

15) Humanity, Part 3

In part 1 of our theological topic: Humanity, we focussed on our created essence as humans to love as we are loved. In part 2 we focussed on the reality of how things go wrong in our world and in our lives. The traditional/biblical word for this is sin. In Parts 3 and 4, we focus more specifically on the Christian life with God above, beside and within us powering us for living love in all its dimensions despite the challenges and struggles.

1) How do we find the inspiration to open our hearts to God in faith, the faith to carry hope in the face of all that can discourage, and the empowerment to love despite all the ways we are entangled in stress, hardship, suffering and conflict? How do we hold on to faith in God, experience resurrection in the midst of dying metaphorical and literal, and rise up to loving in a world where fear is so prevalent?

A) “For by grace you are being saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8) Grace is an important word. It means love as a gift. In fact, true love is always a gift because it comes to us not as a calculation of what is earned or deserved, but from the heart. Grace is the gift of love from God’s heart. We know this gift because we are created and are alive. We experience this gift when love floods our hearts and we are alive to it. Grace is the experience that above and beyond any failing, limitation or perceived deficiency in myself, I am loved infinitely and eternally. To believe this empowers me like nothing else can. It also motivates me to love like nothing else can.

Love also motivates me to care about truth and justice for others as much as myself. But justice powered by love does not seek to punish in revenge, but to heal with the hope of reconciliation. It is also the desire to protect the vulnerable from harm and that has to involve tough love when it comes to those who perpetrate harm. Tough love is holding someone accountable but with care for their humanity and hope for their capacity to acknowledge and regret harm done in search of ways to atone in some meaningful way.

B) “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand... And not only that, but we also have confidence in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5: 1-5) The Holy Spirit is God’s love energy flowing into us and grace is the experience of that love as it rises up and waters our spirits. Out of such experience and through the power of such energy we love in a world where fear seeks to suck love out of us filling us with hate, indifference and selfishness.

C) There are many qualities that the experience of divine grace powered by the Holy Spirit produces in a person, but let me itemize a few in particular.

Gratitude is a recognition, a feeling and an experience that despite all that is wrong and all that life deals us, we are thankful for all we've received and all we're able to give. Gratitude empowers us to see the good rather than get sucked into the bad. Gratitude is real regardless of a person's situation.

Humility is another important quality of the Spirit. Humility is openness to others, openness to hope in what can yet be despite what is. Humility is a recognition of our need for others and our interdependence with mother earth and all life in it. Humility is a recognition that "but for the grace of God go I".

Generosity as a spiritual quality is not about money as it is about believing and hoping the best of people and seeing the good despite the bad. Generosity refrains from judgement and gives others the benefit of the doubt. We need a lot of generosity in a world such as ours where fear causes us not only to mistrust others but to judge them at their worst.

Love needs the spiritual gifts of **faith and hope** to fulfill its goal of reaching and blessing other life as much as one's own life in the world. Faith is trust in God's love moving in one's life and hope is openness to what love can yet accomplish in and through one's life. Without such trust and openness love cannot fulfill its healing and transforming possibilities in and through us.

Finally, we must also name the spiritual quality **peace**. Despite how unstable and disruptive life can be and how variable life's circumstances, to experience peace as a spiritual gift is to know and feel deep within that we are held in everlasting arms, that as we live and struggle for truth and justice we are in God and God is in us no matter what we lose or suffer in this life. To know such peace, even in key moments of life, is a wondrous gift of the Spirit!

In Part 4 we will discuss several more important topics when it comes to the Christian life rooted in love. What does it mean to grow in love as a Christian and yet continue to struggle with anti-love feelings? Does dependence on the experience of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to choose love undermine our own free will and accountability when we fail to love as we should? Finally, what are those practices that grow faith, hope and love in us?