

September 9, 2007

“The Fruit of the Spirit: Love” Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: Confusion about love – what it is and how it could be

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because love is the fruit of the Spirit,
(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate love in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Songs of love. From what we hear, love has a pull upon us. (READ titles1):

*“I Can’t Help Falling in Love,” “Can You Feel the Love Tonight?” “The Power of Love,”
“Crazy Little Thing Called Love,” “I Just Called to Say I Loved You,” “Because You Loved Me”*

And, apparently, this pull stays with us for some time (READ titles2):

*Love Can Build a Bridge,” “I Will Always Love You,” “Endless Love,” “Love Me Tender,”
“Burning Love,” “House of Love,” “Crazy in Love,” “Shot of Love,” “Lost in Love”*

Yet it would seem there is a dark side as well (READ titles3):

*“Addicted to Love,” “All Out of Love,” “If You Love Someone, Set Them Free,” “Farewell, My
Summer Love”, “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling,” “Tunnel of Love,” “Love Is a Battlefield,”
“Love Hurts,” “Love Stinks”*

All of which seems to make a mockery of then singing *“All You Need Is Love.”*

The confusion in the songs reflects the confusion in the listeners. What is love?

Moving back to our series in Galatians, we’re going to examine “the fruit of the Spirit.”

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 5:16-26

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

(READ John 15:1-7) Jesus speaks quite plainly of our need to “abide” in Him – to continually set aside our own sources of wisdom, strength, and merit and instead draw those things completely and exclusively from Him. It reminds me of something going on in the trees behind our house. One would think, with the number of leaves that have fallen to the ground, summer had given way to fall. But we know that’s not the case. It’s the drought and the reaction of the trees to the adverse conditions. Some of the leaves I see are green. They’re the ones on the trees. Others are brown. They are the ones lying on the ground. Death comes in leaving the Vine. Fruitfulness comes in abiding in Him.

By this point in his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul has made clear they had been called to freedom – freedom from uncertainty and a tyrannized conscience and freedom for acceptance with God and access to Him. They had been set free from sin and its power. But how are we to live out this freedom? Walking by the Spirit. We need the Spirit’s power. For personal growth, for effectiveness in service, we need His power. After all, there are weeds in the garden and He alone has the power to pull them out.

And heading this list of the Spirit’s fruit, these manifestations of the Spirit’s renewing work, is “love.” Paul has already noted in this chapter (READ Galatians 5:6). Faith in Christ expresses itself through love for others. Love then shapes and binds these other virtues together. And so Paul places it first in this list to emphasize its importance. But love is every bit the fruit of the Spirit as the rest listed here. Which means we must look to the Spirit to cultivate love in our lives – love as described in the Scriptures.

I. WHAT IS THIS LOVE?

That said, what is this love, *agape*, spoken of here? Understand that it is more than a feeling. Succinctly, it is an action as well as attitude seeking the best for another.

A) The Realm of Action

Love, as it is said, is a verb. And we are to love regardless of how we may feel.

1. Not just about being moved

It is not simply a matter of being “moved” in our emotions. Love is not about our natural inclinations or to whom we may be readily attracted. It is more than an impulse.

2. But about moving forward

It is more than being moved. It is moving forward. Such has been the case from the beginning (**READ Leviticus 19:9-18**). Love is never actually defined in the Bible. But it is illustrated. Concern for the poor, business ethics, integrity of speech. Such is love.

B) *The Reality of Attitudes*

It exists in the realm of action. That said, there is still the reality of our attitudes.

1. Implicit signals

Love is not to be without emotion. It is to be shown and felt. There are implicit signals in perhaps the best known text, 1 Corinthians 13 (**READ Bridges, [The Fruitful Life](#)**):

- *I am patient with you because I love you and want to forgive you.*
- *I am kind to you because I love you and want to help you.*
- *I do not envy your possessions or your gifts because I love you and want you to have the best.*
- *I do not boast about my attainments because I love you and want to hear about yours.*
- *I am not proud because I love you and want to esteem you before myself.*
- *I am not rude because I love you and care about your feelings.*
- *I am not self-seeking because I love you and want to meet your needs.*
- *I am not easily angered by you because I love you and want to overlook your offenses.*
- *I do not keep a record of your wrongs because I love you, and ‘love covers over a multitude of sins.’*

2. Explicit commands

Implicitly, it would seem our feelings would have to be engaged. Explicitly, this comes out all the more in other passages (**READ Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 1:22**). We are to love fervently, fondly, affectionately. Something akin to how family life is supposed to be.

Again, the point being that love is not only an action but an attitude as well.

Illustration:

We see this in the interactions between Paul and the very audience of this letter (**READ Galatians 4:18-20**). We see much the same in 2 Corinthians. We read of distress, anguish, tears, and the pains of childbirth. Paul was no stoic. He loved deeply.

Application:

Which then speaks to the foolishness of our ever saying of someone, “*Well, I may have to love him but I don’t have to like him.*” Folks, that is sub-Christian. Is that how God looks at us? That is not the gospel. We are called on to do more than to decide to love. We are to desire to love as well. Where our hearts are cold towards another, we are to reach out and lay hold of God in prayer, asking Him to give us a loving spirit that would delight to reach out and embrace one another. And such is the work of the Spirit.

II. **WHERE DO WE SEE IT?**

Such is love. But where do we see it? Where can we look to find it?

A) *In God’s People*

Consider first the specifics of the call to love given by God to His people.

1. Giving of self

Love entails a giving of self, even at great cost (**READ 1 John 3:16-18**).

2. Forgiving of sin

Beyond that, not only are we called to a giving of ourselves at great cost, but a forgiving of sin, even where there is great pain (**READ 1 John 4:7-11**). Love both gives at great cost and forgives where there is great pain, willing to overlook, longing to start anew.

