

Love and the Fullness of God

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Few understand that God created humans to become like him, to become offspring, children, created in his likeness. This fact is reflected in the very first chapter of Genesis: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

But at that time, while human beings were created in the image of God in certain respects, their nature was not God's nature. They did not have the mind nor the character of God. The love and the fullness of God was not in them.

Yet, to be ultimately filled with his love and the fullness of God was the purpose for which God created human beings. And you have the potential to begin fulfilling that purpose now, the very purpose for which you exist!

In this article is revealed the means by which you can experience the love and the fullness of God.

From the very beginning, it was God's will to create in mankind a family that would not only resemble him in superficial respects, but a family of beings that would have his very nature, his mind, his character.

For that to be accomplished required that human beings have free will, that is, they would be free moral agents, with the capacity to choose to do good or evil (Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 119:30, 173; Proverbs 1:29; 3:31; Isaiah 7:15; 56:4; 66:4; Luke 10:42). And they would have to be taught what is good, and learn to choose good over evil of their own volition. That's what godly character is, knowing and choosing to do good.

The nature of human beings would have to be changed, from the carnal, or fleshly, nature with which they were created originally, to the divine nature of God. They would have to be conformed to his image, not just in a physical and superficial sense, but molded spiritually into his likeness:

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son [Jesus Christ], that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8: 29-30).

The aorist tense (action at a point in time, that could be past, present or future) of the verbs in these verses is better rendered in the Concordant Version:

“Whom He foreknew, He designates beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be Firstborn among many brethren. Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also” (Romans 8:29-30, Concordant Version).

As I've explained elsewhere (see “*Seek God*,” cogmessenger.org), predestination is not about calling and choosing only a few for salvation and condemning the rest of mankind to perdition. Notice it says God predestined those he “foreknew.” Who were those God “foreknew”?

The Greek word translated “foreknew” here is προγινώσκω (*proginosko*), which means to know before. Compare Acts 26:4-5, where the word is used in verse 5:

“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first” (Acts 26:4-5). Or it could be translated, “They knew me before [*proginosko*], from the first.” Paul, likely a member of the Sanhedrin before his conversion, was **known to the Jews from an early age**, from near the earliest point at which it was possible to know him (cf. Acts 7:58; 22:3-5; 26:10, 12).

“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people **whom He foreknew** [or knew from the first, or beginning, as it could be translated]” (Romans 11:1-2).

God has known from the beginning the Israelites. All of them. And it is God's purpose that **all Israel** have salvation:

“And so **all Israel will be saved**, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’” (Romans 11:26).

That doesn't mean every last Israelite will be saved, because some will choose to not to be saved, but the vast majority will ultimately come to repentance and fulfill the destiny for which they were created.

Moreover, God has known from the beginning not just the Israelites, but the Gentiles as well. They, too, were created to have their part in the family of God:

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we

ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:26-30).

The "predestination" Paul wrote about is not exclusive, as many assume, but inclusive. It includes all whom God "foreknew," or whom he has known from the earliest time they could be known, Israelites, Jews and Gentiles (Romans 11:1-2, 16, 23-37; Acts 17:24-30). Every human being is created for the purpose of becoming like Christ.

The true gospel is a gospel of hope - the only real hope - for all mankind. For God "desires **all men to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). And his plan will make it possible for everyone to have a full opportunity for salvation.

When the Kingdom of God has been consummated all nations will have a part in it:

"By its light [the light of the New Jerusalem, the glory of God] will the nations walk"

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"They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (Revelation 21:24, 26).

Many other Scriptures foretell of the salvation of the nations of the earth in due time.

But for that to be accomplished a change in the nature of those who will ultimately be in the kingdom of God must occur. Human nature - the natural carnal or fleshly nature with which all humans are born -- will have to be replaced by God's nature. And how is God's nature summed up?

"He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**" (1 John 4:8).

I was once asked the question: "How does love tie in with being filled with the divine nature? Does this relate to our acceptance of the redemptive love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ?"

