
EPH 3:14-21 : AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER [7]

No. EE15

Today we are looking at Ef 3:17b: *the thought of being rooted and established in love.*

A FEW TECHNICAL OBSERVATIONS

□ A comparison of the various translations reveals that this phrase is sometimes taken as part of the first petition and sometimes as part of the second (NIV, NASB). The Greek allows both interpretations, but I do regard the second as the better one. In other words: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (NIV).

□ In the Greek the words "rooted" and "established" are in the same form (perfect passive participle), which helps us understand the prayer.

- Firstly, being rooted and established is the result of the first petition being answered. The Ephesians will be rooted and established to the extent that they experience the strengthening in their inner being through the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ.

- Secondly, the fact that they are rooted and established "in love", confirms our understanding of the text in the previous discussion - that the indwelling of Christ in the first instance has to do with the love that Christians have for our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Thirdly, the fact that they are rooted and established in love will be the primary cause of the Ephesians having the power to "grasp" and to "know" (which we will look at later on).

- Fourthly, we need to note the progression in the prayer - the one petition leads to the next. Our text forms the bridge between the two petitions.

LOVE CAUSES ONE TO BE ANCHORED

Why does the apostle specifically use the two words "rooted" and "established"?

□ The word "rooted" alludes to a tree that is anchored in the earth, drawing life-giving sap from the depths with which to bear fruit.

- In Gal 5:6 the apostle's words are most significant: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love".

Even if the apostle refers here to love for one's neighbour, love for the Lord is undoubtedly in the first instance the driving force behind the Christian's good works. Christian love for one's neighbour, and love for the Lord, always go hand in hand.

In this context it has to do with the heresy of the Judaists who insisted on circumcision as a prerequisite for salvation. No, says Paul, ceremonies will never secure salvation. The only condition is faith - but, of course, it is a specific sort of faith. It is faith which results in good works (1Cor 13:1-3; James 2:14-26). And this immediately leads to the question: What constitutes good works? We find the answer in the letter to the Galatians: good works are that which arise out of love. In other words, works that are aimed at obeying, pleasing and glorifying our Lord, because of our love for Him.

- This is exactly what Paul has in mind in this prayer. If the hearts of the Ephesians are filled to overflowing with love for Jesus, the church will

become like a tree that bears fruit in a thousand ways, over and over again, to the glory of God.

□ The word "grounded" alludes to a building standing on a firm foundation. It therefore indicates stability, constancy and permanence.

The apostle knows that nothing whatsoever can be so lifechanging as a loving relationship with the Lord. It brings inner strength, security, stability and resolution.

- Hardly anything can bring such dishonour to the name of the Lord, do as much harm to his church, or mean as pathetically little to his kingdom, as church members who are fickle and unreliable. They come with a different story about God's guidance almost daily, they give in under the least challenge to their faith, and one can in no way depend on them.

There is an apt description of such a person in James 1:6-8: "... he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does". What is this person's problem? He or she is a doubter or, says James, an unbeliever.

- Christ does not live in a faithless heart (v.17) - which leads to further instability in the life of the person concerned. He then finds himself in a negative spiral, which, if it lasts long enough, ends in a nosedive that leaves him in complete apostasy. No, what Paul is praying for here is exactly the opposite process: a positive upwards spiral, from glory to glory, strength to strength.

- The problem with such unstable people is that they usually build their faith on feelings, which is exactly the opposite of how it should be. Our faith should be grounded in the fundamental promises and principles of the Word. There will still be feelings and emotions, but now encapsulated in assurance and steadfastness.

CONCLUSION

To the extent that people experience the indwelling of Christ in their lives - to the extent therefore that a love for Jesus Christ burns in their hearts - to that extent will both the individual and the church bear fruit to the glory of God, and experience security, rootedness, stability and constancy in Christ.

Anyone with a minimum of insight into the ways of the Lord with his beloved church, will understand that this conclusion lies at the heart of what the true church is. In a certain sense all the other things are secondary. And yet so many churches are strangers to this *sine qua non* of being a true church. May the Lord preserve us from such ignorance!

A FEW PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Even the most profound and spiritual revelations in Scripture, like this prayer, has practical and life-changing implications.

So-called theory and practice are never set in contrast in the Bible. The first part of the New Testament epistles (the so-called indicative part), which deals with God's great acts of redemption in Christ and the secrets of the new dispensation, is invariably followed by a more practical second part (the so-called imperative section). And the second part is always based on the first: because God is as He is described in the first part, and because He did what He did in Christ, therefore, and for that very reason, this is how Christians must live.

A one-sided emphasis on the indicatives in the Word, while ignoring the imperatives, leads to Pharasatism, hypocrisy and self-deception. And accentuation of the imperatives, independent of the indicatives, results in legalism and moralism.

Let us never shrink from the deep indicative truths in the New Testament. They were included, through the work of the Holy Spirit for the very purpose of broadening our knowledge of God and building up our faith. What is required in the first place is not intellect, but enlightenment by the Holy

Spirit. Remember for whom the New Testament was written! Many of the converts at the time were illiterate and uneducated slaves.

2. Bearing fruit is not optional. Therefore we may never be satisfied with anything less than a burning love for Christ in our hearts - hence the importance of this prayer.

In the first 8 verses of Jn 15 Jesus also talks of fruit bearing. There too He stresses the close relationship between an intimate loving relationship with Him, and bearing fruit to the glory of God.

But there is something else that we should not overlook. In these few verses in John he warns us twice about the danger of being rejected: One of the reasons being the absence of fruit bearing in a person's life (v.2), and the other the absence of true fellowship with Him (v. 6). These two causes are not chosen at random as reasons for rejection. They are intimately related. If one is absent, you may be sure that the other is also lacking.

To have Christ in one's heart is to have deep roots - which will inevitably lead to fruit-bearing, time and time again. Do not rest, therefore, if the flame of love for Christ burns low in your heart!

3. It may take a long time before one can start bearing fruit, but those with an unquenchable love for the Lord are able to wait year after year - in fact, they can hardly do anything else.

When Paul describes the attributes of love, he starts off with the statement that it is *patient* (1Cor 13:4). One tends to glance over this without really considering the full implications of it. But to say that love is patient, is to say that it does not become discouraged. It will persist, patiently, year after year.

It reminds one of Jacob who, after having worked for the hand of Lea for seven years, worked a further seven years to get Rachel, "but they seemed like only a few days to him *because of his love for her*" (Gn 29:20).

Perhaps no missionary ever accomplished more than William Carey (1761-1834) in India. Although a

man of many special talents, he ascribed the huge amount of fruit that he brought forth for the Kingdom to his ability to persevere. "I can plod", he used to say.

4. Few things beautify the gospel and glorify Christ more than Christians who are rooted and established in their love for God.

The fallen world has never been known for constancy and firmness of principle. And, of course, our post-modern world is now more relativistic, dependable and inconsistent than ever before.

It is not easy for a Christian to live in such a world, but it does afford us the opportunity to let our light shine all the stronger with our steadfastness, our inner strength, the firmness of our beliefs and our stable lifestyle. We do, after all, understand the world around us. We can face one and all squarely. We know what we believe and on whom we believe. We know why and for what we live. We know where we are going. We are anchored!

Christians in whose hearts Christ dwells are oak trees, not lightweights that can be pushed over easily. They are not washed about by just any wave of teaching.

And they (in fact, only they) make excellent martyrs when this is demanded of them for the sake of God's glory.

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