

March 21, 2021

Viewpoint from the Valley Grove Church Of Christ

The Fruit Of The Spirit: Love

By Jerry Fite

Love is a many faceted thing. The Greeks used specific words to communicate the various aspects of “love”. The Greek word *eros* conveyed merely sexual or “erotic love”. The word *storge* was limited to the “natural affection” in “family love”. *Phileo* focused one upon the intimate, warm, and tender relationship in “friendly love”. We see such tenderness in the love the Father has for the Son in showing Him all things that He does (John 5:20). This is also the tender love the younger women were taught to manifest towards their husbands and children (Titus 2:4). Then, there is *agape*, listed as one facet of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. This is the “love” we manifest by actively seeking the well being of others.

While *eros* and *storge* never occur in the New Testament, *agape* hardly ever occurs in secular Greek. William Barclay quotes Richard C. Trench as saying it was “born within the bosom of revealed religion” (Flesh and Spirit, page 64). The verb and noun forms of this Greek word are found more than 250 times in the New Testament. While *phileo* does occur in the New Testament, and was the highest form of love among the ancient Greeks, it cannot sufficiently describe the love God demands of those who follow the teachings of the Spirit. The glowing feeling of love (*phileo*) one has by his or her attachment to a friend is not the feeling one has in interacting with a persecuting enemy. But God demands that we love (*agapao*) our enemies (Matthew 5:44). This love transcends what we are naturally “attracted to” or what we emotionally “fall into”. This is love we determine to manifest because of our attachment to God and the Spirit’s revelation.

The importance of love cannot be over estimated. It is the avenue through which faith works (Galatians 5:6). Love is what all are to follow after (1 Corinthians 14:1). If one has faith to remove mountains, but has not love, he is nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). We may know accurately many things. However, we have yet to know, as we ought, if we do not manifest a self-sacrificing love towards our weak brethren (1 Corinthians 8:2; cf. Romans 14:15). Paul ranks love as the greatest, in comparison with the important abiding things of faith

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and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). Loving God, and loving our neighbor as ourselves are the first and second commandments in importance, supporting all other commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). Therefore, love is a fruit of the Spirit that must grow in your personal spiritual gardens.

Love is rooted in the character of God, and patterned after His ways. John writes, *“He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:8-10). John reminds all to love, if they are to truly know God. Why? Love is a characteristic of God. However, we would not know God unless He had revealed Himself. Therefore, we would not know love apart from the Spirit’s revealing of God’s character. Observing “how” God loves, we see the pattern for our love. He actively seeks the well being of those who do not love Him. Therefore, we must love our enemies. *“But God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). Jesus asks us, *“For if you love them that love you, what reward have ye? . . .”* (Matthew 5:46). God acted first on our behalf, when we did not love Him. Therefore, love patterned after God demands we must act first to benefit others, regardless what others do or not do.

This love is always manifesting itself on the basis of esteemed value. This is one reason why it is a fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit, providing the standard for true value through the Scriptures, instructs us so we can make the proper judgments, and then we can choose the better things to love. God does this. He loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). He loves because He values the cheerful giver above the one who gives grudgingly. Jesus asked Peter, *“ . . . lovest (agapao) thou me more than these?”* (John 21:15). Peter responded wondering why Jesus did not know of the tender, friendly love (*phileo*) he had for his Lord. Jesus was asking Peter to make a value judgment between the things connected with his fishing business and the more important spiritual business of feeding the followers of Christ. God demands all of us to esteem Him in love above the world, and to esteem Jesus in love above the closest of family members (1 John 2: 15-17, Matthew 10:37).

Paul clearly emphasizes the value esteeming aspect of love in his prayer for the Philippians: *“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offense unto the day of Christ”* (Philippians 1:9-10). The growing love of the Spirit does not broaden one’s mind to accept everything that the world, even the religious world, may promote. This fruit of the Spirit distinguishes

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between the things that differ, focusing upon the intermediate goal of approving the excellent things. Attaching us to the things of true value, this love will help us gain the long-term goal of being found blameless when Jesus comes again to judge all men. When will men learn that one has not ceased to manifest love just because he or she does not approve of the sexual acts of the homosexual? One should not be accused of not loving when refusing to have fellowship with couples in unlawful marriages, or with the false teacher who encouraged them with false teaching. Love, flourishing in the Spirit, is a discerning love. It approves of the things that are excellent, instead of accepting the things that miss the mark.

The loving brother or sister in Christ is always doing the things that promote sound spiritual growth in others. With the humble heart that has room to consider the well-being of others, the brother or sister will be forbearing in love as he or she tries to guide brethren to the knowledge of the truth (Ephesians 4:2; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). The loving brother or sister will not hide the truth, but because he or she values the other's soul, in love, the brother or sister will speak the truth (Ephesians 4:15). Growth and edification through the understanding of truth will result through the patient dealings and plainspoken words of loving brethren (Ephesians 4:16). You will not find a loving brother or sister forsaking assembling with the saints. He or she will be with the

saints for love always "considers" the other person, and the loving Christian knows that by assembling, he or she has the opportunity to "*provoke one another unto love and good works*" (Hebrews 10:24-25). One can never blame the lack of spiritual growth among brethren upon brothers and sisters who manifest love.

Love is what helps brethren maintain peace with each other. By noticing what love does and does not do, we can better understand "why". *"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Brethren can work through difficult circumstances with one another when they are willing to suffer long, bear under and endure the trying times with hope. They can go a long way in solving differences when they approach one another with kindness, and in believing all things, place the best meaning upon the motives of others. They can easily be approached for permanent problem solving when they are void of envy, puffed up pride and a memory that keeps a record of all the evil done to them in the past. Love is what holds brethren together in the bond of peace. It is truly the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:14).

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The same do's and don'ts of love should be understood by every prospective husband and wife before entering marriage. How many couples have said, "I do" when asked, "Will you love her. . .?" and "Will you love him. . .?", and then proceed to be quick-tempered, unkind, envious, and easily provoked with one another. Our love must not only be communicated in word, but it must be manifested in deed as well (1 John 3:18). This divine principle applies not only in supplying the needs of our brethren, but also in backing up the words of love said in a marriage ceremony.

Love heads the list of the fruit of the Spirit. It is impossible to be in the right relationship with God if we do not love. May our love always be void of hypocrisy (Romans 12:9). ". . . *Unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently*" (1 Peter 2:22). Loving fervently is worth the effort. Knowing God, attachment to excellent things, healthy spiritual growth, maintaining peace among brethren, and solid happy marriages are all blessings awaiting those who will truly love.

Visitors — We pray that you benefit spiritually from our worship together and hope to see you again.

March Birthdays:

The 18th Amy Hisaw
The 25th Megan Morgan

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This Bulletin is a weekly publication of the
Valley Grove Church Of Christ, Southaven, MS

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