

# Love

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, initially, we're going to look back at John chapter 13, but I want to take our kind of text, our theme from Galatians chapter 5, because Galatians 5 is really the foundational text for Sunday morning worship until Christmas up till the end of the year, because it's looking at the fruit of the Spirit and we're looking at different aspects of that each week. And it's really a really great thing to sing praise, even when we mourn and even when we're sad. And I think sometimes we've lost sight of that and we're going to go through the motions, we stand up and we sing, we sit down, it's part of praise. But absolutely is our sole expression, there's nothing like it in terms of expressing corporately both praise and mourning. And we've done that before, we recognize that our culture's not great for that. We're kind of very stiff upper lipish in many ways, but there's so many cultures of the world that express their sorrow and their joys really passionately in song. And

I do think we should remember that and I'm sure we do, the singing is beautiful. But it's a sole expression and God's given us that. It's much more than just going through the motions on a Sunday morning, it's much deeper, I hope, for a sole music, great thing. Galatians 5, verse 22 is our theme. But the fruit of the Spirit, remember we've looked at faith and we're looking at the fruit of faith, how it outworks in our life. Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith on this gentleness and self-control against such things there is no law. Now what I would like to do is spend each Sunday morning on one of these particular, it's singular, it's not the fruits of the Spirit, it's not I have that but I don't have that. As Christians we all to a greater or lesser degree will bear these characteristics. We have all of these characteristics, certainly greater or lesser degree, but we're looking to have them more in our lives and so we're looking at them individually under the umbrella of fruit, the singular fruit of the Spirit in our life and today is love, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And you kind of, you probably already thought, ah there's nothing new you can say about that, we all know about love and love, that's just so, it's so passive when we're speaking about Christianity, that's what everyone thinks about, they think of love and it's easy, I can get a handle on love and I think I've got that, I've got that down to a T. I would like to potentially at least suggest that we'll find a different challenge today when we talk about the fruit of God's love in our lives. It might not be what you expect, it might not just be quite as tame as you would expect it to be as we look at this love of God. I think undoubtedly the devil's greatest victory in our Christian lives is when he makes our Christianity small change, when he makes it easy, when he makes it insignificant, when he makes it tentative and when he makes it something that we can just sit back quickly and say, yeah I get that, I understand it, but it makes no great difference to me or my life. Whereas we find often in scripture, always in scripture that particularly Jesus is wanting to express to us that to belong to him is something utterly and completely radical, not ordinary, not easy in the sense of being kind of cheap or insignificant, but really, really he wants us to see it from his perspective. So often we think about Christianity from our perspective, how it looks just as a democratic decision, a body of people have made, a confessional decision or whatever, but he's always saying, look I'm challenging things so that you will see what the gospel is from where I'm looking at it, that is Jesus is looking at it. So for example in John 5, 24 he says, to be a Christian is to be someone who has moved from death to life. Now you can't get more radical than that, that's the language he chooses. He doesn't say that we've skipped from one church to another or from one set of beliefs to another or we've seen the light philosophically, he says we've moved from death to life because he wants us to grasp that something absolutely significant and when we become Christians and the Word of God is in our lives and the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, he said you've entered my world, you've entered a different world, yes

you're still here and yes you still live as ordinary people, he says you live it as ordinary people belonging to my kingdom, you're my people and my world is different and I think sometimes that will be seen or we'll not see that in relation maybe to love because we all know about love, we all love one another, we love our families, we love our spouses, we love our friends, our boyfriends, our girlfriends, we love and love is easy, you know that's the easy part, yep we can put that away in a cupboard because I've got that aspect of Christianity sorted out.

Sometimes therefore I think we can become lazy when we think of God's love for us and what it means, we can take Jesus loves me this I know and we can just use our own point of reference for that and think we have Jesus' love sewn up, Jesus loves me so he can spoil me, Jesus loves me just as I am, I realise that's a him, don't mean it like that, what I mean is that he loves me and I'm fine as I am, there's nothing, there's no challenge in that, it's just I'll just carry on living and being who I am, who is Jesus loves me anyway and he'll accept me at the end and it can be for us, I'm not saying it is but it can be something that's trite, something that's tame and something with a small sea that's conservative and I don't think the love of God is in any way, shape or form conservative, it's utterly radical.

