



# THE POWER *of Love*



*Six Bible Study Lessons from Paul's Letters*

MARY & FRIENDS  
Forever-Loved.org

The Power of Love

Mary and Friends

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## Introduction



If anyone knew the Old Covenant law, it was the Apostle Paul. In his early life, as “Saul,” he had been a Pharisee—a devout follower of the Old Covenant of law introduced by Moses.

Circumcised on the eighth day, Saul had been raised and taught in strict obedience to the Law of Moses. As a young man, he had stood by and encouraged those who stoned Stephen—the church’s first martyr. With all the wrath and judgment of the law, Saul had persecuted and killed those who believed in Jesus.

But then, one day on the road to Damascus, Saul was knocked to the ground by a blinding light. From heaven came the words, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. And from heaven came the reply, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4–5).

After his Damascus Road experience, Saul, renamed Paul, began living his life, not as governed by the law, but as guided by grace. No longer was he bound by the Ten Commandments and other Old Covenant laws. *Faith* and *love*, not legalism, characterized Paul’s new life.

As the first missionary to the gentiles, Paul traveled throughout the Roman Empire preaching Christ. In his letters to communities of new believers, Paul wrote of the life of bondage under the Old Covenant Law and of the life of freedom in the New Covenant love of Christ. Over and over again he commended the believers for their *faith* and *love*.

Many Christians today understand the importance of faith. By faith in Jesus as the Son of God, we are reborn into eternal life. We are justified—not through obedience to the law—but by faith. But, faith isn’t complete by itself. Faith gives God access to us so He can pour His love into us. Faith expresses itself through love. God’s love has expression on earth through us. To live the Christian life here on earth as designed, God provided for us to know His love and share it with others.

For most of my life, as a born-again, church-going Christian, I didn’t really understand that God loved me. I wrongly assumed that I needed to work for God’s love. I thought that before God could love me, I needed to show my love for Him by obeying the Ten Commandments and other “good” rules. But, just as it is impossible to receive eternal life through obedience to the law, it is also impossible to love God and others through obedience to the law.

I was deceived. I cannot love God or others on my own. First John 4:19 tells us, “We love because He first loved us.” We can give away only what we have received. For this reason, we need to be in a constant loving relationship with God.

God values and treasures you beyond measure. You are precious to Him. He has chosen you. He has adopted you into His family. He loves you with an unstoppable, endless love. That love came to rescue you completely—to set you free and to make you whole. Jesus came to give you eternal life in heaven *and* full life, by His definition, here and now, on earth. God created you to know and experience His love, abide in His love and radiate His love.

Paul's writings overflow with the power and provision of God's unconditional, never-failing love.



## Nothing without Love

### 1 Corinthians 13

The first few verses of 1 Corinthians 13 became real to me one memorable summer day in 2004. Eighty-two-year-old Edna and I were visiting in her mobile home. For seven or eight years she and I had been meeting regularly to study the Bible and pray. Almost 40 years my elder, Edna was like a mother to me; we weren't afraid to share honestly with each other.

It was hot that morning and Edna sat in her living room sipping an iced tea. I sat facing her holding a glass of cold water. I don't remember what we were talking about, but Edna put her drink down on the glass table between us and leaned forward. Her intense, blue eyes looked into mine. "Mary" she said, "I want to tell you something."

"Okay," I said.

Slowly and deliberately Edna spoke, "Mary, you don't love."

It was Edna's voice, but it was God talking to me.

Instantly I felt the stunning truth of those words. Verses from chapter 13 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians flashed through my mind. "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (vv. 1-2).

My life passed before me. I had done many, many good things in my Christian life. As a developmental psychologist, I had worked to help disadvantaged and disabled children. I was being a "good" mother to our four children. I did volunteer work for a mission organization. We went to church regularly, had youth group meetings in our home, gave money to programs for the homeless ...

But somehow, in that moment with Edna, Paul's words sank deep into my heart and I understood that in doing these "good" things I was nothing but a "clanging cymbal." Something was horribly wrong with my life. I slumped out of my chair, lay face down on Edna's carpet and prayed, "God, whatever it takes. I want to love You and I want to love people. I don't know what is wrong, but I trust You to fix it."

