

Baptist guilt. That's what Tee Welton calls it and it often plagues his conscience. It's a simple malady, really. He was in a Baptist church for most of his life and they were always asking him to do things and they applied enough guilt that he could just not say no. So even now that he is no longer a Baptist, he still carries that Baptist guilt when people ask him to do things for them. Let me explain just how bad Tee's guilt can be. I texted him to ask if I could talk about his Baptist guilt and he said yes, because he would have felt guilty had he said no. 😊

I was a Baptist deacon while I was in my early twenties so I know a little bit of what he's talking about. And of course, we're just picking on Baptists. Not all Baptists are like that and some non-Baptists apply heavy doses of guilt to their people. What I am talking about is how to motivate the people in the pews. We know that as believers we should do certain things that the Bible teaches and not do certain things that it forbids. We know that we should be wanting to read our Bible and pray and serve others and share our faith and keep battling our own sinfulness and selfishness, but all of these are difficult to do. How do we keep people motivated to strive in all of these areas? This is the job of the church—not just to keep people busy but to move them forward in discipleship, in their spiritual growth. The ultimate goal is to do the right thing for the right reasons.

Christians and churches and whole denominations have used all manner of means to motivate the people in the pews. If you are Catholic, the motivation is the fear of hell or the fear of spending thousands of years in purgatory. It's an ugly form of motivation but it works and had it not been for Martin Luther and the reformers, we would all still be living under this tyranny.

If you believe that you can lose your salvation that is motivation for hard work, isn't it? Some of you grew up with that belief and in that kind of environment. You're saved by grace but if you commit certain sins and don't repent, God could take that all away. It's a tremendous fear-based form of motivation. Again, it's ugly, but it works, so the legalism engine keeps the church locomotive moving forward. In high school I was not saved but I was dating a girl whose church believed that you could lose your salvation. More missionary dating, I suppose. Young people—

please never fall into that trap. Here's what happens. You fall in like—not love—with a cute guy or hot girl. You know you're not supposed to date unbelievers so you are left with one of two choices. A—you convince yourself that since they go to church on Christmas and Easter, they must be a believer. Or B—you convince yourself that you will win them to the Lord—the so-called missionary dating strategy. So after this girl broke up with me because she liked another guy, because they had this false belief that you could lose your salvation, I was told that she had to go down the aisle at church to repent lest she lose her salvation. That's a high price to pay for dumping your boyfriend—even if that boyfriend was me.

But there are also lesser forms of bad motivation. Even if a church doesn't believe in purgatory or that you can lose your salvation, there's still the old standby of shame and guilt. If you were truly a good Christian, you would serve in the nursery and work at VBS. If you really cared about your church family, you'd get to church more often than you do.

Now there is genuine Holy Spirit conviction that can be confused with false guilt. The loving hand of the Spirit can be heavy at times. And then there's Proverbs 27:6 which says "Faithful are the wounds from a friend." A loving friend who knows you well may at times poke at you and spur you on. If it is done in love that is not guilt or shame either.

But in the absence of these good forms of guilt, shame and guilt are powerful motivators. Shame causes Japanese soldiers to disembowel themselves with a knife. Shame causes some Muslim men to kill their daughters due to some perceived offense. And shame and guilt can keep the people in the pews in line. It works and that's why so many people wield this perverted form of power. But it's also horribly destructive.

So then, how should we motivate believers without falling into the damaging effects of shame and guilt? And we all need to be motivated by something. Basically, every action we do in a given day is either motivated by a fear of loss or punishment or by a possible gain. We get up and go to work each day because we are motivated by a paycheck and we are also motivated by the fear of getting fired or being unemployed if we don't drag ourselves to work once again. I buy ice cream because I love the taste of it or I decide not to buy it because I fear for the negative impact of more fat and sugar. You see, all decisions and actions have some sort of motivation at their basis. What motivates you to follow the Lord each day? Why do you decide to obey the Lord instead of choosing sin? Or you could reverse that. Why do you choose to sin and disobey? Why do you do little to nothing to maintain a vital relationship with the Lord?

Rightly understood, the Bible has the perfect source of motivation for us. You can find it all throughout the New testament but it is especially is seen in the book of Ephesians and in the third chapter. This passage is a prayer so like we did three weeks ago, let's read it together as a congregational prayer.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to

know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Let me quickly review the points from three weeks ago when we looked at the first half of this prayer.

