rooms.

But I think it gives a fair description of what our lives can be like. Usually, people who are long-term resident in a house, whatever it was like prior to their purchasing it or building it, they put their own stamp on it, don't they?

It may take a work of many, many years before that happens. And the difference here is that the Lord can accomplish through the work of his Spirit that very quickly in the lives of some of his people.

Perhaps you've seen it take place. Conformity to Christ happening in a short space of time. And they are removed out of this world.

They are not here, as it were, for a long time. The Lord does that work in a brief period of time. And you can see how they shine.

[12:20] For others, it's a long period of years. And that's the most general way. Although it's not safe to generalize. And Paul is praying here that their hearts, that their lives, become totally under the control and the dominion of Christ.

And as this takes place, he is transforming you into a house that reflects Jesus' own character. And that surely ought to be the desire of every believer, that this transformation takes place in our lives.

That we have the prayer as expressed by another, Father, make my life a bright outshining of thy life. That all may see thine own resurrection power mightily put forth in me.

Ever let my heart become, yet more consciously, thy home. And surely that is something that we ought all to be able to identify with if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:42] The permanent resident, the Lord Jesus. The person who ensures the stay of our resident.

And let's remind ourselves again what Paul has said. For this reason he says, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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.

This is the work of the third person of the Trinity. That Christ may dwell in your hearts.

It is through his spirit. Now the shorter catechism, but particularly the larger catechism, I believe is helpful with regard to the definition of sanctification.

Remember the answer that is given in the larger catechism. It is always worth comparing the catechisms. Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby when they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy are in time.

[15:05] Through the powerful operation of his spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man, after the image of God.

Having the seeds of repentance unto life and all other saving graces put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life.

Through the operation of his spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in the whole man.

Now theologians speak of definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification. Definitive sanctification, you are set aside to be holy by God.

Progressive sanctification speaking of the work of the spirit of God in your life, conforming you to the image of Christ. And this increasing conformity is termed by, as I said, progressive sanctification.

[16:22] Now you hear the phrase that a person is spiritual. What do we mean? Because I think perhaps it might be wiser to rephrase the question, what does the Bible teach?

And it seems to me that this is the description of true spirituality. Jesus Christ increasingly dwelling and ruling in our heart.

Because if we remind ourselves, what is the function of the Holy Spirit? Remember what Christ himself taught. He will, that is the spirit, will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it unto you, or show it or reveal it unto you.

That is the work, the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ. His desire is for Christ to be exalted and enthroned, to reveal Christ, to unveil the face of Christ, if you like, in which we see the face of God.

And you know, we use the terminology when we're in a service or in fellowship with other believers. The spirit was there. And I think I know what is meant when we say that.

[17:40] How will we know when the spirit comes? And what Paul states here is this, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. We are experiencing the power of the spirit as we have been more conformed to Christ, as he is more comfortable in more places of our lives and our minds and our desires, in our wills and our pleasures.

The yielding of these to the rule of Christ is surely the goal of the spirit's mighty working. No, do not misunderstand me.

I'd like to emphasize that we cannot do this on our own. Why? For the very simple reason that we don't have the power. And so we pray for the spirit's power to be applied to places in our lives where Christ's rule is resisted by our sinful nature.

Now, before you start raising objections to what I have said, let me try to further illustrate. And let me ask a series of questions.

Are you able to forgive as Christ forgave you? Now, be honest in your answers. Are you able to forgive as Christ forgave you?

[19 : 14] And you'll probably tell me, well, maybe 70% or 80% of the time. That's not what he's asking. Are you able to forgive us?

How did Christ forgive you? Did he forgive you 70% or 80%? Did he not forgive you 100%? That's what is asked of you and me in being conformed to Christ.

So, we are to pray the Father to strengthen us with the spirit's power so that Christ's forgiveness or spirit of forgiveness will reign in us.

Let me ask another question. Are we able are we able to let go a besetting or a cherished sin? Whatever it might be. I'm not asking what it is. But are you able to let it go? Or are you hanging on to it?

[20 : 22] Well, if you are, you have to pray for the spirit to prize the fingers of your hands metaphorically from that sin so that you let it go.

Let me ask another question. Do we have characteristics that are un-Christlike? Do we need humility or meekness or honesty or gentleness or a self-sacrificing spirit?

because all of these things come under the umbrella of what Paul is praying for in this context.