B) *In God Himself*

And what is the basis of such love? Where does it begin?

1. Giving of self

In God Himself, in the giving of Himself at great cost to Himself. God is love. Part of His very nature is love. His was a heart of love before He even created us. Consider the incarnation and death of Jesus. Consider the giving love of the Son (**READ 1 John 3:16**). But consider the giving love of the Father (**READ John 3:16**). In Jesus' incarnation and death, both the Father and the Son gave of themselves to rescue us from our plight.

2. Forgiving of sin

Giving and then forgiving (**READ 1 John 4:9-10**). John speaks of "the propitiation for our sins" – Christ turning away God's righteous anger due to us, satisfying the demands of His justice on our behalf. Think of it. God gave His Son that He might make us sons.

And now He is working His likeness into His family. The giving and forgiving fruit of love we are to express is rooted in the giving and forgiving love of God for us.

Illustration:

And such a love it is (**READ "God the Father," p.199, 750 Illustrations**):

On Saturday, September 18, 1982, the U.S. government released the results of a sad investigation. The government determined that an army soldier stationed in Korea had been a defector to the Communists. According to the investigation, on August 28, 1982, this twenty-year-old private willingly crossed the Korean Demilitarized Zone into North Korea "for motives that are not known." His fellow American soldiers pleaded with him to turn back, but he did not respond. The day after the findings were released, the parents of the young man held a press conference on the lawn of their St. Louis home. Wiping tears from his eyes, the father said that they had accepted the fact that their son was indeed a defector. "He has lost his credibility in this country, even with me," said the man. But then he showed the heart of a father. "I still love my son," he said, "and want him back."

Application:

What we are called to do is to love as that father did – giving at great cost and forgiving even when there is great pain. And we are enabled and impelled to do so all the more as we recognize that we are that son, each one of us – foolish, traitorous, rebellious, sinful, wayward, and lost. But loved still by the Father who has shown and continually works such love into our hearts by His Spirit that we might show such love as well.

III. HOW IS IT CULTIVATED?

Love is the fruit of the Spirit. One last thing – how is such fruit cultivated? The answer may surprise you. We are fully responsible and fully dependent at the same time.

A) *Our Pursuit*

On the one hand, we are fully responsible to pursue the cultivation of love.

1. The principle

As we are with every manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (**READ Galatians 5:25**). We are commanded to love. Another way of translating this is to "keep in step with the Spirit" – to walk in formation, discipline our lives, diligently pursue the means of grace.

2. The pursuit

Saturating our minds with Scripture – perhaps even some of these texts – knowing the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to transform us. Giving ourselves to prayer, asking the Spirit to apply this Word. And then to obey it, to do the things that love demands.

Such is what "keeping in step with the Spirit" entails – our pursuit.

Illustration:

Here is where the analogy to gardening breaks down. You can find all kinds of things worth eating growing out in the wild. Not so here. In this garden, in this vineyard, there is no wild fruit. For there to be growth, there must be cultivation. The only thing that grows naturally in this garden are the weeds that threaten to choke out the fruit.

B) *Our Dependence*

That said, this cultivation must be carried out in dependence upon the Spirit.

1. The principle

(**READ Galatians 5:18**) Yes, we are to “keep in step with the Spirit.” But we are also to be “led by the Spirit.” Ours is an active involvement and a passive engagement.

2. The dependence

We are fully responsible and fully dependent at the same time.

Though the responsibility for developing and displaying Christlike love is ours, the power for Christlike love comes from Christ,. Fully responsible and fully dependent.

Application:

Think with me. We cannot know how, when, or where the wind of the Spirit will blow. And we certainly cannot force Him in any way. But we can work this soil with an eye to the heavens, dependent upon the Giver of the sun and the rain and assured it will come. We cannot cause the growth. But we can plant the seeds and prepare the soil. We can meditate upon the Scriptures. We can pray over our need to grow in love. We can take time to consider the areas, the people, in our lives where we are not loving well. We can admit our failures and bring them to God and ask Him to help us make changes.

These things we can and must do if the fruit of love is to grow. But they must be done with the awareness that change will take place only as God works to make it happen. Nothing could be clearer. For the fruit of the Spirit we need the Spirit.

CONCLUSION:

For while the effort may be ours, this does not come about in our strength. In fact, that’s part of Paul’s point (**READ Galatians 5:16**). There’s a promise here. Rely on the Spirit, and you will see these things increasingly in your life – real fruit, real love. Rely on yourself, the law, and you will see at best nothing more than a false artificial fruit. John Sanderson tells the story of when his young children were exposed to the measles. The family physician suggested that they be given inoculations to protect them. As the doctor was administering the shots, Sanderson asked him how the medication worked and he replied, “*This will give them a light case of the measles, so mild that no one will be able to detect it, but enough so they will not contract the real thing.*”

Hear me. It is possible to have “a light case of Christianity” – an exposure to it but never really contracting it. It is possible to bear artificial fruit – not the love we’ve been considering but a limited love, a love restricted in its scope, in its devotion, and in its intensity. A love that is little more than a civil pleasantness, a social nicety that looks to receive reciprocally from others. With love, as with all the fruit of the Spirit, there is such a thing as false fruit. And we may be deluded into thinking that’s all there is.

But the gospel of Christ sets forth something else entirely, a fruit real and sweet to the taste. It patterns such love in the teachings and examples we find in the Scriptures. It impels us to such love in the loving sacrifice of Christ for us. And it equips us for such love by the work of the Spirit in our lives. May we know and grow in such love! And may we look to the Spirit, the source of this growth, to bring forth His fruit in us.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because love is the fruit of the Spirit,

(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate love in our lives.