

Series: The Fruit of the Spirit
Title: Love: The Greatest of These
Text: Galatians 5:22
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“What’s Love Got to Do with It”

Let’s examine the first fruit of the Spirit by examining four realities associated with it ...

LOVE IS MORE THAN A MERE EMOTION. (1,000)

I will always remember the day I met my wife. I’ll also remember the months we dated, as well as our engagement period. Those days were filled with excitement and newness. To have someone with whom I was so enthralled, and to have someone who was enthralled with me, made life exhilarating! We married within less than fifteen months of first meeting. The timeframe leading up to our vows was filled with the giddy happiness. We were in love!

Modern Conceptions of Love

When many think of “love,” they think of the emotions experienced by two young lovers. The virtue is believed to be a magical force that mystically descends on individuals. It is thought that one has little to no choice concerning who or what he or she loves. Such conceptions of the virtue are portrayed in songs like Sam Cooke’s “Cupid” or George Strait’s “Lovebug.”

Others have perverted love. They have used the word as a platform for supporting and excusing acts that go against God’s plan for humanity. Sexual sin is sometimes justified on the basis of the virtue. In other situations, love is a justification for tolerating error or evil. Considering the confusion swirling around this affection, it is important for believers to define what love really is.

Greek Conceptions of Love

In the Greek-dominated world of the New Testament, love was seen in a more multidimensional nature than it is today. As a result, there were special Greek terms to speak of different aspects or types of love. Knowing the difference between such distinctions can help us grasp the nature the love spoken of in Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit.

The first type of Greek love was that of brotherly love. It was represented by the word “*philadelphía*.” I’m sure you recognize the term as being the name of a large city in Pennsylvania. Perhaps you already new the meaning of the name of that city, as it is known as “the city of brotherly love.” Though it was used in the first-century world to speak of love amongst siblings, it was also used figuratively to speak of the love between close friends. As a result, it was employed in Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Hebrews 13:1, 1 Peter 1:22, and 2 Peter 1:7 to speak of the family-like love that should exist between God’s people. Since Christians have the same Heavenly Father, they share a brotherly-like bond through the Holy Spirit.

The second type of Greek love was known as “*storgē*” love. In sounding out the word, you perhaps hear a sound similar to our word “stork,” the name of a mythical bird

that supposedly delivered newborn babies to new parents in European folklore. The love represented by “storgē” was a love between family members. According to Scripture, such love is not strong amongst those given over to sin (Romans 1:31), and it will wane in society as the last days draw near (2 Timothy 3:3).

Ēros was the third type of Greek love. It referred to the romantic type of love, the type that normally existed between a husband and wife. Our word “erotic” was derived from the Greek word used for this concept. The term does not appear in our New Testament.

Agapē Love

All of this leads us to the fourth and final type of Greek love — agapē love. The word is the most frequent word used for love in the New Testament. It is the one Jesus used when He said, “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son...” (John 3:16). It is also the one He used when He said, “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

The Greek word “agapē” referred to a unique demonstration of love. It spoke of an affection for others that was based on a conscientious choice. Different than the other conceptions of Greek love, it involved a matter of will and action.¹ To love in such a way, one directed his or her desires to find joy in a particular person or thing.²

Seen in this way, the love to which the Lord calls us is not a mere emotion. It involves a deliberate choice, a personal commitment. Christian love is not dependent on human feelings or circumstances. It is the result of a faith-filled decision to regard others as Christ desires. Agapē love is an intentional bending of one’s heart and desires toward another.

A Little Less Talk, A Lot More Action

When the apostle John wrote his letters to first-century churches in Asia Minor, he knew some of his readers were failing to demonstrate Christian charity. Many talked a good game, but their lives were empty of real love. Consequently, John told the church, “Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth” (1 John 3:18). It is one thing to say, “I love you.” It is another thing to actively demonstrate Christian love that emanates from the truth of God in one’s heart.

If modern Christians want to see the fruit of love present in their lives, they must come to grips with the fact that Christian love is different from worldly conceptions of love. It involves a deliberate, conscientious choice to put others before self (Matthew 7:12 and 22:39). Those who see the fruit of the Spirit emanate from their lives in this area are careful to take personal responsibility for love. They rely on the Spirit to produce it, but they know they have choice to make in the matter.

LOVE STARTS WITH GOD. (1957)

To adequately talk about love, one must first talk about God. The Lord is the foundation upon which all charity is built. He the the source from which all genuine affection flows.

¹ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

² Zodhiates, [CD-Rom].

Mere humanity cannot love apart from God. Attempts at exhibiting kind regard toward others are ultimately second-rate, futile, and vain. Those who try to change their ways in reference to love will ultimately experience burnout and frustration if they don't learn to look to the Lord.