**Read 1 Corinthians 13.**

<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup>For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

**Questions**

1. In the introduction to this lesson, the author was powerfully confronted by the first verses of 1 Corinthians 13. In what ways do verses 1–3 speak to you personally?
2. Verse 2 speaks of having “a faith that can move mountains.” In what ways does faith express itself in your life?
3. The things described in verses 1–3 seem like “good” things to do. In what ways are they incomplete in what God desires?
4. Recall and describe a time when you did something “good” because you knew it was a “good” thing to do. Your knowledge of how you should behave told you something was a “good” thing to do and so you did it.

5. Recall and describe a time when you did something purely out of love and compassion—because you felt God leading you to do it.
  
6. Compare the similarities and differences between your responses to questions 4 and 5 above.
  
7. Identify the characteristics of love mentioned in verses 4–8.
  
8. Think of someone you know who has these characteristics. Give one or two specific examples of how you have seen this person act with love toward others.
  
9. Verse 8 says, “Love never fails.” What does this statement mean to you?
  
10. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 again, this time replacing the word *love* with the word *God* (i.e., “God is patient. God is kind.”). Read slowly and thoughtfully letting the fullness of God’s love sink into you. What thoughts do you have about God after reading the passage in this way?
  
11. Considering the focus of this passage, what do you think Paul is talking about in verses 9–12?



12. How would you define “love” according to this passage?

### Reflection

Imagine that God designed a short movie entitled, *Love Never Fails* (see verse 8). Let the scenes from the movie unfold before the eyes of your heart. See the images, the colors, tones and expressions.

If you feel God is leading you, share your experience.

## 2



# Faith and Love

## Romans 4:13–5:8

I accepted Christ by faith as a 16-year-old. I believed that Jesus was the Son of God who died for my sins and I invited Him into my life. From that moment on I knew that I would go to heaven; eternal life is God's free gift to all who believe.

Yet tragically, although I knew by faith that Jesus was God's Son, I did not understand the scope of His unconditional love for me. And because I didn't really understand God's love, I totally missed seeing God's plan for humanity. But God is love and love is at the center of His plan for all His creation. Over time I have learned that God's love is the foundation for understanding the entire Bible—including, of course, this passage from Romans.

In the beginning, Adam knew only a loving union with God. But when Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, union with God was broken and his whole nature and way of life changed. Rather than living in unity with a loving Father and relying on His leading, humans now had to make their own independent way in life—based on their knowledge of good and evil.

This grieved God. His most treasured of all creation was severed from His loving relationship. And so, God planned a total and complete rescue. It would cost Him dearly, but He would pay any price ... because He loved us and the creation over which we were designed to rule.

To begin the process of restoration, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. These commands, together with the other Old Covenant laws, gave clarity to what was good and what was evil. However, humans couldn't obey the rules. The Old Covenant law identified what was good and evil, but it did not come with the ability to obey what it demanded. In this way the law both defined sin and made us all sinners by virtue of our disobedience.

But in God's plan, the insufficiency of the law pointed us to the sufficiency of Christ. Even while we were sinners trapped under the bondage of the law, God reached down and loved us. Through Jesus' sacrificial death, He paid the price for our separation and sin.

As Paul clearly tells us in the following passage, God promised Abraham a right standing with Him that comes by faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God provided a way for us to be reconciled to Himself. Then in restored union with God, He continually pours His limitless love into our hearts.

**Read Romans 4:13–5:8.****Chapter 4**

<sup>13</sup>It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup>because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup>As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

<sup>18</sup>Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' <sup>19</sup>Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. <sup>20</sup>Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' <sup>23</sup>The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

**Chapter 5**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**Questions**

1. In your own words, what are verses 4:13–16 saying?

2. According to verses 4:18–21, how did Abraham respond to God’s promise that he would be “heir of the world” (v. 13) and the “father of many nations” (v. 17)?
3. Abraham’s faith was tested. Recall and describe a test of faith you have experienced in your life.
4. In what specific ways might God be challenging you personally to live by faith?
5. According to verses 5:1–5, what are some of the things of God we have access to by faith?
6. In verse 5:2, Paul says that by faith we have “access” into God’s grace *and* we “stand” in that grace. Compare what it means to have “access” into grace versus what it means to “stand” in grace. How do you have “access”? In what ways are you “standing”?
7. Imagine “boast[ing] in the hope of the glory of God” (see verse 5:2). The New King James Version uses the word “rejoice[ing].” What feelings and images do these words bring to mind?
8. How might verses 5:3–5 encourage you in times of suffering or tribulation?

9. Recall and describe a time when trials in your life, or the life of another you know, resulted in godly character changes.
  