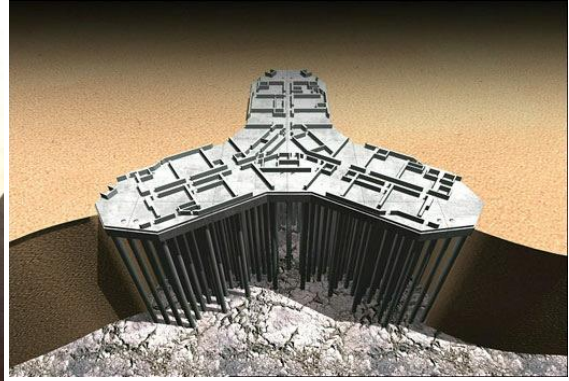
God created and owns us.
God has unlimited powers
It is his prerogative to answer prayers
God is good and God is strong
God's power is personal
God's power abides within us.

It's all one continuous prayer but the first purpose clause come in verse 17—*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*. Then immediately after this, we get another purpose clause. *that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Paul wants us to grasp the infinite love of God. That's the larger purpose but before we get to that we need to camp out on this little phrase—you, being rooted and grounded in love. In the flow of the prayer, it's sort of a parentheses. Being rooted and grounded in love is not the end goal but rather the starting point. It's the assumption and the foundation upon which the rest of the prayer rests. Paul could have said, **because** you are rooted and grounded in love, you may have strength to comprehend... Being rooted and grounded in love is not something that will happen to you or might happen to you if you stop sinning or if you follow hard after Jesus or if you are diligent to read your Bible, pray and be a good Christian. This is something that is already true of all believers. You are already rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. You can't earn that and you can't lose it.

Rooted and grounded. Just like it sounds like, there are two metaphors here—an agricultural metaphor and an architectural metaphor. Rooted in love. We know that trees have a large root system which anchors it deep into the ground. Usually this is great—unless you want to get rid of the roots. We had an arbor vitae next to our garage that was way overgrown. It wasn't going to be enough merely to cut it down. We needed to get rid of the roots because we wanted to plant something there again. Ethan set to work digging around it. After he had dug a significant hole, he started hacking away at the roots with an axe. This process of digging and chopping would have continued on a lot longer if Chris Eisermann had not stopped by and was able to pull the rest out with his truck. You appreciate the root system when you have these experiences.

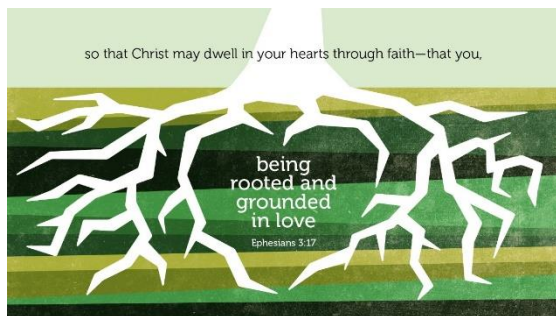
That arbor vitae was a pain but it was nothing compared to the tree that fell in our backyard when I was in high school. During a severe thunderstorm, my dad and I were looking out the back door at the large tree swaying in the wind. My dad said, "Look at that tree. It looks like it's



going to blow over.” It wasn’t ten seconds later that it actually did. It seemed even bigger standing next to it.

Believers are rooted in love and we are grounded in love. That’s the architectural metaphor. Of course Paul never saw a sky scraper but if he had, he may have mentioned something like Burj Khalifa—the tallest building in the world. This massive structure which stands over one half mile tall is firmly anchored into the ground. There are 192 pylons driven 150 feet into the ground. This thing is grounded.

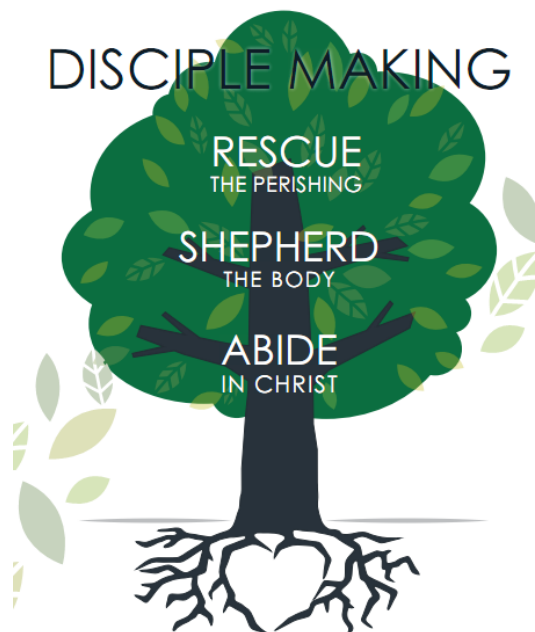
Rooted and grounded in love. This is another facet of our identity in Christ. It is who we are by virtue of Christ’s work in our lives. It is a perfect love that is unchanging because it is initiated, driven and sealed by God himself. If being rooted and grounded in God’s love depended on you and me, we’d be sunk. We would constantly uprooting ourselves if it were left up to us.



