

For the past few weeks, we've been engaged in a short study on the fruit of the Spirit. In the previous two sermons, I've provided a total of six basic principles concerning the fruit of the Spirit: It's evidence of a necessary and radical change; it's produced by the Spirit of Christ; it's the responsibility of every true Christian; it's hindered by the flesh; it's distinguished from a counterfeit fruit; and its perfection is only found in Christ.

- I. The Priority of Love
- II. The Manifestation of Love
- III. The Cultivation of Love

#### I. The priority of love

1. Here, I want to briefly yet clearly suggest that Paul places love first because there is a priority in love.
2. John Reuther—"Love is the most prominent fruit, not just because it is first in this list, but because the Scripture overwhelmingly testifies that it is so. Paul states it explicitly in 1Cor.13:13. 'And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love'."
3. Matt.22:36-40—"Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. 'And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
4. Jn.13:34-35—"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that You are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
5. Rom.13:8-10—"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfilment of the law."
6. 1Cor.13:4-8—"Love suffers long and is kind: love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."
7. Col.3:12-14—"Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."
8. Here I want to briefly summarize these five passages, with three reasons why love receives a priority.
9. (1) Love fulfills the law—love is a summary of the law because true love fulfills the righteous reequipments of the law.
10. This is why Paul says, v23—"Against such there is no law"—that is—the law doesn't condemn these because they fulfill the law.
11. When we, from the heart, love God, our neighbor, our brethren, and our enemies—we fulfil the law.
12. When you love God, you will have no other gods beside Him, make for yourself carved images, take His name in vain, and fail to keep the Sabbath holy.
13. When you love your neighbor, you will honor those with authority, will not murder them, commit adultery, steal from them, lie about them, or covet their belongings.

14. Thus, remember, the law functions as the eyes of love, or perhaps we can say, the pathway of love—the law informs us what love is.
15. (2) Love motivates the soul—love not only fulfils the law, but it motives the soul to obey God and serve others.
16. This is why Paul could say, love is kind, patient, gentle, and meek, which are other fruit of the Spirit.
17. Love is necessary for the other fruit of the Spirit—love is a powerful motivating force within the soul.
18. Let me put it this way—love is not only what we do, but it's also why—it's both—what we do and why we do it.
19. Gal.5:13—"Through love serve one another" v14—"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"
20. Love is an active grace—it motivates the soul—a loveless heart is a lazy heart—a loving heart is a working heart.
21. Why does that father get up early every morning to go off to work; why does that mother wake up at 2am with that sick child?
22. Why does that pastor labor in his study to prepare messages; why does that missionary travel over sea and land?
23. They do all of this (and more) because of one word—love—love for God and love for their neighbor.
24. (3) Love verifies our profession—that is, love renders us Christ-like and verifies we are truly His disciples.
25. If the fruit of the Spirit is first LOVE—then, every person who lacks love, of necessity lacks the Spirit.
26. The evidence that the Spirit of God has taken up residency in a soul, is that it produces the fruit of love.
27. Thus—throughout the NT Scripture, love is put as a necessary evidence or mark of true and saving religion.
28. Do you want to know how you're doing with regards to maturity—how much fruit is upon your tree.
29. It's easy to judge ourselves with some man-made standard—how many books I've read, or how many meetings I've attended.
30. But brethren—judge yourself on how much fruit you bear—how loving am I—this is the FIRST fruit of the Spirit.

## II. The manifestation of love

1. At the very heart of love is giving—in loving God, we give Him things, and in loving others we give them things.
2. True love gives—this is true also of God's love for us—"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."
3. Thus, I'm not hear attempting a definition of love, as much as a description of love—this is how love acts and/or looks.
4. But let me clarify—love not only gives, but it gives the right things, and it gives for the right reasons.
5. Remember what we've already seen—love fulfils the law—it always acts lawfully or in accord with God's law.
6. Thus, if love gives, then what possibly can we give God? How does love show itself toward God and how does it show itself toward others?

7. (1) Love gives to God our highest adoration—that is—it gives to God whole-hearted esteem and worship.
8. Everything else seems small and insignificant in compassion—all that's in this world fails in comparison.
9. Those who love God see Him as the greatest possible Good—they esteem Him above everything else.
10. Thomas Watson—"We love God when we set a high value upon Him as being the most sublime and infinite good, we so esteem God, as that if we have Him, we do not care though we want all things else. The stars vanish when the sun appears. All creatures vanish in our thoughts when the Sun of righteousness shines in His full splendor."
11. Ps.73:25—"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."
12. John Gill—"God is to be loved by His saints as their *summum bonum*, their chief good; yea, their only good, their ALL in ALL; and so to be only loved."
13. Matt.6:24—"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."
14. 1Jn.2:15—"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."
15. John Gill—"Love to God is seen by a disesteem of all things in comparison of God: to love the world, and the things of it, in an immoderate manner, is not consistent with the love of the Father, or with the profession of love to Him."
16. (2) Love gives to God our deepest allegiance—that is, we not only give Him our praise, but obedience.
17. Deut.30:19-20—"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."
18. 1Jn.5:2-3—"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."
19. V2 means, we know that our love for the brethren is genuine, when it springs from love to God and His law.
20. V3—"For this is the love of God"—that is—this is what love to God looks like—"that we keep His commandments."
21. He then clarifies—"And His commandments are not burdensome"—that is—we no longer keep them as a burden.
22. We no longer attempt to keep the law as a means of acceptance—we are no longer under the law as a covenant.
23. Thus, how does love to God express itself—in loving, keeping, and obeying the commandments of God.
24. (3) Love gives to others our time and treasure—this is the essence of love—it seeks the good of others.
25. Now—let me simply say in passing—there always exists a connection between love to God and others.
26. Those who really and rightly love God will of necessity love others—and especially other Christians.
27. 1Jn.3:16-19—"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children,