10. According to verse 5:5, how does the love of God get into our hearts?
  
11. The Old Covenant law says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). How does God’s love, as shown in verses 5:5 and 8, differ from that spoken of in the law?
  
12. See verses 5:5 and 8 as promises of God’s love to you. How might you personally “stand” in (not just have “access to”) those promises? (Consider how Abraham stood in the promises God gave to him.)

### **Reflection**

Quiet your racing mind. Read verses 5:5–8 again.

Imagine God demonstrating His love toward you. The Holy Spirit is pouring, pouring, pouring love into your heart. See a stream of living water flooding into you. Its source is the pure, never-ending love of God. See yourself accepting that love. Drink it in. Rest in it. Grow in it. Let it become part of you and flow out of you to others.

### 3



## Knowing and Experiencing God's Love Galatians 2:16–3:3

In the process of coming to understand how much God really loved me and seeing love as the foundation for His rescue of humanity, I also came to understand how God had created us human beings. He made us to be recipients and givers of His great love. God designed us in His image—to be like Him—so that we could have a loving relationship with Him and others. God intends that all of His creation be subject to His loving will through us.

When God created us, He made us to be of three parts: spirit, soul and body. Our spirit is a resting place for God's Spirit on earth. Our soul is comprised of our mind, will and emotions. And our body is the earthly house for the spirit and soul.

In God's creative design, His Spirit is meant to fill our spirit, our spirit is meant to lead our soul and our soul is meant to direct our body. But when Adam chose to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he severed his spirit relationship with God and therefore had to live by the leading of his own soul. The human soul—with its new-found knowledge of good and evil—was now in charge. Thus, the “flesh” (Galatians 3:3)—the soul and body together—was no longer led by God. When we live in the flesh, we live by laws because the independent soul, cut off from the Spirit can only live by rules.

Adam's fall destroyed the way God had created humanity to live. We were not created to live in the flesh. We were created to live in the Spirit. Jesus provides for us to be born-again of the Spirit—by faith. And he made a way for us to live our lives on earth continually walking in the Spirit—in love.

Paul spoke this truth to the Galatians. He shared with them how he lived his life on earth in faith *and* love. He confronted them with these words: “You foolish Galatians! ... After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” Just as I had done in my Christian life, the believers in Galatia had received Christ by faith, but for living life on earth, they were falling back into living by the law—into living in the flesh.

**Read Galatians 2:16–3:3.****Chapter 2**

<sup>16</sup>Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup>But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup>If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a law-breaker.

<sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

**Chapter 3**

<sup>1</sup>You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>I would like to learn just one thing from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

**Questions**

1. The word *justify* (see verses 2:16 and 17) means to “declare to be right” or to “make righteous in the sight of God.” Is it possible to be justified by the Old Testament law? Why or why not?
2. What does it mean to you personally to be “justified ... by faith in Jesus Christ”?
3. According to Galatians 2:20, how is Paul living his life on earth?

4. Notice that in verse 20, Paul is not struggling to crucify himself. He says, “I *have been* crucified with Christ.” In what ways do we sometimes try to crucify ourselves? What kind of results do these efforts typically bring?
  
5. Paul had persecuted and killed those who believed in Jesus Christ. Yet in verse 20, he refers to Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me.” Describe God’s love as you think Paul might have experienced it.
  
6. In what ways does knowing and experiencing God’s love make it possible to live the life Paul is describing?
  
7. In your own words, what is Paul warning the Galatians about in verses 3:1–3?
  
8. In verse 3:3, what do you think Paul means when he refers to the “flesh”?
  
9. How is it possible to begin in the Spirit—to be born again and receive eternal life through faith—and yet to still be relying, in some way, on the flesh to live life on earth?
  
10. Recall and describe a time when you personally tried to accomplish something “by means of the flesh”—when you let your soul choose the “good” it wanted to do and tried to do that “good” in your own strength. What was the result?



11. In what ways might you as a believer be relying on a New Testament version of the law or set of rules to guide your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. What might help you more fully embrace God's perfect love?

### Reflection

Visit the Forever Loved website (Forever-Loved.org) and listen to the song, "The Love of God." Imagine Paul—the one who had persecuted and killed believers but had come to know the love of God—singing beside you. Let the love of God wash over you as the words sink into your heart.

If you cannot access the video, read the lyrics to the third verse, found below.

