

The Fruit of the Spirit (2): Love

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[0 : 00] And perhaps we'd have a deeper sense of belonging. Wouldn't the world be a safer place if the love of Jesus was more in evidence?

Guns would be unnecessary and bombs entirely a thing of the past. Well, we can't change the world, but we can change ourselves. This evening, then I want to challenge you all toward the love, which is the first expression of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

That love which makes the world go round. That love which would make the church a better place and the world a far safer place. And I want to challenge you all in four directions.

First, love like Jesus. Secondly, love by the fruit. Third, love as you were loved. And fourth, love by the Spirit.

First of all, then, this evening, love like Jesus. Love like Jesus. If we want to know what love really is, then rather than consult a dictionary or listen to music, read literature, or write poems, we're best going straight to the source.

[1 : 19] Love is the portrait of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is the portrait of love. If you're a Christian this evening and you want to know how to express your love for other Christians, the best resource guide are the Gospels, in which you see and hear the portrait of love for yourself.

Jesus Christ. Or we can trace the origin of the word which Paul uses for love here in Galatians 5.22, the word agape.

We can trace its use through the Old and New Testaments. But there is no better place to understand it than in the words and works of our Lord Jesus himself.

Let's be sure about this. When it comes to Jesus, actions speak louder than words. I'm never a man loved like Jesus did.

We begin with the highest command of Jesus. That found in John chapter 13, verse 34, where he said to his disciples, A new command I give to you, love one another.

[2 : 31] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. He gave no higher command than this, the so-called 11th commandment.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. It's not merely the highest of Jesus' commandments. It is the highest fruit of the Spirit that we love one another just as Jesus has loved us.

And how has he loved us? Well, he loved us in that he gave himself to us and for us. In his birth and his becoming man, he gave himself to us.

In his death and resurrection, he gave himself for us. He held nothing back for himself. He refused to insist upon his own rights. And he said to his disciples, I have not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.

And so at the beginning of John 13, we read these amazing words. Jesus knew that his time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

[3 : 54] He'd always loved his disciples. And even now, the night before his death, he loved them still. He loved them.

And he held nothing back from them. But having taken off his outer garments, he wrapped a towel around his waist, filled a basin with water, and washed their feet.

What held Jesus to the cross if it was not his love for us? It was not the nails in his hands or his feet. It wasn't the crude fixings of a Roman cross. It was his love, determined to give itself in our place as the sacrifice for our sin.

His love for us drove him to die that we might live. He loved and he gave.

[4 : 59] So this then is the highest command of Jesus, that even as he gave up everything for us, so we are to give up everything one for another. How different this standard of love.

Many people in the world around us, transfixed by their reputations and their possessions, see other people as things they can get things from. But Jesus saw other people as people he could give things to.

He didn't use them to become rich or to heighten his reputation. Rather, he made them rich and he gave them a reason for living.

The essence of love is this, self-giving, self-sacrifice. Not so much that we see in others a people we can get things from, but a people we can give ourselves to.

There's a good definition of Jesus' love for us. Seeing other people as people we can give ourselves to. You say to me, but it hurts when I love this way because I give myself to other people.

[6 : 26] I do, but they throw it back in my face. And Jesus says, well, of course it does. See what they did to me. They nailed me to a cross.

And then you say, but I don't know who to love. Perhaps I'll only love those who love me back. And Jesus says to us, but don't you know that I loved you when you hated me?

And I love you even when your forefathers drove those nails into my hands and my feet. We could go on all evening describing the great love of Jesus for us.

That love so intelligent, so inventive, so constant, so committed, so forgiving, so forbearing. But let me suggest just one more thing about the love of Jesus.

Namely, that it was so great it stretched even to Jesus' enemies. The rich young ruler came to Jesus with a religious question, but with a heart filled with the love of money.

[7 : 33] This rich young man loved money more than he loved God. And so, when confronted by Jesus' command to give it all up, the rich young man walked away. But we read in Mark chapter 10, verse 21, simply the most remarkable words.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus looked at him and loved him.

This rich young man didn't love Jesus, but Jesus loved him. Jesus said to his disciples, love your enemies.

It is easy to love the lovable, but the ultimate test of the Holy Spirit's work in us is not that we only love those who are worthy of our love, but our enemies also.

That we spend and are spent on behalf of those who will never thank us for the gift of ourselves and may well laugh at us for it. Now, perhaps that's where you are this evening.

[8 : 46] You seriously doubt the existence of anything you can't see. You are a materialist. You don't believe in the human soul because, well, medics can't point to it on a CT scan.