let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him."

28. (4) Love gives others preference over itself—this too is the essence of love—it puts others before itself.
29. Rom.12:9-10—"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."
30. Eph.5:25—"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."
31. Gal.5:13-15—"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another."
32. There were two competing dangers that threatened the church at Galatia—legalism and lawlessness.
33. Legalism—in that the Judaizers were teaching them that in addition to Christ they needed circumcision.
34. Lawlessness—in that, being largely former pagans—they had come out of a life characterized by lawless living.
35. Thus—Paul stresses two things—freedom and servitude—freedom from sin, man, and the penalty of God's law.
36. Servitude to one another in a life characterized by self-less love, v13—through love serve one another."
37. V14—"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
38. John Angell James—"Love is the basis, and cement, and beauty of Christian union. The church where it is lacking, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members, is nothing better than a heap of stones."

### III. The cultivation of love

1. In order to assist us to cultivate or promote this grace or fruit of the Spirit—I want to suggest three things.
2. But before I do that, let me remind you of something I said a few weeks ago—while love is a fruit of the Spirit, we have an obligation to be fruitful.
3. The fact that the Spirit produces the fruit of love in our hearts, in no way lessens our responsibility to grow in love.
4. Every Christian has the responsibility to cultivate the soil of their soul, that it may bear fruit for God.
5. Furthermore, by way of introduction to this final point (on the cultivation of love), love is cultivated just as any other grace.
6. If you remember, a few weeks ago, I mentioned that the Spirit always produces fruit through the word.
7. Thus, we fundamentally grow in love in the same way we grow in joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
8. But here I want to suggest a few particular helps to assist in our growth of the fruit (or grace) of love.
9. (1) Ponder God's love—that is, think deeply upon God's love for us in Christ—this strengthens and motivates the soul.
10. The person who loves most, knows God's love best—these two are necessarily related and inseparable.

11. Perhaps I can put this another way—in order to reflect God's love, you first have to experience that love.
12. Rom.5:5—"The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us."
13. That is, the first thing the Spirit does in order to bear the fruit of love in our hearts, He pours out God's love.
14. This is truly beautiful imagery—in order to produce fruit, we need water—this is likened to the love of God.
15. 1Jn.4:8—"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love"—showing and knowing love are related.
16. 1Jn.4:10-11—"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."
17. 1Jn.4:19—"We love Him because He first loved us"—loving God is the result of our knowing His love.
18. (2) Imitate God's love—that is, we must not only ponder His love for us, but we must imitate it to others.
19. Perhaps put another way—knowing His love not only strengthens and motivates, but provides a pattern.
20. Jn.13:34—"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (Eph.5:1-2; Eph.5:25)."
21. (3) Look upon others through God's eyes—that is—view other Christians as objects of God's electing love.
22. John Owen—"If we find a person that is admitted into church society, he is as certain and evident as object of our love, as if we saw him laying in the arms of Christ."
23. Edward Payson—"There are some Christians whom it is not very easy to love, on account of some disagreeable peculiarities about them...But our Savior loves them, notwithstanding all these imperfections; and ought not our affections to follow his? If he were now visibly on earth, and we were permitted to stand by his side, if we saw him bend a look of love on any individual, would not our affections immediately flow out towards that person, however disagreeable or imperfect he might be? Such a look our Savior does bend on the most unlovely of his disciples. Let us, then, love them all, for his sake."
24. Brethren, simply put—if the Father elected them, Christ died for them, and the Spirit indwells them, who are we to despise them.
25. The Father loves them—Christ loves them—the Spirit loves them—and so, who are we not to love them.
26. I want you to go back with me, two-thousand years, and behold our Savior suffering upon that old rugged cross.
27. And if we were able to ask Him, why—Why are you suffering under such outward and inward agonies, what would He say?
28. Well, I suggest He would in part say—I am suffering under these agonies for the sake of that brother or sister you struggle to love.
29. Yes, brethren, there are people who are difficult to love—but if our Savior loves them, so should we.
30. Furthermore, if the truth be told, you and I are likely just as difficult to love as they are (if not worse).
31. Acts 20:28 (Paul's final words to the Ephesian elders)—"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."
32. Yes, some of them, dare I say, all of them, will at times be difficult to shepherd, but they've all been purchased with the same blood.