

The Fruit of the Spirit

Part 9 – Love for God

Matthew 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, “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 neighbour as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Marcus Buckingham, in his book, *The One Thing You Need to Know*, said that there is always one central thing that determines the success of anything.

Without the one thing, you can do everything else right, and still fail.

For instance, what one thing determines marital success?

A marriage, that’s not only happy, but growing happier?

Is it good communication? Is it physical attraction? Is it the ability to listen?

These are all good things.

Research at State University New York found one common thread in the happiest couples:

On every quality, they rated each other more highly than they rated themselves.

As they continued to monitor the couples, they were not only happy, but got happier as time passed.

They had greater levels of satisfaction, fewer sources of conflict, and fewer moments of doubt.

That’s the One Thing for marital success.

What about Christianity? Is there One Thing that determines its success?

According to Jesus, yes.

That one thing is love.

Paul agrees.

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

This is now the ninth message on the topic of The Fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

You’ll notice that Paul lists it first, but I’ve left it till last so that’s its importance isn’t lost after a whole bunch of other messages.

1. God is love

1 John 4:8

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

I was taught that God has a love side, and a justice side.

Sounds Jekyll and Hyde to me.

Let me say this: you will not find this taught in the Bible.

The Bible teaches that God is love.

That's His very nature.

This is a new concept for some: God isn't just loving.

He IS love.

Everything else proceeds from that love.

His grace, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, goodness, generosity: qualities that are easy to see that they come from love.

But here's another list: Judgment, justice, anger, righteousness, hate.

These are also attributes of that come from His nature of love.

They don't come from His other side.

God doesn't suffer from Multiple Personality Disorder.

He doesn't have a dark side.

Everything proceeds from His love.

If you don't understand that, you will never get a clear grasp of God's nature.

Question: If God is love, why is there Hell?

I don't have time to explain that in this message.

You can either meditate on it, or buy a copy of my book *If God is a God of Love*.

But I will say this: If God is love, there must be a Hell.

2. Love is the true essence of the Scriptures

Jesus said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, [Mark adds: and with all your strength]. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

1 Timothy 1:5

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

Why not murder, commit adultery, or steal?

Why: forgive, be kind, gentle, generous, or share our faith?

Because that's what love looks like.

Okay, I know what you're thinking.

But pastor, there are some really weird laws in the Old Testament.

How do you explain those? What have they got to do with love?

For instance:

Leviticus 19:19

You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

And what about:

Deuteronomy 14:21

..You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

How do we explain things like these in the light of love?

Okay, first let's understand two things.

1. You can be sure that, 3,000 years ago, the people of that time fully understood the implications of laws like that.

What often happens is that over the passage of time, we lose the context.

And once we've lost the context, we lose the meaning.

There's a story of a sentry standing day after day at his post for no apparent reason.

One day, a passer-by asked him why he stood in that particular place.

"I don't know," the sentry replied, "I'm just following orders."

The passer-by then went to the captain of the guard and asked him why the sentry was posted in that place.

"I don't know," the captain replied. "We're just following orders."

So the captain of the guard went to the king: "Why do we post a sentry at that particular spot?" he asked.

But the king didn't know.

So he called for his wise men and asked them.

The answer came back that a hundred years earlier, Catherine the Great had planted a rosebush and had ordered a sentry placed there to protect it.

The rosebush had been dead for eighty years.

Catherine the Great was dead too, but the sentry still stood guard.

Just because we've lost the meaning, doesn't mean it never had any.

2. Jesus understood why those laws were there.

And He said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two laws of love.

That means that the laws all come from love.

That's all the Law and the Prophets; not some; not most; but all.

I get tired of hearing laws like that pulled out of the Bible on TV to make the Scriptures sound ridiculous.

In the words of C.S. Lewis: The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them.

So who'd like to know why the Law says "..You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."?

And why it says, "You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you."

Who'd like to know what that's got to do with love?

