

Love

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[0 : 0 0] Well, on Sunday evenings in St. Columbus, we're beginning a new series on the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. So if you have a Bible with you, you might find it helpful to have it open there in Galatians chapter 5, page 974. We read there in verse 22 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. So over the coming Sunday evenings, we're going to try and unpack these Spirit-given qualities together and really try and ask the question, what does it look like to live a life that's characterized by love, to live a life that is saturated with joy, to live a life that is characterized by patience and goodness and kindness and all these different things. Basically, what we're going to do in this series is look at what it looks like to live a life that is led by the Spirit, that's growing in the Spirit, that's being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and how we can grow in all these different things in the face of all the challenges and difficulties and temptations we come across every day in our lives. Now, just to refresh our minds, two weeks ago, Corey gave us a general overview of this chapter and we thought about how salvation is not just about being made right with

God, salvation is not just about forgiveness. Remember, Galatians is a letter that's written to Christians, it's a letter that's written to a church, it's something that's for you and for me in living the Christian life. And we saw two weeks ago that the gospel is something that changes you from the inside out. It means that you don't need to live under the law but under grace. Remember, being under law means that thinking that your performance, your moral accomplishments are the ground of your acceptance. It means thinking that your work, your achievements, your ability to do good is somehow going to earn you favor or salvation with God. And it's so easy for us to slip into that way of thinking. John Stopp, an Anglican minister down in also in London, he said this, he said that the false teachers in the Galatian church, they were saying that these Christian converts had to be circumcised. And he says in his commentary on this letter, he says, you might think that that's a very trivial matter. You might think that circumcision is only a minor surgical operation. So why does Paul make so much fuss and bother about circumcision?

Well, John Stopp says because of the theology that lies behind it. The false teachers in Galatia were pushing this idea that it stands for salvation by good works. It's salvation in obedience to the law. It's essentially a Jesus Christ plus. The slogan John Stopp says of these false teachers in Galatia is unless you are circumcised and unless you keep the law, you cannot be saved. And Paul's point in Galatians, we saw two weeks ago and time and time again in his letters, is you cannot add anything to Jesus. You cannot add circumcision, you cannot add works, you cannot add moral achievements.

Salvation in the Bible is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. In other words, if you're trying to be good, if you're trying to follow the rules, if you're trying to be moral with the belief, the understanding that by being moral you'll earn favour before God, you'll produce works of the flesh, you'll produce what are called the bad fruit. The passage we read in Galatians 5 here is essentially what it looks like to live a life that is not under law but under grace, a life that is led by the Spirit. Last Sunday evening, Neil took us through the bad fruit in verse 19, the works of the flesh, the sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ideology and all these things. And just to refresh our minds again, Neil said that the works of the flesh are like bad fruit and bad fruit comes from a bad heart. And the heart, whether it's good or bad, comes from your roots. So when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit, what we're asking is what does it look like to have a life that is rooted in good roots, a life rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, a life rooted in His love and His grace. Well, verse 22 says, the fruit of the

Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law. So what we're going to do this evening, begin doing this

evening and then over the next few weeks, is we're going to try and unpack together these qualities. [5 : 05] And this evening we begin with love. Now, I want to look at love by asking three brief questions. First of all, what is love? Secondly, what is counterfeit love? And by that we just mean what appears on the surface to be love but is actually something else. And then thirdly, how do we get it?

So first things first, what is love? Well, there's immediately a problem in our English language when it comes to defining love. It's a word that's meaning is so broad. We use it for so many different things. For example, if you're someone who's married, the way that you love your husband or you love your wife will be different to the way you love your close friends and family members. If you say that you love eating pizza, you're hopefully talking about a different kind of love than the love you have for your parents or for your children. People use the word love today with a range of different meanings. So right away we need to be asking what kind of love is the Bible talking about? What kind of love is Paul saying is a fruit of the Spirit? Well, in the original language that Paul was writing in, in the Greek, they had lots of words for love. They were far more nuanced and far more precise than we were, when than we are. And if you've been around St.

Columbus for a while, you'll probably have them etched into your memory by now. The words that Paul uses here is agape. The fruit of the Spirit is agape. They had different words for different kinds of love. They had words for romantic love. They had words for friendship love and brotherly love and all these different kinds of things. But the word here in Galatians 5 is agape. Now, what does that mean? Well, it's an inherently selfless love that is based on the good of the other person. It's not a love that asks, what can I get from you? It's not a love that asks about how can you somehow satisfy some needs in me. It's a love that is for the good of the other person. It's a love that's defined for us in the Bible. First John 3.16, we might have it on the screen. It says, this is how we know what love is. This is how we know what agape is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. [7 : 28] So agape love is a love that is self-sacrificing. It's saying, I'll lay down my life for you. If you want a clear definition of love, we need to look first and foremost primarily to the gospel.