There is much more to the connection between love and being filled with the divine nature than mere "acceptance of the redemptive love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ." Many people are willing to accept "the redemptive love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ," but are **unwilling** to make the changes necessary to become filled with the divine nature.

To the Ephesians Paul wrote:

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being **rooted and grounded in love**, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -- to **know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

To be filled with all the fullness of God requires that we become rooted and grounded in love, and that we come to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.

The implication, I believe, is that God's love can be fully known only by being experienced as we learn to live it. It's not something that can be fully known simply by reading or hearing about it, or contemplating it. "...no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). "...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Believing that God loves us and gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for our sins helps us understand the nature of God's love. But just accepting or believing that God loves us, and that Jesus died for us, is not nearly enough. The redemptive love and sacrifice of the Father and Christ exemplify their divine love, which God commands that **we acquire and apply in our own lives**:

“Beloved, let us **love one another**, for **love is of God**; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, **we also ought to love one another**” (1 John 4:7-11).

Note that we are not only to accept God's love, but we must express that same love ourselves. The kind of love being discussed here is a very special kind of love. It is translated from the Greek ἀγάπη (*agape*), which in this context is divine love, the love that proceeds from God.

That kind of love is a gift of the Holy Spirit:

“... the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through *the* Holy Spirit given to us” (Romans 5:5, Green's Literal Translation).

Yet even though that Divine love proceeding from God is a gift that accompanies

God's Spirit, given to those who obey God (Acts 5:32), it requires constant choices and effort on our part to apply it in our relationships:

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:27-36).

Abiding in God's love requires that we obey his commandments:

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

.....

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:10, 12).

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." [Greek: "the fulfilling of the law is love"] (Romans 13:8-10).

God's love is expressed in the keeping of the commandments, the most basic of which are to love God first and foremost, and love others as we love ourselves:

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

"But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, ` "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:34-40).

The ten commandments and other commandments that God gives us are specific ways of expressing these two great and fundamental laws. As one strives to keep God's commandments, surrendering his will to God's, he becomes filled with God's Spirit, through which God dwells in us:

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. **He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.** And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, **'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word;** and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:15-23)

Thus as we learn to keep the commandments, expressing God's divine love, we become filled with the fullness of God, for God is love (Ephesians 3:14-19; 1 John 4:16).

Comprehending and living according to God's love and being filled with his fullness (his Spirit, hence his spiritual nature) is something we should be striving for now. However, we won't be perfectly filled with God's fullness until the resurrection. At the "first resurrection," those who "are Christ's," i.e., those who have been converted and remained faithful, will be resurrected into his likeness. Then they shall fully "bear the image of the heavenly Man" (1 Corinthians 15:49, cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23; Philippians 3:21; Revelation 20:4-6).

All who have lived will eventually be resurrected (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23; Revelation 20:11-13). All will be given ample opportunity for salvation. But the first resurrection is a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). Unless we are growing into the likeness of God now, however, we simply won't be in that resurrection:

Jesus warns us:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

.....

"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2,

6).

It is God's will that those who are a part of his Church, the body of Christ, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

We are to **imitate Christ**, think and act like Christ in terms of obedience to God's commandments, and walk in love.

"Therefore be **imitators of God** as dear children. And **walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us**, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:1-7; cf. Colossians 2:6; 3:1-15).

Notice how Peter ties together the ideas of spiritual purification, obedience to the truth through the Spirit of God, in loving one another, and having a newness of life through the word of God, which "endures forever":

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:22-25).

Peter continues in the next chapter:

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3).

Peter affirms that we must exercise diligence – persistent and directed effort – in order to be partakers of the divine nature, and enter into the Kingdom of God (2 Peter 1:2-11).

Growing into God's likeness now leads us to the point where we can be completely filled with God's fullness in his Kingdom.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

While Scripture makes it plain that we are to become like God and be transformed into his image, we must experience it in the resurrection to fully comprehend it:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

Remember, God created you to be conformed to his image, to be imbued with his nature, to reflect his divine love, to be born anew into his likeness, to be filled with all the fullness of God.

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