In 1 John 4:8, the apostle John revealed that love comes from God by simply saying, "God is love." His pronouncement was intended to instruct his readers concerning how they might embrace and embody true love. Some amongst his readership were known for unloving ways. In 1 John 3:15 he said, "Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." Apparently there were some unruly people who were toxic in their treatment of others.

The strange thing about the hateful people amongst John's readers was the fact that they made strong professions of faith. The apostle wanted to be clear — if one is habitually hateful, his or her spiritual standing is suspect. To truly know God is to know love. Because the virtue is a fundamental part of His character, those who really know God will give evidence of the fact through the way in which they love others.

John's logic leads us to another conclusion — if we want to know love, we must make sure we know God. Self-help techniques, human-oriented people skills, and positivity philosophies can only do so much. Real love comes from a heart that has been transformed by the love of God.

Communicable vs. Non-Communicable Attributes

Theology is the study of God. Several different branches of theology exist. — bibliology (the study of the Bible), Christology (the study of Christ), pneumatology (The Study of the Holy Spirit), anthropology (the study of man), and more. Within the study of theology, the study of God is known as "theology proper." Several topics are normally discussed under that heading. One of them involves the attributes of God.

Attributes are qualities that define. In relation to the Lord, they are the fundamental traits that mark His character. By studying the nature of our Lord, we discover who He is. In knowing who He is, we better know how to relate to Him. In addition, we equip ourselves with a knowledge about God that can produce greater degrees of faith and hope in our lives.

In investigating the attributes of God, we learn that there are two broad categories — communicable attributes and incommunicable attributes. The first category involves character traits that God shares with humans — love, wisdom, and holiness. The second is concerned with attributes God cannot share with others — His omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, and infiniteness. Humanity cannot attain or acquire God's incommunicable attributes, but they can add His communicable attributes into their lives. In fact, the Lord expects them to do so, since humanity has been made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27),

Love is one of the Lord's communicable attributes. Since He is a God of love, He calls us to love one another. If we really know Him, we will exhibit His love to some degree or another. Walking with Him will result in His virtue in our lives. One such virtue is love. It is a natural "fruit" of a life lived in light of His realities.

Love and the Trinity

When one thinks about the God of the Bible, one must think in terms of threes. Over and over again, the Bible presents the Lord as existing in Three Persons — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The presence of both God (Genesis 1:1) and the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2) in the first two verses of the Bible give witness to the Trinity. The reality of God's triune nature makes Christianity distinct from all other religions.

Some struggle to accept the fact that God exists as Three Persons. They profess that the doctrine is hard to understand, and rightfully so! The Trinity is indeed shrouded in a level of mystery. No earthly mind will ever be able to comprehend the way in which the Lord exists in Three Persons; however, one should not dismiss the doctrine because it is not fully knowable.

Indeed, there will always be mysteries associated with the Lord. If there was nothing hard to understand about God, He would not truly be God. To think that the Creator of the Universe can be confined to a limited box of human understanding is a bit shortsighted. The Lord is a magnificent, mysterious, majestic being. No human mind could ever grasp the totality of His glories!

While the Trinity confounds us and confronts us with our mere humanity, there are simple, straightforward things we can learn from the Lord's Triune nature. One of them is centered on the subject of love. When Jesus prayed for His disciples, He prayed that they would be marked by love. In doing so, He made a startling reference to the Trinity, saying, "May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me" (John 17:21).

According to Jesus, the Trinity is the basis for the love to be shared amongst believers. What did our Lord mean? His words revealed that a level of eternal love is shared amongst the Three Persons of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit share a perfect communion and fellowship with one another, and Jesus prayed that believers would experience a similar love within the church.

Jesus' words reveal how believers can embody and express love — by receiving such love from the Triune God. But Jesus' words also reveal the reason God must exist in a Trinity. If God was one, He would have had no way to convey His love before time began. Love does not exist where there is one, lone, sole, individual. Furthermore, love cannot truly exist where there are only two people. Indeed, if only two exist, expressions of love could potentially be interpreted as being self serving.

It is when three exists that expressions of love can be seen as authentic, genuine, and sincere. Thus, God exists as a Trinity. Perfect affection has flown amongst the Three Persons of the Trinity forever and ever. If one wants to know love, one only needs to look to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

LOVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT VIRTUE.

One word to describe you

"The Greatest of These" 1 Corinthians 13:13

Not a New Thing Deuteronomy 6:4

"All the Law and the Prophets" Matthew 22:37-40

LOVE IS PRODUCED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Romans 5:5

Pray for love.

Learn what love is like from God's Word.

Follow promptings to love.

Experience God's love through interaction with God's people.