Ask the Father to send the spirit to mold our character so that Christ takes up residence there that he is our all and in all.

someone once put it like this breathe oh breathe thy loving spirit into every troubled breast let us all in thee inherit let us find the promised rest take away the love of sinning alpha and omega b end of faith at its beginning set our hearts at liberty the person who ensures the stay of your resident the permanent resident Jesus Christ thirdly the purpose of such permanent residency and the purpose that Paul sets before us here is this that you've been rooted and grounded in love now this prayer is like going up a stair or placing one building block on top of another he first prayed for strengthening by the spirit then he prayed that the spirit's power would enable Christ to take up permanent residency but even that not an end in itself the believers relationship with Christ has the goal of prompting and empowering a life of love remember remember how Christ addressed his disciples as the father has loved me so have

[22 : 48] I loved you abide in my love if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love Paul writing to Timothy in the first chapter of his first letter the aim of our charge or our ministry is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith so it is not quite as obvious in our English translation but in the Greek it is literally in love being rooted and grounded the emphasis and the Greek always puts the word on which emphasis is placed first and the emphasis in the Greek is in love being rooted and grounded in other words the emphasis is on the word love now Paul uses two very different metaphors or descriptive terms here the first has to do with with botany or with gardening being rooted the second

I think is to do more with building or construction work being grounded rooted in love if you take cuttings from a hedge in the autumn you may put them in rooting powder and place them in a pot filled with good compost and your hope is that the cutting grows roots draws nourishment from the compost and that you may be able to insert it in the spring where there are gaps in your hedge if you are into gardening you know that poor soil does not produce good growth where roots are placed is very important because without healthy roots a plant dies remember how we sang in the first psalm where the psalmist speaks of the life of a believer and he compares the life of a believer to a tree he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in the season and its leaf does not wither in all that he does he prospers in other words he is telling us that the believer is rooted in a fertile place where he or she constantly produces growth that is in accord with the spirituality of their life and so here

Paul speaks of being rooted in love can there possibly be a more fertile soil to be rooted in than to be rooted in love love is the nutrition if you like that feeds the roots of the believer what could be

more nutritious than love as the food that stimulates and encourages and promotes the growth of the believer surely the symbolism used of rooted in love implies that the believer is to be the channel by which Christ love flows out in their life and you remember how Paul speaks of the power of love in his own life writing to the Corinthians for the love of Christ he says controls me being embedded in love rooted in love surely also has implied that you are controlled motivated dominated by this power and Paul says the end result is that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sins died and was raised rooted in love you would expect to find on the branches of the fruit of love obedience and prayer in the lives of those who are rooted in love as those who are dependent on such a rich nutritious source you see because of our sinful nature our tendency is to love ourselves the apostle

James in a series of questions gives a devastating critique on the life of man what causes quarrels what causes fights among you is it not this that your passions are at war within you you desire and do not have so you murder you covet and cannot obtain as you fight and quarrel and Paul is praying for the Ephesians as we should also pray for the love of Christ to control us so that our war in passions are expelled and replaced with peaceable ones that our covetousness is replaced with contentment why do we not have all of this well remember what James says you do not have because you do not ask now perhaps I should mention one further strand that I believe of teaching from the Bible with regard to being rooted in love Paul in writing to the Corinthians speaks speaks of all that we might do and we read about it tonight in the chapter that we read speaks about all that we might do in the service of Christ we could be gifted orators we could have impressive powers of understanding and analysis we might even go to inordinate lengths even to the point of self sacrifice but without being governed by love however much a clip we might receive it is ultimately worthless if I speak he says in the tongues of men and of angels have not love

I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal and if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love I am nothing if I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love I gain nothing and from that it is evident that what may be impressive and staggering in our estimation is worthless in the eyes of God it does not flow if it does not flow from being rooted in love and on the other hand what may be looked on with almost disdain by us yet in the eyes of God because it is rooted in love is most valuable and the example that comes to mind at the moment is this remember the widow who made a donation do you remember what donation she made it was almost worthless valueless coins the

[30 : 08] ESV translates it as small copper coins two small copper coins which make one penny can you imagine the face of your treasurer receiving a weekly envelope with one penny in it eh he'd probably just tear it and throw it away one penny in the envelope not worth opening how but remember what the bible tells us truly truly I say to you this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box for they all contributed out of their abundance but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had all she had to live on you see Christ saw the motive that lay behind her offering it was an expression of heart love because she was rooted in love so rooted in love is important and the apostles pray not just that we be rooted in love but that we be grounded in love and

