

## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – LOVE**

Text: John 13:31-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; 1 John 4:7-12; Galatians 5:22-23

By: Rev Dr Leo Douma

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2016

Mother Teresa once noted 'The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread'. Remember the Romanian orphanages? In 1990 the world saw thousands of orphans who were mentally deformed simply because they had never been loved. One person has said 'The very essence of life is the need to feel loved and give love; without love life is without rationale whatsoever'.

It is very significant that when we look at the list of the Fruit of the Spirit that 'love' is mentioned first. Love is not just one of the nine fruit. It is the greatest of the fruit. The rest are expressions of love. Someone has put it well: joy is love enjoying itself; peace is love resting; patience is love waiting; kindness is love reacting; goodness is love choosing; faithfulness is love keeping its word; gentleness is love empathising; and self-control is love resisting temptation. It is as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 "*The greatest is love*". This fits in with the understanding we developed last week, that the Fruit of the Spirit is actually the character of God. Love is his chief characteristic. As John wrote "*Dear friends, ...whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*" It's been pointed out that the Bible has '*...no other equivalent statement with respect to the other qualities of God's divine nature. Love is the highest characteristic of God, the one attribute in which all others harmoniously blend.*' The Apostle Paul agrees "*... over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*"

The key question here is how do we define love. The original Greek language tended to use more words to reflect the meaning of a thought than we do in English. English can be a bit lazy. Think of the word 'fast' what does it mean? It can mean you are quick (drives fast), or that colours don't run (the colours are fast) or to tie something up (fasten), or some one is morally loose (fast & lose) or your watch has gained time,

or you are sleeping soundly (fast asleep) or it can mean you are getting close to something (fast approaching). Another word like that is the word 'love.' It can mean a lot as well. A man can say: 'I love my dog, I love cricket, I love pizza, I love my kids, I love my wife, I love my parents and I love all of you.' But the word 'love' in each of those situations means very different things. There is no way that a man loves his dog the same way he loves his wife. We know what sort of love a person is talking about because we work it out from the context of what they say. The Greek language has several different words for 'love'. There is 'eros' which is a sensual, passionate love between lovers. It is what Woody Allen said in a film, 'I was nauseous and tingly all over. I was either in love or I had small pox.' Then there is the word 'phileo' and this is the warm feeling we have for those dearest to us. This is friendship. There is also 'storge' which is affection. It's what you feel for your parents or children. Now Paul doesn't use any of these words when he speaks here of love. Instead he uses the word 'agape'. That love is less a feeling than it is an act of the will. It is why Jesus can tell us to "*love your enemies*". You can't command feelings. You can't be commanded to like someone, or that you 'fall in love' with someone. But 'agape' can be commanded because it is a conscious action. It is something you decide to do. Now that is an interesting concept isn't it, that love is a choice? In our day love is often seen as an emotional thing, something you 'fall into'. But that is more 'eros' or 'storge'. Agape is a commitment we chose to make. For example our marriage vows say that we are committed to 'love and serve' each other, in 'joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want.' In other words it does not matter the circumstances, we will keep loving each other. 'Eros' love says 'I love you because you make me feel good.' 'Phileo' love says 'I love you because I feel good when we are together'. But 'agape' says 'I love you to make you happy. I am committed to you and your growth'. A person should not love another because of anything that person has or does, but simply because that person exists. The Talmud (Jewish commentary on Old Testament law) expresses it in a very insightful teaching: 'When love depends on another factor, then when that factor ceases to exist, so does the love. But when love does not depend on anything else, it never ceases to exist'. If you think about it you realise that true lasting agape is only really possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now the reference to the Spirit reminds us that his task is to reproduce in us the character of Jesus. That is what the Fruit of the Spirit is. The Spirit's calling is to draw us to Jesus, to make him real to us. And to make us more and more like him. So when

we see that the first Fruit of the Spirit is love, then that love is something we see in Jesus. In fact Jesus commanded his disciples to imitate him in his love. He said: (John 13:13&14) *"A new commandment I give unto you. Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."* There you see it. We display Jesus by loving as he did. We reveal the character of Jesus through love. Now the context in which Jesus said this is very interesting. It is the night before Jesus died. He knows it is his time, time to die and leave the disciples. So with some final words he instructs them how they should live while he is away. When you leave loved ones behind for a while and want to say a few words you focus on what is most important. So we are struck by the immense importance Jesus puts on this command to love. It's the first subject he puts to them, so it gets the main emphasis. Why love first? Because as we have already established it is a quality of God himself and it is the quality of God's people that will always be there. Remember what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8 *"Love never fails... where there are prophecies they will cease, where there are tongues they will cease..."* When Jesus comes again and brings the new earth many things will pass away. But not love. It will still be found in that future life. On the new earth the most wonderful experience will be the deep love we have for Jesus and each other.

