

“Fruit of the Spirit” series- STUDY 2.

LOVE

Whenever you learn about bible interpretation one of the things you discover is that in the original Greek there were no punctuation marks or paragraphs or even space between words. So if you consider the passage on the fruit of the Spirit it would look like the following:

THEFRUITOFTHESPIRITISLOVEJOYPEACEPATIENCEKINDNESS
GOODNESSFAITHFULNESSGENTLENESSANDSELFCONTROL

OHP

Why is love first? If someone were to ask an interpretation question like: “How do you know when something is being emphasised?” then answer would be, “It always comes first”. So if we look at our list of the “*fruit of the Spirit*”, is it deliberate or coincidental that “*love*” is mentioned first? Is it simply one of the nine, or is it the first and greatest, with the rest being an expression of love? It is actually the latter. Some one has put it well:

joy is love enjoying itself;
peace is love resting;
patience is love waiting;
kindness is love reacting;
goodness is love choosing;
faithfulness is love keeping its word;
gentleness is love empathising; and
self-control is love resisting temptation.

So love is the key. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 “*The greatest is love*”. This fits in with the understanding we developed last time, that the fruit of the Spirit is actually the characteristics of God. And what we see in 1 John 4:7&8 is that love is the chief characteristic of God. John “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God...whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*” It’s been pointed out that the bible has “...no other equivalent statement with respect to the other qualities of God’s divine nature. Love is the highest characteristic of God, the one attribute in which all others harmoniously blend.” In Colossians Paul writes “...*as God’s chosen people... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive...And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*” (Colossians 3:12-14)

1. So what really is love?

Now speaking again of the original Greek, that language tended to use more words to reflect the meaning of a thought than we do in English. English can be a bit lazy.

Fast
Love
OHP

What's in a word? Think of the word “fast” what does it mean? It can mean you are quick (drives fast), or that colours don't run (the colours are fast) or to tie something up (fasten), or some one is morally loose (fast & lose) or your watch has gained time, or you are sleeping soundly (fast asleep) or it can mean you are close to something (fast approaching). Another word like that is our key word for tonight –“love.” We throw the word “love” around to mean almost anything. A bloke can say: “I love my dog, I love cricket, I love pizza, I love my kids, I love my wife, I love my parents and I love all of you.” But the word love in each of those situations means very different things. There is no way that a bloke loves his dog the same way he loves his wife. We know what sort of love a person is talking about because we work it out from the context of what he says. The Greek language has several different words for “love”.

eros
phileo
storge
agape
OHP

The Spirit's love is agape. There is “*eros*” which is a sensual, passionate love between lovers. It is what Woody Allen said in a film, “I was nauseous and tingly all over. I was either in love or I had small pox.” Then there is the word “*phileo*” and this is the warm fuzzy feeling we have for those dearest to us. This is friendship. There is also “*storge*” which is affection. It's what you feel for you parents or children. Now Paul doesn't use any of these words when he speaks here of love. Instead he uses the word “*agape*”. That love is less a feeling than it is an act of the will. It is why Jesus can tell us to “*love our enemies*”. You can't command feelings. You can't command that you like someone, or that you “fall in love” with someone. But agape can be commanded because it is a conscious action. It is something you decide to do. Now that is an interesting concept isn't it- that love is a choice? In our day love is seen only as an emotional thing, something you “fall into”, but that is the “*eros*” or the “*storge*”. “*Agape*” is a commitment we chose to make. For example our marriage vows say that we are committed to *love and serve* each other, in “*joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health in plenty and in want.*” In other words it does not matter what we do or what we have, we will keep loving each other. In a marriage relationship we know there are days when we, or our spouse, are not so lovable. But because we have chosen to love each other, because we are committed no matter what we have or what we feel, we can be secure in our relationship. “*Eros*” love says “I love you because you make me feel good.” “*Phileo*” love says “I love you because I feel good when we are together”. But agape says “Love you to make you happy. I am committed to you and your growth, even if you are not making me happy”. A person should not love another because of anything that person has or does- but simply because that person exists. The Talmud (Jewish commentary on Old Testament law) expresses it in a very insightful teaching: “When love depends on another factor, then when that factor ceases to exist, so does the love. But when love

does not depend on anything else, it never ceases to exist”. If you think about it you realise that true lasting agape is only really possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. Love as Jesus loved.

