

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... LOVE

Selected

Introduction:

Do you remember the first time you said I love you to that special someone? Perhaps the one who is today your wife or husband? What did you mean by it? What significance did that word “love” have for you?

Love is a much misunderstood and much misrepresented concept in our world today. I expect it has always been that way, but it seems like the past few decades have really distanced human thinking from the true idea of what love is.

The word “love” is bandied about so freely, often with no thought of what it really means. People use it to refer to their husband or wife, their dog, their favorite dress, or a special dessert – “I just love chocolate cheesecake.”

But love is so much more than being attracted to someone, or enamored with a special food or item of clothing. Before we get into the heart of this message, I would like to review for you the use of the word love in the Bible. We are going to stick with the Greek words used in the New Testament.

There are three main Greek words used for love. The first word, eros, you will not find in the Bible, but it is common in ancient Greek literature. It refers, as you can probably figure out, to a sensual attraction to someone. It is the source of our English word erotic.

The other two words are used extensively in the NT. There is the word, philos or philao. It refers to an affectionate kind of love. It is often translated as friend in the New Testament.

But by far the most common word in the NT is agape or agapao. This is the love that is characteristic of God. It is divine love, God’s love, a love that is really beyond description. It is difficult or really impossible to define or describe all the aspects of this divine love. Perhaps that is

why people find true love so elusive today. They are pursuing a myth rather than seeking the love that is described in the Bible.

Well today we want to look at the love that Paul is talking about in Gal. 5:22 – “The fruit of the Spirit is love...” The word he uses there is agape – the love seen in the heart of God. But, what really is love? How do we find true love? How can we show love to others? Those are the three things we want to look at this morning—perceiving love, pursuing love, and practicing love.

Perceiving Love

What is love? How can we ever know or understand love? Is our perception of love what God intended it to be? Before we can ever begin to truly love in the highest sense, with agape love, we must go back to the source of love.

We can never truly love others until we have felt love and experienced love for ourselves. God knew that and so He sent a special gift of love to express his love in a way that we could see and understand. He sent his own son into the world to become one of us – John 3:16.

1 John 4:9-10 – “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (ESV)

The greatest expression of love this world has ever seen, is the love that was shown in Jesus Christ. That God was willing to sacrifice his own Son in our place, is a love that cannot be measured.

But God is not satisfied, and we should not be satisfied, with simply perceiving or experiencing God’s love. We are to be a channel of that love to others as well as back to God himself.

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5 ESV)

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18 ESV)

These commands were reinforced by Jesus, when speaking to the Pharisees. One of them asked him what was the greatest commandment in the Law.

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39 ESV)

And the apostle Paul added this thought:

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV)

We are to have faith; we are to have hope; but most of all we are to have love. We are to love God and love others. That leads us to our second question. How do we find love? How can we realize love in our own hearts?

Pursuing Love

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV)

Walk in love—live a life of love. Note the reference to Christ’s love—walk in love, as Christ loved us... But how do we do that?

There are four things we must recognize in our pursuit of love. (These points come from an article by George Sweeting in Moody Monthly magazine.)

1. Love is a prize to be won. 1 Cor. 14:1 says, “Pursue love...” The NIV says, “Follow the way of love...” The word used there is *“διωκω.”* It is an interesting word. Turn to Philippians 3 for a moment.
v. 6 – persecuting, persecutor
v. 12 – press on, follow after (AV)
v. 14 – press on
Over half of the uses of the word are translated as “persecute.” The word expresses the idea of strenuous activity, a relentless pursuit, going after a goal or a prize without giving up. And the prize is love. Pursue love... it is a prize to be won.

2. Love is the pinnacle of grace.
God’s love is inseparably linked to his grace and his aim in saving us is linked to love. Love is the greatest goal in life – we are to love God and to love others—neighbors, friends, family, even our enemies. And that takes a tremendous measure of grace—the willingness to look past the faults and the flaws and the sins of others. When Paul commands us to pursue love, he is urging that we jealously guard against anything that would detract or hinder us from achieving this ideal. Consciously and unconsciously, every hour of every day, we must follow patiently and persistently after love, extending grace to those around, just as God has to us. Love is the pinnacle of grace.
3. Love is an object of prayer.
“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” (Philippians 1:9-10 ESV)
Paul’s prayer was that the love of these Philippian believers would abound more and more—increase exceedingly, overflow. We would do well to begin each day with prayer asking the Lord to make this discerning love increase in our lives, so that it overflows to those around us.
4. Love is a slow-bearing fruit.
Remember in your pursuit of love that good fruit is not produced in a day. There is a process in the production of any kind of fruit. Seed → growth → flower → pollination → sunshine, rain, wind → finally the finished fruit.
It is interesting that people, old and young alike are seeking the fruit of the Spirit. They are looking for love, for joy, for peace in their lives.
Yet what many are doing is trying to produce this fruit in their lives without ever yielding to the Holy Spirit, the source of the fruit. They are wasting their time. Like the old country song says, I was looking for love in all the wrong places. The fullness of love comes only by the fullness of the Spirit.
It is a fruit that must be produced in our lives by the indwelling Holy Spirit and it takes time as we yield day by day to the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to the pursuit of love, the focus must be on yielding to the Spirit in our lives.

Practicing Love

Well, now we come to the practical question of how we can truly love others. As we surrender to the Holy Spirit—as He produces the fruit of love in our life, how can we actually go about practicing love—especially toward those whom we find difficult to love?

Let me offer a few practical suggestions:

1. Think of someone who gets on your nerves—someone who just kind of bugs you...
2. Make a list of that person's good qualities and bad qualities.
3. Consider those undesirable traits—why he or she has them, and why you react the way you do toward them.
4. In an act of faith, determine to love that person.
5. Pray for the person. This will do more to help you love this person than anything else you can do. Ask God to bless him or her and you will find blessing in your own life.

Conclusion

The fruit of the Spirit – there are many parts to this fruit. But without a doubt, the most significant is love. Without love none of the others could amount to anything.

But the key to love, to knowing and growing love in our life is being yielded to the Holy Spirit, who is the source of this fruit.

God's promise is that the Spirit comes through Christ Jesus to those who believe.

"...that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:14 ESV)

So, His perfect love will fill our hearts, and overflow to those around us if we have received the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus Christ and are fully yielded to Him.