

## The Soil Of Love

(Ephesians 3:14-19) "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, {15} from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, {16} that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; {17} so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, {18} may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, {19} and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God."

### **I. Introduction**

Paul prayed this prayer for the church in Ephesus while he was in prison. He is in a position of humility, on his knees before the Father, and is praying for the church in Ephesus. He begins verse 14 stating, "for this reason..." Paul had been given a mandate to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul has served the Lord with a clear conscience. He has worked hard day and night. He has suffered hardships like a good soldier. Yet he knows that it is going to take prayer to accomplish God's will here on earth. Therefore, Paul is on his knees before the Father praying for the church in Ephesus.

Paul then says, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name..." There were real problems and divisions between the Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul has just finished teaching how the blood of Christ has brought down the barrier of the dividing wall between the Gentiles and Jewish believers. Now, he makes this statement emphasizing that we are all part of the same family and all get our name from the Father.

I used to lead a quarterly prayer meeting for all the churches in Acworth. I visited the various pastors and invited them and their congregations to come and pray together. Some pastors said that they could not pray with people from other denominations, especially charismatic churches. I told them that they weren't getting married. They still declined. They haven't learned that we are all part of the same family with the same Father and the same family name.

Paul then prays for the church to be strengthened with power through His Spirit. That is a great thing for us to pray. The early church prayed for power. In Acts 4:29-30, the church prayed for boldness and for signs and wonders and then the

place where they were praying shook. Could it be that we don't have power because we don't ask. James 4:2 says that "you do not have because you do not ask." Could it be that we are not on our knees praying to the Father for the power.

He wanted the church to be rooted and grounded in love. The purpose for being rooted and grounded in love is:

- that we would know the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love.
- that we would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.
- so that we would be filled up with the fullness of God.

Most of you know that I like gardening, and raising fruit trees. I could easily have been a farmer. I study all about trees, plants, and soil. This year I have been learning about proppagating various types of bushes and vines. I have been successful with layering muscadines and also with caning my blackberries. Part of my study the past year has been in the area of soil.

We are going to focus in on a part of verse 17 today, rooted and grounded in love. First of all, roots are divided up into two main classifications: woody and non-woody. The woody roots are used to:

- give support
- transport nutrients
- store nutrients

The non-woody roots are used to:

- absorb nutrients and
- for chemical production

Another interesting fact about roots is that they grow in the top 18" of soil. Most big trees do not have roots that go down 20 feet. Their roots may go out as far as 70 feet beyond the drip line. They have massive lateral roots which give tremendous support. The church needs to have tremendous root systems, relational roots. That is another message in itself. Let me encourage each of you to get plugged into a community group so that you can get relationally knit together with other people.

Paul also prays for them to be grounded in love. The word for grounded is "themelioo", which is used for laying or building a foundation. It is used in Mathew 7:25 in the parable of the wise builder and the foolish builder.

“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall for it had been founded (themelioo) upon the rock.”

Plants are rooted in soil, but foundations are laid on rock. Roots grow in the top layer of soil. Foundations very often require the removing of the top layers of soil to get down to solid ground.

Foundations, like roots, are two dimensional. They have a spread and they have depth. When the world trade center was built, it had pylons that went 70 feet below into solid bedrock.

Here, love is referred to as a good soil, a soil where people can be rooted in and thrive and bear good fruit. Love is also referred to as a solid rock, like a bedrock, that a good foundation can be built upon. The foundation of love can withstand all the storms of life:

- sickness
- relational
- job related
- financial
- legal
- marital
- children

Today, we are going to look specifically at the soil of love. We are going to look from the natural and then look at the spiritual implications.

First of all, there are basically four variables that are considered when looking at soil:

1. Soil drainage
2. Soil composition
3. Soil nutrients
4. Soil pH

Of these three variables, soil drainage is considered by experts to be the most important. If soil retains water and does not drain, the plant suffocates and dies. At the top of my azalea garden, every plant and tree that I have planted has died. I have checked the nutrient level and it is perfect. I have checked the pH and it is

perfect. I have checked the soil composition and it is good. The problem is that there is some underground drainage or springs that flow through that area and it doesn't drain well and so nothing has been able to survive.

Golf courses have extensive drainage systems so that every square foot of turf drains. Every green has both surface drainage and sub-surface drain tiles. Nicklaus has been the one exception in course architects and he has not used much surface drainage. Unfortunately for those people that have had Nicklaus design their greens, they have had to rebuild his greens at a very high cost. Standing water suffocates the roots of the plants.

I believe the spiritual lesson here is that God pours out His Spirit and His love into our lives and He intends us to pour that same love into others. He gives us spiritual gifts so that we can serve one another. The gifts are not just for us, but for the body of Christ. If a member does not use the gifts that He has, the whole body suffers.

