

The Fruit of the Spirit: Love

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Date: 05 February 2017

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[0 : 00] Well as we turn to God's word we'll just pray for a moment together. Lord it is such a privilege for us to open your word now and we just pray that you'd help us to listen, help us to hear your voice, to learn more about all the amazing things that you do and more about what a glorious God you are and help us to apply that to our lives.

And please come in among us and be gracious to us as we turn to your word now. In Jesus' name. Amen. I'd like us for a short while this evening to turn to Galatians chapter 5.

You can keep a bookmark in 1 Corinthians 13 because we'll come back to that shortly. But I want us to turn to Galatians chapter 5 and we can read again verses 22 and 23.

Here Paul writes, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Over the past few months in Carlyway we've been studying the fruit of the Spirit and it's a wonderful topic for us to look at and I want to just share with you this evening a little of what we have been learning about this great topic.

[1 : 33] And in particular I want us to focus on the first item named by Paul in terms of the fruit of the Spirit. I want us to focus on love.

Now a sermon on love is a very difficult thing. It's a bit like trying to paint a picture of Scotland. If you tried to paint a picture of Scotland you could either paint it all from a distance and you would just see the outline of it but no detail or you could focus in on one particular part and look at that in much more depth.

I think when it comes to the topic of God's love you would need a thousand sermons or maybe a hundred thousand sermons to grasp just the height and depth and wonder of God's love.

So in many ways we will be only scratching the surface this evening but we will do our best and with God's help we hope we will see some more of what he has to teach us. The whole concept of the fruit of the Spirit is a fascinating one and it's reminding us of some incredibly important points and perhaps the most basic point it emphasises is the fact that because we are Christians there should be an effect on our lives.

If you think about it when you come to faith in Christ the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in your heart and that Spirit has an effect. It doesn't just stay in there hidden it has an effect on your life and Paul describes that effect in terms of fruit.

[3 : 08] Our behaviour changes and bit by bit a wonderful work of sanctification goes on in our hearts whereby God conforms us more and more and more to the image of his Son.

And so the fruit of the Spirit is the great effect on our lives of having Christ as our Saviour. So it's immensely practical but it's of course tied into the great theological truth that as the people of God we are the temple of God the Holy Spirit himself dwelling in our hearts.

And so the fruit of the Spirit is the effect but it is also the evidence of the fact that we are Christians. That's what fruit is, isn't it? How do you know that an apple tea is an apple tea?

Because it's got apples on it. And so whatever type of tea it is its nature is revealed by its fruit. That's the evidence of what it is.

And that's the same thing is fundamentally true of us as Christians which is why Jesus says you will know them by their fruit.

[4 : 19] And so these items mentioned by Paul under the heading of the fruit of the Spirit are immensely important because anyone who looks at a Christian should see these things.

It is the effect of having Christ as our Saviour and it is the evidence that we are his. And tied into that is the important emphasis that fruit has an inward and an outward emphasis.

You think about that, an apple tree in the winter has no apples on it but inwardly it's still an apple tree. But in due season the apples come forth and you see outwardly what the tree is on the inside. And the outward-inward emphasis is a really important part of our Christian walk. Yes, Christianity, faith in Jesus Christ is an inward thing primarily.

It is something we do in our heart by trusting in Jesus. But it doesn't stay in our heart. It spreads to affect our lives so that both inwardly and outwardly there is a change.

[5 : 35] And so there's this great emphasis on our lives the fact that we are changed inwardly and then by the influence of the Holy Spirit we are changed outwardly.

And Paul mentions these wonderful items that characterize that fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Now, I don't think that that's a list of descending order of importance. As if to say that love is the most important and self-control is the least important. I don't think it's a descending order list.

But, having said that, I do think that the first one is the most important one. Love is primary in terms of the fruit of the Spirit.

And one of the reasons we know that is because Paul emphasizes love a lot in Galatians chapter 5. And in terms of his emphasis he is very much trying to address the problems in Galatia.

