

The Ingredients of God's Love

ONE LOVE IN THREE DIRECTIONS

Knowing the nature of God's unconditional love is crucial in our experience because this love is the very essence of His relationship to us. And this love should be the same essence of our relationship to Him. It should also be the essence of our relationship to one another. God's love first comes to us and causes us to love Him; and then in loving Him, we love one another. These three dimensions are the dimensions of the love of God — His love toward us, our love toward Him, and our love toward one another.

The nature of our love toward the Lord and toward one another should not be any different from His love toward us. The love that reaches us, and is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) is the same love that returns back to Him in worship and intimate fellowship. It is also the same love that flows out from us to one another. It is one love flowing in three directions — God's love coming from God to us, and then going vertically back from us to God, and then horizontally going out to one another. This is one kind of love, not three different loves. There is not one kind of love that God has for us, then another kind of love that we have toward God, and then a third kind of love that we have toward one another. No, the *agape* love in the Bible is one love. It has one nature and that nature flows in three directions.

Let us see this one love flowing out in all directions in John 13:34-35. Verse 34 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Here the Lord is speaking of a "new commandment." However, if you are

familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the Lord had already given the commandment to love one another. In Leviticus 19:18 He says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

But here in John 13:34 the Lord defines the nature of this *new* commandment and, in so doing, contrasts it to the old commandment that preceded it. He says, "Love one another, *as* I have loved you." This means that in the same, identical way that He loves us, we are to love one another. This is the nature of the new commandment — the kind of love we have toward one another is to be identical to the very love the Lord Jesus has for us.

Then the Lord adds in verse 35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Thus, the distinguishing characteristic of the believers, that is, of the Lord's disciples, is that we have love toward one another. What distinguishes the church, the Body of Christ, more than any other characteristic is that in our relationships we have love toward one another. "By this all will know" means that this is what is going to speak to the world. This is what is going to speak louder than any sermon, or any set of beliefs. What will speak louder to people around us is the love we have toward one another.

The "love for one another" in verse 35 is already defined in verse 34. It is the love with which He has loved us: "As I have loved you, that you also love one another." So this love is really one love. We enjoy this love as a sinner condemned, ungodly, and without anything to merit favor from God. In that condition, God, in an unconditional way, out of His free love, comes to us to save us. In mercy, He cleanses us, restores us, and

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reconciles us to Himself by His redemptive work (Titus 3:5 and 2 Cor. 5:18).

There are no words to describe this kind of love. It is God's redeeming love coming to a lost sinner who is, as Ezekiel expresses, lying there helpless in his own blood, not able to rise up, not able to do anything. In Ezekiel 16:6 the Lord says, "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'" There you were in the wilderness, by yourself, wallowing in your own blood; and in this condition He came to you, and said, "Your time was the time of love (Ezek. 16:8). He loved you, and said to you, "Live!" This is God's love toward us.

The nature of this love of God that Ezekiel describes is the nature of the love that is to be among all of God's children. The same love flowing from God to us flows from us to one another. Again, this is the distinguishing mark of believers in Christ. This is how all men will know that we are the Lord's disciples.

THE INGREDIENTS OF GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Now let us look at the ingredients of God's unconditional love. In other words, what this love is made up of, what its very essence is. There are ingredients that make up this love, that give it its very nature. Thus, when we speak of God's unconditional love, we need to know that it is backed up by something.

God's choice

The first ingredient of God's love is God's choice over us. Ephesians 1:3-5 says, ³ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as *He chose us in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him." Then the next phrase, "in love," can be included as part of verse 5, as some Bible versions translate it: ⁵ "*In love, having predestined us unto sonship* by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

These marvelous verses show us the nature of God's unconditional love toward us. Part of what makes up that nature is His choice over us. It was wholly according to the good pleasure of His will that we were *chosen* in Him before the foundation of the world. This was before we were able to establish a history with God and make ourselves a little bit lovable to Him. It was before we could even set foot on the earth to demonstrate that we were "a pretty good fellow" so that God would maybe look at our sincerity and say, "I like that sincerity, so I am

going to make you the object of My love." Before we even had a chance to try to demonstrate any qualities that would merit God's favor, *He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world*. Thus His love in choosing us comes directly out of the good pleasure of His will.

