

## The Fruit of the Spirit is Love

Previously, we considered what a life filled with the Holy Spirit might look like, but more from a doctrinal perspective. The expressions found in Romans 8:1-16 include, "**Walk according to the Spirit**" (Romans 8:4-5), "**Being made free by the Spirit from the law of sin and death**" (Romans 8:2), "**Being in the Spirit**" (Romans 8:9), "**Having the Spirit dwelling in us**" (Romans 8:9-11), "**Through the Spirit mortifying [putting to death] the deeds of the body**" (Romans 8:13), "**Being led by the Spirit**" (Romans 8:14), "**Having the Spirit of sonship**" (Romans 8:15). All these truths need to be appropriated, assimilated, and worked out practically in our daily life, walk, and conduct.

### **A Spirit of Power (for Works) Versus a Spirit of Love (for Transformation)**

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit often came upon men as a divine Spirit of revelation to reveal the mysteries of God or to provide power to accomplish the work of God. But God as the Spirit did not dwell in man. Many believers today are satisfied with that kind of outward Spirit, desiring just the Old Testament gift of power for work. Few know experientially the New Testament gift of the indwelling Spirit Who animates and renews every aspect of our being from body to soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When God gives the Holy Spirit today, His purpose is to form in us a holy and righteous character (Ephesians 1:4), not just to accomplish some outward work. In fact, the true work the Spirit for us is a transformed life that is conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 6:27-29; Romans 8:26-30). The Spirit is a form of God's grace (Hebrews 10:29; Zechariah 12:10), which is a gift for producing a holy mind and spiritual disposition. This only happens when we always pursue the Holy Spirit's operation to sanctify and cultivate our whole inner life so we may live for God's glory.

It is true that Christ promised the Spirit to His disciples so that they might have power to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). But more so, they received the Holy Spirit in such heavenly power and reality to take possession of their entire being and to transform them into holy men over their lifetimes for doing God's work. Christ spoke of power to His disciples, but it was the Spirit filling their whole being that produced the real power issuing from within them. The Lord's disciples manifested the truth, meaning they became and lived out what they preached. They did not just exhibit outward works of power, but were cultivated by the power of the Spirit which transformed their lives.

### **Love is the Standard and Person of God**

Galatians 5:22, "**The fruit of the Spirit is love.**" 5:14 says, "**The whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" Romans 13:10 says, "**Love is the fulfillment of the law.**" Mathew 22:37-39 and Mark 12:29-31 state that love is the greatest commandment. Let's consider love as a fruit of the Spirit from two angles:

- (1) as the standard by which we should measure, examine, and test our hearts and all our thoughts about the Holy Spirit and all of our experience related to a holy, righteous life; and
- (2) that love is God Himself.

First, love is the highest standard God holds for His people and it is the discerning fruit that reveals whether we are in the Spirit or not practically. Is love our person expressed in our daily habits? Do we seek being filled with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of love or do we seek God's help primarily to be more holy, more powerful, more confident, more knowledgeable, etc.? **"The fruit of the Spirit is love."** Is it our experience that the more we have of the Holy Spirit the more loving we become? If one claims that the Holy Spirit dwells in them, there should be a manifestation of a spirit of love issuing out of their daily life. Oh, if this were true in the church of Christ how different her state would be! We need to lay hold of this simple, heavenly truth: that the fruit of the Spirit is a love which appears in our daily life, and that just as the Holy Spirit gets real possession of our life, our heart will be filled with divine, universal love.

Secondly, let us remember that God, from whom the Spirit comes, is love (1 John 4:16). Love is not a mere attribute of God, but describes His person and His essence. God is love, and because this Holy Spirit comes as the Spirit of God, He comes as the Spirit of love. What does it mean that God is love? 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is the most perfect definition of love. Read the following passage twice; the first time as is, but the second time, replace the word "love" with "God."

**Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love does not dishonor others, 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. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.**

If we try to describe God to others, what do we say? To tell people that God is love may seem abstract and hard to comprehend practically. For instance, people may argue, how can a God of love allow suffering, evil, war, etc.? Yet, once we explain that love is a person, it becomes tangible. The apostles "heard, saw, beheld, and handled the Word of life" (1 John 1:1) ... this is tangible. Jesus lived a life of love that everyone could observe and be touched by. Likewise, God as love makes Him so tangible to mankind. The perfect God gave His one and only Son to communicate Himself to the world. When we touch this revelation, we apprehend that God truly is love. God did not stay within Himself, though He, as the Triune God, is a perfect and intimately related oneness consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Love always goes out of itself because love does not seek its own things, and love longs to commend itself to and bless the object of its love. The Triune God came to mankind as love. The essence of love is fellowship, meaning that love never exists for itself alone nor within itself alone. God is love is expressed in the eternal intimacy of the Trinity with the Spirit as the bond of fellowship between the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is the overflowing and interchange of

the love between God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit is the very life of Deity and when He comes to us He comes as the Spirit of love.

God is love not only to Christ, but in Christ God created the world that He might pour out His love upon it and that He might give to all His creatures just as much of His love as they each are capable of receiving. God is love means that God created angels and men that they might enjoy fellowship with Him so that His love would permeate and fill their whole being. When man fell in the garden of Eden, sin shut out this love of God in man. Therefore, God as love gave His one and only Son to die in order to restore the loving intimacy (fellowship) He had with His creation. To the fallen world God gave His Son in a new way, meaning that God as love became a man in the flesh, to prove to man the power of His love. And with His Son He gave His life, His joy, His glory, His holiness, His power, His blessedness, and His all. God is love means that He ever delights to give and communicate Himself. Love is the essential nature of God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, who comes from this God Who is love, will fill us with love.

### **The Fruit of Sin (Flesh) Damaged God's Love in Mankind**

Sin has robbed us of love. God created man, male and female, that they might live a life of love even as God is love and exists in love, and that they might be happy in love. The two are to become one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31). But sin came and destroyed the love. The fruit of sin was obvious: Adam did not hesitate to place the blame upon his wife; Cain did delay in killing his brother, Abel; and the world soon became filled with wickedness. Since that time the world is full of divisions, strife, enmity, sin and unrighteousness. Love vanished from the world. There may have been beautiful examples of natural love even among the unbelieving, but only as a little remnant of the divine love that has been lost.

The worst thing sin ever did in destroying love was to make men selfish and self-centered. Selfishness cannot love as God is love. It only seeks its own things. Selfish people do something that is called "love" but in reality, it is self-centered with the goal of pleasing oneself or making oneself happier. That is not really love because it always has a motive reflecting back to itself.

### **God's Love is Unselfish**

God's love, the true unselfish love, goes outside itself to love the unworthy or unlovable. This is why God can tell His children to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44). However, fallen man has lost this ability to love due to sin. Mankind became creatures of self. To bring the true, unselfish love back to us, Jesus came. He came as the manifestation of Divine love. He willingly laid down His own life and went to be crucified. What an absolutely unselfish life He led! **"Having loved His own that were in the world He loved them unto the end"** (John 13:1). Christ's life with His disciples was one of love. His influence was personal, intimate, and affectionate. His whole interaction with them was one of love. So, He spoke truth when He said, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love**

**one another**" (John 13:34). This commandment differed from all other commandments, but contained and fulfilled them all (Romans 13:10). Christ alone could give such a new commandment, because He had manifested this love, and now is revealing this love to us. He even pours out this love into our hearts by giving His Spirit to dwell within us (Romans 5:5).

### **Love is the Believer's Trademark**

As believers, loving one another is our marque. **"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another"** (John 13:35). If we are truly under the rule of Spirit and are following Christ, we will love one another. This is not an option to a believer. The previous verse, 15:34 says, **"This commandment have I given unto you that you love one another."** In John 17:21, the Lord Jesus prayed, **"That they may be one as we are one, that the world may know You have loved me and have sent me and have loved them as You have loved me."** The world will know the love of God and Christ by our love to one another. So, the great mark of the believer is that he is a person of love. Dear friends, how little the world understands this; how little the church understands this; how little it is preached, or proven in practice. Love is actually the chief matter for every believer to set his heart upon. Yet, how few believers seek God by pleading, "You know I pray for one thing: fill me with love. I study to gain one thing: how I can be filled with love." Christians pursue knowledge, doctrine, and teaching, yet miss the greatest teaching, the greatest commandment: love. It is love that builds up, knowledge only makes us full of fleshly pride (1 Corinthians 8:1-3).

The Lord Jesus came into the world to bring love back to the world. When He died on Calvary, it was the triumph and the revelation of love. And now He calls us to dwell in love and to walk in love. He demands that though a man hate you, you love him in return. True love cannot be conquered by anything in heaven or upon the earth. This is what separates God's love from our fallen love. The more hatred there is, the more love triumphs through it all and shows its true nature. This is the love that Christ commanded His disciples to exercise. John in his epistle says that Christ laid down His life for us, therefore we ought to lay down our life for the brothers and sisters (1 John 3:16). How little men understand this. Look at the disciples. There were frequent dissensions among them. More than once they disputed who should be chief in the kingdom (Luke 9:46-62; 22:24-30). There was fleshly pride because of their lack of love. In contrast, love is humility. Love says, I only exist to be a blessing to others. Love cannot be selfish; it loves as Jesus loved. The disciples whom Christ had chosen had to be taught many things, but by far the most important lesson was to let us see what fallen human nature is and how incapable it is of the higher life, of love like Christ's, until the Holy Spirit comes.

### **Pentecost was the Infilling of Love by the Spirit**

When Jesus Christ had revealed love on earth and had done the work of redeeming love, the Holy Spirit came from heaven to bring His love into our hearts. Pentecost brought the very life and love of Jesus into the hearts of His disciples (Acts 1; Colossians 1:27). Peter was the first to preach out of the very Spirit of Jesus (Acts 2). The disciples learned not only to love each other, but even to love

their enemies. We tend to notice their boldness in the midst of opposition, persecution, and adversity when preaching the gospel. We appreciate their fearless preaching because of our own cowardice and lack of love. When we know the love of Christ within us, we will never focus on the outward things (works of power, eloquence, charisma). The most important element of Pentecost was the redeeming love of Christ that came to take possession of the believers. This was the crucial element that the Holy Spirit brought down from heaven. In the second and the fourth chapters of Acts we observe that the believers were of one heart and one soul. During the three years they had walked with Christ they never possessed one heart and one soul. There was constant contention. All Christ's teaching could not make them of one heart and one soul. But the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and poured out the love of God in their hearts and then they became one heart and one soul.

The same Holy Spirit that brought the love of Christ into the disciples' hearts must also fill our hearts. Nothing less will satisfy God or our innermost being. People may try to copy what Jesus Christ did by preaching or teaching about love. They may do this for years even with the tongue of an angel. However, outward teaching cannot produce inward love. People learn to love in Christ as they receive and submit to the power of the Holy Spirit Who brings the love of Christ into our heart. If we wait upon the Holy Spirit and yield ourselves to Him He will fill us with the love of God.

### **What Does Love Look Like?**

The fruit of the Spirit is unmistakable and obvious. You cannot hide God's love especially when it fills and leads our daily life and conduct. Love is manifested as all kinds of grace and virtues: joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, tenderness, meekness, kindness, slow to anger, slow to speak, quick to listen, forgiveness, and compassion. Love does not exhibit unnecessary sharpness or hardness in our tone, nor unkindness or selfishness, but rather a meek and quiet spirit before God and man (1 Peter 3:4). Love is not pretentious nor can it be fabricated. When the storms of life come, we discover whether we love or not. Usually, we do not. Love expresses all the attractive, gentler virtues, especially in times of storms, adversity, hardship, and persecution. No wonder the Lord says, **"By this shall men know that you are my disciples if you love one another"** (John 13:35). We need to be asking ourselves, "Where is this love in my daily living?"

If we had written the Bible, we would have emphasized the manly (masculine) and outwardly powerful virtues like zeal, courage, eloquence, and persuasion. But God is love relates to the gentler, more feminine, virtues as proof of our dependence upon the Holy Spirit. For instance, Paul writes, **"To you it has been graciously granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe into Him but also to suffer on His behalf"** (Philippians 1:28). We would have written about overcoming the enemies and defeating them much like the disciples thought when Jesus was on earth. They expected Jesus to defeat the Roman Empire for the sake of Israel. Instead, He humbly laid down His life and loved His enemy by NOT retaliating! True heavenly grace is expressed as follows, **"Put on, therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, inward parts of compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering,**

**bearing one another and forgiving one another ... and over all these things put on love which is the uniting bond of perfectness"** (Colossians 3:12-15). These wonderful virtues are not found in the unbelieving world. Christ needed to come from heaven to live them, teach them, and bring them to us through the Holy Spirit.

Do we cherish the blessedness of living a life dominated by longsuffering, meekness, and kindness? Do we truly believe that humility before God is our greatest glory (not fame, not wealth, not status)? Saints, the fruit of the Spirit, brought from the divine relationship of the God-head, produced out of the heart of the crucified Christ, and poured out into our hearts, is first and foremost, love. Once we have such a revelation and realization, our greatest desire will be to seek and ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:7-8), and our greatest aim and study is to lay hold of that for which we have been laid hold of: love. Remember, however, that the Holy Spirit can only dwell in us practically as we give up the self-life to live a life of love.

### **Symptoms of a Lack of Love**

#### **Division**

One of the most obvious symptoms of the degraded, carnal church is division. Believers are called to keep the oneness (Ephesians 4:3), yet sects, factions, parties, and divisions have become the predominant theme throughout the church age. Just as the fruit of the Spirit is love, the fruit of the flesh is division (Galatians 5:20). How is that the most precious truths given by Christ to unite us have been made barriers of separation? Christ abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two (Jew and Gentile) into one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:15). But instead of peace, Christians propagate strife, enmity, jealousy, and even murder (1 Corinthians 3:3; James 4:1-10). Instead of serving one another in love, we provoke and devour one another (Galatians 5:13-15, 26; Hebrews 10:24). When others disagree with us in doctrine, theology, or practice, do we love them by considering them more excellent than ourselves?

#### **Practices**

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of oneness and love in which all believers are invited to eat and drink. To eat the bread represents the One Body of Christ broken for us. To drink the wine represents the one new covenant of love established by the Lord's blood (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Yet, what terrible quarrels between denominations and parties within each church about the meaning of the simple words, "This is My body." The Lord Himself was baptized in the Jordan river in obedience to His Father (Matthew 3:13-17). Believers are baptized into Christ, putting on Christ, for we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:27-28). Yet, Christians fight about infant versus adult baptism, sprinkling versus immersion, and even about which name(s) to use during the ceremony! What was meant as

bonds of union, oneness, and love, has become shields and banners of separation. Shame on us! How little of the Divine beauty, the Divine supremacy of love, can be seen by the world among us!