So we're going to look at love, this theme of the fruit, the first fruit that's recorded and listed as what we will live, what we will show when we are in the vine, when we are remaining in him, remember we looked at the vine last week, we can't bear fruit unless we remain in Christ, so this love, immediately we see it's more than just an ordinary human love because he says we can't bear his fruit unless we remain in him, so it's a love that is from God, okay, we see that, he is now part of our genetic code because his spirit has come to live in us, he's not just the picture on the wall that we look back to, remember he has come to live in our lives, so God by his spirit lives in as we bear his genetic code and we will be therefore people who love like he loves, with his love, okay, God is love and the fruit of the Spirit is love.

[ 8 : 03 ] That word that we're given in Scripture is nowhere else, it's a word that they needed to invent because none of the other words for love quite fitted what God's love is like, so God through his spirit gave the writers of the New Testament a new word called agape which is a word that's used exclusively in relation to God and his love for us and his love in us, is different then from family love which is great and which comes from God, is different from friendship love which is great and also comes from God and is all part of I guess a wider picture, it's different from sexual love which is also from God and we recognize as his gift yet although they are all sourced in God the expression and the description of his love is much fuller than these human reflections of his love although all of these loves are the greatest apologetic for the gospel, aren't they, and for Jesus

Christ and for the reality of God, all of them, that we are not just random beings but we are beings made in the image of a loving God.

Is that not why we absolutely grieve in the presence of evil and hatred because God is a God of love and this world is broken and lost.

It expresses the nature of God Himself, this word, it expresses his love for people and it's his gift that he gives to his people so that we express his love in our lives, okay?

So God is love in and of himself so we have this kind of vision, this picture of God that we have in Scripture who is utterly and perfectly complete within himself.

[ 10 : 16 ] God is love, that there's this mutual relationship of mysterious love and you know, stick with me here because we're moving into ground that we don't maybe normally take us into but just in his character itself, recognized that God is a trinity of beings, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each one this incredible mutual dependent love relationship that is open and that is giving where if I can speak carefully and dangerously that every need within the Godhead is perfectly fulfilled if you can talk about the Godhead having need in its perfection but nonetheless we see that there's this tremendous completeness of God in himself that he is absolutely not a loner, he's not just there in the universe on his own kicking around clouds looking for someone to love and looking for people to create but he's absolutely God is love and is complete within himself as the one who loves Father, Son and Holy Spirit together in completeness.

He didn't need to create humanity in order to be loved or in order to be complete, he created humanity in order to share his love.

So humanity is created in his image to be his vice regents on earth, to be those who live in this glorious paradise that he has made to receive his love and to just bathe in his love but humanity catastrophically rejects his love.

Right from the very beginning isn't that the picture of which we are the four, I can't remember what's the opposite of four bearers, those who follow on after, really deep meaning we follow on after from Adam and Eve our parents and in them we are fallen also.

Holy humanity rejects his love, his lordship and his love yet he makes himself nothing.

[ 12 : 38 ] Even before he created humanity he knew the rejection would be there and he made himself nothing and sent his son to die on the cross.

So many of our sons are focused on the cross because we sing about this incredible God who complete in himself wanting to have humanity receive his love which they reject, he comes again to them in salvation to say I know you've rejected me, there's nothing you can do but I die on the cross in your place to bring you back.

So it's this great love where not only the rejection of it but the redemption that comes from it is all from God and it's therefore a love and if we want to characterise it and try and put kind of weight to it and reality to it it's a love therefore this agape love of God is a love where he loves the unlovely, he loves the people who as he says himself are dead there's nothing lovable in death and in deadness that's why he uses that picture.

He says you know how we would use that image wouldn't we? Well no maybe we wouldn't use that image but you've seen it in films and things like that and maybe the mafia or something and he says hey man you to me are dead, you're dead to me because you cheated.

You know how as you use that language and people say you're dead now, you're cut off, you're no longer part of the family, you're no longer part of the team, you're no longer there, you're dead as if you don't exist and God's saying that was spiritually our condition not just metaphorically but in reality spiritually cut off with no hope separated from this great sovereign Lord and got enemies of him selfish and proud rejecting his love and his lordship and yet he goes, he goes to the cross.

[ 14 : 44 ] It was never that from heaven he could just look down at us and fine tune us a little bit of change here and there, a little bit of good works, a little bit of niceness here and there and that'll be fine. No he had to leave the throne room, this king of kings had to leave there and to be born in a manger and to live this life that we couldn't live and then die in the cross for our sins.

That was before we even rebelled he'd made that plan because his love is so great and because his love is so full and here we have him in John 13.

What is the king of kings doing? He's doing something that even Jewish slaves wouldn't do. You know there's even grades in slavery and a Jewish slave wouldn't be asked to wash the feet of guests who came into the house because that was what they did, you know that's what happened.

People came to visit and you'd had a bath and you were clean all over but you walked along the dusty roads with open sandals, Jesus sandals and your feet got all dusty so an act of love and of sacrifice was the lowest of all the slaves would come in and wash your feet.

You know that, we've spoken about that often before here but none of the disciples would do it here, none of them thought of washing each other's feet but here's Jesus the king of kings, the one who's utterly complete in himself, in his love and in his perfection, his glory who holds all the known and the unknown universe just in his hand and he washes these disciples feet.

[ 16 : 21 ] Hello, what do we do? Do we think it's really spiritual now? Well we'll take our shoes off today and we'll wash one another's feet, that's a real act of love. I don't think that's what he's meaning, it might be you feel free to wash my feet anytime.

Well no, maybe don't. There's a deeper meaning to what he's saying, I'm not saying that we don't, it's him expressing what is the lowest and most menial of serving task that he could do in the society in which he lived but in verse 7 of John 13 he says, you do not realize now what I'm doing but later you will understand.

You will understand. Can you imagine the scene? All I can think of is the disciples just gasping in horror at their master basically, their teacher doing this menial and they couldn't, Peter typically couldn't understand it but responded to Jesus' teaching but he's saying this speaks of something deeper, it speaks of cleansing, it speaks of what I'm about to do on the cross for you and it also speaks about the kind of love that I want you to live as a Christian.

So it's a deeply spiritual and symbolic reality. Jesus is the one who wants to express that love by going to the cross, by explaining our need for cleansing and by offering us his salvation.

God's love is absolutely incredible and he wants us to have that love. I kind of forgot, I think I had a slide up, can you put that slide up just because I've been reading C.S. Lewis, you might gather, just from quote last week as well but he says a very interesting thing about God's love, have you got that slide?

[ 18 : 17 ] No? Okay. I think a thought provoking slide which speaks about, that's a thought provoking image rather, if I may dare, do you like my wee?

No, thanks. If I may dare the biological image, God is a host who deliberately creates his own parasites causing us to be that we may exploit and take advantage of him.

He's in his love, this is the diagram of love itself, of love himself, the inventor of all loves and he has that picture, it's rather not an easy picture in many ways but he wants us to exploit and take advantage of his great love as it is expressed to us, not just in his own being but in his salvation for us.

So that's a little bit, I hope you understand what I'm trying to say, it's very difficult to try and say what sometimes you think you've never understood all of your Christian life because it's so unique and it's so different but what then is that the fruit of that love in our lives, the fruit of the Spirit is love, okay?

What does that mean for us? We recognize that Jesus himself wants us to live in that same way in verse 15 he says, I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

[ 19 : 48 ] Now that is obviously referring to the humble self-sacrificial spirit not to the death on the cross, that's fine, you can take that down now. The fruit of love, what is it for us to love then as Christians?

What is it for us to love as Christians with this love of God, this agape love, this love that isn't natural to us that we are dead to until we come to Christ and receive from Christ in salvation.

What is this love then in our lives? Well I think the first recognition of that love in our lives is accepting his gospel truth itself.