Producing the character of Jesus. Now the reference to the Spirit reminds us that His task is to reproduce in us the character of Jesus. That is what the “*fruit of the Spirit*” is. The Spirit’s calling is to draw us to Jesus, to make Him real to us, and to make us more and more like Him. So when we see that the first fruit of the Spirit is *love*, then that love is something we see in Jesus. In fact Jesus commanded His disciples to imitate Him in His love. He said: (John 13:13&14) “*A new commandment I give unto you. Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.*” There you see it. We display Jesus by loving as He did. We reveal the character of Jesus through love. Now the context in which Jesus said this is very interesting. It is the night before Jesus died. He knows it is His time, time to die and then leave the disciples. So with some final words he instructs them how they should live while He is away. When you leave loved ones behind for a while and want to say a few words you focus on what is most important. So we are struck by the immense importance Jesus puts on this command to love. It’s the first subject he puts to them, and as we have learned, that which comes first gets the main emphasis. Why love first? Because as we have already established it is a quality of God Himself and it is the quality of God’s people that will always be there. Remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8 “*Love never fails... where there are prophecies they will cease, where there are tongues they will cease...*” When we get to the new earth many things will pass away. But not love. It will still be found in that future life. On the new earth the most wonderful experience will be the deep love we have for Jesus and each other.

“**...love as I have loved you.**” Now we notice that as Jesus primes His disciples for life with Him gone to heaven, he says, “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” He could have mentioned the law to love as found in the Old Testament. But he shows them Himself, because Jesus is showing them a new degree of love personified in Himself. When Jesus said, “*As I have loved you*”, he was first referring to the foot washing episode at the start of John 13. There we see the rabbi, the master, giving himself in humble service to his disciples. That sort of action was unheard of. It was a slave’s job to clean the dirty, stinking feet of others. It was so upsetting of the order of things that Peter refused to have a bar of Jesus doing his feet. Jesus’ point in doing it was to give a “live parable” of how he was soon to humble himself to the lowest of all by dying on the cross and suffering the deepest agony of hell. Jesus demonstrated a love that is deeply committed and caring for the other; a love that gives itself completely in sacrifice for another, a love that brings forgiveness and life. Jesus tells his disciples that his love is not just something he does. They have to do it to. Jesus set a new standard in how we are to serve and care for each other. We who are his disciples are to display what Jesus is like, what the Kingdom of God is like with this deep love.

In Jesus is personified the love of God. We said that the *fruit of the Spirit* is the character of God. We see this when we think through how the sacrificial nature of Jesus displayed to a new level the love of God. John wrote, “*For God so loved the world He gave His only Son...*” What a love, how deep it must be, if God wants us as His children through Him giving His one and only. In our world, so broken and torn apart by war and suffering, we may wonder if God loves His world. But as we look back at the cross and see Jesus suffering, we know at what cost God has shown his love for us. John wrote in his first letter “*This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His*

son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) In Jesus is personified the love of God. When we see Jesus we know what God is like. We see so clearly how gracious and giving is His love. But now Jesus has returned to the father. Now someone else has to display the love of God, to show others what it is like. As John writes further in his letter (1 John 4:11&12) “Dear friends, since God so love us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.” No wonder love is the first fruit of the Spirit. This love has to be seen. It’s no wonder Jesus emphasised it with his disciples. If they, and if we, are not truly loving no one will know what God’s love is like. In fact John says something very bold here. “God’s love is made complete in us.” The love of God, which originates in Himself (:8 “God is love”) and was revealed in Jesus as He died in our place, is made complete, it is perfected in us His people. God’s love is only fully completed when we truly love each other as God’s people. When we love and care for each other it’s not just a case of people caring for each other, or getting on well, like any other group or family. It’s God’s love we are sharing. It’s God’s character we are revealing. This is the wonder of this first *fruit of the Spirit*.

