

Love  
Galatians 5:16-26  
1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 13

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Galatians 5:16-26

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

We live in a divided country right now, a country where those on all sides of bitter fights all claim that God is on their side. It's not unreasonable to be asking, where is God really in all of this? Where is the Holy Spirit at work?

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we will know false prophets and good ones by their fruit. By what comes of people listening to them and following them.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:15-20.

Paul, as he often does, goes into more detail. I'll read from Reverend Eugene Peterson's 1993 translation, *The Message*. His language is less formal than we're used to hearing in church, in an effort to be as direct as Paul's original.

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.<sup>2</sup>

These are the fruit of what is opposed to the Holy Spirit, opposed to God.

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Note that this is not “fruits” plural – it’s “fruit.” One person doesn’t get love, another joy, another peace. These all come together from following the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> Galatians 5:19-21, *The Message*. It is interesting that Galatians was the Biblical book that prompted Peterson to write and publish *The Message* – the stilted language of most translations was not getting across what Scripture was really saying.

This Summer, we're going to talk about the fruit of the Spirit. These are the things we should look for in the world, to see where the Holy Spirit is already at work. They are the things we should strive for in our own lives, in order to be working with the Holy Spirit.

The first fruit of the Spirit is Love.

“Love” is a word we modern people, and particularly Americans, over-use. We use it to describe any number of things that are not love. A quick Google search for the word found more than twelve billion-with-a-B results.<sup>3</sup> Many of those results are about anything but love.

As one of my favorite movies says, ironically about popular entertainment, “Playwrights teach us nothing about love. They make it pretty, they make it comical, or they make it lust, but they cannot make it true.”<sup>4</sup>

Love, as the Bible uses the word, does not mean how you feel about your favorite food, or your favorite song or film or experience. That trivializes love.

Love does not mean romance, or lust. That cheapens it.

Love does not mean adolescent or adolescent-like infatuation.

Love does not mean ownership or control. Too many abusers misuse the word that way.

Love is not just an emotion, something that you can feel but choose not to do anything about.<sup>5</sup> Love is expressed in action, or it is good feeling, not love.

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<sup>3</sup> About 12,670,000,000, to be slightly more exact.

<sup>4</sup> Queen Elizabeth I to Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Tina Turner was wrong – “What’s Love Got To Do With It” (1984). Love is more than a second-hand emotion, and there is nothing that love has nothing to do with.

God did not just look at the world with great concern. Scripture tells us that God loves the *cosmos* so much that God sent Jesus down here to be born, live, die, and be resurrected, for us. Not to condemn the world, but so that the *cosmos* could be saved.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus tells us that the two greatest commands for us are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor like you love yourself.<sup>7</sup> He commands us to, “love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to what the folks at Wimbledon say, Love is not zero. It’s something of great importance. Paul says that, if you have amazing gifts but don’t have love, that you are worthless.<sup>9</sup>

“Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors, all our neighbors. When he was asked “Who is my neighbor?” he gave an example that no one in the audience expected. He told the story of the Good Samaritan, a neighbor whom his listeners would have said was of a different race, religion, and culture, but who did something significant to help a Jew. This story ends with the words, “Go thou, and do likewise.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John 3:16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>8</sup> John 15:12-13.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 10:29-37.

Love is about this: do you act for that person's good? Not what you'd like to see them do or be. Not what would make them more like you. Not what would make your life easier. But what is genuinely helping them be the best version of themselves that they can be? And do you think of their good before your own good?

And, then, do you do something about it? That action may be bold and dramatic, or it may be quiet and everyday, over a long time.

When we do that, that's when something blossoms into love. Not when we express concern that fades in a couple days. Not when we send the ever-popular thoughts and prayers. When we do something.

When we do that, Love can change the world. I guarantee it will change their world, and ours. Enough of that, and the whole world starts changing, one person loved at a time.

A poet's song may be dazzling. Passion may be powerful. But the real beauty of love is how it changes lives. The lives of the lover and the beloved.

We will keep coming back to love all summer, as it is intimately connected to joy, to peace, to patience, to kindness and generosity, to faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.