And there's immediately a contrast there with that kind of love and the love people talk about in our society today. I think Friedrich Nietzsche captures our society's view of love quite well. He was a German philosopher in the 19th century and he says that love is a kind of animal instinct. He says love is an instinctual force related to our biological and cultural drives and as such, we can never consider it a moral good. So love is just a feeling.

Love is just an emotion that comes and goes. It's like a chemical urge. It's like a feeling. Love is just an emotion that comes and goes. It's like a chemical urge according to Nietzsche.

And I think a lot of people today view love in that kind of way. This is why C.S. Lewis in his book on the Four Loves, he says most people see love as a kind of hunger. It's a feeling of wanting to use someone to meet our needs. But that's not agape. That's not the fruit of the spirit.

Biblical love is not self-seeking. It's selfless. It's not about trying to meet our own needs, but trying to meet the needs of the other person. There's a great classic text on love in the Bible.

[9 : 01] First Corinthians 13, Paul's writing there and he's really telling us what love is and what love isn't. So I thought it'd be good to read it briefly, but my eyesight is absolutely atrocious. So I'm gonna have to...

Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 13, and this is a wake-up call for me. I really need to get my eyes tested. He says, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. 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. And we can go on and go on and go on. But the point here is that the essence of love is selfless. The essence of love in the Bible is to serve someone else's needs regardless of your own.

So a gap in love is focused on the object for its benefit. It is love for the good of the other person.

So secondly, what is counterfeit love? In other words, what might look like love on the surface but is actually something else? And I just want to touch on this briefly because Neil preached a sermon last week on the bad fruit which you should go and listen to online if you haven't heard it.

But just briefly, when we talk about the bad fruit, we're talking about the things Paul lists in verse 19 and 20. The sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these. Now the first three in that list are related to love, right? The Bible consistently contrasts love with this Greek word *porneia*. Now *porneia* is where we get the word pornography.

[11 : 33] And really it means to surrender yourself sexually. It means to give in to the lie of counterfeit love. It means to give in to the lie that you will find true joy and happiness and love in sexual indulgence.

We live in a society today that affirms and celebrates sexual freedom. And I think to many people today it might appear on the surface to be a good fruit, to be something to be affirmed and celebrated. But the Bible says that that is not love. God is so clear throughout the Bible that the only place for sexual intimacy is in the context of a marriage. But the point here is that our love can be twisted. Human love is intended to be, it's meant to be a reflection of God's love.

But the image of God inside us has been broken and twisted by the fall. And that's why one of the key pitfalls in the Christian life is counterfeit love. It's the dangers of *porneia*. It's the dangers of surrounding yourself to this lie that love is found in sex. Really though that's the polar opposite of *agape*. It's a selfish love instead of a selfless love. It's a love that stops being about the good of the other person and it turns it around and says, well, what can I get from you?

What can I take from you? We can't have this idea of love being about fulfilling some kind of need inside ourselves. There's a professor in the US, Edmund Clowney, and he's making this point and he uses the example of a wife asking her husband, why do you love me? And he says, well, imagine the husband answers and says something like, well, you're serviceable. You meet my needs. You tick all the right boxes. You're physically acceptable to me. That kind of response isn't going to go down very well. The point is that loving someone because they meet some need within us is not true Christian love. It's not God's love. It's not *agape*. John Piper says that this is related to the counterfeit love of covetousness. It's a mouthful. In other words, when your heart is set on something or someone and you want it, you want this thing or this person and you want it so badly, your desire becomes misplaced desire. It becomes lust. It becomes envy. It becomes greed.

It becomes these bad fruits. So there are counterfeit loves. Another one to highlight, I would say, would be flattery. Love can be counterfeited in subtle ways. Even our speech can appear to be loving when in reality we're speaking in order to further our own interests. Flattery is defined as excessive and insincere praise given especially to further one's own interests. So it's manipulative love. It's love for the purpose of control. It's about evoking a certain response in a person to serve your own ends, trying to win the person's affection so that you can be built up.

[14 : 56] But true biblical love is not self-seeking. It's selfless. So thirdly, and this is what I want to spend most of our time this evening, how do we get it? How do we get that true biblical selfless love?

How is love outworked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit? And I want to say four things just briefly on this. First of all, we need to look at God's love. Every day we need to worship and adore God for who he is. Now why do we start with that? Well, it's because this kind of love that we've been talking about, it doesn't inherently come from ourselves. True love begins with God.

And the Bible says a ton about God's love. We could do a whole sermon series on it, but I want to highlight briefly just a few things. The Bible tells us that God is love. It's part of who he is.