[6 : 39] And so, I really want us to do two things tonight. I want us just to spend a wee while thinking about the situation in Galatia. And then I want us to see how we can then apply that in our own context here today.

The letter to the Galatians was a letter written in a crisis. Paul had planted the church in Galatia not long after he had left but after he left other people came who started teaching a different gospel. And they were contradicting the teaching that Paul had given and they were saying that Paul was wrong and they were right. And when Paul heard about this he was deeply concerned and he wrote this letter in order to address the problems that the Galatian church had fallen into.

Now there are two key mistakes that Paul is addressing. Two key mistakes that any Christian can fall into.

And it happened in Galatia and it happens in our own time. Paul is addressing these two mistakes. The first one is the main one.

[7 : 53] The problem of legalism. Legalism was what lay at the heart of the problems in Galatia. In particular, there was the question of circumcision.

Legalism basically means that you are adding your own works of the law to the gospel. You are saying instead of being saved entirely by the grace of God I am making myself good enough. I am doing something in order to earn God's love. I am doing something so that God will save me. And the Galatians were being told by these people who had come in that you have got to be circumcised if you want to be saved.

You've got to keep what is said in the Old Testament law regarding circumcision. And Paul is horrified when he hears this because his whole emphasis is on the fact that Christ has set us free from the law.

And so instead of being under the strain and pressure of the Old Testament law in that regard, Christ has set us free. And we are no longer bound by circumcision as he says in verse 5 of Galatians or verse 6 in Galatians 5.

[9 : 05] You can see it there yourself. He says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. And he then goes on to say what we should be focusing on.

He is saying that we should focus on God's love. Circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only faith working through love.

So basically what Paul is saying is the solution to the problem of legalism is to focus on God's love. That's the solution to legalism.

And that's a really, really important thing for us to remember because we can all slip into the trap of legalism. We can all think that because we are doing certain things God will love us more.

Do you ever think to yourself I've I've forgotten to pray as much as I should. I haven't read my Bible as often as I should.

[10 : 16] I've let God down. He doesn't love me as much. Do you ever think like that? That's legalism.

Because God's love is in no way shaped by your efforts. God's love is never ever under the power of legalism.

You cannot make God love you more. You cannot do things that will persuade God to love you more. And likewise our mistakes and their failures do not reduce God's love for us. Now that's a really, really important thing to remember because it is a wonderful source of assurance. remember it says while we were still dead in our trespasses and sins God loved us with a great love.

That's what Paul says in Ephesians 2. And so you and I make a lot of mistakes but we are not in a legalistic relationship in terms of God's love for us.

[11 : 45] And so God's love is not reduced by our failings. It is not diminished by our mistakes. And the fact that you feel like a let down to God does not do anything to reduce his love for you.

Sometimes we say the phrase God loves you because and you put lots of things after that. Because I go to church or because I'm a good person or because I'm trying to avoid things or because I'm doing this or because I've gone to the Lord's table or because I've done that. We have this idea God loves me because dot dot dot dot dot. We need to get rid of the word because and you need to change it to a full stop. God loves you full stop.

And legalism does not come into it. Paul is saying that you've been set free from sin. Circumcision doesn't count for anything.

You cannot earn God's love. You don't need to. He loves you with an immense love. That's the main message of Galatians and it's a message that we all need to remind ourselves of all the time.

[13 : 03] Certainly I do. But Paul also in Galatians chapter 5 addresses another problem. And this problem is the complete opposite of legalism.

Remember I said there was two mistakes that are being addressed in Galatians chapter 5. On the one hand you've got the problem of legalism that says we need to keep the law in order for God to love us. The opposite problem is what we call antinomianism which basically says God loves me I can do what I like.

Doesn't matter what I do with my life. Doesn't matter how much I sin. Doesn't matter I'm forgiven I can do whatever. We call that antinomianism because the Greek word for law is nomos.

So anti is like against like anticlockwise nomos. Nomianism. So against the law. And lots of people think like that. Sometimes you have the legalist on one side.

