

Fruit of the Spirit: LOVE

Intro:

Today we are continuing our series on the Fruit of the Spirit, or the results of God's grace the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. It is characteristics that are from God and contrary to our sinful human nature. Pastor Richard went on to describe them as, fruit that "give nourishment and lead to a whole and happy life." If this is the case then we deserve to examine them closely and to trace just how they might lead us to the life described by Pastor Richard and ultimately by scripture. Let's review these fruit that we speak of :

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

- Galatians 5:22-23

As we progress through this in depth look at this life giving "fruit" we'll be discussing the potential impact each quality has on your life. Today, we are starting from the top. Today, we will be unpacking the question, "What is Love?" How would you define it? For many of us love can be used as a term of endearment that describes a fleeting moment of affection and feeling. It can be used to describe the relationship that exists between family members and close friends. In the English we use the word to describe a deep feeling and emotional connection. We ask the word love to fill a lot of uses and communicate different meanings. Some might say I "love the Dallas Cowboys" and I would say "I love my mom" but the meaning and commitment level are clearly different. A true understanding of love is often so complex that many languages use multiple words to emphasize the type of feelings they are referring too. Did you know that both biblical languages use three different words to characterize love in biblical texts?

Hebrew : Ahava, Hesed, Raham

Greek: Agape, Philia, Eros

It is this simple fact that reveals the reality of our discussion today: Love is very complex and in order for it to be brought out in our life we have to understand it and all of its complexities. **You see, when viewed accurately, the impact of love can only be understood through embracing God, embodying love in our personal relationships, and expanding our role in God's eternal kingdom.**

Background:

Our main passage for today comes from 1 Corinthians Chapter 13: 1-8. First Corinthians 13 is often referred to as the "Love" chapter and you have probably been to a wedding or two where it was referenced or read in its entirety. However the reality is that it carries a much deeper meaning than just the interactions between husband and wife. This part of the picture, but it is most definitely not a

complete understanding of the passage. For us to see the passage in its entirety we have to understand the way love is being communicated.

The word for love in this passage is agape. Agape is a powerful, unconditional love that was used in the Old Testament to communicate the depth of love God has for all people. This is not some fleeting feeling or emotional connection. This word is communicating a deep commitment to relational connection and an unconditional devotion to that relationship. It's also the same word we translate to "love" in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit description. With this in mind it seems appropriate that we attach the appropriate weight to the impact this truth can have on our life.

To sum it up, a proper understanding of 1st Corinthians 13 reveals a description of how God interacts with all of us and how we are called to interact with others.

Observation:

As I look at this description of Love, I see three things we can pull out that should inform our view on the importance of this "fruit" and the potential it has to nourish our life.

1. Love is essential to the work of The Holy Spirit . (Vs. 1-3)

For us to have a clear understanding of just how powerful the spirit is we have to understand that unconditional "agape" love lies at the heart of everything. The bible and Christian tradition are full of examples of people embracing the role of the Holy Spirit. In my personal faith journey the two examples that seem the most prominent to me are the Pentecostal spirit filled movement and the monastic tradition. Both are completely different movements that offer a different flavor, but both contain powerful movements of the Holy Spirit and the reality is that both of these movements have at times been filled with "agape" love and at other times have been filled with extreme legalism. This little fact of Christian history should remind us that, while our faith is powerful, when it is void of love that power is crippled to the point where it is unrecognizable. It then takes a strong voice to remind people that love is the most essential work of the spirit in the life of the Christian.

2. Love gives credibility the other works of the Spirit. (Vs. 4-7)

If we compare the qualities of 1st Corinthians 13 with the qualities we see in Galatians 5, the similarities are striking. This is not a coincidence and it reminds us that "agape" love is at the heart of the work the spirit does. Love gives credibility to everything that is motivated by the spirit, because if our striving towards the spirit is merely about cultivating these things to "be better" than we are missing the point. If we are just striving to achieve these qualities to be "holy" than we are actually being selfish and contradicting the very thing we are striving to create. It also will lead you down a not so happy path focused much more on your "failure" than on the work of God in your life. Cultivating the power of the Holy Spirit in your life starts with love because love motivates the rest of the qualities and it is ultimately love that gives credibility to the other "fruit".

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3. Love is eternal, we will always be able to experience it (Vs. 8)

The reality is that at some point, the other works of the spirit that have appeared in Christian tradition will no longer be necessary. Many of these works were here to give acknowledgement that God is still very much in control of our world and that his power is real. There will come a day when his power and presence will go unquestioned and we as humans will have a complete knowledge of God, we won't need things to be revealed to us anymore because we will be a part of them happening. Our perfected state will be restored and we will have complete knowledge and relationship with God. Love is an essential aspect of the work of God in our world and a key reason for that is that it will always remain as our main connection to God, even when other works of the Spirit cease to exist, love will remain. The "agape" love of God will always be available to us and it will always connect him to us in a powerful way.