For this reason, you don't love Jesus. After all, how can you love someone or something that you don't think is real? And I don't want to argue with you about this.

Simply to say, that though you may not love Jesus because you think he's not real tonight, the Jesus I know is real loves you.

He really does. He loves you. Love like Jesus. Second, love by the fruit.

Love by the fruit. 500 years ago, the German reformer Martin Luther in his famous commentary on Galatians wrote these words concerning the fruit of the spirit.

[9 : 51] He wrote, it would have been enough to have said love. Love. And no more. Love extends to all the fruits of the spirit.

Love extends to all the fruits of the spirit. As so many other times, Luther had it absolutely right because as you look through the nine virtues which make up the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, they could all be summed up in this just one word.

Love. So what does it look like to love? What does it mean to love? And Paul says, well, look, love is joyful.

Love is peaceable. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is gentle. Love is good. Love is faithful. Love is self-controlled. Love extends to all the fruits of the spirit.

Luther said it. And so in 1 Corinthians 13, in that great chapter on love, we read, love is patient, and love is kind, and so on. And here in Galatians 5, that love is peaceable, that love is kind, and so on.

[11 : 04] That's what it means to love like Jesus, to love joyfully, to strive for peace with others, to be patient with ourselves and with others, to be kind to others, to be good to others, to be gentle with ourselves and with others, to be faithful to others, and to be self-controlled in the way we love one another.

No one can claim to love if he is impatient with another man. No one can claim to love if he is harsh with another man.

No one can claim to love who causes divisions in church families. Unfortunately, our society has twisted what it means to love, that it would seem that the list of the former works, the former list, the works of the sinful nature in Galatians 5, 19 through 21, committing adultery, being sexually immoral, impure and unclean, that that's what it means to love.

But that's not love. We must insist that the fruit of the Spirit, that the love of the fruit of the Spirit is joyful, peaceful and so on, not the previous list.

We must resist the world, see the perversion of the word love. Galatians 5, 14, a few verses before our own, we read, the entire law is summed up in a single command, love your neighbour as yourself.

[12:51] So what does it mean to love others? It means to rejoice with them, not adding to their burdens, but taking away from them, being patient with them, as far as it's possible to live at peace with them, and so on.

Here's the measure of true godliness. Not that a man is so theologically advanced that he looks down on everyone else with disdain and thinks of them as lightweight, but that he is so theologically mature that he looks on everyone else with the love of Jesus in his heart and on his lips.

That is, after all, what the love of Jesus looked like, a love so gentle and so patient with his disciples. They got it wrong so many times, they failed him so often, but he was gentle with them. And he patiently picks them up and sets them back on the way. That's what the love of Jesus looked like. A love so faithful, a love so self-controlled with his people.

So we don't understand and we're confused. And we head out against all we know to be true and against God himself.

[14:17] But God faithfully absorbs the blows and with such self-control he shows his love to us. This isn't territory where everything is sweetness and light.

Love is best shown in the darkness. And the sourness of real life with all its disappointments and disagreements. Now maybe there are some of us who have been brought up in the church to believe that other virtues were more important than love.

Perhaps we cast our minds back to the days of great preachers and we think that the greatest virtue in the Christian life is the ability to preach. Or perhaps we remember, no disrespect intended, perhaps we remember rather straight-laced old ladies who would scowl at us if we were restless at all in church.

And we've somehow been led to believe that the greatest virtue in the Christian life is the ability to sit quiet for 45 minutes. Or perhaps we remember that really strict elder who kept a check on the gardens of the adherents of the church just to make sure that there was no washing out in the Sabbath.

The greatest virtue of the Christian life became Sabbath observance or hypocrisy, whichever you prefer. Well, listen carefully.

[15:43] what we thought back then was wrong. The greatest virtue in the Christian life has always been, is now, and will always be love.

The greatest virtue will always be that of giving ourselves to one another, of sacrificing our rights joyfully in order that another person can succeed.

Or be willing or be willing for others to be in control and not ourselves. Or being gentle with those who are trying hard and struggling.

Or refusing to look down our nose at them. This is the example we must follow. The example of Jesus and the example of the fruit of the Spirit.

Third, love as you were loved. Love as you were loved. We move on to discuss how we may love like this.

[16:47] Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is the expression of the Holy Spirit's work in us and through us. And so, all our fruit-bearing as Christians is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

However, I want us to begin somewhere which is even more basic to human psychology. Namely, it is only as we love, it's only as we know we are loved, rather, that we may love others.