It's one of his attributes. We were speaking this morning, Corey was reminding us of God's divine attributes. God's attributes are a part of who he is. And we said this morning that we cannot ever read our emotional experiences back into God. We can't project our own attributes back into God. We have no room to craft our own definition of love and somehow impose that on God. God's love is perfect. God's love is inexhaustible. God loved before he created anything.

[16 : 31] God has always been and always will be love. He's always existed, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect triune unity and love. Now, last week, we had a quote from J.I. Packer that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is presentness. It's to make God present in our lives, to bring him near, to bring him close. And the truth is that the more you look at God, the nearer you are to God, the more time you spend with God, living in union with him, the more you become like him.

See, if you spend a lot of time with someone, you're going to start picking up some of their traits, you're going to become like them. If you spend enough time in a certain place, your accent might change. You might pick up a different turn of phrase. Your vocabulary might change. When I was

up north the other day, I asked for salt and salt on my chips and the girl in the fish and chip shop looked at me like, what are you talking about? And I think it was a sign that I'd been in Edinburgh too long. At the point here is the more time you spend with God, the more time you look at him, the more time you listen to him in his words, the more you worship him for who he is, the more you'll become like him, the more you will change. The Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts to shape us and to mold us into his image. So to grow in the fruit of love, we have to look at God for who he is. Secondly, to grow in love in the Christian life, we have to reflect on God's love for us. We have to look at the gospel. We have to look at what God has done to demonstrate that love. Earlier on in the letter in chapter two verse 20, Paul says, the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Do you ever stop and reflect during your week on how much God loves you? Do you ever stop and just marvel at the fact that this infinite and eternal God, this God who made an incredible, vast universe, loves you individually? I think it's something that's easy to take for granted in our Christian lives.

Do we ever begin our day by saying, today the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me? In another letter, Paul says in Romans chapter five, we might also have that on the screen, he says that in verse five, I think it is, God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And that love is at the heart of the gospel. That's why it's bizarre when Christians think that God loves you because somehow your accomplishments or your ability to live up to a moral standard have anything to do with it.

[19:51] God never says, I love you because you somehow earned it. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. In the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter seven, God comes to his people and he says to them, oh Israel, I did not love you because you were the greatest of nations. I did not love you because you were the largest of nations, the most able of nations. He says that he loves you because he loves you. He set his affection upon you. And if you've come to know Jesus as a Christ through the gospel, then his love for you is something that can never be earned, but it's also something you can never lose. It cannot be shaped or affected by a single thing that you do. God's love for you is inexhaustible. Further on in the letter to the Romans in chapter eight, verse 38, Paul says, I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Now, the point is when you feel like things are going well spiritually, when you feel like you're able to read your Bible, you're able to read your Bible, you're able to read your Bible, you're able to read your Bible well spiritually, when you feel like you're able to read your Bible a lot and you love coming to church and you love worshipping God, then God loves you more than you can possibly imagine, but at the same time, when you feel like a total spiritual failure, when you feel dry and distant, God does not love you any less. The love that God has for us in Jesus is incredible.

So, just thinking back to last week, what's your heart motivation? Where are your roots planted this evening? If your roots are planted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and what He's done for you and His love for you, that will lead you to producing good fruit. Now, I want to think a bit about how that's practically outworked as fruit in our lives. First of all, very briefly, in our love for God and then secondly, in our love for one another as Christians. Maybe some of you are here tonight and you are feeling spiritually dry. Maybe you're feeling apathetic or maybe you're feeling your heart is distant from God and you're singing the words but you're just going through the motions.

Maybe you feel like somehow your love for God has dissipated or has somehow been reduced and sometimes we do come to worship and we feel distant, we feel distracted.

In the Old Testament, God says to His people, you worship me with your lips but your hearts are far from me. So what's the answer? How do we grow in our love for God? Well, the Bible solution to spiritual dryness is always to return to the gospel. It's to return to what Jesus Christ has done for you. Just to remind yourself of what we looked at this morning, that Jesus Christ took the full weight of that wrath, the wrath of God against human sin so that you could get the full gift of the gift of His righteousness. The solution to spiritual dryness is to stop and think about the costly love of Christ.

You see, sometimes as Christians, I think our love for God, our love for Jesus Christ sometimes becomes love for the benefits, love of getting out of hell, love of a doctrine, but cultivating that spiritual fruit of love, it involves loving God as a person. It means loving Him in a relationship. And if you love someone, you want to spend time with them. You want to please them, you want to grow a strong, a deep, a meaningful relationship with them. And I think that should transform the way we view our devotional time, the way we view reading God's word and praying.