Application:

One of the most practical applications we will ever see comes straight from the bible, a from a little book called Hosea, one of the Minor Prophets. In it we are told the story of a man who was seeking to follow God and to make the love of God a reality in his life. He believed so much in what he was doing that he married a woman who was unfaithful to him, multiple times. One of those times she finds herself in debt to another man and Hosea cares for his unfaithful wife in such a way that pays to have her returned so he can fulfill his promise to love her. Now that we have a little better understanding of the important role love plays in properly understanding and expressing the work of the Holy Spirit in our world, we are left with the age old question, "What in the world are we supposed to do about this?"

1. Embrace love from God

The reality is this: if we have not embraced the "agape" or unconditional love of God in our life we will never be able to authentically express that love to others. Believe me when I say this, there is literally nothing you could do that will prevent God from loving you. Scripture tells his and History supports this fact. However, relational love is also a two way street, you've got to embrace that love. You have got to believe that what I am saying to you is true. God loves you, you are his child, and this fact should radically transform your life. Christian Spiritual Formation Author Brennan Manning said it this way,

"Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion."

Whatever you might think of yourself, your past, your present, or your future I am here to day to tell you that right now in this moment you have the opportunity to change all that. You have the opportunity to embrace God's love and believe that he claims you as his own. Believing that fact will radically change the way you see yourself and ultimately the way you see and love other people. God loves you today, he loved you yesterday, and he will love you tomorrow. The only thing keeping you from experiencing that is yourself. Embrace him and let him show you the extent of his love. If you need to talk to somebody and have them walk you through what this means, maybe it's time to make a an appointment with a friend, pastor, or counselor and let them share with you some ideas on how to make this a reality.

2. **Embody** love in your relationships

If we claim to be Christians and we claim to believe that we have embraced the Love God offers that we have a responsibility to embody that love to other people. All the qualities listed in these scriptures are designed to ultimately be an expression of love in the context of relationship. If you find yourself struggling to carry these things out in your everyday life, it might be because you've forgotten that love is the essential ingredient. All of these characteristics are powerful and have the ability to impact the lives of people around you, but if you use them to display the transformational work the holy spirit has done in your life that impact points people to God. Rather than you simply being a good person, you have now become a living expression of the love of God into the life of another person and that is a powerful thing. It has the ability to impact their life in a dramatic way, someone didn't just talk to them about God's love; someone showed them God's love. Love is an action, not just an emotion. Maybe it's time to start being the neighbor you have always felt you should be, but have never taken the time to be.

3. **Expand** your role in God's eternal kingdom

Finally, we must understand that love has eternal ramifications and an eternal perspective. Love is not just about the here and now. Love is about eternity. God is at work restoring creation, transforming us and our world back to the way he has always intended for us to be. As Christians we have a job to do, we have to be a physical representation of his love to our world, this also means that we have a role in establishing God's eternal kingdom. Love is about more than self-care and helping our fellow man. Love is about the restoration of the world and the establishment of a new world where Love will be the driving force behind everything. You have a role to play in making that world and that kingdom a reality. You have a role in helping our world understand that God has big plans that extend far beyond anything we could ever hope or imagine. A world void of pain, suffering, hurt, and evil is coming but that world is not going to come from any human effort, it is going to come from people like you me expanding the power of God in our world. It's going to come from us making a commitment to see God's kingdom come; it's going to come from us believing that God's unconditional love had the ability to transform the world. We have got to recognize that our understanding of God's love motivates and empowers us to make a dramatic impact in our life, the lives of others, and the world around us. Being the change we want to see in the world takes more than action, it takes power and motivation, and those things come when we fully embrace Love the way God intended.

Conclusion:

An accurate view of love shouldn't just impact our romantic or personal life. An accurate view of love shouldn't just impact our romantic or personal life. An accurate view of love should motivate us to completely change the way we live our life; it should allow us to passionately embrace God, embody his love in a personal way, and expand our role in his eternal kingdom. Love should motivate us to completely change the way we live our life; it should allow us to passionately embrace God, embody his love in a personal way, and expand our role in his eternal kingdom. It should provide us with the motivation, action, and power we need to be active difference makers that challenge people to believe

that the world many hope for is possible, but it is only possible through the supreme power of God and his work in our life, the lives of others, and the world at large. That work all starts with Love.