The second area is the soil composition. Soil is made up of water, air, organic matter and mineral matter. The soil must have the right amount of air, water, organic matter and rock. The ideal mix of the soil is Mineral Matter 45%, Organic Matter 5%, Air 25% and Water 25%.

The mineral matter is further classified by size, either as fine earth or as coarse particles (rock fragments).

The fine earth is broken into three groups: sand, silt and clay. The coarse particles are broken into four groups: pebbles, cobbles, stones and boulders.

When I worked at a golf course I had to learn the importance of this. As golfers play on greens and as they get mowed every morning, the soil gets compacted. The roots can no longer get the air or water that they need. Therefore, they must aerify the greens three to four times a year by putting these deep tines into the greens. Then, they fill the holes with a mixture of peat and sand. The golfers hate it because the greens are not very puttable for a couple of weeks. But, if it is not done, the grass on the greens will gradually weaken and die.

Jesus spoke about the different soil types. He said the seeds planted on hard ground were snatched up and did not grow. The seeds planted in rocky soil sprang up, but because their roots had no depth, when persecution came, they withered up

and died. Then, He talked about the soil with weeds. The plant came up, but so did the weeds and they choked out the plant so that it could not bear fruit. And finally, Jesus spoke about the good soil that bore good fruit, 30, 60 and 100 fold.

(Matthew 13:3-8) "And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; {4} and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. {5} "And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. {6} "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. {7} "And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. {8} "And others fell on the good soil, and yielded^ a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

(Matthew 13:18-23) ""Hear then the parable of the sower. {19} "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. {20} "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; {21} yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. {22} "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. {23} "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.""

The third consideration in soil is the nutrient level. The three primary nutrients that a soil needs are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. The nitrogen promotes leaf growth and should be used in summer. The potassium is very good for root growth and is better applied in the dormant season.

We could spend a whole lot of time talking about the various types of soils, but I want to focus in the fourth variable and that is the pH of the soil. Most plants grow well in a pH between 5.9 and 6.5. They can survive between 4.5 and 8.0, but outside of these ranges, a plant will lock up. It cannot receive any nutrients from the soil. It cannot receive fertilizer or anything until the pH is changed. In areas where there is a lot of rainfall, the soil tends to be acidic and where there is very

little rain, the soil tends to be more alkaline. Most corrections for acidic soil are made by adding lime to sweeten the soil to bring it up to an acceptable level. For alkaline soils, sulfur can be added to lower the pH.

Here is a picture of me in my primary garden. The soil is very good. It has a pH of 6.8. The nutrient level is very good. As you can see the corn stalks are about 8 feet tall. I picked some corn this week and we have been enjoying the sweet corn. Good soil produces good fruit and very tasty fruit at that.

Because I didn't want my yellow corn to cross pollinate with my white corn, I put in new garden this year. I tilled it and planted seven rows of corn. I watered and took care of it just like my main garden. However, the corn stalks only grew to about 1 to 2 ½ feet tall. Most of the stalks have no corn on them. On the stalks that did produce corn, it was very small and sparse. Because I wanted to find out why my corn did not make, I tested the soil and found that it was very bitter soil. The pH of the soil is 5.4. Corn grows well between 5.5 and 7.5, with 6.5 being ideal. It will not grow below 5.5, which is where my soil is.

Here is a picture showing the differences between the bitter soil and the good soil. Bitter soil has no fruit or bad fruit. Good soil produces good fruit.

I also has some goats. Karen and I have been studying goats and how to care for our goats. We have done lots of research on the web. A couple of weeks ago I came across the website of Hannah and Mike Wardell. Their ranch could not grow anything at all. Their soil nutrient level was excellent, but they found out that their pH was too low. Therefore, Mike Wardell applied two tons of lime per acre to raise the pH of the soil and the pastures grew like crazy.

**They have a saying, “We now believe that good soil equals healthy plants equals healthy animals.” I like the saying. I believe it has spiritual implications. I believe that the good soil of love equals good healthy people equals lots of kingdom fruitfulness.**

pH affects many areas of our lives. Research is now linking many sicknesses and diseases to an acidic diet. pH is also important in the oil business. The pH of a drilling mud can mean life or death when drilling around H<sub>2</sub>S. Drillers add lime to their mud to bring up the pH. It neutralizes H<sub>2</sub>S so that it does not kill those working on the well. Just a small dose of 0.06%, which is 600 parts per million will instantly kill you.

Here is a picture looking out my back yard in M.I.S., Iran. They had a well blowout above the city. It happened to my father's well while we were in the states on vacation. They called him and he had to cut short his vacation to go back and deal with the situation. If they had not set fire to the rig, the whole city would have died from the H<sub>2</sub>S. It is heavier than air and would have gone straight down into the city. It took several months and many million dollars to resolve the problem.

