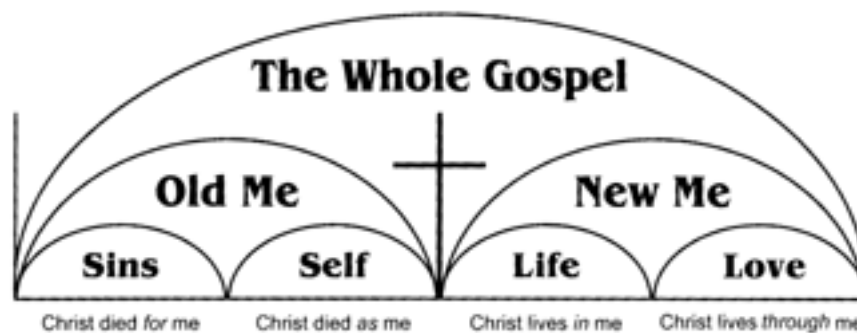


The Power of the Gospel

19

The Law of Love

As we saw in the last lesson, the fourth quarter of the Gospel deals with the outward expression of the Gospel to others. The Gospel is not just Christ living *in* you; it's also Christ living *through* you. The Gospel is not just God loving *you*; it's also God loving *others* through you.



The Gospel is a Gospel of love (note [Romans 5:8](#); [8:35-39](#); [1 John 3:1](#)). But love is not just a feeling. Love is an action. That love was expressed in the supreme sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross. But the love of the Gospel is not an historic “once for all” love. It is a love expressed on a *daily* basis.

As we have been examining the second half of the Gospel, we have discovered that the New Me has been “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” ([Ephesians 4:24](#)) and that it is “being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” ([Colossians 3:10](#)). We have seen how God has made a way for us to “escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” and to “partake in the divine nature” ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). And we have also seen that this partaking in the divine nature is “through the *knowledge* of him who called us by his *own* glory and goodness” ([2 Peter 1:4](#)).

One of the most fundamental attributes of God’s “own glory and goodness” is love ([1 John 4:16](#)). Love is the first fruit of the Spirit listed in [Galatians 5:21-22](#). This love is the basis of your salvation in Christ and of your walk in the Spirit.

Love in Three Dimensions

Read Ephesians 3:17-19

The Message describes the awe of Christ's love for you with these words:

“And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience its breadth! Test its length! Plumb its depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.”

God's love is boundless. You will need the rest of eternity just to fathom its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (KJV). But notice that Paul says it is only by being “rooted and established in love” that you will have the capacity “together with all the saints” to comprehend “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (NIV).

Read Philippians 1:9

Paul's prayer for the Philippian Christians, and for you too, is that “your love may abound more and more *in knowledge and depth of insight*” (NIV). How does your love abound to the point of overflowing? It is through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (**Ephesians 1:17**). It is through a supernatural increase in your knowledge and depth of insight into his love.

We need to understand that we will never fully comprehend God's love unless we experience it operating on three dimensions.

The first dimension of love

Read Psalm 36:5-7

The first dimension of God's love is his love for you. This love is described in the Bible as:

- Great (**Psalm 89:1; 103:11; 107:43**)
- Unfailing (**Psalm 33:5,18,22; 52:8; 89:2; 90:14**)
- Abounding (**Psalm 86:5,15**)
- Everlasting (**Psalm 103:17; 106:1**)



The first dimension of love

Read Romans 5:5

God's love is what fires the Christian life. It is God's love which inspires praise (**Psalm 63:3**) and it is God's love which motives you to walk in the Spirit. Once you have a revelation of this love, it changes your attitude to life forever.

Read Psalm 42:8

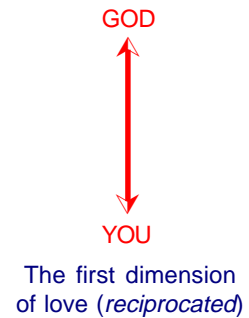
Having been saved by grace, your relationship with God is based upon love. You now have the privilege and joy of reciprocating God's love by *loving God back*. It is important to realize, however, the direction in which love flows in your life. **1 John 4:19** (NIV) states:

“We love because he first loved us.”

It is not that you love God, so therefore God is obliged to love you back. No, God loved you first. His love now sets the pace of your relationship with him.