That is a recognition that we have grasped his love and have taken it. The recognition of need, even when we were created perfect we still needed him.

We needed his love, we needed him in relationship with us. Now we rebelled against that but in Christ our rebellion is exposed and your greatest need today and my greatest need today is his cleansing.

[ 20 : 57 ] You know that's what he symbolizes in washing the disciples feet, we need cleansing. That's what God says, that's what Jesus says. That's the big message of the feet washing.

He says that we need cleansing from God. We are enemies in His sight without Christ. That our hearts are wrong, that we are spiritually dead until we come to Him.

We are selfish and judgmental and sinful and we are undeserving of His love. There is no merit we can go into His presence and say, look here is my list.

We need cleansing and we can't clean ourselves. Just the feet washing is that we can't clean ourselves. Jesus has to do it for us.

So in becoming Christians, whatever else we think Christianity is, if we think it's just about being charitable or nice or going to church or being moral or being boring, whatever it might be, whatever else we might think it, it must be that we have come to a place where we've cried out, we've fallen in our knees, even metaphorically if not physically.

[ 22 : 00 ] And we've cried out, Lord, I need to be made clean. I'm ugly and I'm sinful and I'm selfish and I don't love you and I don't even believe sometimes in you. I need your cleansing.

I need to be washed by you and I don't deserve that. We don't come as equals and we don't come in our own pride and arrogance. We come in humility.

There's nothing more humbling than what Jesus did and that is speaking to us of our need as the Bible tells us to come to Him. But I think it also speaks of our ongoing recognition of cleansing, our ongoing recognition of cleansing.

It's that coming to Christ in confession, which we're commanded to do in the Lord's prayer, is a recognition that in an ongoing way we continue to need Him.

It's not that picture on the wall where Jesus saved us and then we just live our lives any way. It's this constant need, His holiness, His purity, His Holy Spirit is in us and every day we need to come to Him for cleansing because it's guaranteed.

[ 23 : 13 ] But it's a reminder not to God, it's a reminder to us of our dependence on Him. It's an expression of that. I know we're justified. I know all that theology.

I know we'll never be more clean than the day we believe. I know He's covered all our sins. I know these things. But from our point of view, we're at a place where we still fail and fall and fall short and we are being made holy.

There's a great verse, it means that yesterday downstairs, Hebrews 10 and verse 14 where it's expressed for us, because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever.

So we're made perfect forever when we come to Christ. In God's eyes we're perfect forever, but then He says, those who are being made holy in their lives.

So there's a twofold thing, isn't it? We're made perfect forever in God's eyes, but we are still being made holy in our life and we go to Him with an on. When was the last time you prayed for forgiveness and confessed your sins and confessed the lovelessness of your heart before God?

[ 24 : 17 ] And when did I? When have we recognized that, Lord, I need Your kind of love? Not my Jesus love, this I know kind of love that maybe is just human love, but Lord, I need Your love.

So it's an ongoing recognition of confession and also an ongoing recognition similarly of dependence. He made us to be dependent. We don't like that.

We love independence. We love to get on the throne. We love to be in that place where we make the decisions, where we even say, well, I don't want God to rule over me. I'd rather make my own mistakes.

But it's a council of folly, isn't it, when it's God who we're speaking about? It's not really manly or macho to think like that or strong.

It's actually abject weakness to continue against the truth and to continue against the reality of a sovereign, loving, good God who has made us, who gives us every single gift we have that we choose to reject.

[ 25 : 22 ] It's dependent. We need Him. We need Him and His grace. We don't need His acceptance. And we don't need to prove ourselves to Him.

So much of life is about being accepted because of who we are, my beauty, my value, my fun, my friendliness. And people will accept me because of that, but Jesus, isn't that?

Just depend on me because I've accepted you as an enemy. I've accepted you as a sinner and I've forgiven you and I've adopted you into my family. You don't need to try and prove anything for me to love you.

Just depend on me. Depend on me daily. Depend on me early. Depend on me for the oxygen as if it's the oxygen that you breathe. And depend on one another.

I don't have time to speak about that. So dependence on the last thing I want to say is just about giving off that grace, giving off that love.

[ 26 : 24 ] So it's not just that we love others with a human love, not just loving our family normally, loving our neighbors, loving in the church, particularly not just loving people who love us or people who are like us, but it's loving like Christ loves us.

And grasp that, that that is His gift. That's why we need Him because naturally we struggle with that. Naturally we just, and I'm not saying this is wrong, but it mustn't be the full extent of love.

Naturally we just, we magnet towards those who are like us, those who are attractive, those who are easy to love. Jesus is reminding us that His grace is a love for the unlovable.

That's what the gospel is all about. It's about Jesus living and loving the outcasts and the criminals and the prostitutes and the needy and the enemies, the sulky, the superior and the sneering.

That is who Jesus recognizes are those in need of love. We so often love on the basis of niceness and we often reject on the basis of failure, don't we?

[ 27 : 38 ] They've let me down. They're cheques. They're idiots. We walk away because they've let us down. They've dropped below the standard that we embrace for loving people.

And He says, my grace is different. My grace says, you will love and help those and embrace those who wrong you and who are not naturally among those that you would choose to love.

It's loving because He loves us. That is the core. It's loving the unlovable. It's also loving God Himself.

Because He's unlovely. But because we rebel against Him naturally. No one can bow the knee to God and say, I will serve you and I will love you unless He has touched us with His love, unless we recognize our need of His love.

And it's also love then, lastly, very within that of service and humility. The whole illustration of washing feet.

[ 28 : 54 ] With God's love in our lives, which is the fruit of the Spirit, that we are people who respond outside of our own tiny little world and see the need of people around us and see the face need that comes before us and live in Christian community and put others first in that community.

How difficult that pure community that you can sit in others better than yourselves, but you recognize need. A friend in need is a pain in the neck, says the world.

Friend in need is how we express grace because that's exactly where we were. And that's exactly how we were before God. That's a revelation of grace where we are.

That strength is where we are willing to serve and give and give when we've nothing left to give because of grace and because of what God has given to us.

It's when we say, I can commit. So often we're saying I can't commit to community, Christian community. I can't commit to the cause.

[ 30 : 07 ] I can't be involved. It's messy. It's dirty. My life's so complex in my own world, my bubble. I can't. I want to be in control. I want to say yes and no.

I want to go where I want to go and do what I want to do and be what I want to be. I can't do that if I'm in Christ and if God's people are hanging around me in need.

And yet He says that because we are there. We're in need. We're empty. We're lost often. And not only do we need God, but we need His people.

Now I would argue that that is a challenge to every sinew of my sinful nature, which just wants to be absolutely independent and self-absorbed.

But He says, if you remain in me, I give, I love you. I absolutely love you. I created you to be loved. I've redeemed you.

[ 31 : 02 ] I've bought you back. I've paid the price. I've washed your feet. I love you and I've given you my Holy Spirit. All you need, I love you. You've got inexhaustible resources.

Just tap into them. Remain in me. Remain in the Spirit. Keep in step with the Spirit. I do sometimes wonder if I'm even on the first step of understanding that.

That's for me why prayer is so crucial. When did we last pray? Did we feel that we could love with the love of God as Christians this last week without Him?

We can't begin to do that because everything reacts against His love in our lives naturally.

So maybe that we live prayerful lives in order to live this radical, different way for Him and for His glory. It's the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

[ 32 : 06 ] Amen. Lord God bless us as we think about your love and find it difficult. Sometimes in all its simplicity, we also find it difficult because we are so prone to complicate it through our own sinful understanding.

Give us pure understanding. Give us clear understanding. Give us simple childlike faith. Even though we can't understand that we can believe and trust and live with that love.

Give us the simple childlike ability just to love others the way you love us and to love you the way that you created us to love you.

Receiving your love and depending on your Lordship and living for your glory. Help us then we pray to bear that fruit and help us to be radical and revolutionary as our people as we live the walk of love.

We thank you that that is the way you've chosen. A way of self-sacrificial, humble and despised love which is not the weapons with which the world will fight.

[ 33 : 22 ] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.