**Galatians 5:16-26**

I. Love is the primary fruit of the Spirit Paul has in mind in this passage

A. Defining love

 1. Agape (v. 22) is not a feeling but unconditional, sacrificial action for others’ good

2. Agape is sacrificial: “serve” one another in love (v. 13)

3. Agape is unconditional: love your neighbor “as yourself” (v. 14)

B. The context of this passage is relational conflict

 1. The passage is framed by relational conflict (v. 15 and v. 26)

2. Notice how many of the acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit are relational in nature (v. 19-23)

C. It’s easy to bring our individualistic glasses to this passage

We think of walking in the Spirit primarily in terms of our own individual journey

-If someone asks us if we are growing as Christians, we may just think of individual issues (Bible reading, prayer, defeating sin, etc)

D. But for Paul, walking in the Spirit is also about how we relate to one another as a body

1. One of the main things the Spirit wants to do in our lives is increase our love for one another

2. One of the truest tests spiritual growth is whether we are growing in our capacity to love other people (in our prayers, in our hearts, in our words, actions, in conflict, etc)

3. This is why commitment to a local group of believers is so important

Community is the crucible of genuine spiritual growth

4. Jn 13:35: “This is how the world will know that you are my disciples--if you love one another.”

II. “Empty glory” is one of the great enemies of love

A. Definition

1. “Conceited” (v. 26) = “empty glory”

a. We all have this desire for glory

 = We all want to be someone great and be acknowledged as great “We are all in one large cosmic game of American idol”

b. This pursuit is “empty”

It leads us to regard ourselves as more important than we actually are

 2. Adam and Eve gave into this pursuit of empty glory

 Satan: “If you eat the fruit, you will be like God”

3. Our sinful nature (v. 17) is that self-centered part of us we inherited from Adam and Eve that lives for our own pleasure and glory

B. Empty glory is the enemy of loving community

1. When a bunch of people with empty glory are put together (all with this need to be important and acknowledged), the result is competition and rivalry

 a. We either “provoke” others (v. 26) if we feel superior to them

b. Or we “envy” others (v. 26) if we feel inferior to them

2. Rather than thinking of each other, we are being driven by our own need to be acknowledged

3. This can play out in one of two ways

a. Aggressive behavior (v. 15)

 The Bachelor is a great example of this

b. Passive aggressive behavior

People pleasers still want glory but seek it through others’ approval, so while they may do things that look loving, it can often just be a form of self love

III. How does the Spirit transform us into loving people?

A. He takes that neediness for empty glory and fills it with God’s own loving presence

1. Ro 8:15-16: he convinces us that God is our Abba Father

2. Ro 5:5: God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit

3. Eph 3:16-19: a prayer for a deep experience of fullness and love through the Spirit

4. The Spirit gives the assurance that we are loved unconditionally by God and that’s all we need

B. Much of the problem in our relationships is driven by the neediness inside ourselves

-In our “need” to be respected, acknowledged, vindicated, liked, praised, etc. we treat people unlovingly when we don’t get that “need” met (e.g. yelling at a soccer game, gossip, exploding when confronted)

C. The Spirit frees us from that neediness, so that we’re freed to love others and focus on their needs

D. Jesus is the perfect example of this

He was filled with Spirit and utterly convinced of the Father’s love and that gave him the security to love others radically

IV. Conclusion

A. Where do you want to ask the Spirit to grow your capacity to love? Is there a specific relationship or a specific area of your life?

B. Where do you need to experience the love of God in the midst of your neediness?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss this statement made on Sunday: “Community is the crucible of genuine spiritual growth.” Do you agree, and if so how have you seen that truth play out in your own life?

2. On Sunday it was argued that one of the truest tests of our own spiritual growth is whether we are growing in our capacity to love other people. Where specifically do you think God might be wanting you to lean into loving others more in the coming weeks?

3. Discuss the idea of “vain glory” mentioned on Sunday. Where have you seen the pursuit of “vain glory” popping up in your life lately?

4. We talked about how our own neediness can get in the way of us loving each other unconditionally and sacrificially. Where in your own life to you see your own neediness getting in the way of loving others well?

5. What has been your biggest takeaway from the last three Sundays on Galatians 5?