*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 oceans 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 for evermore endure  
The saints and angels song.*

## 4



# Love Fulfills the Law

## Galatians 5:13–25; Romans 13:8–10

**W**hen I was young, my mother taped a hand-written note to the refrigerator door: “God doesn’t love us because we are good; He makes us good because He loves us.” As a teenager growing up, I thought these words were just wishful thinking. But, in my ongoing journey of learning of God’s love, I began to understand them as powerful, freeing truth. I began to comprehend that when we are connected to God and His love, we become right on the outside because we are right on the inside.

God doesn’t intend for us to live the Christian life by trying to be “good” and follow rules. He designed us to live by resting in His love—with our soul surrendered to His Spirit. Jesus never asks us to live the Christian life; He asks us to let Him live His life through us.

When the Holy Spirit comes to live in our spirit by faith, we are born again and inherit eternal life. But, as Paul makes clear, there is more to life than being born again; there is also right living in this life. When we “are led by the Spirit” or “keep in step with the Spirit” (to use Paul’s words), we walk out our lives on earth led by God. In this way, our soul—not just our spirit—is in alignment with God’s plan. But until the soul bends to the leading of the Spirit, the Spirit and the flesh (the soul and body together) will be in constant conflict.

God’s love for us calls us and provides for us to be “led by the Spirit.” When we know God’s complete love for us, we can trust Him in all things and surrender our will to His. We can let our will rest in His. We serve God, not because of pressure from without (such as the law), but because of the love of Christ within. In this way, “love is the fulfillment of the law.”

In the passages for this lesson, Paul is not giving us a list of ways to act or rules to obey. Rather, he is describing what God’s love manifested through us looks like. He is giving us a description of the Christian life that comes naturally from being led by the Spirit—from being led by God who is love.

**Read Galatians 5:13–25 and Romans 13:8–10.****Galatians 5:13–25**

<sup>13</sup>You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup>For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>15</sup>If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

<sup>16</sup>So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

<sup>19</sup>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

**Romans 13:8–10**

<sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Questions**

1. Galatians 5:13 says we have been “called to be free.” What are we freed from? Who are we free to become?
2. \*According to verse 14, the law is fulfilled in keeping the command “love your neighbor as yourself.” How do you actually come to love your neighbor as yourself?

3. As described in verse 16, how do we keep from “gratify[ing] the desires of the flesh”? In what ways do you personally try to keep from “gratify[ing] the desires of the flesh”?
  
4. \*What role, if any, does the law play in helping us avoid the desires of the flesh?
  
5. According to verse 17, the Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another. What does this mean? If possible, give a personal example of how you have experienced this conflict.
  
6. What does it mean to you to be “led by the Spirit” (v 18)?
  
7. \*According to verses 22–23, what are the fruit of the Spirit? How do our lives come to bear such fruit?
  
8. How do you know when you are being led by the Spirit? How do you know when you are being led by your own “good” flesh?

9. A baby learns to walk by taking a few steps and falling and then getting up and trying again. How does this analogy apply to learning to walk in the Spirit? If possible, give a personal example.
  
10. Rephrase Romans 13:8–10 into your own words. How is love the fulfillment of the law?
  
11. In what ways do Christians often live their lives as if faith (not love) is the fulfillment of the law? In what ways might you be living your life in this way?
  
12. Imagine and describe the life of a person who is completely led by the Spirit—who acts, speaks and thinks only as the Spirit leads.

## **Reflection**

Get alone in a quiet place with God.

Imagine that you are a branch growing from a strong vine. Jesus is that vine and your connection with Him supplies everything to you. As part of the vine, you are vigorous and healthy. Life giving sap flows into you causing you to bear fruit. Loving deeds and right attitudes come forth naturally as you abide in Jesus' love.

Let yourself receive and experience His love. Rest in it. Grow in it. Live in it.

**Study Notes**

2. Jesus summed up the Old Covenant law with these words: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, and with all your mind ... And ... love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39). The Old Covenant demanded that we love God and our neighbor. But in the New Covenant, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. *As I have loved you*, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). In the New Covenant, God loves us first. Love starts with God; He is the source. First John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.”

4. In Galatians 3:24 Paul tells us, “So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.” The purpose of the law was to point out the failure of our own self-efforts, so that we would come to trust in Jesus who alone can save us.

7. In John 15:4 Jesus said, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” He went on to say, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love” (John 15:9). (Other translations of the Bible use the word “abide” instead of “remain.”)

## 5



# The Fullness of God's Love Ephesians 3:14–21

**A**fter that day at Edna's, as I began to know and experience more of God's love, one of the first Bible passages to come alive to me was from Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. Paul prayed, "That you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (vv.17–19).

I experienced something of the profound depths of this Scripture one evening as I was sitting on a boat dock looking out over a lake in the mountains. The sun was setting and the water glistened with dancing shades of bronze and golden. Trees dotted the lakeshore and to my left a rugged, stone mountain rose into the scattered, wispy clouds.

Alone on the dock the thoughts came gently to me. "Mary, I love you. My creation is a love gift to you. My love for you has no end. It has a width, a length, a depth and a height. I love you with a four-dimensional love that exceeds all you can think or imagine."

In those moments as the sun set, I was overwhelmed with the vastness and expanse of God's love for me. Tears ran down my cheeks as I let His love flood me.

Now, years later, I can more fully understand the depths of Paul's prayer for us. Yes, there is faith. By faith we are born again into Spirit-to-spirit connection with God. Jesus dwells in our hearts through faith. But there is also love. In Spirit-to-spirit connection with God, we come to know and experience His love for us. And, as I understand it now, that love brings with it amazing promises!

When Paul prays for the Ephesians, he does not ask God to give them healthy and prosperous lives. He prays God's eternal best for them. He prays for the promises faith brings. And he prays for the fullness of the promises love brings ... "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

**Read Ephesians 3:14–21.**

<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

**Questions**

1. In verses 14–15, notice Paul's posture. How does he come before the Father? How do you typically come to God in prayer?
2. In verses 16–17, what does Paul ask the Father to give us "through faith"?
3. In verse 17, what do you think Paul means when he prays about "being rooted and established in love"? How are you "rooted and established" in God's love?
4. We typically think in three dimensions, yet, in verse 18, Paul describes God's love as having four dimensions: "wide and long and high and deep." Think of five or more words that best describe God's love.



5. Often our prayers focus on physical concerns and the pressures of life. Make a list of the specific requests Paul makes in this prayer. What does this list tell you about God's desire for the Ephesians?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In verse 19, what does Paul ask the Father to give us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How do you think "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" relates to "the fruit of the Spirit"? (See Galatians 5:22–23; lesson 4.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Imagine someone who is "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Describe what he/she is like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Verses 20–21 are an outburst of praise to God. Let your heart sing along with Paul's words. Compose your own verse(s) of praise to the Lord.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What is God saying to you today through this passage?

11. If Paul's prayer became a reality for you, what do you think your life would look/be like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Sit quietly before God. Think about what it means to know the love of Christ "that surpasses knowledge." Open yourself to deeper and deeper understanding of His love. Share a few thoughts.

### **Reflection**

Read Paul's prayer again, this time making it your personal prayer to God. You are kneeling before God your Father. Where Paul prays "you," replace with "me" or "I." Where Paul prays, "your," replace with "my." You are crying out to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner being. You are pleading to know the love of God ... that you might be filled to overflowing with God.

You may want to make Paul's prayer your prayer for someone else. Reread the passage inserting their name into the text.

## 6



# Love Conquers All

## Romans 8:28–39

**O**ur youngest son was just a few months old when I, at age 32, started feeling horribly dizzy and began seeing double. The next evening, exhausted after a long day of doctor’s appointments, I lay in an MRI machine, alone and afraid. Then I remembered Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

“I am going to be OK,” I told myself. “God is going to work this out for good.”

But things didn’t go as I had planned. The next day, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. No! We had four young children and were moving to another state in a few weeks where I had a perfect university job awaiting. No! This wasn’t good!

For two years I did everything the doctors told me to do, but the disease only progressed. I couldn’t do my job. Some days I couldn’t even take care of our kids. My sister and her family moved from out of state to help us. In weakness, depression and confusion, I struggled with God, “What are you doing? This isn’t ‘good!’”

But as I slowly came to realize, God’s definition of good doesn’t necessarily mean having a job you like or being healthy so you can get back to living your version of a “good” Christian life. In fact, after the experience at Edna’s, as I grew to understand more of God’s love for me, I began to see that God’s definition of good is actually given in the verse following Romans 8:28. Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

Now I understand! In every hurtful event and circumstance in our lives, God is working to make us like Jesus—to bring us into perfect union with Himself. God’s definition of good—His loving plan—is to restore us to life on earth as He had designed in the beginning. We were created in the image of God—to be like Jesus. And God, in His great love for us, has made a way for us to be restored to His original intent.