Other times you have the antinomian on the other side who basically says it doesn't matter how I live my life. Doesn't matter I've been saved I can do whatever. Paul is saying no no no no no.

[14 : 10] Look at verse 13. He says you were called to freedom brothers only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.

Paul is saying do not use your salvation as an opportunity to just sin again and to go back to where you were and to rebuild what has been torn down. And look again what Paul focuses on.

He says but through love serve one another. And so the way to solve legalism is to focus on God's love and the fact that we don't have to earn it.

The way to solve antinomianism is exactly the same. To focus on God's love and to realise that we are loved by God. We are loved by a perfect father and because he loves us we love him and we want to live in his way.

We want to obey him. We want to follow him. God's love for us should fill us with love for him and that should give us great motivation to think I want to obey God in my life.

[15 : 24] I want to do what he wants me to do. So far from thinking I'll do whatever I want we think every day I'm going to read my Bible and try and learn what God wants me to do.

Every day I'm going to pray and I'm going to say Lord guide me and keep me and make me more and more holy in my life so that I will be like Jesus and live for you.

And so it's so interesting to see this that legalism and antinomianism are opposites aren't they? But yet the solution to them both is the same.

St. Clair Ferguson says that they're opposites but they have the same cure. We are to focus on God's love. And we have to ask ourselves the question am I falling into either of these categories? Am I a legalist? Am I an antinomian? And it's so easy to go to be one to be the other to fall into the trap. A really good example is the Lord's Supper.

[16 : 34] How many times have we heard people say I can't go to the Lord's table. I'm not worthy. That's legalism really isn't it?

Because you're thinking I've got to get myself up a bit. I've got to work my way up. That's legalism. But on the other hand you might hear somebody say I'm saved.

I don't need to go to the Lord's table. I'm saved. It doesn't really matter. That's antinomianism because the Lord has said do this in remembrance of me.

And the answer to it is to remember God's love. God loves you. So as a Christian you don't need you're not worthy anyway so you don't need to be preoccupied with that.

And God loves you and gave himself for you therefore we should obey him and do what he's commanded us to do. And the whole point I'm trying to emphasize is that the heart of living the Christian life is a constant focus on love.

[17 : 41] Love is at the heart of everything that we do. That's why it is first in the list of the fruit of the spirit.

And so that was the problem that Paul was dealing with in Galatia. What about today? What about our own lives? How do we apply this in practice as God's people?

Well if we look again in Galatians chapter 5 we see something really really interesting. As we say Paul is emphasizing God's love for us and our love for him and how important it is for love to be at the center of our lives.

If we are trusting in Jesus we have been set free and we are being transformed by the amazing love of God. But notice in Genesis in Galatians chapter 5 Paul does not say Jesus has set you free therefore love God.

We would expect him to say that I think. You have been set free by Jesus therefore love God. Paul does not say that. He says Jesus has set you free therefore love one another.

[18 : 59] look again at verse 13 and 14. For you are called to freedom brothers only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word you shall love your neighbor as yourself. love. And so as Paul is highlighting the centrality of God's love his emphasis is on us loving each other.

And I think that is so interesting. And the reason for that is very simple. In the New Testament love for Jesus and love for each other are inseparable.

you cannot have one without the other. And the New Testament is utterly clear on that point.

Listen to what John writes in 1 John 4 verse 20. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother he's a liar.

[20 : 12] he could not be putting it in stronger terms. He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from him whoever loves God must also love his brother. So John there in his letter Paul in his letter here are saying the same thing.

We must love one another. And that's why love for one another is a fruit of the spirit. And that means that if the gospel has had any effect on us at all we will love each other.

As Jesus says this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. And all that raises the massive question how do we do that?

love one another? Well the New Testament teaching in this regard is wonderful because it's very simple. The New Testament simply tells us what love is and what love isn't.

[21 : 28] And that's the great emphasis of 1 Corinthians 13. And you can turn back to that passage and we'll just spend the last week while looking at what it teaches.

I'll read again verse 4 to the beginning of verse 8. Love is patient and kind.

Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Now, Paul is amazing.

