

## March 3, 2021 | Wholly Living

Week 2 | Gal. 5:22-26 | Love

Last week we did an overview of the book of Galatians, ending with what is commonly referred to as the 'Fruits of the Spirit.' In that discussion, we learned that these virtues are really a response to the vices of the flesh Paul had indexed just a few verses prior. His point was to show how that those who keep in step with the Spirit will have characteristics that prove the existence of the Spirit in an individual's life. And, conversely, the absence of the Spirit in the inner-workings of a person's heart will undoubtedly produce outward signs, i.e. the vices of the flesh. Paul's reasoning was that when the God of the universe takes up residence in a person's heart, some significant/obvious/undeniable changes will occur. And those specific changes are as follows:

**READ: Galatians 5:22-26 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Lest we forget, it bears mentioning that these features of the Spirit are just that, the *Spirit's* features. In no way are we able to cultivate or produce these on our own. The only qualities we can generate have already been listed, and they aren't pretty. This means that Paul wasn't telling the Galatians to be more "loving" or "joyful" or "self-controlled." Instead, he reveals that these divine attributes already indwell the believer because the very Spirit of God indwells the believer. They do not need to be worked on but instead discovered. Thus, our primary responsibility in studying the Fruits of the Spirit is a need to learn about these virtues so that when the Spirit prompts us to be "faithful," or "patient," or "kind," we are willing to listen and obey. In this way, we are the followers, and the Spirit is our guide; we need only walk in the direction God leads.

The first attribute of the Spirit which Paul deals with is love.

- As most anyone who's gone to church for any length of time will tell you, the Greek language has four different words to describe four different kinds of love, whereas we only have one in English.

1. **ἀγάπη** (*a-gap-é*) – a Godly love; or an **unmerited** love that is self-giving.

2. **στοργή** (*stor-gé*) – a parental love; or a love between family members, especially for a child.
3. **φίλος** (*phi-Los*) – a friendly love; or a **merited** love that is self-giving.
4. **ἔρως** (*ér-ōs*) – a physical love; or a love that desires to possess. It is often used to describe lust, and although we get the English word "erotic" from it, it doesn't always have a negative connotation.

Of these four, only *eros* is absent in the NT. This is rather intriguing because the word *eros* outside Christian literature is the far more predominant word than the other three in the first century. No one is entirely sure why it's totally absent from the NT. But the leading theory is that either the NT writers wanted to avoid the typical explicit connotation of the word, or they wanted to steer clear of any mention of the Greek god by the same name.

*Storge* is only found twice in all of the NT (cf. Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3).

*Philos* is found a respectable 25 times in the NT, with John using it the most in the NT.

*Agapē* comes in at a staggering 116 times, with none other than Paul using the word at least 75 times. The verb form of *agape* (*agapaō* – "show love") occurs a total of 142 times in the NT. And Paul uses *agapaō* 34 times in his writings alone. So, this means that Paul spoke about this kind of love 109 times over the course of his thirteen canonical works. I'd be surprised if there were another topic he talked about more than *agape*.

Now, of those four Greek words for love, which term is used in Gal. 5:22? That's right, surprise, surprise, it's *agape*. Love is of such prime focus to Paul and so central to the overall discussion of the Spirit's virtues that Paul could've simply placed a period and not gone on into the eight other characteristics. Love is that place from which all of the other graces flow. Without love, there is no joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control. It is without a doubt the first among equals.

Why? Well, love—that self-giving *agape* kind of love—is so paramount that only love is said to be the purest expression of God Himself. Meaning, you are never more like God than when you are loving.

**READ:** 1 John 4:7-9 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God,

because God is love. <sup>9</sup> 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.

And only through God loving us, sending His Son for us to redeem us, that we are now enabled to love others as God loved us.

This is so crucial to the rest of the Fruits of the Spirit that removing love from the equation would also mean disrupting the gifts of the Spirit entirely. Quite literally, the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church) cannot function properly without love at its core. In fact, this is precisely the problem the Church of Corinth had.

**READ: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

<sup>13</sup> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Even among the big three (faith, hope, and love), love triumphs.

In his letter to a young pastor, Paul reminded Timothy that love is the primary goal of the ministry.

**READ: 1 Timothy 1:5-7 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup>The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup>Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, <sup>7</sup>desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

The "aim," as Paul calls it, or the desired end of the ministry is love. Meaning, whatever way the ministry is conducted, whatever it accomplishes, or wherever it goes, the final result—the bottom line; when it's all said and done—is love. This means that a good litmus test for every ministry is this: "Are the things that are said and done lead to love?" One question I ask myself regularly about Grace Pointe is this, "If Grace Pointe were to disappear, would the community notice?" Sound Bible teaching ought to result in a faith internalized in the heart and then externalized as love for others. Should a church ever fail to love properly, it is because its pastor has failed to teach them how to love at all.

In his letter to believers in Rome, Paul even said that to love others is to fulfill the whole law.

**READ: Romans 13:8-10 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

If we are owed anything to anyone it is to love them. Doesn't matter who they are, what they've done, or what they believe, we are called, charged, and commanded to love them. Some of the problems the Church had in the first-century were a direct result of a lack of love (cf. Rom. 14:1-15:6; 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1).

Not unlike the one in Gal 5, Paul goes into a virtue list to describe the "new self" of the believer. At the very end of that list, he, in no uncertain terms, makes love the very thing that holds the "new self" together.

**READ: Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you,

so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Quite literally, without love, the Christian life falls apart. It is the adhesive that joins the virtues together. It is the singularity to which all the other aspects of Christianity can find their source. It is the causality of all things. It is the melody line to which all the additional notes play off. Show me a Christian who has learned how to love like God loved them, and I will show you a joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled Christian.

### **SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?**

Love for God and others is the sum total of Christianity and the purest expression of the Spirit.

### **READ: Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

During both the Middle Ages and Renaissance, alchemists sought to make a remedy, often called a "panacea," to cure every illness and even avoid death. Stories about things like the "elixir of life," the "fountain of youth," and the "philosopher's stone" were nothing more than tales about explorers who were trying to find one of these mythological cure-alls. And while there is no such thing as a true panacea that'll cure not only cancer but the flu and even aging, love is the closest thing we have to a genuine panacea.

Now, I readily admit that love cannot cure diseases, but it can cure the human condition. Love, in a way, is the base ingredient for the elixir of life, as it is the primary motivation for God's working in our world (cf. Jn. 3:16). What's more, love can be seen as the spring which feeds the fountain of youth, as it is the basis for all Christian ethic and practice (cf. Col. 3:14). Even love is like the power behind the philosopher's stone, as it is the only thing that can bring meaning and purpose to what the Church does (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

Love cannot be synthesized and mass-marketed, which can be used as a medicine for every disease. But it can be a powerful motivator for a person to become a doctor. Love cannot be mined and manufactured into a missile that can be shot at our planet for world peace. But it can fill the hearts of people to have sympathy for their opponents. Love cannot be distilled and

packaged into a box that can be given to everyone hungry. But it can fuel a desire to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

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## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Hall of Flaw | Week 1

TITLE: Flawed but Faithful

TEXT: Hebrews 11; 12:1-2

This six-week series explores the flaws of those listed in Hebrews chapter 11, the "Faith Hall of Fame." Through examining the lives of people like Sarah, Moses, and David, we'll see human weakness overwhelmed by God's faithfulness. Ultimately, as we look at the flaws of those in the Hall of Faith, we'll discover that our actual "role model" is not some historical figure who lived long ago, but Jesus Christ who not only lived then but is also alive today. That though we can look to the heroes of faith from time to time, we must always keep our eyes on the Son of God.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: