

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... LOVE

For some time now I have been wanting to start a sermonette series on the fruits of the spirit but I've held back on starting it as I felt I couldn't justify covering the first of those fruits, that of love, in the short space of time allocated for a sermonette. Today with the opportunity to speak a little bit longer, I'd like to kick start this series where Paul discusses some of the most important attitudes that are a part of the mindset of someone who is following the lead of the Holy Spirit.

In the first half of the message today I will be covering much of what I covered in the very first ever sermonette that I gave 20 years ago. The title of that message was "What is Love?" I thought back then that I should speak on the most important subject of all just in case I never got the opportunity to ever speak again.

In that message I explored the three parts of a definition for love that Mr Armstrong gave which we'll look at today.

In the second part of my message today we'll also look at the various ways that the Apostle Paul described this very multi-faceted fruit of God's spirit over in 1 Corinthians 13. In that chapter the Apostle Paul gave over a dozen different descriptors of what love is. Love is a multi-faceted fruit of God's spirit that in a way summarises all the other fruits of God's spirit. We could describe it as a kaleidoscope into the mind and heart of the God that we love and serve.

Let's firstly go to Galatians 5, the chapter where Paul describes the fruits of the spirit and look at the context.

Over here in **Galatians 5 in verse 13** Paul says "Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Dropping down to **verse 16** he goes on to say: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

We are constantly dealing with this war within between our carnal human nature or the flesh and the part of us that is striving to follow the lead of God's spirit and do what is right and keep God's law.

In **verses 19-21** he describes the works of the flesh that include attitudes and actions that break God's law and bring trouble into our lives and corrupt our character and then in **verses 22 and 23** he says: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

These are not an exhaustive list of fruits of God's spirit but here are nine key traits of someone who is sensitive to God's will and striving to follow the lead of God's spirit.

Anyone who has been in the church for any great length of time is usually familiar with three main Greek words for love but before we look at those I have a question for you. Do you know what the Hebrew word or words for love is?

Well, the Hebrew word that is translated as love in most verses is **ahab** - a-h-a-b. Some of you might now be thinking – “Ahab as in wicked king Ahab?” Well, yes and no. It’s spelt the same way as his name in English but the Hebrew for King Ahab also has c before the h and the name achab is a related word that means brother or friend. It would have been a weird sense of irony if such a wicked king was called the Hebrew for love. Another common Hebrew word with a similar meaning often used in the Old Testament is **hesed**, h-e-s-e-d, and it is translated as mercy and kindness and sometimes as lovingkindness.

Let’s now look at the Greek words for love. For much of my time in the church I always thought that there were three Greek words for love which each had clear different meanings, one for romantic love, one the love of friendship and the other a higher form of unselfish love. That was until I read an article that appeared in the United News at the beginning of last year by Don Hooser.

There are at least four words used for love in the Greek. Only two of them are used in the Bible. One of those not found in the New Testament is the Greek word eros. **Eros** means romantic or sexual love and it is the root of our English word erotic.

There is another Greek word for love not found in the New Testament – **storgos** - which is a word generally used for love between family members. A similar word – philostorgos – is used in **Romans 12:10** where it is translated as kindly affectionate.

The first of the two words commonly used for love in the New Testament is **phileo**. Phileo is the verb form and philos is the noun. These words mean the love of friendship or brotherly love. Phileo forms the root of Philadelphia - the city of brotherly love - both one of the seven churches of Revelation as well the city in America where Rocky came from.

The last of the Greek words for love is **agape**. It is agape that is listed as the first of the fruits of God’s spirit in **Galatians 5, verse 22**. Agape is the noun and verb is agapao.

It has commonly been thought to mean a higher unselfish love and distinct from phileo which is thought to be just a natural human form of love. That was my understanding until I read Don Hooser’s article.

He pointed out that agape doesn’t only mean a higher unselfish form of love in the New Testament. Notice four quick examples:

John 3:19 — “Men loved [agapao] darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

John 12:43 — “For they loved [agapao] the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

2 Timothy 4:10 — “Demas has forsaken me, having loved [agapao] this present world.”

2 Peter 2:15 — “They have forsaken the right way...following the way of Balaam...who loved [agapao] the wages of unrighteousness.”

He went on to quote some examples of where phileo is used instead of agape for the love of God.

In **John 5:20** we read: “For the Father loves [phileo] the Son.”

And in **John 16:27** it says: “For the Father Himself loves [phileo] you, because you have loved [phileo] Me.”

He summarises his discussion about these two Greek words by saying:

“Thus we see that the Greek language does not make a major distinction between agape/agapao and philos/phileo. Agape/agapao has a shade of meaning which is significant: It implies a decision to love even when there is no expectation of a reciprocal response. It often is not a mutual, two-way love.”

For those of you who would like to review Don Hooser’s article it appeared in the January-February 2018 issue of the United News. If you don’t have a hard copy you can access a digital copy on the UCG Archive on our Fellowship site. I had to use the Archive’s very handy search function just to find out which issue the article was in.

Phileo and agape are used interchangeably but there does appear to be some slight difference in meaning and there is evidence for this in the ladder of virtues which we can have a look at over in 2 Peter 1 if you’d like to turn there.

Over in **2 Peter 1** we read starting from **verse 5**: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” Brotherly kindness is translated from the Greek philadelphia and love here is the Greek agape.

I have always found interesting the story in **John 21** where Christ asks Peter 3 times if he loved him after Peter had previously denied him 3 times. The first two times when Jesus asks “Do you love me?” agape is used but Peter replies with phileo. On the third occasion Jesus changes tack and He uses the word phileo. Having betrayed Christ, maybe Peter wasn’t confident that he could respond with the degree of love that Christ was asking him for.

When I think of agape one thing that often comes to my mind is a scene from the old comedy show “The Comedy Company” with Con the Fruiterer best known for his catch phrase “Couple of days..Bewdiful!”. With a name like Con he was Greek and he would often rattle off the names of his daughters – Rulla, Tulla, Sulla, Vulla and Agape. Agape being the odd one out.

When I was young and new to the church one thing that really helped me to understand what love was a definition that Mr Herbert Armstrong used to use for the word love. To this day, it is still the best definition that I have run across for the word love. He defined love as **AN UNSELFISH, OUTGOING CONCERN FOR OTHERS.**

Let's unpack that definition now and have a look at the three aspects of it so we can gain a deeper understanding of this most important fruit of God's spirit.

The first point is that LOVE IS UNSELFISH. It must have unselfish motives. Some people pursue friendships out of selfish motives and take rather than give. Some psychologists maintain that no one ever acts from purely altruistic motives, because we rarely give to a relationship without receiving something in return. We do, however, have control in consciously establishing our motives for friendship.

In the love chapter, **1 Corinthians 13** that we'll look more closely at a little later, it says in **verse 4** that love does not seek its own. Selfishness is the root of perhaps all improper motives. When we look after our own needs in a friendship, we become selfish and self-centred, focusing on what we alone derive from the relationship.

Love doesn't give in order to get back. It gives out of concern to serve the other person. We can put ourselves to the test. Analyse your motives when you give to others your time in friendship, conversation, service and physical things. You may be surprised if you are honest, as I still am at times, just how much we're motivated to do things out of our own interests whether it's being with the people we want to be with or getting physical rewards, friendship or whatever in return back.

Do we give in order to get back favours, friendship, popularity or anything MORE than wanting to give to the other person? If we are, then it's not unselfish. It's what psychologists call need-love as opposed to unconditional love where there are no strings attached. As soon as the need is no longer there, then neither is the person who only gives need-love. The question we can all ask ourselves is "Am I a giver or am I a taker?"