### **Doctrines and Teachings**

Isn't it clear that in the church doctrine, creed, theology, history, and practice take priority over love? The church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) left their first love despite having works, labor, endurance and discernment about apostles. Therefore, God removed their lampstand out of its place because they did not repent! The church in Sardis was pronounced dead when they thought they were alive in Christ! God found none of their works completed and they needed to be clothed in white garments, walking with Christ in white because they are worthy (Revelation 3:1-6). Saints, our living is more important than our words and teaching. The church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) was so full of self and flesh that they proclaimed themselves as rich, wealthy, and having need of nothing. God's perspective was the opposite: He considered them poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked! On one hand, it is more than pitiful that we are so off the mark. On the other hand, God in the Spirit calls us to repentance unto salvation (Revelation 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3, 19; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Even the baptism of the Holy Spirit is used as a cause of separation. Can we learn to expect that everyone may not think the same or express themselves in the same way as we pursue Christ, but that our first thoughts and actions should be to exercise love, gentleness, and kindness? We must no longer be fooled into thinking that we must be valiant for the truth, while we forget that God's word commands us to speak the truth in love. How sad to hear that even among God's servants there are too often divisions and coldness among those who are working for God. We serve the same Father! We name the same Savior and Lord, yet because of differences of temperament or opinion, estrangements and jealousies come in and love waxes cold. In the church, there are earnest, consecrated Christians who have given up all for Christ, but who have never learned the mystery of love. Is it any different in our homes? We meet together with our family, in neighborhood gatherings, in church councils and committees, in conferences, associations and missions, but a great lack of love exists among fellow workers and believers despite knowing that love is the true mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### **Upholding Love as the Standard**

How is it possible that we too often communicate with harsh or unkind words and gestures, evil speaking, and malice among the ones we are to love? How could we possibly love our enemies when we cannot even love our family in Christ? All of this shortage stems from the love of Christ not being allowed to take complete possession of us. When we exhibit an outburst of anger, a cold isolation, or hidden ill thoughts in the family it shows that we have not learned to love, and have certainly not learned to elevate love to its rightful position in our hearts: as the chief fruit of the Spirit. We must learn that love is the true test of life in the Spirit. All our desire to be

filled with the Spirit must center on producing love. When self is willingly denied and humility becomes the order of the day, then we all know that the love of God and Jesus becomes our life. We must pursue the life in which love is supreme, in which love causes us to bow down in such deep humility that no matter where you go and no matter what man does to you, you seek the help of God to love.

### **Loving Our Brother is Proof that God Dwells in Us**

If we all truly examine ourselves and place our whole life inside the looking glass of God's word, we will sink in shame, but hopefully, seek the Lord for repentance and the true filling of the Holy Spirit. Can we consider others more excellent than ourselves, especially believers in the church and those whom God has placed us with? Surely, we will plead, "Oh God, I ask You to fill Your church with the Holy Spirit so that we all will be filled with the Spirit of love?" 1 John 4:12 says, "**No man has seen the Father at any time. If we love one another God dwells in us.**" I cannot see God, but as a compensation I can see my brother. So, if I love my brother, this proves that God dwells in me. Do we believe this? Is love the dominate theme in your daily living?

John goes further to reveal the most solemn test, 1 John 4:20, "**If a man says he loves God and hates his brother he is a liar; for he that does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.**" The most exposing tests are within the family and those closest to us. Do we love our wives as ourselves (Ephesians 5:28)? Do we love, nurture, and cherish our children so they do not get provoked or confused by our duplicity (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:21; 1 Timothy 3:4-5)? Of do we say one thing (love), but live another (self)? Parents, are your children loving and following Christ as you do? If not, you are more than likely at least partially to blame. Children are your fruit!