I said that is suggestive of construction or a building project we know from the bible the need for a sure foundation remember the closing remarks of the sermon on the mount everyone says Jesus who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock everyone who hears and who does it's not just who hears but who hears and who does we're not just to be hearers of the word as James says we're also to be doers of the word and when you listen to the sermon on the mount you're not just hearing Jesus words you are hearing Jesus himself and Jesus words expressly express perfectly his character his mind his will he never has Jesus never has to say do do do as

I say and not as I do and the person says Jesus who hears and obeys is like the wise man building on the rock notice Jesus doesn't say on a rock but on the rock and yet in that context there is no indication of of a rock he has not mentioned a rock before in the passage well you might say well it's not obvious but surely he means his own teachings maybe maybe but do you remember further on in Matthew's gospel where Matthew records for us Peter's response to a very personal question who do you say that I am says Jesus and Simon Peter replied you are the

Christ the son of the living God and you remember the response of Christ and I tell you you are Peter on this rock I will build my church and he's not referring to Peter what rock does he build the church on on Christ himself and the Christ is the rock he is the sure foundation against which the defense mechanism of the forces of darkness are incapable of preventing the construction of his church because that's what the gates of hell it's not an attack mechanism it's a defense mechanism gates and it means that they cannot prevent the construction of the church because where does he find the building blocks or the stones which are used in the construction of his church are they not taken out from under the powers of darkness and so

Paul is saying here here is the foundation that he is praying for us to be built on the foundation of love divine love an eternal foundation a stable foundation because from all eternity God is love and the apostle has already designated this love as being very great in the very source of salvation in chapter 2 God been rich in mercy because of the great love which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ and you know divine love is not some abstract concept it is a passionate affection that has been expressed through sacrificial action and then he goes on to expand on that aspect of love being expressed through sacrificial action later on in the letter walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for a fragrant offering and sacrifice to

[35 : 40] God and then on the teaching of marriage husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her and both of these are highlighting how this love is expressed through sacrificial action well what a sure steadfast solid foundation is divine love and I would now suggest that this is the really loving person the person who is rooted and grounded in love and we can only be that as we yield the whole of our lives to the purpose of Christ's whole but I just noticed that the time has gone by I hadn't intended to go on so long well the purpose of such permanent residency that we might be rooted and grounded in love the person who ensures our permanent resident the Holy Spirit our permanent resident Jesus

Christ the process by which we enjoy such a resident that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that ye be rooted and grounded in love now the Bible speaks of faith as being passive and active in justification you might say that our faith is passive we simply receive salvation as a gift but once saved that faith requires to express itself actively in our lives and it seems to me that this is the sense in which the apostle uses the term here Christ dwelling in your hearts through the activity of faith that involves seeing the promises and behaving accordingly Abraham you remember left out and although he dwelt for a period of time in Haran ultimately he moved out in accord with the calling he received when the glory of

God was revealed to him and we don't know how that was revealed but we do understand that the authority with which that revelation was given prompted obedience in his life and you know just as an aside sometimes the Bible can have such an effect upon us that we moderate our lives and attempt to improve them and we move so far but we don't move as far as God is calling us until the call is reinforced and we move leaving everyone and everything to follow the promise of the almighty so whether you remember again how Abraham was taken out whether it was part of the vision or whether it happened as a physical reality

I'm not sure in my own mind some people say it's part of the vision some in my own mind I tend to think it's a physical reality but the Lord showed the number of stars in the heavens in the night sky they were so numerous they couldn't be numbered God numbers them of course but man cannot and man is still discovering more stars and God assured him that his offspring would be as numerous as these stars and we read Abraham believed the Lord and God counted it to him as righteousness it doesn't say that Abraham did anything there he just believed no yes faith without works is dead works is an indication of faith but there it is just mere belief and God counted it to him as righteousness they were persuaded of the promises and they embraced them so where there is activity of faith there will be commitment to the word of

God there will be cooperation with Christ and being cleansed you will be exercised in obedience to him our permanent resident Jesus Christ the person who ensures our resident resides in us the Holy Spirit the purpose of such permanent residency being rooted and grounded in love the process by which we enjoy such a residence through faith and perhaps if I am spared the next time I'm in a prayer meeting we'll look at another part of this marvelous and uplifting prayer that is worthy of our study and devotion let us pray