

Rooted and Grounded in Love

By Pastor Christopher Seah

¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3:17 ESV)

In Ephesians 3:17-19, the apostle Paul prays that the Lord Jesus Christ may dwell in the hearts of his people through faith. Paul asks this for us that we might have the strength to understand “with all the saints” the full extent that Christ loves us, that we may be filled with “the fullness of God.” That is a bold and ambitious prayer, one that we all should take upon ourselves regularly. Too often, we pray safely; administratively and reactively. We pray to maintain the status quo. But we need to pray for God’s larger goals to be realized in our lives. We need to pray that we would all be consumed the holy fire of the glory of God in Christ.

But I am especially drawn to this little phrase in the middle of the statement: “...*that you, being rooted and grounded in love...*” This phrase, if we understand it correctly, tells us about the condition of those for whom the apostle prays. Paul is not praying for unbelievers but for believers. The love mentioned here is likely connected to 1:6: “to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us *in the Beloved.*” If our reading is correct, then being rooted and grounded in love is another way of talking about our union with the Beloved One of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). Love is not merely a vague emotion or pleasing sensation. It is a heavenly reality. It is centered upon a Person. Love is embodied in Jesus Christ the beloved Son of God, the One who has dwelled in the Father’s omnipotent and omnipresent love since the beginning, from days of eternity.

So important it is for us to be “rooted and grounded in love” that it appears we would not be able to comprehend the fullness of Christ’s love if we were not. If we are right in reading Paul this way, we are even saying that proper study of Scripture and theology cannot take place unless we are first *grounded* in the love of God in Christ. How many times have people studied doctrine because they want to win arguments? How often has the study of sacred theology become a kind of character armor, a way of showing that we are better, holier, wiser, more righteous, more serious, than others? How many times has the study of Scripture been driven merely by the desire to defend against error, instead of adoring God? I, for one, know something of how theology can be merged with a self-centered desire for appearing better than others. I, for one, know how theological studies can be separated from the adoration of God. Each of us needs to be aware of how our unique brands of sinfulness work. We each need to be conscious of how we are powered by Un-love in our work, studies, and family life.

But how does the love of God in Christ function as a new energy that replaces the bitter energy of mere self-defense? Let's think first about how God's love frees us. If we are deeply rooted in love, we do not have to be energized by fear, anxiety, or self-protective hatred. *If we are grounded in, rooted on, and embraced by the beloved Son, we do not have to...*

- put someone down in order to make ourselves feel good
- speak of someone's sins in order to deflect attention from our own
- be constantly thinking of how to manage our public image
- despise those whom we perceive to be our competitors at school or work
- be constantly thinking of defensive arguments to defeat those who question us
- cloak ourselves with sarcasm
- work hard (primarily) to prove others wrong
- get our ways all the time
- engage in fault-finding as our default mode of action
- resort to emotional manipulation to get others to do our bidding
- fixate on all the ways things don't work the way we would like

Are you in any one of the items in that list above? Most of us, I suppose, have occupied one position or another. Some of us may be presently camping out in one or two. But recognize that being rooted in love frees us from those destructive motivations.

If we are grounded in, rooted on, and embraced by the beloved Son, we do, however, get to do the following:

- love another human being who cannot possibly return the favor
- encourage, energize, and affirm another human being
- allow others the freedom to grow in their God-ordained paths and paces
- talk frankly about our own shortcomings and frailties
- be fully present when we are with our children, spouses, and friends
- ask forgiveness when we have done wrong
- surrender our preferences for the good of others
- disagree with others without hating them
- pray heartily and generously for those who hurt us
- truly befriend another person with no strings attached
- accept that some form of crucifixion is our lot this side of glory
- genuinely rejoice in the successes and happiness of others (!)
- rebuke to kill the sin, not obliterate the sinner
- serve others joyfully and willingly, not slavishly
- derive satisfaction in our private worship and secret acts of goodness
- relinquish our agendas for others—while retaining only God's loving agenda for them

Only when we truly accept that we are loved by God in Christ will we start to display more and more the holy, compassionate life that our Savior requires of us.

Are you abiding daily in the awareness of God's love—or are you simply content to talk about it? How often do you pause to acknowledge that God is presently delighting in you through Christ, personally caring for your growth and needs? Has the wonder of God's love been replaced by the weight of your fears? Has the freshness of God's love been eclipsed by a renewed focus on your own efforts, successes and failings? We need to guard our hearts with the love of God. May God give us grace to do so. Amen.