3. A good practical definition.

Love is a verb. Now it’s clear that we had better get this “love” right in our lives. We need a good, practical definition. It must be practical, it must be acted, it must be lived. It can’t just be a nice theology we talk about. It must be something that takes on shoes and moves right into the ordinary things of everyday life. It’s not something we do with pious faces on Sunday. It’s what happens at home and in the work place and at school, when we go out. It must be something so practical you can measure it. You can look back over the years and see the change. We get no better definition than what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 :4-6 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” Notice how it’s all verbs, action words. Notice how it parallels the *fruit of the Spirit*. Notice how easy and correctly we can replace the name “Jesus” with “love” and it all makes perfect sense. “Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy, Jesus does not boast....” And what we should also be able to do is replace the word “love” with our own name. How true is this definition for us?

Is our love mature or immature? To help you be practical with this definition of love there is a list below made up by Rev Bill van Schie (Christian Reformed Church of Mt Evelyn) in his premarital counselling course “Preparing To Leave And Cleave”. He lists the verbs in Paul’s definition into mature and immature aspects. Look at the list below and think about these points in terms of your significant relations, marriage, family, church, work. Are you patient or easily provoked, irritable, touchy. Go through the list and decide on two mature areas that you are doing (reasonably) well. In prayer give thanks to God how you and the Spirit are bearing fruit. Chose two areas on the immature side where you really need to do some work. Spend time in pray for the Spirit to guide you in growing in that aspect of love:

Love that is realistic**Mature:**

1. Patient = tolerant, calm
2. Kind = appreciates, helps, builds up
3. Accepts = self-acceptance, positive
4. Humble = sees own faults, polite
5. Courteous = gentle, honours
6. Unselfish = not insist on own rights
7. Forgiving = letting go of grievances
8. Covers all = bears, believes, hopes
9. Truthful = honest, open, trusting
10. Endures = is responsible, perseveres

Agape = unselfish, serving the other

Immature

- Easily provoked = touchy, irritable
 Exploits = self-gratification, uses to serve self
 Envy = competition, hates to be second
 Conceited = exaggerates, brags, boasts
 Unseemly = rude, arrogant
 Selfish = demands exclusive attention
 Grudges = dwells on faults and hurts
 Limited = limited to self interest.
 Deceitful = distorts truth in own interest
 Fails = irresponsible, ego-centric, static

Selfish = serving self.

Remember to be led by the Spirit. Remember, this is not something you are to do on your own. It is not possible. This is the “*fruit of the Spirit*”. It is His work in you as He reveals the character of Jesus and the Father in our lives. We have seen from God’s word what the fruit of “*love*” is really like. Now we should strive to do this with all the energy we have for God’s sake. But at the same time we beg the Spirit to lead us. Remember from the first study that we are to be led by the Spirit.. So be constantly in prayer with the Spirit. If you are some one who is quickly irritated, be aware of the Spirit’s presence. Pray to Him to keep you calm. Don’t just try in your own strength, trust Him, rely on Him, be aware of the presence of Almighty God. Let’s really work on this fruit so that our family and church and neighbours get the sense of what God is like. “*God is love*”. Let’s show it.

DISCUSSION.

Preparation. Read the sermon notes.

Readings. John 13:31-35, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; 1 John 4:7-12, Galatians 5:22

Questions.

1. Explain why love is listed first in the “fruit of the Spirit.” Describe how the rest of the fruit can all be explained in terms of love.
2. Explain the meaning of each of the following and describe how you may have experienced each in your life:
 - i. eros
 - ii. phileo
 - iii. storge
 - iv. agape
3. Explain the importance of love in terms of Paul’s remark “...love never fails...” (1 Corinthians 13:8)

4. How does the fruit of love reveal the character of Jesus? How would we display it in our lives? Are we, in fact, displaying this in our lives? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What does John mean when he writes, "*If we love each other, God is in us and His love is made complete in us*"? What are the implications for our lives and our being church?
6. What do we mean when we say "Love is a verb"?
7. How mature or immature is your love? Go through the chart "**Love that is realistic**" on page 10 and think about those items listed in terms of your relationships at home, at work, at church. Describe two areas where you are doing (reasonably) well. Also describe two areas where you need to do some work on with the Spirit. (Spend time in prayer on these points in particular.)
8. How can the Spirit help you to show more love? What steps will you actually take to grow in this fruit?