There is a law of physics which states: “To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” In theory, God’s love for you should trigger an equal love for him in return. But think about it for a moment. How can you ever love God in the capacity or quality that he loved you? There is simply no way. His love was total – he sacrificed all. How can you ever match the depth of that love?

Well, there is a way. For God’s love is not one-dimensional. He has made a way for your to express the depth of your love for him in a similar manner to the way he expressed his love for you!



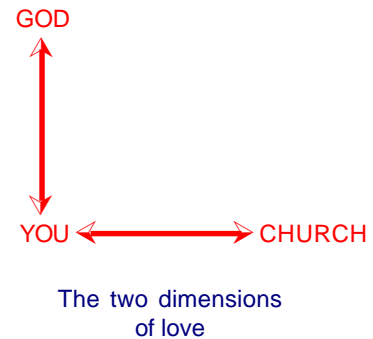
The second dimension of love

God’s love for you (and your love for him) is the *first* dimension of God’s love. As wonderful as this love-relationship you have with God may be, however, this is simply the *vertical* expression of God’s love in your life. The Bible reveals that there is another *horizontal* component to God’s love.

Read 1 John 4:7-12

John makes a number of clear statements in this passage about God’s love:

- You are able to love others because love comes from God (**verse 7**). This is the flow of love – from God, through you, to others.
- The distinguishing characteristic of one “born of God” is love (**verse 7**). If you have experienced the “new birth” experience (**1 Peter 1:3,23; Titus 3:5**), this will result in a new capacity to love others.
- If you truly know God (understand him) you will reflect in your love for others in God’s family (**verse 7-8**). God gives us birth through a revelation of himself (**James 1:18**) and a continuing revelation of God is what spurs us to love others.
- You are to love your brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way God loved us (**verse 9-11**).
- By loving other Christians, God’s love in you is made complete (**verse 12**).



Read 1 John 4:19-21

You cannot love God and not love your brother or sister in Christ. The two states

are incompatible. Loving one another is loving God and loving God is loving one another (note **John 21:15-17**). You simply cannot separate the vertical and horizontal components of God's love.

Read 1 John 3:10-18

Read 1 John 5:1-2

Notice how John says that we prove that we love God by loving his children. And likewise we prove that we truly love our brothers and sisters by loving God and obeying his commands. And God's primary command is to love one another! (see **John 15:17**). Do you see how intertwined the concepts of loving God and loving one another are in Scripture?

It's been said by some Christians: "I love God but I can't stand his Church." But this begs the question: Is it possible to love Christ and not love that which he loves?

Read Ephesians 5:25-27

As unlovely as some parts of the Church may be, Christ is in the process of washing his Church with "the water of the word" (**Ephesians 5:27**). His love for his Body should be reflected in our own love for his Body.

Read 1 Peter 1:22

The third dimension of love

We've noted so far that there is a vertical and horizontal element to God's love. But now we'll see that here is also *another* horizontal component to this love.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14

It is in this context of Christ's love compelling us that Paul goes on to describe us as "ambassadors," pleading with the world to be reconciled to God (**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**).

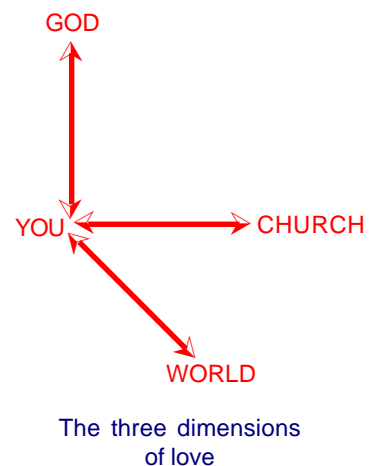
Read Isaiah 58:6-7

God's heart yearns to embrace a world that is perishing, yet the hands with which he now reaches out to a hurting world are yours. We are now his Body (**1 Corinthians 12:12**), the extension of his love upon the earth.

Read Matthew 25:34-40

Notice how Jesus links your love for him to how you respond to the needs of those around you. He actually so identifies with the needs of this world that by responding in love to those needs, you are expressing your love to Christ!

Notice that there is no requirement in either of the horizontal expressions of God's



love for that love to be reciprocated. All horizontal expressions of God's love are unconditional, because we already have the security of a loving relationship vertically with God. Our sense of self-worth and acceptance is not based on the response of others to our acts of love. No, our sense of security in love is rooted firmly in our vertical relationship with the Lord.

