

January 19, 2025

Being Fruitful

“Love”

Galatians 5:22-23

1 John 4:7-16

Intro:

The 2001 movie “Moulin Rouge” is about a young man, played by Ewan MacGregor, who heads out into the world to find love. He finds himself in Paris at the famous Moulin Rouge cabaret, where he meets the star of the review, played by Nicole Kidman, and falls in love with her. The rest of the movie is the journey those two characters take to try and be together. One of the best parts of the movie is the soundtrack, which is full of great songs pulled from the pop music charts and fitted into the period of the movie. One such song, a medley of some 10 songs, is called the “The Elephant Love Medley”. The opening lines of the song are this:

“Ewan:

Love is a many splendored thing
Love lifts us up where we belong
All you need is love!

Nicole:

Please, don't start that again

Ewan:

All you need is love

Nicole:

A girl has got to eat

Ewan:

All you need is love

Nicole:

Or she'll end up on the streets

Ewan:

All you need is love

Nicole:

Love is just a game”

You can look up the song and listen to all of it if you like. It is a fun mash-up, and MacGregor and Kidman do a great job of performing it.

I mention it this morning because it, and the movie, show how society views love and which concept of the word “love” is held as the most valuable – romantic love, desired and felt between two people. That is the ultimate pursuit and the ultimate goal, at least from a societal perspective. From a biblical perspective, and specifically a Fruit-of-the-Spirit perspective, love is understood very differently.

Last Sunday, we began a new sermon series looking at the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23, and we spent the time exploring just why Paul says that against this (the Fruit of the Spirit) there is no law. This morning we go back up to the beginning of the passage and begin to look at each segment of the Fruit of the Spirit. You will remember that last week I said that the word “fruit” in this context is singular and not plural, meaning that the 9 items Paul lists are not individual fruits that we can pick and choose from, but all part of one fruit. Therefore, we must consider them all as part of what the Holy Spirit is working in us. They are, all together, evidence of God at work in our lives. We are using the image of an orange to visualize this, as opposed to, say, a cluster of grapes.

Love:

The first item on the list is Love. This is not a random coincidence. Love is something that Paul speaks of often. More importantly, love is the command that Jesus gave to his disciples, and to those who would come later as his followers. Of the New Testament writers, John probably puts the most emphasis on this commandment. Three times, John records Jesus giving the instruction to love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17). He brings up this instruction up 5 more times in the first letter he wrote. Clearly, this was an important topic for John. Paul, in addition to mentioning love in Galatians 5, gives us probably the clearest definition of what love for one another looks like in action, in 1 Corinthians 13.

Nothing of what is said in those contexts is about erotic love.

Image of God:

When we examine the love that is part of the Fruit of the Spirit, we need to make sure that we keep it connected to the fruit as a whole. The Fruit of the Spirit is not just a collection of nice-sounding platitudes that can be ignored if they become inconvenient. The Fruit of the Spirit isn't even primarily about what we do. Certainly, there is action connected to it, since one can't be living a fruitful life without any evidence. But that is almost a by-product of what it is really about.

What the Fruit of the Spirit is primarily about, and love leads the way here, is reflecting God in our lives. To put it another way, it is the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, and our surrendering to that work. Craig Keener puts it this way: "The Fruit of the Spirit is the character of the Spirit of God's Son living in us..., God's image in his children."¹

So, if what Keener says is true, then loving one another – as Jesus has commanded – is more than just providing a rubric by which people measure whether we are a "good enough" Christian. Christopher Wright, whose book "Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit" is influencing my thinking on this topic, says that the fruit of love proves something, meaning that our love for one another is evidence of some important realities about our relationship with God.² Let's look briefly at those four things.

Life:

The first thing that love for one another gives evidence to is life. We have in us, as Christians, the life of Christ. We have been born again into new life, and it is this new life that is being developed and grown by the Spirit in our lives. This isn't a

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 516.

² Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of The Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 25.

life that is fueled by our own will or power. It is simply (and profoundly!) God's life in us. We are in him, and he is life within us. The way we love one another gives evidence of that life within us because it reflects the character of God. Where there is life from God, it will be evident because we will love like him. Wright says that "Christian love is a matter of life and death... It's what proves you have passed from one to the other."³ Meaning passing from being dead in our sin to being alive in Christ.

Faith:

The second thing is that love for one another gives evidence of faith. This is similar to the evidence of life – the action of loving others shows not only that we have life in God, but also that we actually believe in the one whom we are claiming to follow. James, in his letter, says that faith, without accompanying and appropriate deeds, is dead (James 2:17). Obviously, John and James are making similar points. John, however, connects the two points together as a single command from Jesus. 1 John 3:23 states "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us." This is a singular command with two connected parts. The implication is that if you aren't doing the one, you aren't doing the other. So, if you are not loving to one another, then you aren't really showing evidence of belief in Jesus. What it shows instead is a desire to be disobedient to the one whom you confess to believe in. Wright suggests that separating love and faith in that way is really evidence of a lack of faith.

God:

The third thing is that love for one another is evidence of God's character. Remember Keener's comment about the fruit of the spirit being God's image in his children? This is how that relates specifically to the fruit of love. Let's recall our earlier reading from 1 John 4:7-12:

³ Wright, 26.

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

There are two things to note here. The first is that God is love. If we hold to this truth, and we hold that Jesus, who is God, lives in us, then the love of God lives in us and should be evident through how we love one another. What this also does is show God to other people. Verse 12 states that no one has seen God, but he can be seen (brought to full expression) through how we love one another. This sounds like a simple truth, and yet it is probably the most difficult to realize. So many people see Christians not only treating the non-Christian world poorly but treating other Christians in a manner that does not give evidence to love. If that is the example that is set, then how can we expect people to really see and experience God in their life – how much he loves them? The answer is that we can't. But, when Christians genuinely act in love for one another, then God is revealed.

Jesus:

Fourthly, love for one another is evidence for Jesus. When we call ourselves Christians, we are taking Christ's name for ourselves. This isn't just a matter of re-branding or developing an alias. It is an identifier. His name becomes ours. We cease representing our own selves and begin to represent him. His name is a sign of ownership. John 13:34-35 says, "A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." If we live out this command, this love, it shows that we belong to Jesus more truly than calling

ourselves “Christian” does. It is evidence that he is real and transformative in our lives, and that is a powerful statement.

Conclusion:

I would like to close by quoting Christopher Wright again: “When Christians love one another, it proves they have eternal life and a saving faith, it proves the reality of God, and it proves that they are true followers of Jesus. But when they don’t... well, what does that prove?”⁴

Let’s Pray.

⁴ Wright, 35.