[24 : 15] These aren't box-taking exercises. These are not things we do because we feel guilty. These are things we should do because we love to do them. We love to spend time with the God who loves us with an incredible love. Now, finally, love is outworks the fruit of the Spirit towards one another. Galatians chapter 5 verse 14 says this, the whole law is fulfilled in one word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says a similar thing in Mark chapter 12. He says, the most important commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your might, and love your neighbor as yourself. It's easy. One of the greatest theologians in history, John Calvin, said, you can't divide love for God and love for one another. They are inseparable things. That's why we read earlier our second reading in 1 John chapter 4. We might have that on the screen as well. It says, if anyone says, I love God but hates his brother, he is a liar. For 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.

Calvin goes on, he says this, the truth is that we will never do this. We will never love our neighbor with sincerity and according to the will of God unless we turn our own self-love into the right kind of love. Our love of ourselves and the love of our neighbor are contrary and conflicting dispositions. Calvin says that our self-love produces neglect and contempt for others. It produces cruelty. It produces all these bad fruits we thought about last week.

The reality is that loving each other with agape love, with true love, the love that God has for you and me in the gospel is difficult. It's hard. Some people are hard to love. I'm sure you can think of people in your life, maybe other Christians who are really difficult work to love. You have to really work at it. And of course we all have deep, deep imperfections when it comes to this kind of love. It's a fight, it's a struggle, it's a battle. We have to determine every day to walk in step with the Spirit to choose to love one another.

I want to highlight one more thing in Galatians before we close. And that's that in verse 22, when Paul's speaking about the fruit of the Spirit, when he says love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, all these things, the words in the singular, the word for fruit. Now in English, that might not seem like a big deal because English is weird and it can be both singular and plural. You can speak about fruit individually and you can speak about a bowl of fruit that's got lots more fruit inside it. But in Greek, they're more precise and it's in the singular. So the point there really is that these things love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control and all these things. They're not completely separate entities. You can't just have one or two or three of them. They're a whole. Tim Keller says to think of the fruit of the Spirit like a diamond, with many different facets and like windows into the same thing. He says you can look into any of them and see the others. They're all part of one piece, really the fruit of the Spirit. We can be lacking in some areas, we can be deficient in some areas, but as a Christian, if God's at work in your heart, these things, they will grow. But we can certainly be deficient and I think part of our goal in this series is to ask ourselves, to examine our own hearts, to look into the mirror of God's

[28 : 23] Word and say where do I need to grow? Where am I lacking peace? Where am I deficient in patience? Sometimes as Christians we're deeply, deeply aware of our deficiencies. I was on a train last night from Inverness to Edinburgh and we broke down near Pitlockery. So it was some seven and a half hour journey and being stuck near Pitlockery for two hours is not exactly good fun, but the rest of the train was filled with drunk hearts fans. So I was sitting there, I was thinking I've got so half my sermon to finish for tomorrow and the train was stinking as both toilets were clogged and we got to Perth and the train terminated. It's like half 11 at this point and I'm lacking in patience right now. I'm feeling pretty frustrated with ScotRail and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on and so forth. The point is that as Christians, we're going to lose our patience. There are going to be people we find difficult to love, people we maybe neglect to love when we should. Sometimes we will snap back at people when we're angry, we'll get irritated. But the Bible says if you walk by the Spirit, if you are motivated by the love of God lavished on you in the gospel, then these fruits are things that will grow. I want to just conclude with this illustration that

Tim Keller uses. He says that the fruit of the Spirit and their growth in your life, if you're a Christian, is inevitable. He says there's a story about a man who died and when he was buried, he was buried under a marble slab and somehow a wheat acorn fell into his grave and was buried with him. And he says over time, gradually and unnoticed, this acorn grew and eventually, after years and years, it split open this marble slab. Now he asks, if you were to put your money on a big slab of marble or a tiny wee seat, it would be a no-brainer. But he says if someone has the Spirit of God in them, if they're a Christian, fruit will grow. A seed, however small, will grow. Whatever a Christian's life is like, the fruit of the Spirit will burst through.

And Keller says this to remind us and encourage us that however marble-like our sinful nature might feel, however difficult we might find the transformed Christian life to be, growth by the Holy Spirit, is inevitable. But he says it also should challenge us. It should force us to ask, particularly if we've been Christians for a while, where's the fruit growing in my life? If I look back over my life over the last year, have I grown in joy? Am I more peaceful this year than I was last year? He says we are saved ultimately by faith, not by growing fruit, but we are not saved by a fruitless faith. A person saved by faith will be a person in whom the fruit of the Spirit will grow. Let's pray. Lord God, our Father in heaven, we come before you and we praise you for your incredible, incredible love for us. Lord, we pray that tonight we would know in our own hearts the power of that love. Father, we thank you that you gave yourself for us. Lord, you are so rich in love. Help us, Father, in our own lives to love the unlovable. Help us, Lord, to be selfless in the way that we love. Help us, Father, as we seek to grow as Christians, to be looking to you as the one who equips and transforms us. Father, help us in every situation you place us in this next week to be people who love others and who point others to you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.