Now we notice that as Jesus primes his disciples for life with him gone to heaven, he says, *"Love one another as I have loved you."* He could have mentioned the law to love as found in the Old Testament. But he shows them himself, because Jesus is showing them a new degree of love personified in himself. When Jesus said, *"as I have loved you"*, he was first referring to the foot washing episode at the start of John 13. There we see the rabbi the master, giving himself in humble service to his disciples. That sort of action was unheard of. It was a slave's job to clean the dirty, stinking feet of others. It was so upsetting of the order of things that at first Peter refused to participate. Jesus' point in doing it was to give a 'live parable' of how he was soon to humble himself to the lowest of all by dying on the cross and suffering the deepest agony of hell. Jesus demonstrated a love that is deeply committed and caring for the other. He showed a love that gives itself completely in sacrifice for another. Jesus tells his disciples that his love is not just something he does. They have to do it to. Jesus set a new standard in how we are to serve and care for each other.

We said that the Fruit of the Spirit is the character of God. We see this when we think through the enormity of what God gave. John wrote, *"For God so loved the world he gave his only Son..."* What a love God must have for us, how deep it must be, if God gave up whom he treasured the most to have us as his children. In our world, so broken and torn apart by war and suffering, we may wonder if God loves his world. But as we look back at the cross and see Jesus suffering, we know at what cost God has shown his love for us. John wrote in his first letter *"This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* In Jesus is personified the love of God. When we see Jesus we know what God is like. We see so clearly how gracious and giving is his love. But now Jesus has returned to the Father. Now someone else has to display the love of God. We have to show others what it is like. As John writes further in his letter (1 John 4:11&12) *"Dear friends, since God so love us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."* No wonder love is the first fruit of the Spirit. This love has to be seen. It's no wonder Jesus emphasised it with his disciples. If they, and if we, are not truly loving no one will know what God's love is like. In fact John says something very bold here. *"God's love is made complete in us."* The love of God, which originates in himself (:8 *"God is love"*) and was revealed in Jesus as he died in our place, is made complete, it is perfected in us his people. God's love is only fully completed when we truly love each other as God's people. When we love and care for each other it's God's love we are sharing. It's God's character we are revealing. This is the wonder of this first Fruit of the Spirit.

Now it's clear that we had better get this 'love' right in our lives. We need a good, practical definition. It must be doable, it must be acted, it must be lived. It can't just be a nice theology we talk about. It must be something that takes on shoes and moves right into the ordinary things of everyday life. It's not something we do with pious faces on Sunday. It's what happens at home and in the work place and at school, when we go out. It must be something so practical you can measure it, you can look back over the years and see the change. We get no better definition than what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 :4-6 *"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."* Notice how it's all verbs, action words. Notice how it parallels the Fruit of the Spirit. Notice how easy and correctly we can replace the name word 'love' with the name

'Jesus' and it all makes perfect sense. 'Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy or boast'. And what we should also be able to do is replace the word 'love' with our own name. 'Leo is patient. Leo is kind...' How true is this definition for us?

[POWER POINT CHART] To help you be practical with this definition of love look at the chart 'Love that is realistic'. There we see Paul's definition listed into mature and immature aspects. Think of these points in terms of your significant relations, marriage, family, church, work. Rate yourself and ask someone to rate you. Are you patient or easily provoked, irritable, touchy. To apply this definition of love practically, decide on two mature areas that you are doing well. In prayer give thanks to God how you and the Spirit are bearing fruit. Chose two areas on the immature side where you really need to do some work. Spend time in prayer for the Spirit to guide you in growing in that aspect of love.

Remember, this is not something you are to do on your own. It is not possible. This is the "*fruit of the Spirit*". It is his work in you as he reveals the character of Jesus in our lives. Remember to 'be led by the Spirit'. Let's really work on this fruit so that our family and church and neighbours get the sense of what God is like. "*God is love*". Let's show it. Whatever your situation take a breath and think of what love is from God's perspective. If you are someone who tends to be irritated quickly with others, be aware of the Spirit's presence in you. Pray to him to keep you calm. Don't just try in your own strength, trust him, rely on him, be aware of the presence of Almighty God. If you need some extra motivation to love others, think of Jesus suffering on the cross for you. Think of God's love, a love so deep he gave everything to have you as his child. Think of Jesus never giving up on you. To help us be motivated by the way Jesus gave himself for us we will now participate in the Lord's Supper. As you take the bread and wine think: this sacrament is my Lord's guarantee that everything is forgiven. God cannot love me more that he does already. Then respond to that and think as Jesus has loved me so I will love those around me so I make God's love complete.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

1. Explain why love is listed first in the "fruit of the Spirit." Describe how the rest of the fruit can all be explained in terms of love.
2. Explain the meaning of each of the following and describe how you may have experienced each in your life:
  - i. eros
  - ii. phileo
  - iii. storge
  - iv. agape
3. How does the fruit of love reveal the character of Jesus? How would we display it in our lives? Are we, in fact, displaying this in our lives? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. What does John mean when he writes, "*If we love each other, God is in us and his love is made complete in us*"? What are the implications for our lives and our being church?