That's four verses and a wee bit in verse 8. So basically four verses and in these four verses he makes 16 points.

[22 : 36] Now, I can barely make three points in 40 minutes. Myrtle is even worse than me. Paul teaches us a massive amount in just a few verses.

And I want us just to look at it in two basic ways. Paul tells us eight things that love isn't and he tells us eight things that love is.

And so let's look first at what love isn't. He says love does not envy. Now, the word envy is just expressing the idea of being resentful or jealous.

And we can so often be like that. Maybe we see somebody else being successful or somebody else getting something that we like or somebody else getting attention while we are not and envy can stir

up within us.

We can resent that and we look on and we think I wish I had that. And this spirit of jealousy can grow in our hearts.

[23 : 47] Paul is telling us love is not like that. When love sees somebody else succeeding it is glad. And so love is not envious at all.

And so that idea of envy should never be there between Christians, never there between congregations, never there between ministers, never there among God's people.

Love does not envy. That's the first thing it isn't. Second thing he says love does not boast. Now that's the idea of well you know what boasting means.

The idea of bragging, of speaking for vain glory. And so often people do it. They boast and they try to push themselves up so that they come across so well.

And it's so interesting you often see it with children. You can see children will boast about something whether it's what they have or what they've done. Quite often they'll exaggerate and they're doing it to be popular.

[24 : 52] They're doing it to impress their friends and yet the only thing they do is the very opposite because nobody likes a boaster or a bragger. And so people do it all the time.

Children do it a lot and even some adults do it. Paul is saying love Christian love doesn't boast. It's not interested in vainglory.

It doesn't brag. The third thing that love isn't, it's not arrogant. Literally that is the phrase, it's not puffed up. The idea of exalting ourselves, pushing ourselves up, trying to make ourselves more important than we are, trying to think of ourselves as better than other people.

love. It's an easy thing to do. Paul is saying love never behaves like that. Love is not arrogant.

Neither, fourthly, is love rude.

Now, the word there basically means to behave in a disgraceful or an inappropriate way. And I don't need to go into any details, you know exactly what Paul is talking about.

[26 : 03] And it's so interesting that the world very often associates love and intimacy with that which is really inappropriate and disgraceful.

Paul is reminding us that these two things are polar opposites. Love is never, ever immoral or disgraceful or crude or anything like that.

Love has got a purity which excludes all of these things. Fifthly, Paul says love does not seek its own way. In other words, love is not selfish.

And again, that's a really important thing. So many people are driven by themselves, by me, me, me, me, me. Paul is saying love is not like that.

It is not selfish. Sixthly, love is not irritable. That's a really interesting point from Paul. And he's basically saying that love is not provoked.

[27 : 07] Even if people are being exasperated, pushed and tested by somebody's behaviour or somebody's conduct, love does not give in to that. Love avoids being exasperated when they're being challenged or pushed by others.

The seventh one is very interesting. Love is not resentful. Now, literally, that means love does not take into account evil or keeps no record of wrongdoing.

The word that's used is the idea of accounting. You think of an account where you're taking a list of things. And it is so easy to take a list of the wrong things that are done to us.

Isn't that true? How often do you meet people and they think, I don't like that person because they did that. I don't go to that church because they did that. I don't talk to that family because they did that.

All of that is keeping an account of wrongdoing. It's very, very easy to do it. Lots of people do it.

Some people have accounts that are 60 or 70 years old, where feuds have lasted decades.

[28 : 24] Paul is saying love has no interest in keeping that kind of account. And then lastly, he says love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.

Now how I wish that was true of Britain. You look at the newspapers, they're rejoicing in wrongdoing constantly.

The media is obsessed with exposing wrongdoing and they take delight in that. And the more controversial and the more awful it is, the better. Paul is saying love does not rejoice at wrongdoing.

And we must never be like that. So there's eight things that love isn't. And Paul is telling us that we must never do these things to each other as Christians.

Never. It's not a try not to do these things. It's not a, oh well if you do these things a bit it doesn't matter. It's a never, never should we do these things.

