

Pastor Jim Lloyd

Date: September 16, 2018

Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 2. Love: A Matter of Life and Death

Text: 1 John 3:11-18

Today's topic is the first fruit of the Spirit: **LOVE**. As we will see in today's text, it's a matter of life and death. Love is found all over the Bible. In fact, every book of the New Testament references the word "love" – with one exception. The word "love" doesn't appear in the Book of Acts, but love is certainly demonstrated time and time again through the actions of the apostles. The idea of love in the Christian life – loving God, loving others – is not a limited idea. You find it again and again with every turn of the page. So when Paul lists love as the first quality of the fruit of the Spirit, his readers didn't exactly say, "Whoa! Love? Where did that come from?" It was already a central theme of New Testament preaching. This is why, shortly before Paul listed the qualities that comprise the fruit of the Spirit, he said ... *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love"* (Galatians 5:6). Then he said, *"...serve one another in love"* (5:13). And then, *"The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'"* (5:14). Love was the theme of the early church. This component of the fruit of the Spirit translates the Greek word AGAPE, which refers to unconditional, sacrificial love. When the Bible speaks of God's love for us, AGAPE is always used. Love is listed first in the list of the fruit of the Spirit because if we don't love, none of the other traits can be produced in our lives. To produce this component of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, God puts us in situations with people who are very difficult to love. To love DIFFICULT people with AGAPE love, we MUST FIRST love God. Our text for today is from 1 John. The entire book of 1 John is about love; we'll focus specifically on 1 John 3:11-18 (Read this). So today we'll look at this topic – LOVE – not as a theory or a concept or an ideal, but as a quality that we are called to put into practice every day of our lives.

1 John tells us 3 things that love is NOT: **Love is not a feeling**. In this text we see that love is an ACTION. It's something you DO. **Love is not an option**. John makes it clear that if you're serious about living the Christian life, you need to be serious about loving others. It's not just something you do when it's convenient, or when it's easy. It's something you do day-in and day-out. **Love is not a new idea**. As I mentioned before, love has always been at the core of the gospel. This is why John says, *"This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another"* (vs. 11). He says basically the same thing in chapter 2, *"Dear friends, I'm not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning"* (2:7). In fact, when I say that love is not a new idea, I'm saying that love wasn't even a new idea in New Testament times. It's also found in the Old Testament. One primary example – *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Leviticus 19:18). As far as God is concerned, love is the central theme of the spiritual life. So, what is love? What does it look like? John tells us, *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us..."* Then he says, *"And we ought to lay down our life for our brothers"* (vs. 16). For the believer, the challenge is not to KNOW what love is. The challenge is to be able to SHOW what love is, to everyone I encounter. So today I want to talk about what it means to show God's love to others. It's about what you do to demonstrate God's love to the people in your life – your spouse, your children, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, people you have nothing in common with, people you disagree with, even people that you might have considered to be your enemies. We are to LOVE THEM ALL – without reservation, without hesitation, without holding anything back. Today we'll look at three ways you can do that.

1. Treat Others As Your Equal. Record bears that in the days of the Roman Empire, when a general or emperor would lead a procession through a cheering crowd, he would have a slave in the chariot with him, whose job it was to whisper in his ear, "Remember, you too are mortal." We often think that the greatest obstacle to love is hate. But it's not JUST hate. It's also PRIDE, ARROGANCE, and CONDESCENSION. These stand in the way of loving others. C.S. Lewis said, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you." There is NO place in the Christian life for pride, arrogance, or condescension! One thing that made the Christian church so unique in the Roman world is that it crossed all cultural boundaries. Each fellowship was made up of people from every segment of society and from all walks of life. Those who found themselves EXCLUDED elsewhere received a warm embrace among believers. That's because even in one of his earliest letters – Galatians, where we find the fruit of the Spirit – Paul reinforced this idea of equality: *"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (3:26-28). Here's what I'm getting at: If you're entertaining the idea that you're just a little bit better – or a whole lot better – than those around you, you're NOT capable of loving them as Christ loves them. Rarely will we take the leap into the deep end of the pool and say from the start, "I

hate that person.” Instead, we just let pride seep in, a little at a time. And with pride comes arrogance; with arrogance, contempt, and love and contempt DO NOT MIX. God’s love for you and me is a “reaching down” kind of love, because in terms of goodness and righteousness, he’s “up there” and we’re “down here.” He’s holy, we’re sinful, and He reaches down to love us. Our love for one another is NEVER a reaching down kind of love. It’s a reaching ACROSS kind of love – because we’re all in the same boat. We all have a past – a sinful past; we’ve sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And we all have the same potential: to become the righteousness of God in Christ. Love begins by recognizing that each of us share a common story, and so condescension has no place among us. Love will say: “I can identify with you. I see the good in you. I see your potential.” There’s a word that goes along with treating others as your equal. The word is DIGNITY. Love begins with treating others with dignity.