The true depth of our love is tested when helping and doing the right thing for others requires sacrifice on our part. One example of this is in the parable of the Good Samaritan. While the others shied away from helping the man who got robbed and beaten, the Good Samaritan was generous with his time and money to help the man.

Another example of such sacrifice is expressed in **Psalms 15, verse 4** where David describes a righteous man as someone who swears to his own hurt. When we have promised or agreed to do something circumstances may change and we may be tempted to go back on our word at the cost of the person we have promised that something to. We shouldn't give in to that temptation but keep our word and let our yes be yes and our no be no. A better offer coming along or just not feeling in the mood shouldn't make us go back on our word. God is faithful and that's what we should be as well.

The second point of Mr Armstrong's definition is that LOVE IS OUTGOING. It must manifest itself in a pattern of good works and not just be good intentions.

In **Proverbs 27:5** God says "Open love is better than love carefully concealed." It's better to actually rebuke someone in a proper spirit when it's needed than to have love and concern that is just merely in our heart. Our love can't merely be good intentions – it has to be outgoing!

Please turn with with me to 1 Timothy 6:18. Breaking into Paul's commands to Timothy for the physically rich he says here in **1 Timothy 6:18**: "Let them do good, that they may be RICH in good works, ready to give, willing to share."

Now what about us? Are we RICH in good works? If I were to ask you to write a list down of all the good works that you had done in the last couple of weeks how many things could you come up with?

Paul says in **Ephesians 5:2** that we are to walk in love. The word walk there might be better translated as "lifestyle". Our lifestyle should be that of outgoing acts of love.

Let's now go over to Luke 6 to the Sermon on the Mount. Over here in **Luke 6 from verse 32** Jesus Christ says the following: "But if you love those that love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same."

Here is a real litmus test for a christian. We can ask ourselves some hard questions – Is our love merely limited to our own small circle of friends? Is it limited to giving only when it is convenient to us? If it is, then Christ quite bluntly says here that our conversion is no better than that of the sinners of the world.

If we have true outgoing love we'll extend ourself beyond our own personal comfort zone and give to those we wouldn't naturally associate with, as well as those who are closest to us.

There are two distinct components to friendliness. Those two components are the breadth of a person's friendliness (How widely we mix) and the second is the depth of one's friendliness (How deeply we build our friendships as opposed to only taking a rather superficial interest in others).

Many of us have limitations on what we can do to give to others and many of us can be naturally shy (and I include myself in that category) but what we can do to help create a sense of belonging for others we should do by welcoming visitors, the elderly, children, new members and looking after anyone else who might be lonely and in need in our midst.

It's perfectly natural for people to associate in smaller groups with people who have similar interests to us. Such smaller groups are needed to get to know others on a more personal level. It's only when these groups become exclusive cliques does it become wrong.

Evan and I had an interesting discussion after his recent sermonette about Inclusive v Exclusive. I mentioned to him that my own personal experiences in the church have varied widely between being made to feel very welcome at times to feeling very much on the outer based on a wide variety of factors. One thing that I have noticed is when unintentional neglect does occur it usually starts first with those who are not connected with any family in the church or who are not connected with a group of peer friends.

In describing the early New Testament church after their first Pentecost together it says in **Acts 2:44** that "all who believed were together and had all things in common".

They had a burning desire to spend as much time together as possible and look out for one another's needs. Is that true of us?

The third and final part of Mr Armstrong's definition is that LOVE IS ALSO BEING CONCERNED. What do we mean concern? Our concerns or cares are those things we think about. Are our minds focused just on our daily pursuits and having fun or do we think a lot about others?

I remember fondly the times when I was a teenager when I had the chance to visit our late elder Jack Clune's sister, Isabel Weight, while she was still alive. I was just new to the church and looking for anyone who liked to talk about the things of God and she was a real friend at the time. Even though she suffered terribly from emphysema I would be absolutely amazed by how she'd be constantly thinking about others and how they were doing compared to the very carnal teenager that I was at the time.