Did you notice anything familiar about the main powerpoint slide I used? Where have you seen this image before? Brian Larrington borrowed this image when he created the

discipleship tree in our brochure. Brian designed the tree and then Kellyn took his tree and designed the brochure. The core of our discipleship is meant to communicate that all believers are rooted and grounded in the love of God. That goes hand in hand with abiding in Christ from John 15. We abide in Christ because we are rooted and grounded in God’s immovable, unchangeable love.

This also answers the original question about motivation. As I said, most religions and many denominations externally motivate the people in the pew through some form of fear. But rightly



understood, God's love through the gospel is internally motivating in a positive way. You don't serve out of fear of punishment or duty or anything other than gratitude. Again, rightly understood and continually reflected upon, the love of God is internally transforming. As I said on Father's Day, the imperfect love of an earthly father changes you, how much more the perfect love of our Heavenly Father.

The human heart longs to be accepted. God's love is this acceptance. We long to be free from striving for salvation and acceptance by God. God's love causes us to cease our striving. Why fight and work for your salvation when that has already been done for you. We believe lies about ourselves but being rooted and grounded in God's love can negate and slowly erase those lies. I challenge you to give me one lie you believe about yourself that cannot be crushed by the love of God. The difficulty in the lies we believe is to first see them as lies and then second to apply truth to the lies.

One such person who did this for a friend was John Newton. I'm sure you know that Newton, the former slave trader, wrote Amazing Grace. But most people do not know that Amazing Grace first appeared in a book of hymns, a third of which was written by Newton's friend, John Cowper. Cowper was a troubled soul. He suffered from severe bouts of melancholy. Today we call it depression. Cowper attempted to take his own life on countless occasions during the decades long friendship he had with Newton. And Newton discovered that Cowper did better when he was writing poems and hymns and so he invited to write a hymn book with him.

One of Cowper's best known hymns is *There is a Fountain*, which is about God's redeeming love. It's a fountain of blood which comes from Immanuel's veins. Let's sing the last verse together.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.
And shall be till I die,
And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

Cowper beat down his melancholy by signing and meditating on God's truths, chief of which was God's redeeming love. Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die. But it has to be your theme. You can't just acknowledge it and leave it there. You can't hear it preached once and then you've got it forever. You've got to sing it and read about it and apply it to your heart and mind daily.

And the love of God is big, isn't it? It's so big that Paul described it this way. *that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

This prayer teaches us that divine power is necessary for understanding of divine love. We can't understand this on our own. Unless we ask that God grant us the power to grasp this love, it won't sink down into our bones. We'll get it at some level. We'll get a taste of it, but we will not grasp its breadth and length and height and depth without the power to do so. Divine power is necessary for understanding of divine love. This is not a prayer for power to love others, to obey God or to do great things. This is a prayer to understand the unsurpassing love of Christ.

No wonder most of the world does not understand this love. They can't. You can tell them about it but it has to be driven deep into their souls by the regular powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Paul said that he wants us to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge. Now there's a paradox if I have ever heard one. How do you know something surpasses knowledge? It's like taking a bite out of infinity. It can't be done yet we are to pray for this very thing. One bite at a time. One prayer at a time. One hymn sung at a time. One chapter read, one verse memorized. You need divine power to understand divine love but you must also expose yourself to this truth in every possible manner.

I want to close with another hymn about the love of God but first I want you to know the origins of the hymn. In the 1800's this poem was found scrawled on the walls of an insane asylum.

Were the sky of parchment made,
A quill each reed, each twig and blade,
Could we with ink the oceans fill,
Were every man a scribe of skill,
The marvelous story, Of God's great glory
Would still remain untold; For He, most high
The earth and sky Created alone of old.

Does that sound familiar to you? It was not written by the man suffering melancholy. It was part of a poem written by a Jewish rabbi in the eleventh century. Apparently, this truth was a balm to the suffering man, so much so that he wrote it on the walls of his cell. An evangelist in the late 1890's concluded his message by quoting these scrawled verses. At the meeting, and making notes, was songwriter Frederick H. Lehman.

Lehman wrote about this haunting last verse. "Since the lines had been found penciled on the wall of patient's room in an insane asylum after he had been carried to his grave, the general opinion was that this inmate had written the epic in moments of sanity."¹

Lehman was so moved by this verse that he changed it slightly and it became the final verse of his hymn, The Love of God. Please stand and join me in singing this hymn to close the service.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.

Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Rich Maurer
July 9, 2017

¹ <http://digging-history.com/2014/10/26/hymnspiration-the-love-of-god/>