It is for this reason that you cannot properly love others (whether in the Church or in the world) unless you have been "rooted and established" in the first dimension of God's love. We are free to love others, without strings attached, because of the strength of our relationship with a God who has "lavished" his love upon us (**1 John 3:1**).

Fulfilling the Law

Read Matthew 22:35-40

Despite the complexity of Old Covenant Law (there were 613 distinct commandments), the whole of that Law hung on just two commandments:

- Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength (**Deuteronomy 6:5**)
- Love your neighbor as yourself (**Leviticus 19:18**)

These two commandments both summarized the Law and fulfilled the Law. In fact, the Law has been not so much abolished as it has been fulfilled in Christ (**Matthew 5:17**). It has become redundant because of the Cross of Christ and the entrance of the Holy Spirit into your heart.

Read Jeremiah 31:33-34

The Law was originally written on tablets of stone, but now it is written on the "tablets of human hearts" (**2 Corinthians 3:3**). The righteous standard of God has now been internalized on your heart through the pen of God's Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:13-14

Part of the good news of the Gospel is that you have been set free from slavery to the complexity of the Law. In fact, the Bible says that when you died in Christ, you also died to the Law! (**Romans 7:4-6; Galatians 2:19**). God nailed the long list of commandments to the Cross in Christ (**Colossians 2:14**). Now as a free person, however, God intends you to use that freedom to love others. In fact, this loving of others is a vital part of what it means to "walk in the Spirit" (note the context of **Galatians 5:16**).

The fruit of the Spirit is God's answer to the Law (**Galatians 5:22-23**). As Paul says in **verse 23**, "Against [these fruit of the Spirit] there is no law" (NIV).

Read James 2:8-11

James calls the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," the Royal Law. He then goes on to give the implications of what this means.

All the way through this module, we have emphasized that there are two ways you can live the Christian life – a right way and a wrong way. In this passage, James explains those two ways of living using the picture of the Law.

- The *wrong* way of living – by the **Law of Multiple Regulations**. James says that the problem with this way of living is that by breaking even one commandment, you default on the entire Law.
- The *right* way of living – by the **Law of Love**. Instead of focusing on *trying* to keep the Law, this focuses on loving those around you.

God has wonderfully reduced the entire set of commandments to just two: Loving him and loving others. No wonder John was able to say that God’s commands are not burdensome (**1 John 5:3**).

Read Romans 13:9-10

A New Commandment

Read John 13:34-35

In his parting words with his disciples, just hours before going to the Cross, Jesus inaugurated the whole basis of life under the New Covenant with one commandment. As the New International Version translates verse 34:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. *As I have loved you*, so you must love one another.”

Note the standard against which love is measured. Many religions have the ethical precept, “Do *not* do to others what you would *not* have them do to you.” Some even have the more active precept, “Do to others as you would have them *do* to you.”

The Old Testament takes this one step further and instructs you to “love your neighbor as yourself.” But with the coming of Jesus, the standard of measurement against which love is measured is no longer yourself but Christ. We are now to love one another in the same way that Christ loved us!

Other References

Here are some further verses which have bearing on our study today:

- **Galatians 6:2**
- **Ephesians 4:2**
- **2 John 5-6**
- **Philippians 2:1-4**

Read Ephesians 5:1-2

The Debt of Love

A moment ago we read **Romans 13:9-10**. Now let’s read the verse immediately preceding it.

Read Romans 13:8

There are two kinds of debt to which a person can feel obligated.

The debt of revenge

Read Romans 12:17,19

At the core of the old self is a strong sense of personal justice. If anyone wrongs you, that sense of justice is piqued. The scale of personal justice has been tipped and I now “owe” that person something. I owe them a harsh word, a fit of anger, a slanderous accusation, or maybe just the “silent treatment” – just some of the many ways I can exact revenge on a person. Until the scale is tipped back to neutral, I feel that there is still an injustice. Their action against me has created a debt of revenge.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-9

The debt of love

But note what Paul says in **Romans 13:8**. You, as a Christian, now have a “continuing debt” (NIV). That debt was originally to God, but at the Cross, God transferred your debt to Christ, who in turn transferred your debt to those around you. “There is no way,” says Jesus, “that you can ever repay the debt of love you owe to me. But I’m not asking you to, for I’ve transferred that debt to those around you. I’ve credited your debt to the account of your brothers and sisters at church, to the people in prison, to that homeless man on the street. You now owe *them* a debt of love! And it is a continuing debt, for it can never be fully repaid!”