We read in **Matthew 15, verses 19 and 20** about how what comes out of the heart defiles a man referring to all sorts of wrong attitudes which lead to sinful actions. The process works for good also. If we think about giving to others a lot more then we are more likely to act on those thoughts. Planning good things to brighten up other people's day or helping out others can give great pleasure and can be a lot of fun at times.

Mr Armstrong used to describe the two broad ways of life in the Bible very simply as the way of give and the way of get. Are we just living for ourselves or is giving to God and to others a big part of what drives us in our life?

In showing love to others there are two broad ways where we can do this. One way we can do this is in an unplanned, spontaneous or reactionary way. We'll respond to other people when they approach us. The other way is to take a planned, proactive approach where we plan our efforts to give to others. I would submit to you that, like most endeavours of life, if we only take a reactive approach then we'll only be half as effective compared to if we take a proactive, planned approach.

Turn with me please to Isaiah 32:8. Here in **Isaiah 32:8** it says, "But a generous man devises generous things, And by generosity he shall stand." Yes, it's important to plan your giving. Have an active plan for giving - opportunities, occasions and situations where you intend to live the way of give. Think about it and set it in motion consciously.

We can plan regular opportunities to give hospitality. We can plan to give others time in prayer. When you ask God to bless someone who is sick, who is weak, who is depressed you have given them time. It's a reflection of the way of give.

We can plan to see those who are sick or elderly. We can plan to talk to new members, visitors or those who need someone to talk to or someone who we haven't talked to for a while. We can plan to use our money, our possessions and our talents to give to others who have needs we know about.

From a kind word, an encouraging note, a thoughtful gesture, an ear to listen, or an expression of appreciation, to a sacrifice of time, energy or convenience, love is a way of life. And it is a way of life that is not out for recognition. It does what it does because

it feels it. And it feels it because it believes in it, and is led by God's spirit that comes from the God who is love.

We've looked at Mr Armstrong's definition for love. Let's now look at the way that the Apostle Paul describes the love of God over in **1 Corinthians 13** if you'd like to turn there.

He starts the chapter by saying: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

Many of us have a certain emptiness in our hearts that longs to be filled. So many have fallen into the trap of pursuing every doctrinal novelty and self-interest under the sun in order to fill that void when it is only the love of God APPLIED in our lives that will fill that emptiness.

Continuing on in verse 3 Paul goes on to say: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."

Matthew Henry in his commentary says the following about this verse: "Charity, or, as it is commonly elsewhere rendered, love - agapē: not what is meant by charity in our common use of the word, which most men understand of alms - giving, but love in its fullest and most extensive meaning, true love to God and man, a benevolent disposition of mind towards our fellow-Christians, growing out of sincere and fervent devotion to God...The external act of giving alms may proceed from a very ill principle [meaning a wrong motive]. Vain-glorious ostentation, or a proud conceit of merit, may put a man to large expense this way who has no true love to God nor men. Our doing good to others will do none to us, if it be not well done, namely, from a principle of devotion and charity, love to God, and good-will to men."

Our actions are not really love if they are they are done from the wrong motive, if they are done for selfish reasons.

The love of God is multi-faceted fruit of God's spirit that in a way summarises all the other fruits of God's spirit and as we go through each of Paul's various descriptions of what true love is here we'll see a number of the other fruits of the spirit I hope to cover in future sermonettes.

On facebook someone posted a story about a wise mother who was concerned about a certain crush her teenage daughter had on a immature boy at school. She had her read this description of love and replace each instance of the word love with the name of the boy she had a crush on. After she done so for a few of the descriptors of love here her daughter realised he was not someone with good character who had her best interests at heart.

Whenever we examine ourself like before Passover it makes for a good exercise to put our own name in here and see how much it rings true and how we are going with each of these points. So let's go through them now:

Love suffers long (1 Cor. 13:4). Patience is needed when things go wrong, so we will suffer without anger or discouragement. It comes from understanding other people's weaknesses, just as God understands our weaknesses and exhibits great patience toward us. God expects us to have the same mercy for others as He does for us.

