

**The Fruit of a God-Filled Life: A Legacy of Love**  
**March 30, 2008**  
**Galatians 5:19-23**

This morning, we're kicking off a brand-new series called, "The Fruit of a God-Filled Life" from the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

Our focus today is on love, which is preached about in a lot in churches. The danger here is that because love is such a well-known topic you may be tempted to check out. I hope you don't. If I see that you are, I may switch back to last week's message just to get your attention!

While love is a common theme, it's not always easy to define or describe it. We can learn a lot by listening to the perspective of children.

- Here's what Greg, who is 8-years-old, said about love, "Love is the most important thing in the world, but baseball is pretty good too."
- Mae, age 9 remarked, "No one is sure why love happens, but I heard it has something to do with how you smell. That's why perfume and deodorant are so popular."
- When asked what falling in love is like, 9-year-old Roger said, "It's like an avalanche where you have to run for your life."
- Leo, age 7, isn't all that interested in love when he says, "If falling in love is anything like learning how to spell, I don't want to do it. It takes too long."
- And finally, Bobby, who is 8, recognizes the power of love and the inevitability of being ambushed by it when he declares, "Love will find you, even if you're trying to hide from it. I've been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me!"

Before we look at love this morning, I want to set the table for this series by making some observations that will help frame our study on the Fruit of the Spirit. Read along with me as I read Galatians 5:22-23. In fact, consider this your first practice session, because by the end of this series it's my goal that everyone who comes to First Presbyterian Church will have memorized this sentence from God's Word:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23*

1. The Fruit of the Spirit is a package deal. Did you notice that verse 22 uses the singular "fruit" and not "fruits"? This is not a grammatical error. The Greek very clearly reveals that it's in the **singular**.

It's not a 'pick and choose' list like a buffet table to browse through. We can't say, "I'll take a little love, a portion of peace, a spoonful of self-control, but I'll pass on the patience." It's a full-meal deal. It's one kind of fruit with nine different qualities.

2. The focus is on Christian character. It's important to distinguish between **the gift of the Spirit** which happens at salvation; **the gifts of the Spirit**, which have to do with service; and the **fruit of the Spirit**, which relate to Christian character. Unfortunately we have sometimes elevated the gifts of the Spirit over the fruit of the Spirit. Building Christian character must take precedence over displaying special abilities.

3. Not all fruit ripens at the same time. As you look at my life you may see that the individual fruit of joy is fully sweetened but at the same time that of patience may be small, sour and shrunken. In God's perfect time, he will bring to maturity all nine virtues!

4. Bearing fruit is a both a gift and a task. There's a paradox in living for Christ, isn't there? Fruit is always a gift, but it still requires hard work. We've been given the Fruit of the Spirit and yet we're reminded in Galatians 5:16 to "live by the Spirit." **It's ours, but we have to appropriate** that which He has given us. It's not automatic.

I think that just about every reasonable person would agree that the character qualities described as the "Fruit of the Spirit" are **good qualities to have**. Who wants to have more love in his life? Who wants more joy, peace, patience, kindness? Who would argue against goodness, gentleness, faithfulness or self-control?

But let's also be real enough to admit that **few of us are displaying all of these characteristics** in our lives on a daily basis. So we're going to dig into God's Word to find out not only what these qualities are, but **how you can actually bear** this kind of fruit in your own life – whether you're a brand new Christian, or a life-long believer.

**This morning, we're going to start with "Love."**

In the famous "love passage" that is read at most weddings, 1 Corinthians 13 helps us understand what love is and what it looks like in daily life. But when Paul wrote this chapter, he was **not thinking about weddings** or romance.

All sorts of **disputes and divisions** plagued the Corinthian church. They argued about which spiritual gift was the greatest; they were selfish, they were taking each other to court, and they were impatient with others. Paul was writing to the church, and instructing ordinary Christians on how they should get along with each other on a day-to-day basis.

**D.L. Moody** once remarked that "some men occasionally take a journey into 1 Corinthians 13 but very few people actually live there." Let's see if we can be those who put our roots down in this chapter and live it out in our lives.

#### • **The Preeminence of Love (verses 1-3)**

Read along as I read the first three verses: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, 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. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."*

In the first century, there was a **big gong or cymbal hanging** at the entrance of most **pagan temples**. When people came to worship, they would hit this gong in the hope that it would **awaken the pagan gods** so they would listen to their prayers. Paul is saying that even if he were so blessed that he could speak with great eloquence in every language known to man and angels, if he didn't have love it would be as useless as the **ridiculous** act of pounding on a piece of metal to wake up a non-existent deity.

In verse 2, Paul says that love is **more important than knowledge**. Even if we know everything about nuclear science, medicine, philosophy, psychology and theology but still do not have love, we are nothing.

Unbelievably, Paul says that love is **more important than faith**. He's not saying that faith is unimportant, because we know that Hebrews 11:6 says, "*without faith it is impossible to please God.*" What he is saying is that love is preeminent: "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

- The Practice of Love (verses 4-7)

In John 13:34, Jesus challenges us, "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" This is not a suggestion; it's a command.

We tend to **think that love is something that just happens to us**. We fall in love like we fall into a ditch, or we fall out of love like we fall out of a tree. The Bible teaches us that love is **something we can control**. It is a choice about the way we live. **We can't create this love but we can allow it to grow in our lives.**

Let's read verses 4-7: "*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*"

Let's look at these descriptions a little more closely. As we do, we'll see the Fruit of the Spirit sprouting up through the soil of 1 Corinthians 13 and out into the branches of our lives.