It is only as we know we are loved that we can love others. They say that those who were abused as children are likely to grow up to abuse others themselves.

And it really is so sad. It is a generational curse that only Christ can break. But if we flip that argument on its head, it is only those who know they are loved who can genuinely love others. Knowing that you're loved breeds security and stability. Early on, we talked about how we are to love each other just as Jesus loved us.

[17 : 58] but who was it who loved Jesus such that he could love us in these wonderful ways? Well, on two occasions, at his baptism and his transfiguration, the voice of his father thundered from the heavens.

You are my beloved son. With you, I'm well pleased. You are my beloved son. With you, I'm well pleased. And so Jesus, secure and stable in the love of his heavenly father, loved his disciples with the same love with which he was loved.

He says to them in John 15, 9, As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. And now, we, stable in the love of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we can love others with that same intensity and self-givingness.

One of my friends in the ministry has a problem and he knows it. He can't do enough for you. He will give you the last penny he has in his pocket.

He will go hungry just so that you can eat. To all intents and purposes, he is the most loving person I've ever met. But that is precisely his problem.

[19 : 34] By doing all these wonderfully loving things, he is not loving others from a place of security and stability. Rather, he is doing things for them in order to earn their praise, respect, and attention.

He really is so insecure on the inside and he feels so loved that he tries to make up for it with outrageous acts of service to other people. But all the time, and he knows it, he is using others to fill the hole in his heart which his lack of stability and security in the love of God alone should be filling. He is not really loving others. He is giving to get which really isn't love. But this is the good news of the gospel.

We are deeply loved by God. Just as Joseph's coat was made up of many bright colours, so the colours of God's love shine forth into our hearts. And how, pray tell me, do we know that we are loved by God so deeply?

Well, you know it as you look at the broken body of his son on the cross. before we read these words, God demonstrated his own love for us in this. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[21 : 04] Filled with the security and stability of knowing that we are loved by God, we may now love others in freedom and in joy.

Let me apply this point, before we move on to our last point, let me apply this point to those of us who are rather like my friend, not loving others, not really, but using them.

Getting our kicks out of making others think well of us. Building our self-esteem not on how God feels about us, but upon how we can manipulate others to feel about us.

Not looking to the gospel for our stability and security, but to the opinions of others. Let me give you a challenge. Read through Jesus' upper room discourse in John 13 through 17 and note the references to love.

You'll quickly discover that there are far more references to God's love for us than to our love for him or for others.

[22 : 21] Pray for repentance in undervaluing God's love and pray for the certainty of the gospel to refresh your heart in the love of Jesus for you because only then will your love for others be acceptable to God.

Lastly, love by the spirit, love by the spirit. A couple of years ago the council replaced a pavement near to where we live in Anisland in the west end of Glasgow and they finished it off with a fine black tar and for a while it looked absolutely perfect, that pavement did.

But after a year, a bump showed in the tarmac and a couple of months later the tarmac burst upward. Pray tell what had caused this ultra-strong good-looking tarmac to break.

In Glasgow do we have moles with jackhammers? It was a dandelion. A dandelion.

The constant pressure of its growth upwards finally breaking through the hard tarmac and destroying the pavement. Now the surface of our hearts rather like that tarmac and love finds it difficult to break through.

[23 : 52] But what breaks through the tarmac is the Holy Spirit. He transforms our hearts of stone into beating hearts of love. His power is irresistible.

We cannot work up the love we need to love others. Rather the Holy Spirit works in us. We read of Jesus that he was, not only was he secure in the love of his father, but he was filled with the Spirit beyond measure.

The very same Spirit who filled him with the love of God for sinners and for strangers alike. As we saw last week, the path to Christian growth, and especially here in the fruit of the Spirit, consists not in doing more and trying harder.

It consists entirely in a deepening faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the channel through which the Holy Spirit changes us and buckles the hardening tarmac of our hearts from the inside out.

Faith is the Holy Spirit's path to the expression of the fruit of the Spirit. Wouldn't our churches be better places if we loved each other the way Jesus loved us?

[25 : 27] Wouldn't our world be a safer place if we loved each other the way Jesus has loved us? Well, we can't change the world's love for itself, but we can't change the way we love others.

This we can only do as we love like Jesus, training that love to be joyful, peaceable, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

world. This we can only do as we are secure and stable in God's love for us, and we increasingly believe and appropriate for ourselves the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So the seed has been planted. Now let the fruit of love grow.riendent xi