Take a look at how some other versions render **Romans 13:8**:

New International Version: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”

New King James Version: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

New Century Version: “Do not owe people anything, except always owe love to each other, because the person who loves others has obeyed all the law.”

God’s Word: “Pay your debts as they come due. However, one debt you can never finish paying is the debt of love that you owe each other. The one who loves another person has fulfilled Moses’ Teachings.”

New Living Translation: “Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God’s law.”

The Living Bible: “Pay all your debts except the debt of love for others—never finish paying that! For if you love them, you will be obeying all of God’s laws, fulfilling all his requirements.”

The New Testament in Modern English: “Keep out of debt altogether, except that perpetual debt of love which we owe one another. The man who loves his neighbor has obeyed the whole Law in regard to his neighbor.”

The Message: “Don’t run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along.”

The Amplified Bible: “Keep out of debt and owe no man anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor— who practices loving others — has fulfilled the Law [relating to one’s fellowmen], meeting all its requirements.”

You have a love-debt to everyone! You owe them love, mercy and forgiveness. When someone slights you, you are now able to turn the other cheek (**Luke 6:27-36**), simply because that is what Christ did for you (**Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 27:27-31**). When someone wrongs you, you are able to forgive, simply because Christ has already forgiven you.

Read Colossians 3:12-14

Showing Mercy

Read Luke 6:36

Once again, the starting point for you to express love to others is a revelation of God’s love toward you. We can show mercy to others because we ourselves have received mercy from God (**Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 Peter 2:10; Hebrews 4:16; Romans 12:1**). We are only able to show mercy because we have had a revelation that God is merciful.

Paul had such an overwhelming revelation of God’s mercy extended toward him (**1 Timothy 1:13-16**) that this compelled him forward in reaching out to others (**2 Corinthians 5:14**). He saw himself indebted to everyone but this debt was repaid in the preaching of the Gospel (**Romans 1:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:16-18**).

Mercy can be defined as “compassion shown by one individual to another who has no claim to kindness.” This was our condition before God. But it also remains the condition of many of those around us.

Read Matthew 18:21-35

This is a familiar parable, but one which brings into stark clarity the issues as God sees them. Note Jesus’ words at the end, as rendered by the NIV:

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

These are serious words. God is not playing games here. He states in no uncertain terms that if we choose not to forgive our brother, we forfeit the forgiveness of

God for ourselves. Your unforgiveness blocks the daily flow of God's forgiveness and mercy toward you (note **Matthew 6:14-15**).

Read Luke 7:39-47

Loving much is connected by Jesus to a revelation of the forgiveness of God. Love for God can only come out of a revelation of the depth of God's mercy toward you. That same love is what then spurs you to show mercy to others.

Having said this, however, it is important to know *when* to show mercy and *when not to*. All expressions of mercy by a Christian must operate within the bounds of God's grace. There is such a thing as "unsanctified mercy," which is mercy shown where God does not desire to show mercy. In this case, our mercy has stepped outside the parameters of God's own expression of love and mercy.

The key point is this: *Love as God loves. Show mercy as God shows mercy.*

Read Jude 22-23

The Way of Love

Read 1 Corinthians 12:31

In the middle of his teaching on the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, Paul instructs the Corinthian Christians on what he calls "the most excellent way" (NIV). In the following chapter, he goes on to describe this "most excellent way."

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

All ministry – whether teaching, encouraging, witnessing, prophesying, praying, counselling, pastoring, worship leading, or any other expression – should be conducted in "the way of love." Everything in Christian ministry is intended by God to be an expression of love. There is a "faith that works by love" (**Galatians 5:6**) and a "labor prompted by love" (**1 Thessalonians 1:3**). We should "follow the way of love" in all that we do for the Lord (**1 Corinthians 14:1**).

As you are "rooted and established" in a revelation of God's love for you, Paul's prayer in **1 Thessalonians 3:12** (NIV) will become a vibrant reality for you:

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow *for each other and for everyone else*, just as ours does for you."