Love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4). Kindness is responding to the needs of others. Much of Christ's life was spent meeting the needs of others through healings and other miraculous events. He performed miracles out of compassion which is a combination of sympathy for someone in distress and a desire to alleviate his or her problem.

Love does not envy (1 Cor. 13:4). Envy prevents us from rejoicing at the successes of others. It cripples personal relationships. How much better it is to be grateful for the accomplishments of others! Aren't you happier when your successes are appreciated? When envy is removed, appreciation is possible. It helps others reach their full potential without fear of hurt.

Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up (1 Cor. 13:4). Love eliminates pride, which separates us from others because we feel superior. Feelings of self-superiority should warn us that love is missing in our lives as it separates us from others. Boasting and trying to get one up on others leads us to looking down on others which is the opposite of what true love is. Love builds others up rather than trying to elevate ourselves over other people.

Love does not behave rudely (1 Cor. 13:5). Good manners are an expression of love. They show our concern for others when we act out of humility. We should question our actions to see if they are done in good taste. God tells us to show honor and follow the rules of custom. Our society has faltered in this trait and discarded etiquette and proper behavior.

Love does not seek its own (1 Cor. 13:5). God's love acting in us will make us more generous; we will have the give attitude that motivates God Himself. We will think as much or more of others as we do of ourselves. The way of selfishness and get has caused all this world's evils, but a Christian will not demand to have his own way at the expense of others.

Love is not easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). Love eliminates wrong anger. Christ Himself was angry on occasion, but He channeled His aggression perfectly. Wrong anger results from our lack of patience and from our selfishness, particularly when we insist on things going our own way and not being gracious of spirit when they don't.

Love thinks no evil (1 Cor. 13:5). God's way is one of forgiving and forgetting the evil deeds of others, when repented of. It replaces unnecessary suspicion with trust. This approach builds friendship.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). A person filled with love doesn't like to see others sin and suffer the consequences. Instead he enjoys the truth that frees a person from sin and unhappiness. We should not love or take pleasure in sin but strive to have a pure heart.

Love bears all things (1 Cor: 13:7). Love doesn't avoid obligations. It is willing to take on responsibilities. Bearing one another's burdens fulfills the law of Christ it says in Galatians 6:2. Jesus gladly took upon Himself the burden of being our Savior. It required a tremendous sacrifice, but His love for us made it possible. We need that same love for others.

Love believes all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Love does not mean rejecting prudence or gullibly believing everything that other people might say. Believing all things here means to have a disposition that is apt to hold a good opinion of others when there is no appearance or evidence to the contrary, to give people the benefit of the doubt.

Love hopes all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Christian love is filled with hope for the future. There is the hope generated by God's presence in our lives and in the lives of others. There is the ultimate hope of God's Kingdom being established and having a part in it. We are to lay hold of this hope as when we are filled with it we will radiate joy and happiness.

Love endures all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Love endures hardship. It helps us have the right attitude when things are difficult. God promises in **Romans 8:28** to work all things, both good and bad, to work out for our eventual good in the long run. Trusting fully that God always has our best interests at heart will give us the strength to be able to endure all things.

In **verse 13** Paul goes on to say "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Albert Barnes in his commentary says the following on why love is the greatest of these virtues. He writes: "It exerts a wider influence; it is more necessary to the happiness of society; it overcomes more evils...Faith and hope rather pertain to individuals; love pertains to society, and is that without which the kingdom of God cannot stand. Individuals may be saved by faith and hope; but the whole immense kingdom of God depends on love."

In conclusion, the first of the fruits of God's spirit, love, is a multi-faceted fruit of God's spirit, a kaleidoscope into the mind and heart of our great God. It is an unselfish outgoing concern for others. It is an attitude of wanting God's best for other people, both friend and foe and it is an expression of the way of give, the opposite of Satan and this world's way of get.