

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Love, Galatians 5:22-23

This year we have been considering the theme of "bonding", of developing our relationships with one another and with God. Our focus builds on the relational nature of God's expectations (*cf. Matthew 22:34-40*) and seeks to cultivate within us a character that supports those relationships. This lesson furthers that goal by introducing a series examining "the fruit of the Spirit"¹ in Galatians 5:22-23. The Spirit-produced fruit Paul mentioned describes the relationship-oriented character of those who commit to following Jesus. Therefore, we will take the next nine weeks to consider the fruit of the Spirit and its place within our lives. We will examine the first of those fruits in the lesson - love.

"The greatest of these is love"²

- Paul listed love in the first-place position among the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, a position that makes sense when we consider the elevated place he gave to love in his letter to the Galatians. Paul, for example, wrote that:
 - "Faith working through love" matters most (*Galatians 5:6*).
 - "The whole law is fulfilled in" love (*Galatians 5:13-14*).
- Good reason motivated the preferential place Paul gave to love – love is the ground upon which Christianity rests. Consider:
 - Love inspired God's redemptive plan in Jesus (*John 3:16-17*).
 - Love forms the foundation upon which God bases all His commands (*Matthew 22:34-40*).
 - Love is also the foundation of obedience (*John 14:15; 1 John 5:3*).
 - Love, therefore, identifies "the children of God" (*1 John 1:5; 2:10; 3:10; John 13:34-35*).
- One might move quickly past love in the fruit of the Spirit list, assuming an understanding because of its commonly discussed and widely valued place in our world. But a more careful reading of the Bible's presentation of love reveals that it differs from the love often conceived in our world.
 - While "love" usually refers to an experience one person feels for another (i.e., "I feel love for another person"), popular-level conceptions of that experience in our culture very often focus on one's person, feelings, and desires.
 - The Bible offers a very different definition of love that begins with God rather than us.
 - 1 John 4:8 – God is love.
 - 1 John 4:9-10 – God reveals His love to us through Jesus.

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

² 1 Corinthians 13:13.



- John 13:3-17, 34-35 – Jesus models God's love for us.
- Embracing the Bible's God-shaped, Jesus-expressed love results in a love that has a different character than the love we commonly encounter in our world.
 - Our world tends to promote a self-centered love (*cf. 2 Timothy 3:2-5*) while God's love prompts a selfless, service-focused love (*1 Corinthians 13:4-7; John 13:3-17, 34-35*).
 - Our world's love promotes self-care while God's love puts the interests and wellbeing of others ahead of one's concerns (*Philippians 2:1-8*).
 - Our world loves those who love them back and hates those who hate them while God's love prompts one to love and serve their enemies (*Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 10:25-37*).
- The Bible devotes so much attention to defining love because we tend to default to our world's selfish understandings of love.
- Even though our world might promote selfish love as something healthy and empowering, we need to understand that selfish love will only generate disorder and evil (*James 3:16*).

Applications

- The Holy Spirit seeks to create within us a God-defined love that focuses itself on others' good rather than one's own good (*Galatians 5:6, 13-14*).
- Because we tend to default to our world's models of love, embracing the love the Holy Spirit seeks to create within us involves effort on our part. Cultivate biblical love involves:
 - **Work** – merely knowing about the Bible's love will not lead to its growth in our lives.
 - **Intentionality** – growing biblical love requires setting it as a goal we intentionally work to accomplish.
 - **Consideration of others** – we often underestimate the harm our words and actions have on others, evidencing a lack of awareness/concern/love for them (*cf. Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:1-8*).

God is love, but a love that differs from the love embraced by our world. If we claim to be God's people, we need to be individuals who practice the love that defines Him. Therefore, does your life reveal a God-like love that expresses itself through your relationships with the people around you?



WE SHOULD NOT BE LIKE CAIN

1 John 3:11-15

Love occupies first place in the fruit of the Spirit Paul listed in Galatians 5:22-23. We spent time in this morning's worship considering love, and this class will explore practical applications from that lesson.

Cain, Satan, and Jesus

John, in 1 John, addressed the "many antichrists" that were troubling his audience (*1 John 2:18-27*). Because of the danger those "false prophets" presented, John instructed his readers to "test" individuals and their message to determine whether they were from God (*1 John 4:1-6*). He told his audience they would be able to identify "antichrists" by noting their beliefs about Jesus (*1 John 2:22*) and observing whether they obeyed God's command to love (*1 John 3:4-10; 4:1-5:5*). John offered a negative illustration of the command to love when he wrote that his readers "should not be like Cain," who hated, rather than loved, his brother (*1 John 3:11-14*).

The New Testament mentions Cain three times, each time offering him as a negative example. Consider:

- **Hebrews 11:4** – contrasting Cain with his "righteous" brother Abel, Hebrews implies Cain's unrighteousness.
- **1 John 3:11-15** – Cain's murder of his brother Abel illustrates the consequences of failing to love.
- **Jude 10-11** – Jude portrays Cain as an "unreasoning animal," as someone who abandoned his humanity and became the offspring of the serpent (*cf. Genesis 3:15*).

Given the harsh assessments of Cain, consider Genesis' brief record of his life.

- The story of Cain follows the account of Adam and Eve's rebellion and its consequences (*Genesis 3:1-19*), which included God placing "enmity" between the offspring of the woman and the serpent (*Genesis 3:15*).
- Cain's story begins with Eve announcing that she had "gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (*Genesis 4:1*). Eve's somewhat ambiguous phrase in Hebrew echoes the Bible's pattern of children born with a God-assigned purpose and prompts readers to anticipate something good from Cain (*cf. Genesis 6:28-29; 17:1-21; Judges 13:1-7; Jeremiah 1:4-5; Luke 1:1-17, 26-33*).
- Rather than living up to the potential goodness implied in his introduction, Cain gave himself over to sin's control and murdered his brother (*Genesis 4:7-8*). Rather than ruling as God's image-bearer (*Genesis 1:26-28; 4:7*), he submitted himself to sin and bore the image of the serpent (*Genesis 3:15; 1 John 3:12*).