How do we treat a person who is a most unlovable person? Maybe you to work with a person that has the opposite disposition to yours, causing much inner turmoil and even anxiety when you are together. You are a careful business man and he/she is carefree, untidy, and not "business like". Isn't it easier to correct this person, exhort him to change, or avoid this person as much as possible? God often "forces" us to work with those that "rub us the wrong way." God is trying to expose our lack of love. Yet, we often take this as an opportunity to rebuke or to preach our doctrine rather than lay down our soul-life and love that person. What could love look like in this situation? Paul said, "**Why not rather be wronged?**" (1 Corinthians 6:7) Can we humble ourselves to honestly admit that we cannot love them? Will we repent, confess, and seek to learn the greatest lesson that Christ lived and taught: love is the fruit of the Spirit every day and all day-long. If a man does not love or cannot love his brother whom he has seen, if you don't love that unlovable person whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen? You can deceive yourself with beautiful thoughts about loving God, but God is not mocked; what a man sows he will reap (Galatians 6:7-10).

Paul told us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Corinthians 11:28) so we may prove what is the good, well pleasing and perfect will of God. The good, well pleasing and perfect will of God is love. "**By our love shall all men know we are His disciples**"



(John 13:35). Therefore, you must prove your love to God by practically loving your brother. Love is the one standard that God will use to judge our love for Him by. If the love of God is in our heart we will love our brother. This means our life will be characterized by kindness, tenderness, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, joy, peace, compassion, forgiveness, forbearance, and grace. We will conduct ourselves in a way that leads to oneness, harmony, and unity with our brothers. Our lives will match our message. We not only speak of love, but more impressively, we live it out.

### **Knowing a Tree by its Fruit**

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Therefore, the first thing we need, if we want to be filled with the Spirit, is to surrender our heart and life to the filling of the Spirit of love. Only the fullness of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us can enable us to live such a life of love. "**Be filled with the Spirit**," and "**The fruit of the Spirit is love**" are too inseparable concepts of God. They are not mutually exclusive, but represent two sides of the same coin. If a man wants to have the fruit of an apple tree he must plant an apple tree. You must have the proper tree to produce the desired fruit (Matthew 7:20). If you want to be filled with the love of God you must cultivate the proper "tree"; that is, the filling with the Spirit on a daily basis. We should constantly be brought to humble confession of how little we have loved, and how little we have even desired this kind of love. Previously, we sought the power of the Holy Spirit in our work out of pride and selfishness. We did not give up ourselves to Christ to be filled, first of all, with love, with gentleness, humility, and meekness. We loved being right, we loved being above others, we loved being first, and we loved our soul-lives. Brothers and sisters, can we confess to the Lord, and those whom we are with, in order to allow Christ's deep exposing and cleansing of our selfishness, pride, and lack of love? Will we seek to be filled with the Spirit for a daily life of humility and love, showing that we love not our lives unto death (Revelation 12:11)? The blessing of such a life is that the power of the Spirit for service will come alongside.

Brother, the filling of the Spirit of God is the filling with the love of God that we may be the most humble, gentle, meek people of all, so that everyone may know that we are Christ's disciples by the love we have. Loving one another is the evidence to all that God dwells in us and we in God, and that love is being perfected in us (1 John 4:16-17). The filling of the Spirit, the filling with love, is not any attainment of ours in the old creation, but it is a gift, an impartation and infusion of the Holy Spirit as we yield to Him and are led by Him daily. We are made free by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17) as He dwells within us throughout our day (Romans 8:9-11), so that we can walk by the Spirit (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16), and be led by the Spirit, possessing the witness of the Spirit that we are His sons (Romans 8:14).

#### **PRAYER:**

God, forgive us for our shortcomings, ignorance, or disobedience in the matter of love. We pray through faith to submit ourselves to the filling of the Spirit of love. We ask that we can absolutely and entirely give ourselves as vessels for the filling with the love of

God. Lord, we accept the lesson, that the Spirit comes to fill us with the love of heaven, with a love that makes loving others the one joy of our life. We yield ourselves to a life of laying down our soul-life to possess Your love, and by Your grace we will make the filling of the Spirit and love our one object and desire. Dear Jesus, write this truth on our hearts so it is perfected in us: that the Holy Spirit's fruit and chief work is to give Christ and the love of God in us for our everyday life. By Your grace alone can we live lives of unceasing love.