

*Sunday, April 19, 2020*

## **Bible Study** **The Character of Christ [pt. 1]: LOVE**

**The Texts: READ Galatians 5:22-25; John 13:34-35; John 15:5-13; Matthew 5:43-44; Matthew 22:37-40; 1 John 3:16 & 18; 1 John 4:8 & 19; Luke 7:47**

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (*Galatians 5:22-23*). These contrast with the “works of the flesh” which Paul warned against in verses 19-21. These “works of the flesh,” Paul tells us (*Galatians 5:17*) come from the “desires of the flesh,” or our sinful nature. In opposition to these “fleshly works” is the “fruit of the Spirit.” Without the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Christ (*Romans 8:9*), these qualities cannot be perfected in one’s life, and this character of Christ cannot become one’s “way of life.” Without the indwelling of the Spirit we cannot put these into practice, live into them, and bear much fruit (*John 15:1-17*).

We must first understand that we cannot produce this character in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit dwelling within us who produces his fruit in our lives. We will return to Galatians 5:22-25 in the coming weeks, but each time we do we will focus our study on one specific aspect or characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit, which is the Character of Christ. This week our focus is on “Love” and what scripture teaches us about “Love.”

The Greeks had four words for “love.” *Eros* means the passionate love between a man and woman. This word is not found in the New Testament at all. *Storgé*, not found in scripture, means the familial affection and love that parents have for children, and siblings for one another. *Philia* is the love shared between friends. It is a reciprocal kind of love; love given for love received in the bonds of friendship.

The most common word used for “love” to be found in scripture is *agapé*. It is used 116 times as a noun, and 143 times as a verb. In each and every one of our texts listed above, the word used for “love” is the Greek word *agapé*. *Agapé* is unconditional, sacrificial love. It is undaunted and unconquerable. It is, as William Barclay has written, that love which means “no matter what a [person] may do to us by way of insult or injury or humiliation we will never seek anything else than [that person’s] highest good.”

Scripture tells us that “God is *agapé*” and that if we do not live with *agapé* then we do not know God (*1 John 4:8*). *Agapé* is at the very heart of Christ’s character and the foundation for real living. We must also understand that in *agapé*, God created.

*Sunday, April 19, 2020*

In *agapé*, God rules. In *agapé*, God reveals and guides. In *agapé*, God forgives and saves. And in *agapé*, Jesus will return.

*Agapé* is where God is and God is where his people are. Therefore we must be *agapé* people, right? This kind of love, *agapé*, makes us responsible to and for other people. With our sins forgiven and our lives redeemed we are separated (sanctified, made holy) in order to *agapé*. In order to give, and love, and serve, unconditionally and sacrificially. Is it any wonder that God's word makes it clear that we cannot do this without the Holy Spirit? Without the Spirit of Christ within us, without that new birth, this Way to Life is impossible to live. This abundant life with God would be impossible to experience.

Of this love Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Men think there are circumstances when one may deal with human beings without love. But there are none. You may deal with things without love. Cut trees, bake bricks, hammer iron, but you cannot deal with [people] without love." For the minute that you do they are no longer human being, they are things — mere commodities.

Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you *agapé* one another." "You shall *agapé* the Lord your God...this is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like the first, you shall *agapé* your neighbor as yourself." "*Agapé* your enemies."

"For God had so much *agapé* for the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." *Agapé* is the reason Jesus gave his life for us. *Agapé* is the reason Jesus now sends us out in his name. *Agapé* mends, heals, forgives, reconciles — puts the world back in right relationship with God — even at the rate of one person at a time.

A man was very busy with his work but was often interrupted by his little daughter. Rather than ask her to leave the room, he cut out a map of Europe into small pieces for her to put back together. He thought it would take her quite some time to get it put together. Time that she would not be interrupting him. However, his daughter completed the puzzle much sooner than he expected. He asked her how she was able to put it together so quickly. She said, "Daddy, there was a picture of a man on the other side, and when I got the man right, the map came together."

**Will you help to "get the man right" and thus partner with God in mending the world? How will you *agapé* this week?**

*Sunday, April 19, 2020*

## **Character of Christ [pt. 1]: Love Questions for Further Reflection**

### **Galatians 5:22-25**

Paul has just warned the Galatians about being enslaved to legalism (5:1-15). What is he warning them about being enslaved to in this passage (5:16-25)? What two things are in conflict with each other (v. 17)? If we were made alive (born again) by the Spirit, why do we still struggle with sin? Is the crucifixion (putting to death) of the sinful nature done *to* or *by* the Christian (v. 24)? How are we led by the Spirit? Which aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit are still ‘in the bud’ in your life? Which are blossoming?

### **John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:23-24; and John 15:1-17**

Why is showing love to another so important for God’s mission in the world (*John 13:35*)? How is it possible to fulfill Jesus’ command to love another (*1 John 3:24*)? What does it mean to “abide” in Christ? Is it possible to bear the Fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*) if we do not abide in Christ?

### **1 John 4:7-21**

What is the source of human love? What does it mean that God **IS** love? How is God’s love expressed through humans? Why is it a lie to say you love God but do not show love to your brother? Is “brother” here synonymous with “neighbor” in Luke 10:25-37?

From vv. 8-15, what do you learn about the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? About their relationship to us? How does the message that God’s love drives out fear (v. 18) relate to the teaching that God is light (*1 John 1:5; John 3:19-21*)?

### **Agapé**

Look again at the passages listed on the top of page 1. Is the love described in these verses an action or a feeling (*1 John 3:18*)? What is the connection between loving God and loving others (*Matthew 22:37-40; 1 John 4:19-21*)? How does this illuminate Jesus’ command to “love your enemies” (*Matthew 5:43-44, Luke 7:47*)? Why should *agapé* extend even to our enemies (*Romans 5:6-11*)? What is the only way to improve how you show love to others (*1 John 4:15-17*)?

In what ways will you love unconditionally and sacrificially this week? How will others experience God’s *agapé* love through you this week?