These laws were given before the Israelites were invading the land of Canaan.

And the Canaanites were a godless bunch.

They believed in something called sympathetic magic.

This was the idea that if they performed certain symbolic actions, they would influence nature or the gods.

If they boiled a kid in its mother's milk, then that would ensure that the whole flock would be fertile.

Mixing animal breeds or different materials would marry them together.

By doing that, they would guarantee future productivity.

God is saying, "You can't love Me and be involved in that rubbish."

Doesn't that make sense now that you understand it?

But remember this: Just because we've lost the explanation, doesn't mean there never was one.

3. To love God is to love His people

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Sometimes people say, "I don't hate so-and-so, I just don't love him."

This concept doesn't exist in Scripture.

In Scripture, it's love or hate.

There's no third option, no middle ground.

Notice what John says: If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

John is saying that hating our brother and not loving our brother is the same thing.

This means that hate is not only actively doing things like hurting, stealing, slander.

It's also withholding what is good when it is within my power.

People need to be taught, encouraged, comforted, led, organised, served in practical ways, prayed for, healed, helped financially, counselled, and supported emotionally.

Whenever I can do that, but don't, that's hate.

These are called sins of omission.

You might have heard of the pastor who was teaching on the topic of sin.

He asked, "Who can tell me what sins of omission are?"

A boy put his hand up and said, "Those are the sins we should have committed, but didn't."

Let me give you an example of sins of omission.

I was writing to someone, and I started to write a kind comment about them.

Then I remembered an unkind thing they'd said.

Immediately I felt hostility.

So I hit delete.

Then the Holy Spirit got on my case.

It became instantly clear to me that that was hate: I was failing to do something good that I should and could do.

1 John 3:17

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?

To love God is to love His people.

4. Love for God is evidenced by obedience

John 14:15

If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 14:21

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Revelation 2:1-6

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Here are four important things to note in this passage of Scripture.

1. Jesus speaking to a church – the Ephesian church.
2. They had lots of good things: patience, good works, perseverance, they hated evil, and tested people's claims to be apostles.
3. They had lost their first love.
4. If didn't change, Jesus would remove their lampstand; in other words, they would cease to be a church.

And all because they lost their first love, they lost their first works.

Do you want to know why churches die? Jesus gives us the answer.

It's not because there are no smart people, or the money isn't coming in, or they don't have the right location, or they don't have good programs.

In that passage of Scripture in Revelation, they had lost their first love.

And as a result, Jesus gave them an 'or else'.

And when Jesus gives you an or else, you'd better start listening.

In effect, Jesus said, "If you Ephesians don't do something about the loss of your first love, I will remove your lampstand."

Which means: I will remove you as a church.

Why do churches die? Loss of first love.

I was asked to be involved with a church that was dying.

The first thing I asked them was, "What does God want this church to look like in five years?"

They gave me a nice list, but there was nothing on it about reaching people for Jesus.

That's the sort of thing that happens when a church has lost its first love.

What's the solution to a loss of first love?

Remember where we've fallen from, repent, and start doing the first works.

What are the first works?

The works that proceed from our first love.

If we do the first works, it will stimulate the first love.

A man went to a counsellor and asked for the best way to break up with his wife and hurt her as much as possible in the process.

The counsellor thought about it.

Then he said, “This is the best way to do that. Go home and treat your wife like a princess. Tell her you love her deeply, help around the house, and take her out on dates. Really make her feel special. At the end of three months, dump her.”

The man thought that was a great idea and went home and followed the counsellor’s instructions to the letter.

Several months later, the counsellor bumped into the man in the street.

He said, “How did the break-up go?”

The man said, “What break-up?”

The counsellor said, “When you came to see me last, you were going to break up with your wife.”

The man said, “Why on earth would I want to do that? I’m married to the best wife in the world.”

It’s amazing how our actions can influence the way we feel and stimulate the love we once felt.

I want to ask you: Do you still have your first love for the Lord?