

1. Fruit of the Spirit and Love

Galatians 5:19-26

Intro

Henry Wingblade (President of Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota) used to say that, “Christian personality is hidden deep inside us. It is unseen, like the soup carried in a tray high over a waiter’s head. No one knows what’s inside – unless the waiter is bumped and he trips! Just so, people don’t know what’s inside us until we’ve been bumped. But if Christ is living inside, what spills out is the fruit of the Spirit.”

Evidence of Spiritual Maturity

It is imperative that we understand that the marks of true spirituality and the signs of maturity in Christian growth are found not in the gifts of the Spirit, but rather they are found in the fruit of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2 – *“If I speak in the tongues of men and angels (gift of the Spirit) but have not love, (fruit of the Spirit) I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

Jesus our example

Each of the nine fruits or character traits can be seen in the life of Christ. Not only is He our pattern and example for a fruitful and fruit filled life, He is also our source for leading a fruitful and fruit filled life. This is clearly seen in John 15:4 when Jesus said, *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”*

Fruit of the Spirit Shapes Christian Character

We need to understand that what makes the fruit of the Spirit such a crucial study, is because it deals directly with our character. Character deals directly with our integrity, and our integrity speaks of who we are when no one else is looking. Our integrity shouts to the heavens as to what is really inside us.

God will use trials to show us what is on the inside of us, and that is the proof of our faith. When the pressure is on and the world is squeezing tightly, just like a tube of toothpaste (for lack of a better analogy) – something has to come out.

Our character is much more important than any gift that we possess. As a matter of fact, if we are operating in the gifts of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit, we will be doing harm to the Gospel.

Matthew 7:16-23 Jesus said, *“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus by their fruit you will recognize them.*

Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Fruit bearing can at times be painful for the believer:

John 15:2 Jesus teaches that, *“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even be more fruitful.”*

Often we have a hard time discerning if the pain or trial that we are going through is from God or from the enemy. Remember, not always is it the enemy, it just might be God pruning you to be even more fruitful. Also, it is important to remember that God uses trials to test us.

Evidence that one is a Christian is by Their Fruit

A Christian's character is determined by the Spirit-led qualities that issue from his or her heart. Spiritual fruit is extremely important. It is the indicator that a person is truly born again. If there is no fruit in your life, something is wrong because fruit is evidence that God is at work. God spoke through Hosea, saying, *“I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me”* (Hosea 14:8). Whatever you do that is godly is from God. Walking in the Spirit produces fruit.

Attitude and fruit

Before you ever see the evidence of fruit, there must be a correct attitude behind it because attitudes produce actions. Whatever is going on inside a person will be manifested externally. The Christian life can also be summarized by the attitudes of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control. If those attitudes are present, they will produce the appropriate actions. A Christian can't experience love or joy in a corner by himself or in seclusion because those are things that are shared with others. Fruit that is produced by the Spirit is not self-centered but Christ centered.

NINE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

1. Love

Love is the greatest and most blessed manifestation of the character of God. Scripture declares that God is love. In 1 John 4:16 we read, *“...God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.”*

The simplest and most profound description of Christian character also is love. It is sad to say that in some churches love has not characterized those who profess to be Christians.

Throughout history the church at times has not been a good example of love. Sometimes it is easier to have all your doctrines in order than to be a loving person. Sometimes it's easier to be active in church work than to love sacrificially. Yet the supreme characteristic that God demands of His people is love.

Agape Love

Agape (love) is one of the rarest words in the ancient Greek literature, but one of the most common in the New Testament. Unlike our English “love”, agape never refers to romantic or sexual love, nor does it refer to mere sentiment, a pleasant feeling about someone or something. It does not mean close friendship or brotherly love.

Dr. Karl Menninger, famous psychiatrist. Has written that, *“Love is the medicine for our sick old world. If people can learn to give and receive love, they will usually recover from their physical or mental illness.”* How true.

What is True Love?

The problem, however, is that few people have any idea of what true love is. In my pre-marriage counselling I often ask couples to define love and what it means to them personally. I have found that most have a difficult time describing it.

Most people seem to think of it only in terms of nice feelings, warm affection, romance and physical attraction and desire.

In Scripture we find 4 terms in the New Testament to define love: Philos; Storge, Eros; & Agapé.

Philos: is love between friends.

Storgé: is love between a parent and a child.

Eros: is love between a couple, sexual love.

Agapé: is love of commitment and sacrifice.

- Agape is sacrificial love of giving one's self.
- It is love of commitment & loyalty.
- It is love that greatly values the person and makes them feel very important & secure.
- It is a love that is willing to give one's life for the other.

This agape love is a deep love that is rarely experienced in marriages. That is why many couples feel empty because their relationship is only based on romance, affection and physical love. Many relationships and marriages are at a loss because they perhaps have never experienced this deep love of commitment.

Sometimes when we say, "I love you", we often mean, "I love me and I want you." People have to admit that the love they feel sometimes can be selfishness.

Of course this is very opposite of agape love. Agape is self-giving love, love that demands something of us, love that is more concerned with giving than receiving. This kind of love is rare in many Christian circles as it was in the Corinthian church. The reason it is rare is because it is so unnatural to human nature.

Our world has defined love as "romantic feeling" or "attraction", which has nothing to do with true love in God's terms. The supreme measure and example of agape love is God's love. God who loved the world (us) so much that he sent Jesus to die in our place for our sins of rebellion against Him.

This agape love is sacrifice of self for the sake of others, even for others who may not care for us and who may even hate us. It is not a feeling but a determined act of the will which always results in determined acts of self-giving.

The Greek form of love, agape is a verb. It does not focus on what **love is** so much as on what **love does**.

Agape love is active, not abstract or passive.

- It does not simply feel patience, it practices patience.
- It does not simply have kind feelings, it does kind things.
- **Love is fully love only when it does something.**

In I John 3:18 we read, "*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with **action** and in truth.*" As with all of God's word, we cannot truly begin to understand love until we begin to appropriate it in our lives.

Love is a joyful desire to put the welfare of others above our own. It leaves no place for pride, vanity, arrogance, self-seeking, or self-glory. It is an act of choice we are commanded to exercise even on behalf of our enemies.

Jesus said: "*I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:44-45).

Agape love is not just an emotion. It is an act of self-sacrifice. It is not necessarily feeling love toward a particular person.

Romans 5:8 does not say, "*God proved his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ had a warm feeling toward us.*" Rather, while we were yet sinners, "*Christ died for us.*"

Before Jesus went to the cross He taught about the sacrificial nature of love, saying, "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). God always defines biblical love in terms of self- sacrifice.

Did you know that you and I are commanded to love like that? Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*"

If you would like to love like that, let the Spirit produce it in you. Romans 5:5 says, "*And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*" The only way you'll ever see that kind of agape love generated in your life is through the Holy Spirit, the source and power of spiritual life.

Conclusion

We need to understand that what makes the fruit of the Spirit such a crucial study, is because it deals directly with our character. Character deals directly with our integrity, and our integrity speaks of who we are when no one else is looking. Our integrity shouts to the world as to what is really inside us.

Christian character is shown in the fruit we produce in our lives. The character we exemplify is that of Christ because Jesus demonstrated all these fruits in his life. We are to do likewise.