[29 : 34] And the other amazing thing that we are reminded of is that God is never any of these things. God is not envious or arrogant or selfish or resentful or rejoicing when things go wrong in your life.

God is never, ever like that. So that's eight things that love isn't. What about the opposite side of it? The eight things that love is.

Well these are wonderful and really these verses are some of the most beautiful verses that have ever been written. First of all, love is patient. Now the word for patient in Greek basically means to take a long term view.

And that's really what patience is, isn't it? To take a long term view of somebody. And so therefore you've got somebody who comes to you, you meet them, you get to know them, and then you see that they've got mistakes and they've got character flaws, and there's things about them that are far from perfect.

Love has a long term view. Love thinks I will stick with this person, I will be patient with them.

[30 : 55] I love that emphasis, the idea of a long term commitment towards one another. Love is also kind, which is a simple word but an incredibly important word.

It's the idea of just being willing and desiring to do good to others. To be of use to other people, to show our kindness. And so we can look around at each other tonight and we can say, how can we help each other?

How can we give a wee boost to one another? How can we show concern or thoughtfulness or kindness? And that can be done in so many different ways and we can do it every single day.

Basic, simple kindness. There's nothing complicated about it. But Paul is saying that's how love manifests itself. Thirdly, love rejoices in truth.

That's a great phrase again. The idea that it just has no interest in falsehood, no interest in rudeness or seeking its own way or anything like that.

[32 : 01] It rejoices in that which is true. And that is the best way for us to go through our lives. Sometimes falseness and sin can be so tempting, can't it?

You can, maybe you hear about some story about some person in the news or whatever and you think, oh I'd love to hear more about that. And we're drawn to gossip and we're tempted to indulge in all of these things and Paul is reminding us love rejoices in truth.

And let's make that our desire every day. Let's make truth, the truth of the gospel and the truth of our relationship with one another, let's make that the thing that we delight in.

Fourthly, Paul says love bears all things. That's a really interesting word because basically that word means to cover over with silence.

and it's expressing the idea of forbearance and it's telling us that sometimes love keeps quiet.

[33 : 13] I'm not saying it does all the time but I'm saying sometimes because you know when we get to know one another as we become closer we find more and more wrong with each other and we're exposing more and more of our mistakes and the more you get to know us the more you see that we are sinners that applies to everyone it applies an awful lot to ministers but love bears all these things love is happy to sometimes keep quiet not to spread the bad news about somebody not to hammer somebody when they're down but sometimes when it's appropriate to keep quiet next Paul says love believes all things so that doesn't mean being gullible if you say the earth is flat we're going to believe it it doesn't mean that at all it rather is emphasizing that trust is at the heart of loving one another as Christians we trust in the

Lord but we also trust each other we trust each other and we seek to see the good in one another it believes all things and has trust at the heart of a relationship Paul then goes on to say that love hopes all things and that's emphasizing the fact that there is an optimism about loving one another we're not pessimists as Christians we are not negative about everything we are the opposite we are positive and expectant and confident and hopeful in all situations love hopes all things that's at the heart of loving one another next Paul says love endures all things that's another great phrase because it simply means staying put we stick with each other we stick with one another as God's people and last of all he says at the beginning of verse eight love never ends or as some translations will have love never fails the world fails and things can come along in our lives that we never ever expect but the steadfast love of the

Lord never ceases and his mercies never come to an end and so when things fail here on earth when things come to an end we must always remember that God's love is not finished and that is how we are to treat each other as Christians anyone who walks in this door should see that we are patient kind rejoicing in truth bearing all things believing all things hoping all things enduring all things that there is a love in our midst that will never end and of course it maybe goes without saying that God is all of these things I just take patience as an example do you know that God has got a long term view of you a long term view and so when God committed to being your God there were no ifs buts or maybes

