

COLLECTIVE

Life in the Spirit Series (Lesson 6): The Fruit of the Spirit Love - Part II

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

Our connect group lessons this year will focus primarily on Galatians 5.

In this lesson, we continue our study on the first Fruit of the Spirit – Love.

In Lesson 5, we learnt that when Christians love one another, it is evidence of some very important realities: love is evidence of life and evidence of faith. Today we continue on what love for one another is evidence of: -

3) Love for One Another Is Evidence for God

One of the most famous verses in the Bible, after John 3:16, is “God is love” (1 John 4:8). As with all Bible verses, it’s important to read it in context.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

John says three main things in this passage.

God is the source of all love (1 John 4:7-8). “Love comes from God,” he says. All human love flows from God because God is the source of all true love. Love is his very nature and being. All that God does or says is ultimately an expression of his love. When God acts in justice, it is the expression of God’s love.

When God acts in anger, it is God’s love defending itself (and us) from everything that would spoil and destroy the world and the people he has made in love. God’s whole attitude and action towards his creation is love. God’s love is the greatest reality in the universe, greater even than the universe itself.

God has given us the proof and model of his love (1 John 4:9-11). John comes back to the very heart of the gospel itself. How do we know that God loves us? Because God the Father gave his only Son, and God the Son willingly gave himself, to save us from eternal death and give us eternal life. The wonderful truth of the gospel of 1 John 3:16 is just beneath the surface of these verses.

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The cross is the ultimate proof of God's love—the love of the Father and of the Son. Notice the beautiful balance between 1 John 4:9-10, which speaks of the love of the Father in sending his Son, and 1 John 3:16, which speaks of the love of the Son in laying down his life for us.

Paul makes exactly the same balanced point when he speaks of God the Father as the one “who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32), and of “the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

But once again, remember the main point here. John is saying all this about God's love not just to teach us about atonement of God, but to motivate us to imitate the love of God the Father and God the Son by loving one another. And so that brings us to the climax of his argument: “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). The cross is not just the means by which we are saved, but also the model for how we are to live.

So then, if you are struggling to love others (as often happens, for all kinds of reasons), there are two things you should do: first, go to the source of love, God himself, and ask for his divine love to fill you; and second, look at the model of love, the cross of Christ, and follow his example.

But then John goes one step further and makes an even more powerful statement about what happens when Christians love one another. God becomes visible through our love for one another (1 John 4:12). “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:12).

John is implying that our love for one another makes visible the love of God. When Christians love each other – in practical, sacrificial ways – then the love of God (or rather, the God who is love) can be seen. The world should be able to look at Christians and how they live together and love together and see something of the reality of God being demonstrated.

The invisible God makes himself visible in the love that Christians have for one another. We are supposed to be the living proof of the living God. No one can see God. But people can see us. And when we love one another, it is the love of God they see.

When Christians do not or will not love one another, and instead find all kinds of ways of excusing themselves from this command of Jesus, then puts into doubt whether they are truly born again (1 John 4:7). They show that they don't really know God (1 John 4:8); and they are despising the cross of Christ by refusing to live as if it has anything to teach us (1 John 4:9-10).

But worst of all, they are keeping God invisible (1 John 4:12). They are hiding the love of God. They are concealing the God who is love, the God who cannot be seen in himself, but longs to be seen in and through us.

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4) Love for One Another Is Evidence for Jesus

Jesus said, "A new command I give 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" (John 13:34-35).

When Christians love each other, it shows who they belong to. It points people to Jesus. Christian love is incredibly transforming, and in many contexts so surprising and countercultural that it can only be the work of Christ, the power of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit.

What a vital fruit this kind of love is! It is absolutely first and foremost. 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.

Reflection/discussion:

How can you manifest the Fruit of the Spirit – Love for one another in practical and sacrificial ways that makes visible the reality of God in your life and a true follower of Jesus?