2. Treat Others With Compassion. Here’s how Frederick Buechner defined compassion: “Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you, too.” Loving others means that you can’t sit still, you can’t rest, you cannot be silent as long as someone is in need – and you have the ability to do something about it. The Apostle John didn’t pull any punches with this guideline. He said, *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him how can the love of God be in him?”* (vs. 17). Now, you can’t solve the whole world’s problems, and you can’t pay the whole world’s bills, but there will be times when God brings a situation to the forefront...and you have the wherewithal to do something about it...and love insists that you do. I will be quick to say that this is not just about money. It applies to much more than merely assisting others in material matters. It means that you’re willing to do whatever you can to help a person in need – even when money isn’t part of the solution. I read a story this week about a gentleman who had major car trouble and couldn’t cover the cost of the repairs. When his neighbor found out about it, he said, “I wish I could help you financially, but that’s just not possible. But, here’s what I can do. I’ll take you to and from work and get your kids to school – every day – until your car is running.” It was a daily demonstration of brotherly love that took a couple of months to complete. And in the long run, it was much more meaningful than just loaning a neighbor some money. Compassion says: When someone I know is hurting, I refuse to look the other way. I will do what I can do to make this matter right. If when Paul said that the fruit of the Spirit is love, he were merely talking about a feeling – that would make it so much easier, wouldn’t it – just to require a feeling. But love is not a feeling. It’s not just words you speak. It’s an action you take. This means that there will be times when love is an inconvenience, a sacrifice. There will be times when love comes with a cost. But, love is willing to pay the cost. That’s because love looks at those in need and says, “You’re worth the effort.” Love sees the value in each person. There’s a quote that has been attributed to several people; I think Samuel Johnson said it first: “The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.” That’s love. That’s compassion. No “I’ll do this for you because you can do that for me.” Instead, love says, “Today I will do for you what you can’t do for yourself...because you’re worth it.”

3. Take The First Step. Maybe you’ve heard someone say, “When he makes an effort to reconcile, I’ll reconcile.” This is a natural inclination, but it’s not a Spirit-led inclination. It’s not a spiritually mature inclination. Those who are filled with the fruit of the Spirit will say: “I’m willing to take the first step. I’m willing to risk making the first move.” Rodney Stark, a sociologist at the University of Washington, said that when a major plague hit the ancient Roman Empire, Christians had surprisingly high survival rates. Why? Most Roman citizens would banish any plague-stricken person from their household. But, since Christians had no fear of death, they nursed their sick, instead of throwing them out on the streets. Therefore, many Christians survived the plague. That is what Paul meant when he said that we are to *“serve one another in love”* (Galatians 5:13). It applies to marriages. It applies to your relationship to your children, to your parents, your friendships, your co-workers, and every other relationship. Love has no fear of taking the first step. When those who are filled with Holy Spirit LOVE see a need, they respond.

I began today by saying that LOVE is a Matter of Life and Death. These aren’t my sentiments; they’re John’s. He said, *“We know that WE HAVE PASSED FROM DEATH TO LIFE, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death”* (vs. 14). That pretty much takes out the love-is-an-option theory, doesn’t it? Can you think of any other aspect of our behavior toward one another that the Bible expresses in such a cut and dried manner? I don’t think so. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:2, *“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I AM NOTHING.”* Paul begins this list of qualities that he calls the Fruit of the Spirit with the greatest quality of them all: LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:13). It’s not an ideal that we hope to develop someday in the future. It’s a quality of character that we strive to make a priority TODAY. What’s it come down to? How we treat one another. I trust that we all KNOW what love is ... because we’ve experienced it through Jesus Christ. Now it’s time for us to SHOW what love is ... in the way we serve others.