Irrespective of what would happen in our life time — how many failures we would have, and what kind of history we would establish — irrespective of all of that, He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and eternally made us the object of His love. His love toward us comes from eternity past and goes to eternity future, passing through time, through the devil's work, through demonic activity, through failure, through sin, through the world, through guilt, through condemnation. This is God's love directed toward us out of eternity.

This love is made up of God's choice. Before Jacob was born, the word was uttered, "Jacob I have loved." Before Jacob and Esau were able to do anything good or bad, before they were out of Rebecca's womb, God said, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Rom. 9:13). Don't try to understand this. You can't. God just says it, and in saying it He indicates that the nature of His love is made up of His choice — period.

The fact that you are the object of God's love strongly testifies that you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. This is the nature of God's unconditional love. This is how He loves us — not dependent on conditions, but unconditionally — based upon the sheer good pleasure of His own will. You wonder why? We all wonder why. Here, we are just not in the realm of getting an answer. We are in the realm of worship. We simply join with Paul in Romans 11:33-36 and exclaim, ³³ "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? ³⁵ Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen." This is the realm of worship and thanksgiving, the realm of "Thank You, Lord! I do not know why You chose me, but I thank You."

Have you ever received a gift and felt like you did not deserve it? You wondered why it was given to you. But the giver had no special reason. So all you could say was, "Thank you." Oh, this is the nature of God's love. It is based upon His choice.

God's Plan

God's plan is revealed in Ephesians 1:5, which says, "In love, having *predestined* us unto sonship by Jesus

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Christ to Himself.” This shows us that we were marked out, set apart by God beforehand. Our destiny was determined prior to our birth. In love God predestined us unto His plan. And His plan is to conform us to the image of His firstborn Son. Christ’s image is to shine out through the very fibers of our being (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). This is what it means to be predestined unto sonship. It includes a full inward continuous participation in the life of the Lord Jesus — from our spirit into our soul, and into our mortal body — so that Christ emanates from us. He just flows out of our being. We react like Him. We think like Him. Our attitudes are like Him. Our choices are His. He is our life. As we are beholding Him we being transformed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18). As we bear the image of God’s Son, we are fulfilling God’s plan over us. This is all according to the good pleasure of God’s will.

The nature, or essence, of God’s love includes His choice and His plan. His choice is beyond our comprehension; but because He chose us, He set His love upon us. We have become the objects of His love and can only say with David, “Where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psa. 139:7). We cannot get away from God’s love. It will find us out. It is the greatest hound that you will ever meet up with. Just as the police dogs sniff out things that are hidden, God’s love will sniff us out. Regardless of where we are, even if we are buried under sin and condemnation, the love of God will come and find us there because we are the objects of that love. This is the love of God toward us. And this is the same love we bear toward one another.

When we as God’s people rise up to see the essence and nature of this love between us, and begin relating to one another according to this love, “all will know” that we are the Lord’s disciples (John 13:35). The world will know because this love is a defined love. It is the love of God’s choice and the love of God’s plan. And it issues in a distinguishing trait — we have love toward one another, even as Christ has loved us.

Christ’s redemption

We also need to see that God’s love is made up of Christ’s redemption. Indeed, the redemption demonstrated at the cross is the very essence of God’s love. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” With this verse in mind, look at Ephesians 5:25; “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” Husbands are to love their wives *in the same way* that Christ loves the church.

In what way did Christ love the church? Consider how the Lord loved the church and gave Himself up for her — *the Christian Vol. 19, No. 5*

when she was *not* a perfected, glorious church. Rather, *when* she was sinful and ungodly. She was by nature a child of wrath, just as the others. She was under the dominion of the devil, living in the lust of the flesh and fulfilling its desires. She was all the negative things described in Ephesians 2:1-3. Yet this is what the Lord loved, as verse 4 says: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...”

When the Lord loved the church, He loved her in a raw form needing to be cleansed and washed in the blood. This is redeeming love — that Christ died for us in our state of being ungodly and sinful. This is dying love. It is blood-shedding love. It is sin-bearing love. It is love that took our sin and our judgment. Thus, God’s love is made up of the ingredient of the kind of love demonstrated in Christ’s redemption on the cross.

Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and intercession

God’s love is further constituted with Christ’s resurrecting, ascending, and interceding power. These are the elements that make up the love of God to us. The love that God has toward us is not a detached, remote love from the heavens, but it is a love that provides on-site power to be changed. It imparts to us the very nature and life-power of resurrection to inwardly do the work on us sinful, fallen human beings. Resurrection life is present in our spirit, joining us to the heavens with *His* resurrection and *His* ascension.

Now this power of resurrection life has entered our spirit, joining us to the Lord who is a life-giving Spirit. He, this moment, is giving to us the resurrected, ascended life that He is living. In John 14:19 the Lord said, “Because I live, you will live also.”

There is the life-power of resurrection and ascension in our spirit that has power to change us, and that life has become a drink to us. It has become our food. As we enjoy that life, it flows and it operates. It has the ability to tear down our hardness. It has the ability to work in us to the extent of changing our choice, attitude, and feelings. That life in us can do a complete work on our insides because it has passed through human living and death itself. It has resurrected and ascended all the way to the throne, and now it has been dispensed into our spirit and is living, operating, and working in us.

All we need to do is stir up what is already within us. Second Timothy 1:6-7 says, ⁶“Stir up [fan into flame] the gift of God which is in you....” ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” All you do is *fan into flame* the gift of God which is in you. The Greek verb literally means to “fire life up,”

to “fan” it. Fire up what is smoldering there. You and I have a spirit that is joined to the resurrected, ascended Christ and this One is just waiting for us to make a move. For example, during the day as you are going through some kind of trial, you just open yourself to call “Jesus.” By speaking His name, you are fanning the flame, *causing* resurrection life to operate from within. How precious is God’s love working in us by His ever-present power in resurrection and ascension!

Along with resurrection and ascension is the ingredient of interceding love. God’s love is present this very moment with us through Christ’s intercession. How marvelous it is when that intercession takes hold of our inner being — when the groanings of the Spirit begin passing through us. Romans 8:26 describes this phenomenon. We find ourselves burdened to pray, not even knowing how to pray for one another, but knowing that the Spirit is interceding. Yet we are comforted, knowing that “He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to God” (Rom. 8:27). The intercession of this One gives us an assurance: “And we know that all things work together for good” (v. 28). The “good” here is conformity to His image. Thus, the Lord’s love flowing through the prayers of the saints is preserving us, keeping us, and making sure that all things are according to God’s plan and purpose.

The Spirit’s transmission

Finally, God’s love with all of its ingredients is transmitted to us by the Holy Spirit. Thus, whether or not you are conscious of the love of God, whether or not you have the sensations of that love, it has been permanently poured out in the region of your heart (Rom. 5:5). Simply open up your heart and fellowship with the Lord. Admit that you have lived in your self-life. Confess your sins. Tell Him everything. Tell Him about the lowest feelings that you have. Tell Him how stressed out you are. Even bring your feelings of anger to Him. Say, “Lord, I don’t understand why this has happened to me.” *Just tell Him.*

The Spirit transmits all that is in this love — God’s choice, plan, Christ’s redemption, resurrection, ascension, and intercession. Now we can have the reality of this love in our experience. We can be in “the good of it” by the Holy Spirit. Jude 20-21 says, ²⁰“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God.” The participial phrase, “praying in the Holy Spirit,” modifies the verb, “keep yourselves in the love of God.” So *the way* we keep ourselves in the love of God is by

praying in the Holy Spirit. When we pray in the Holy Spirit, we enter the realm of the poured-out love of God.

It is so easy for a day to go by — you go to work and come home. Maybe you have been burdened down with all the cares of life and have had no prayer and fellowship with the Lord. You feel somewhat beaten down. And you feel like God does not love or care about you that much. You do not have the present enjoyment of His love in your sensation. But Jude tells us, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” Take some initiative now. Do not go away from the love, but keep yourself in it (John 15:9). He tells you how — “praying in the Holy Spirit.” That means you use your spirit to pray, fellowship, talk, call out, cry out, and sing. This activates your spirit and brings you into the realm of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:15-16). Sometimes there is a breaking-through period, but the principle is that we can keep ourselves in the love of God. All the ingredients of God’s love become our enjoyment and practical possession by the Spirit’s transmission coming to us in our prayer. This prayer transmits God’s love to us — our love to God — and our love to one another.*

— Bill Freeman

GOD’S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

BY BILL FREEMAN

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