God says I am with you for the long term and that is why God's love is so amazing because as God gets to know me he knew me anyway but just to use this kind of language as God gets to know me he's going to find and he does find lots and lots of things that would give him reason for second thoughts but there are no second thoughts with God he says I have a long term view and that's one of the many amazing things about God's love love and all of these things are shown to us perfectly in Jesus Christ he is the perfect example of this kind of love and of course it all makes perfect sense remember what we said as Christians the Holy

Spirit dwells in us the Holy Spirit is making us like Jesus and so as we bear the fruit of the Spirit we are simply becoming more and more like Jesus and he did all of these things that we are reading about here he loved his neighbour he sat and ate with sinners that nobody wanted to be with he called people like tax collectors like Zacchaeus and he says you can come into my family this man also is a son of Abraham even when people who were in desperate need with disgusting diseases when they came and said to Jesus if you will you can make me clean he was moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him and said I am willing be clean the love that Jesus showed to sinners like us is just amazing and in fact Jesus takes it to the highest level because he even loved his enemies when they came to the place that is called the skull there they crucified him and the criminals one on his right and one on his left and Jesus said father forgive them for they know not what they do and so when you look at

[39 : 29] Jesus you see this perfect fruit of love shown to us the great challenge for living a Christian life is that every single person should be able to see that same love in us that's what Paul is saying I want you to have that same fruit of love in your life and that's a great challenge but I hope it's motivating because who wants to live the life of the world who wants to go down their path of rejoicing in sin there's just emptiness there but a life of obedient love for God is a wonderful wonderful life and so love is at the very heart of the fruit of the spirit

I'm very nearly finished but I want to just say one more wee thing about God's love as I said God's love is just such a massive topic and we can barely scratch the surface but I want us just to remember the words of Jesus Jesus came as a great demonstration of God's love it was God's love that motivated the sending of the son it was because God so loved the world that he gave his only son and on the cross we see the incredible love of God to sinners the fact that Jesus the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and as he said himself greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends love is at the absolute heart of the gospel but I want us just to go away remembering what Jesus says in John 15 verse 9 he says as the father has loved me so have

I loved you abide in my love God now the word abide simply means to stay to stay in the same place and so tonight I want you to let your mind go to the cross and I want you to think of the fact that Jesus went there for you to take away your sin and to demonstrate the immensity of God's love for sinners I want your mind to go there I want your mind to dwell on the depth of Jesus love for you let your mind go to that place and stay there abide there

God's love for us is amazing and as we go through this week and as we go through our lives Jesus is saying to us abide stay in my love nowhere better to be amen let us pray God our father we are so thankful for what your word teaches and we marvel Lord at the depths of your love love and as we think of Jesus Christ of his example and of his amazing work for sinners on the cross we praise you and thank you for your love and we pray

Lord that just as we see that love in Christ we pray that others would see that love in us that it would be evident to all that as Christians we are those who are abiding day by day in your love for us and we pray that if there's anyone here tonight who is maybe not yet a Christian we pray that you would show them your love so clearly and we ask this in Jesus name Amen Our closing singing is the last verses of Psalm 103 this time we're going to sing the Sing Psalms version the

[44 : 54] Sing Psalms version that's on page 135 we'll sing from verse 12 to verse 22 and these are verses that describe God's love just so brilliantly as far as east is from the west so far his love has borne away out many sins and trespasses and all the guilt that on us lay just as a father loves his child so God loves those who fear his name for he remembers we are dust and well he knows our feeble frame let's sing from verse 12 to the end to God's praise praise as far as he is from the west so far his love has borne away out many sins sins and trespasses and all the guilt that on us lay just as our father loves his child so God loves souls to fear his name but he remembers we are dust and well he knows our feeble frame his human life is like the grass and like a metal flood it grows his place will never be recalled love what over it the tempest flows but everlasting is

God's love for those who fear him and his seed for those who keep his covenant and carefully his precepts heat God's kingly kingly fruit is over all in heaven he has set his throne on you his angels praise praise the lord strong ones by whom his will is done oh praise the lord you heavenly host heavenly host his servant soon care for his word his word his heart his word throughout his breath and you my soul obey the grace of our lord the grace of our lord the love of the holy spirit be with you all amen