What is pH? pH is a measurement of how acidic or alkaline a soil is. The word acidic means sour or bitter. A neutral pH is 7.0. Anything higher than that is considered alkaline and anything lower than 7.0 is considered acidic. The pH of the soil can be measured by a pH meter. There are an assortment of pH meters that range in price from \$20.00 to a very sophisticated electronic sensor for several hundred dollars.

There are other ways of detecting whether a soil is acidic or sour. When a fruit bearing plant is in acidic soil, if it bears fruit, the fruit will be very sour. I planted some thornless blackberries by my office and the blackberries were very plump and large, much bigger than the ones we have growing wild. But the first time I tasted one of them, my mouth puckered up. The soil was too acidic and needed some lime. For the past couple of years, I have been putting down lime for my blueberries and blackberries. My blackberries are still very sour. The soil is so acidic that it needs to be tilled deeply and treated heavily with lime.

Another way is to look at the vegetation. If moss is present, you know that the pH of the soil is probably 5.5 or lower. Grasses cannot live in soil this acidic, but mosses thrive.

Listen to the definitions of acid. This is not just talking about soil, but it is also talking about people. The soil of our hearts and lives can become very acidic, very sour and bitter.

1. A compound, usually having a sour taste and capable of neutralizing alkalis and reddening blue litmus paper, containing hydrogen that can be replaced by a metal or an electropositive group to form a salt.
2. Something with a sour taste.
3. Sharp or biting, sarcastic, scornful, bitter, or ill natured in mood, manner, etc.

Scripture has a lot to say about bitterness. For example, in Exodus 15, the nation of Israel came to Marah and they could not drink the waters of Marah for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. They grumbled to Moses and he cried out to the Lord. The Lord showed him a tree and had him throw it into the waters and they became sweet. God wants to do the same thing in our lives. He hung on a tree to take away our bitterness. He wants rivers of living waters flowing out of our innermost being.

(Exodus 15:23) "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah."

(Exodus 15:25) "Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them."

(John 7:38) ""He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'""

James talks about bitterness when he deals with the tongue in James 3. Listen to what he says.

(James 3:11-14) "Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? {12} Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh. {13} Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. {14} But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

He makes a point that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12:33-35. The words that come out of our mouth stem from what lies in our hearts. When the fountain of our mouth brings forth bitter water, it is because of the bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in our hearts. There is a very easy way to look at the pH of our hearts. Look at the words that come out of our mouths. Jesus said that you will know if a tree is good by its fruit. We can look at the fruit and see if it is bitterness or sweet.

(Matthew 12:33-35) ""Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. {34} "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the



mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. {35} "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil."

A couple of months ago, I asked Thomas to have lunch with me. Why? Because I told him that I was getting critical of the church and needed to talk to him. I don't want any bitterness in my heart. I want a clean and pure heart.

What are the signs of bitterness in our life? Here are some of the signs of bitterness.

- animosity towards a person (any stage)
- anger (Eph 4:31) (any stage)
- avoidance of people, withdrawal (usually an indication, early sign)
- cutting off communication (all stages)
- critical spirit (can be early sign, but normally in advanced stage)
- cursing (any stage, but normally in advanced stage)
- desire for vengeance (any stage)
- easily offended (many times takes things out of context and is offended) (all stages)
- lack of warmth, coldness in relationship (usually an indication, early sign)
- negative attitude (any stage)
- severing of relationship (advanced stage)
- sharp, cutting words (advanced stage)
- slander (any stage)
- unwillingness to forgive (advanced stage)

What are the ways that we can treat the soil of our heart for bitterness?

1. The love of God. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
  - Love is patient (long suffering--makrothumeo)
  - love is kind
  - and is not jealous
  - love does not brag and is not arrogant
  - does not act unbecomingly
  - it does not seek its own
  - is not provoked
  - does not take into account a wrong suffered,
  - does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
  - bears all things,

- believes all things,
- hopes all things,
- endures all things."

The pH of love neutralizes all bitterness and does not allow any roots of bitterness to grow. Look at what Hebrews 12:15 tells us.

Hebrews 12:15 "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;"

2. The kindness of God neutralizes the bitterness in peoples lives. It allows them to receive freely from the Lord. Like a plant, it unlocks them so that they can receive kingdom nutrients. A church that is full of love and kindness will have quite an impact on the world. It will also be a place of healing. There are lots of embittered lives in the kingdom of God. Like the lime mud on the rigs, the spirit of the church must be sweet to neutralize the bitterness that people bring in.

(Romans 2:4) "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

3. The Word of God. There was a man in another church whose life was very bitter. He was going through some really trying times and his family life was very bad. But the man would sit down and devour the word of God. It was sweet to his soul and changing the pH of his heart.

