

So What?

How the Apostle Paul instructs us to live out our life as members of a the body of believers.

Part 4—The Power of Love

In May of 1975, two world powers made strategic defense decisions that continue to have impressive ramifications.

The United States launched the first of 10 ten super aircraft carriers, The Nimitz. At a length of over 3 football fields and with a displacement of over 2 hundred million pounds, she is larger than any warship ever built. The nuclear powered Nimitz and her sisters, by carrying a crew of 5680 troops and 85 aircraft, would be the largest cruise ships in the world and the 8th largest airports. Two weeks ago, I towed a friend named Dave on a wake board behind my ski boat. We were traveling at about 22 knots. The Nimitz cruises at 30 knots.

At the same time, the country of France, realizing it did not have domestic access to all of the carbon-based fuels its growing population would need, set a course to decommission all of its coal and natural gas fired electric plants and replace them over a 20 year period with nuclear plants. Moreover, the French government set out to create an all-electric society; one that is warmed, cooled, and propelled almost entirely by electricity.

Today, no country in the world has a weapon that can match our nuclear powered supercarrier. Today, France is the only large industrialized nation in the Western World that is energy independent. Indeed, the French economy is booming today as the soaring price of carbon-based energy is crippling industries world-wide.

The Nimitz and a French power plant are both powered by a lump uranium fuel the size of a sack of flour. And for the first 30 years, neither had to be refueled. Indeed, the Nimitz came in for a fuel stop for the first time in 2005; the first of the French reactors are being refueled this year.

Each atom of our world contains amazing power. Yet we really don't understand this power. I shared a few weeks ago that on the Swiss-French border, scientists are building a massive super-collider to explore the nature of the atom. You see, physicists still have no idea what is holding the basic building blocks of this world together. They don't actually understand what power is released when an atom is split. Nuclear power is still dangerous because the full nature of the atom is not understood. Indeed, this project near Geneva is hoping to finally

locate and document the elusive “God Particle,” the thing that is holding this whole universe together.

Over the past 3 weeks, we have been looking at the root-level nature of the Christian faith. We have been trying to understand, at a proverbial sub-atomic theological level, what happens when a person becomes a Christian. How are they changed? What power is installed inside of them that can potentially be released?

We have shared together three seminal works of Christian theology—Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. In these works, the Apostle Paul codified for posterity the nature of God as revealed through Christ. We discovered the following:

1. God created everything, including humans crafted in God’s image with free will.
2. Free-willed humans are charged with overseeing the earth and caring for it.
3. All humans have used their free will to make choices that differ from the perfect plan and will of God in their lives.
4. These wrong choices, referred to in the Bible as sins, have separated us from God, who is sinless and perfect.
5. Wrong choices, as violations of God’s perfect law, create consequences (penalties).
6. Someone has to address these penalties for these wrong choices.
7. God came to earth himself in the human form of Jesus.
8. Jesus, who lived without sin, paid the price for our wrong choices by his death on a cross.
9. All can receive the death of Jesus as the payment for our wrong choices by (1) confessing our wrong choices and (2) acknowledging Jesus as Lord of their lives.
10. When a person confesses their wrong choices and receives Jesus as Lord and Savior, God himself in the form of His Holy Spirit enters into the person, makes them into someone new, and grants them new and special abilities called “spiritual gifts.”
11. These new abilities are the source of power for the new believer to serve as the church in the world.

The implications of such theology are profound. Each and every Christian potentially has a source of never-depleting fuel inside of them—the full-power of God through the Holy Spirit. Last week we discovered that each person has a different mix of Spiritual gifts and that together, as Christian pray for, discover, and use collaboratively these gifts, we form one powerful body—the Church.

But what is the nature of God? Of what is the Holy Spirit made? Of what substance is God crafted? What is the “God particle” that holds the universe together? I hope the super-collider near Geneva finds it. But actually, I am not sure those scientists are looking in the right place. The scriptures reveal to us the very nature and substance of God—the thing that holds the universe together.

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love

one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” I John, Chapter 4

And though that may be a late-New Testament statement of the nature of God, we actually find this theological construct of God foreshadowed 2000 earlier when the Law of Moses was being restated and clarified:

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands...¹² If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers. ¹³ He will love you and bless you.” Deuteronomy, Chapter 7

The very nature and substance of God is love. So when God enters our person in the form of his Holy Spirit as we confess our sins and receive Christ as Lord and Savior, it is actually LOVE that is entering into our hearts. Therefore, as we are empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, it is love that must flow out of us. Any use of our amazing spiritual gifts that come out in an unloving way are NOT empowered by God.

But what is love? How does the Bible define love? Paul defines it like this:

“And now I will show you the most excellent way. ¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

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

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When 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 childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor 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.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” I Corinthians, Chapter 13

According to the above, love is

- patience
- kindness
- contentment

- humbleness
- politeness
- altruism
- peacefulness
- truthfulness
- protectiveness
- trustfulness
- hopefulness
- and persevering

And, if we do not display the attributes above, no matter how powerful, gifted, or skilled we are by God's spirit, we are actually useless. Perhaps we are even more than useless. Without love, we may actually be a highly Spirit-empowered yet unstable Christian compound that when unleashed can cause catastrophic damage.

Embedded right in the middle of a large passage that discusses God's gifts in our lives, 1 Corinthians, Chapters 12 and 14, Paul resets the discussion on love—the most excellent way (to live life). Likewise, just after the passage in Romans that exhorts us to use our God-given gifts, Paul exhorts us to love:

*“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Romans, Chapter 12
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The people of this earth are exhorted throughout the New Testament to render all that they are over to God, to be forgiven and reconciled to him through Jesus, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And we are also exhorted to exhibit the true nature of God by allowing his Spirit to love through us. Jesus summed it like this:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:39-40

So what? So what difference does being a Christian make in our lives? So this: God lives inside us and empowers us with new abilities to serve as his body, the church, in the world. Moreover, the very substance of God himself—love—can and should flow through you. Nuclear power is strong enough to power the world's most awesome fighting machine and to power a country of 61 million people over an area about the size of Texas for about 30 years. But the power that actually holds the universe together, the power of God's love, is strong enough to fuel all people for an entire age of humanity—from the resurrection of Christ until his return. Yes, we have awesome power given to us by the Spirit to be the church. But only in the context of love do we actually have useful outcomes. As we gather each week for the Holy Sacrament of Communion, we are refueling in the Spirit empowered to serve in love together in this world to the glory of God. Let us continually confess our sins and gather for worship of God so we can make a difference in this world for his sake.