In this passage, Paul makes it clear: God predestines, He calls, He justifies, and He glorifies. And when we are glorified, the nature of Christ—the love of God—characterizes our lives. In oneness with God, His loving nature becomes ours so that we are conformed to the image of His Son. Truly, “We *are* more than conquerors through him who loved us!”

**Read Romans 8:28–39.**

<sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup>And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup>What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:

‘For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Questions**

1. Consider your own life experiences as they relate to Romans 8:28. If possible, give an example of something good that has come out of something “bad” in your life.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do verses 29–30 tell us about God’s purpose for us?

3. What do these verses tell us about how God planned and promised for us to become conformed to the image of His Son?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What part do we play in being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. \*Paul says in verse 30, “he also glorified.” God has actually made a way for us to be glorified. Imagine and describe what a glorified person might look/be like.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In verses 31–34, Paul asks five questions. Choose one of the questions and answer it.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How does God define a conqueror? How can a “sheep to be slaughtered” (verse 36) be more than a conqueror (verse 37)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. In what ways does Jesus’ love for you make you more than a conqueror?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What, if anything, is keeping you personally from living like a conqueror—from living glorified?

10. In verse 35, Paul asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” In verses 38–39 he answers this question. Describe his answer in your own words.
  
11. What are you afraid might separate you from God and His love? How does this passage address those fears?
  
12. Recall and describe a time when you were especially aware of God’s loving presence. What impact did that time have on you?

## Reflection

Sit quietly for a moment. Be aware of God’s love surrounding you like air. Nothing can dampen or lessen that love. Nothing can separate you from it. Keep your eyes on Him. Breathe in His love and all the promises that come with it.

Rest in knowing you are *predestined*. God *called* you. Through the blood of Jesus you are *justified*. In loving relationship with God you are *glorified*. God in His love has provided these things for you.

Believe. Only believe. In God’s vast goodness, you are not afraid. You are bold and courageous. You are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you. You are shining with God’s goodness—sharing His glory—in the darkness of this world. Go forth radiating the love of Jesus to all you encounter.

*Onward, Forever Loved!*

**Study Notes**

5. In John 17:22–23, Jesus prays for us: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Isaiah 60:1–2 tells us: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you, and his glory appears over you.” Clearly God’s intent is that we be glorified on earth.

The word glorified means to attribute proper worth to—to recognize and honor one for who one really is. When Christ is glorified it means that His glory—His nature and character as God—is brought to light. When God glorifies us, it means that we display God’s loving nature as He designed us to share it.

## Suggestions for Study

### About this Bible Study

- The Bible passages included in this study guide are from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. Feel free to use a different translation if you like.
- The study questions are designed to encourage you to think deeply about God's Word and to help you open yourself to more of His love.
- If you cannot print this study guide, you can write your answers on a separate sheet.
- This study can be used individually or with groups.

### Suggestions for Individual or Group Study

- Begin and end your reading and study time with prayer. Ask God to help you understand the Bible passages and reveal more of Himself to you. Thank Him for your time together.
- Read and reread the Luke passages as you work through each of the lessons. Reflect on what you have read and see if anything stands out to you.
- Do not feel you must answer the questions all at once or in any particular order. Even choosing a few questions will allow you to benefit from the study.
- At the end of some of the lessons, Study Notes provide additional information for questions marked with an asterisk (\*).

### Suggestions for Group Study

- Each time you gather with your group, come prepared—ready to share, ready to listen and ready to learn.
- As the group leader guides the discussion and encourages members to share their thoughts and ideas, be willing to participate, but try not to dominate. Listen to others in the group without judging them. What the Holy Spirit shows you will not necessarily be the same as what He shows someone else.
- Remember that what is shared in the group stays in the group. Being able to share without fear of being talked about helps create a safe place for honest discussion and healing.

### Suggestions for Group Leaders

- Begin and end each group time with prayer.
- Unless the Holy Spirit specifically leads you otherwise, help the group stay focused on the passage being studied.
- Encourage group members to listen and learn from each other without judging.
- Give everyone opportunities to share. Imagine that Jesus is in your group; see how He interacts with other members. Love those around you, being sensitive to their needs and backgrounds. Encourage all to come to a deeper understanding of God and His love.
- As the leader, try not to dominate the discussion with “right” answers. God will teach each member through the verses being discussed and through the insights of others in the group.
- Be assured that the Holy Spirit will guide you and give you the strength and wisdom you need to be a thoughtful, caring leader.