(Psalms 119:103) "How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

4. Worship and music. Remember in 1 Sam 16:23 how David would play for Saul and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the spirit would depart from him. Music has the ability to sweeten the soil of our hearts. There was a man at another church who was full of bitterness. He was full of sarcasm and criticism about everything. He would not pray with the church, but the man would listen to morningstar music, very loud at that. The music was impacting his life. He would not participate in prayer

(1 Samuel 16:23) "So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came

to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him."

(Psalms 81:2) "Raise a song, strike the timbrel, The sweet sounding lyre with the harp."

## Invitation

1. Pour Your Heart Out To The Lord. In closing today, I want to look at six responses to bitterness. The first is found in 1 Samuel 1:6-18. Elkanah had two wives. That is always going to be a problem with rivalry and jealousy. Penninah was able to bear Elkanah children, but Hannah was barren. Penninah would irritate and provoke her bitterly. Rather than becoming bitter, Hannah did something that I believe the Lord would have some of us to do. She poured her heart and wept bitterly before the Lord. When Eli, the priest, saw her, he thought she was drunk. But then, after finding out what she was doing, he said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked Him. Some of you need to pour your heart out before the Lord.

(1 Samuel 1:6-18) "Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. {7} And it happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her, so she wept and would not eat. {8} Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" {9} Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. {10} And she, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. {11} And she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head." {12} Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. {13} As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. {14} Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you." {15} But Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD. {16} "Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman; for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation." {17} Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him." {18} And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."

2. The second response is found in Acts 8:18-24. Peter had just laid hands on people and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Simon saw this and wanted to have the same power. Simon liked to be noticed and he had proclaimed himself to be great. Peter read Simon's heart, that he was in the gall of bitterness in the bondage of iniquity. He told him to repent of this wickedness of yours.

(Acts 8:18-24) "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, {19} saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." {20} But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! {21} "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. {22} "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. {23} "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." {24} But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.""

Sometimes bitterness is a result of sin in our lives. It could be bitter jealousy or wrong motives.

Psalms 73:3, 21 "For I was envious of the arrogant, As I saw the prosperity of the wicked." ....Psalms 73:21 "When my heart was embittered, And I was pierced within,"

It can also come through an adulteress relationship. Proverbs tells us that the lips of an adulteress drip honey, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood. God wants us to repent of the sin so that the bitterness can be released from our lives.

(Proverbs 5:3-4) "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, And smoother than oil is her speech; {4} But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword."

3. The third response is also found in Acts 8:24. Simon answered and said Pray to the Lord for me. He didn't even know how to pray for himself in this situation. If you feel like Simon this morning and would like someone else to pray for you, we have people who will pray with you and for you. God wants to set us free from bitterness. He wants to throw the branch in your waters and make it sweet. Come

forward and be prayed for.

4. The next response is to pursue peace with all men. There may have been a breach or offense in your relationship. It has been a hard thing and it haunts you day and night. A root of bitterness is forming and you know that it needs to be dealt with. The Lord wants to pour out His grace in your life. He wants to pull out the root of bitterness. He wants you to humble yourself and make the relationship right. If you would like someone to pray with you over the situation, we would be glad to do so. But, you have a responsibility to pursue. Pursue means to keep going after something until you get it.

(Hebrews 12:14-17) "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. {15} See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; {16} that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. {17} For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."

5. The next response is to let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you. The word put away in the Greek is *airo*. It means to lift or take up. It was used specifically to weigh anchor or to sail away. God wants all bitterness and anger to be pulled up and to let it sail away from you. If you have been weighed down by bitterness, let some people pray for you today. Let them help you pull up the anchor and let the bitterness be put away from you.

(Ephesians 4:31-5:2) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. {32} And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; {2} and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

6. The last response is found in Proverbs 31:6. King Lemuel's mother was giving him some good advice and told him that it was not for kings to drink wine. Instead, give strong drink to him who is perishing and wine to him whose life is bitter.

(Proverbs 31:6) "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter."

But we have a better wine than the natural wine. Scripture says do not be drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

(Acts 2:13) "But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine.""

The wine of the Spirit is sweet. In Acts 2:13, people witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people and thought they were full of sweet wine. Some of you need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. The wine of the Spirit produces love, joy and peace in our lives. The wine of the Spirit neutralizes the bitterness in our lives. If you would like a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit,

(Ephesians 5:18-20) "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, {19} speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; {20} always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;"

One of the best ways to be filled with the Holy Spirit is in worship. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit. If you would like someone to pray with you to be filled with His Spirit, come forward. Again, if the Lord has been speaking to you about any of these areas, come forward. God wants purify our hearts for a sincere love of the brethren.