- Love is **patient**. This word is also translated "Long-suffering." Interesting that suffering is equated with love!
- Love is **kind**. Another way of translating this word is "gentle."
- Love does **not envy**. Instead of wishing I had what you have, love helps me to celebrate what God has given you without being jealous of it for myself.
- Love does **not boast**. This word literally means a "braggart" and is used nowhere else in the Bible. It can also mean, "wind-bag." The fruit of love does not brag about what I have or what I've done.
- Love is **not proud**. Pride has no place in a believer's life because everything we have is by grace.
- Love is **not rude**. The Greek word means that love does not "behave in an ugly, indecent or obscene manner."
- Love is **not self-seeking**. This is the polar opposite of love. True love does not seek to build up self but rather puts others first.
- Love is **not easily angered**.
- Love keeps **no record of wrongs**. This is an accounting term meaning that we must not add up and itemize the failures of others. Instead of being so **tough on people who sin differently** than we do, let's learn to give grace by cutting others some slack.
- Love does **not delight in evil**. We should not enjoy hearing about other people's sins or focus on the bad stuff that happens in our world.
- Love **rejoices with the truth**. Instead of locking into the vices of others, love celebrates and applauds the virtues of those around us.

- Love **always protects**. The image here is of a blanket that covers, or hides things. 1 Peter 4:8 challenges us to, *“Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* When I am quick to notice fault and tell others about it, I am not practicing love.
- Love **always trusts**. The idea here is that we resist the temptation to think the worst. We delight in giving people **second and third chances**.
- Love **always hopes**. No matter how dark things are or how bleak things look; love maintains an attitude of hope that they can get better. It’s a refusal to take failure as final.
- Love **always perseveres**. Love hangs in there with others in long-term relationships. We’re going to spend eternity with each other so we might as well get along now.

## Living a Life of Love

So, let’s make it personal. Ask yourself: **Do I treat others with the same type of love that God has shown me? Love is hard.** We can start as we learn to...

1. Love those who are close to us. Someone has said, *“To love the whole world for me is no chore; the only real problem’s my neighbor next door.”* If we are not demonstrating love to those closest to us, how do we expect to do so in other relationships? We are commanded to love no matter how inconsiderate our **spouse** is; no matter how unreasonable our **parents** are; no matter how disrespectful our **children** are; and no matter how selfish our **friends** are.
2. Love those who are different from us. We tend to gravitate toward those who have similar backgrounds, values and interests. While we don’t have to be best friends with everyone, we do need to strive to love everyone, even if they are different from us.
3. Love those who disagree with us. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to love someone who we think is wrong? Remember this. **Christians with whom we disagree are never our enemies.** They are still family members.
4. Love those who irritate us. Isn’t it hard to love people who bug us? It’s not easy to love people **we think are stupid**, is it? When there is someone in the church who rubs us the wrong way, we need to **make a special effort** to change our attitude and to treat others in a loving manner.

I’ve got a **confession** to make. That description of love **doesn’t describe me**. Even with my family, those whom I say I love the most, I fall short. I’m not patient. I’ve yielded to the temptation to bring up past wrongs when I want to win an argument. I’ve plunked myself down on the good end of the couch while leaving Kathy to finish the dishes. Yes, I’m tired, but in my heart I know that she’s tired too.

Yes, **I have the fruit of love** in my life, but it’s **not as ripe and sweet** as the love that Jesus has poured out on me. Is that true for you?

But all is not lost! Here are some **application steps** that will help us learn how to love: What can we do if we’re not demonstrating the fruit of love in our life?

1. Confess your lack of love. Don’t make excuses for lousy, unloving attitudes. Own it before God and to those you’ve been sinning against.

2. Focus on God's love for you. Read portions of Scripture about God's love. Sing or listen to hymns and worship songs that speak of how God has shown us grace and mercy. Live every day with the knowledge that even if no one else cares about you, God loves you. Allow His love to be the reservoir that enables you to love others.

3. Identify someone that is hard for you to love. (That's the easy part, right!) Pray and ask God not to change that person, but to help you change your attitude toward this person.

4. Treat that person in a loving way. Have you ever noticed that our feelings often follow our actions? Doing the loving thing is a good place to start. When God provides the opportunity for you to act in a loving way to someone, make sure you do it.

1 John 3:18: *"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

Do you want to know **the best way to save a marriage** that's headed down the drain? Make a decision. No matter what my spouse does or says. No matter whether my spouse shows any appreciation for me or what I do, I'm going to treat him or her with the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13. **Unilateral love.** Even when I don't feel it, I'm going to do it.

Try that **experiment for 30 days**, and see what a difference it will make in your marriage, or your relationship with your parents, or your boss.

All four of these things boil down to one preeminent principle:

If you want to see the Holy Spirit bear His fruit in your life, then you must stay connected to the vine. John 15:4 gives us the secret to fruit bearing. Jesus says, *"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."*

In his book called, "Secrets of the Vine," Bruce Wilkinson states that nearly half of all Christians bear little or no fruit. Another third bear some fruit. But only about 5% bear a lot. He concludes by saying, "Bearing fruit is not some unique phenomenon reserved for certain types of Christians. It's the destiny of every believer." (Page 26)

Let us pray: