

Nine Secrets of Healthy Relationships

Love – Part Two

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV) ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT) ²² But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

- We're here to talk about REAL LIFE today, like this e-mail I got from one of our guys in our church after last Sunday morning:

Man, why did you have to preach about losing your temper and all that Christian living stuff? Nothing has gone right this week, and I'm looking for someone to blame. I stopped just short of choking a UPS agent through the phone line on Tuesday, and now I'm into it with the mechanics on the work they did to my truck. I didn't mean to sign up for the condensed version of the Christian living course this week! Let's see ... should I proceed with my plan to install tub faucets and a tub surround this weekend? Perhaps it might be best if my wife and kids go visit their grandmother while I work? Bye for now ... I gotta go bang my head on the stress relief poster.

- Some people get uncomfortable when a pastor preaches on "relationships," but that's where our Christianity is lived out – in our relationships with God, with family and friends, and with others. I'm not known as a Christian on the basis of what I believe, or even what I have experienced – I'm known only by the fruit seen in my life!
- Our subject for today is "love" – here's one viewpoint ...

A pastor was helping a young couple plan their wedding, and they were reviewing some changes the couple wanted to make in the traditional vows to make them more contemporary. The pastor thought the new vows were beautiful, until they got to the final line: "For richer or poorer; in sickness and in health; until we no longer love each other." The pastor stopped them and asked, "What do you mean by that?" The couple replied, "Well, couples sometimes fall out of love, and they should not be required to remain married and unhappy for the rest of their lives. Everyone has the right to be happy." At first the pastor was surprised, then he realized that modern society had subtly got to them – the lack of commitment they saw in the world all around them had infiltrated their thinking!

- Here's a different viewpoint on "love" ...

In his book, Letters to an Unborn Child, David Ireland wrote to the child in his wife's womb partly because he knew that he may never see the child. While his wife's pregnancy developed, David was dying of a crippling neurological disease. He wrote in one of his letters ... "Your mother is very special. Few men know what it's like to receive appreciation for taking their wives out to dinner when it entails what it does for us. It means that she has to dress me, shave me, brush my teeth, comb my hair, wheel me out of the house and down the steps, open the garage and put me in the car, take the pedals off the chair, stand me up, sit me in the seat of the car, twist me around so that I'm comfortable, fold the wheelchair, put it in the car, go around to the other side of the car, start it up, back it out, get out of the car, pull the garage door down, get back into the car, and drive off to the restaurant. And then, it starts all over again; she gets out of the car, unfolds the wheelchair, opens the door, spins me around, stands me up, seats me in the wheelchair, pushes the pedals out, closes and locks the car, wheels me into the restaurant, then takes the pedals off the wheelchair so I won't be uncomfortable. We sit down to have dinner, and she feeds me throughout the entire meal. And when it's over she pays the bill, pushes the wheelchair out to the car again, and reverses the same routine. And when it's over – finished – with real warmth she'll say, 'Honey, thank you for taking me out to dinner.' I never quite know what to answer." David's wife, Joyce, provides us with an example of real love!

- The Bible tells us in 1 John 4:16 that "God is love," so it is no surprise that the first aspect of the fruit that He wants to grow in our lives is LOVE! Love is at the top of the list, because it is the **FOUNDATION** for the rest of the fruit God wants to grow in us. In fact, many linguistic scholars translate Galatians 5:22-23 like this ... "But the fruit of the Spirit is love : (colon) joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."
- 1 Corinthians 13 (the love chapter) is read at many weddings. Take a close look at the first seven verses – it is the Fruit of the Spirit, in just a slightly different order!

Galatians 5:22-23	1 Corinthians 13:1-7
Love	Love does not seek her own, is not selfish or self-centered
Joy	Loves does not rejoice in iniquity but rather rejoices in the truth
Peace	Love is not easily provoked, but is serene and stable
Patience (KJV – longsuffering)	Love suffers long, perseveres, is patient
Kindness (KJV – gentleness)	Love is merciful, thoughtful, and concerned; it envies not
Goodness	Love is great, gracious, and generous; it is kind and good
Faithfulness (KJV – faith)	Love thinks no evil but has faith in God and others
Gentleness (KJV – meekness)	Love is humble and gentle, does not vaunt itself
Self-control (KJV – temperance)	Love is disciplined and controlled, does not behave unbecomingly

- If we're going to talk about love, it only makes sense to define it from a Biblical perspective – that's the only opinion that counts anyway!

Two Misconceptions About Love:

1. The world says love is a FEELING ...

- In our culture, love is grossly misdefined by 4 minute songs on the radio, 1 hour soap operas on the television, 2 hour movies at the cinema, and 300 page novels on the bookshelf. In fact, we use the word "love" so much that we've destroyed it's meaning! Rick Long tells me that he loves his wife and he loves his dogs. His wife is loving and supportive, and those dogs are disobedient and sneaky – but when it rains, he'll send his wife out to bring the dogs in! Charlie Brown said, "Love is a warm puppy." Someone else said, "Puppy love will not last through the dog days of life!"
- How is it that you use the same word "love" for your wife, the dog, the car, baseball, pizza, etc.? When we hear Rick say that he loves his dogs, we don't think "here's a weirdo who loves his dogs like he loves his wife" – instead, we understand he's speaking of a different kind of love. This can certainly be difficult for someone learning our language! But because the Bible was not originally written in English, it does not suffer the limitations of our language, so it can help us in this area. There are four Greek words for love:

Eros	Sexual or sensual love
Storge	Family or natural love
Phile	Friendship or companionship love
Agape	God's love

- **EROS:** The New Testament doesn't use the word "eros," from which we get the word "erotic." However, the Bible does teach that sexual love is a wonderful blessing from God, as long as it is experienced within His boundaries of marriage. Outside of that, it does incredible harm to us! But as good as eros love can be, it is still quite limited.
- **STORGE:** The Bible uses this word twice in the New Testament in the negative sense, to describe evil people who are "without natural affection" (Greek – astorgos). Storge is the love that exists in a family, between parents and children, and among siblings. It is vastly different than eros love, and to blend the two even slightly leads to perverse sins such as incest. Parents should not be dismayed at the normal "friction" that exists between siblings – that is God's natural way of insuring that the line is never crossed! Storge love is strong ("blood is thicker than water!"), but it is also quite limited.

- **PHILE:** We derive the term "philanthropy" from this Greek word; it designates a friendship kind of love. The New Testament translates it several times as "brotherly love." This is the kind of love that develops between us and those we have a natural affinity for, those we don't have any personality conflict with. Sometimes this happens under times of great stress, such as this week (after the terrorist attacks on the US) when we see people laying aside their differences to help each other. Sometimes it happens through circumstances that put us in the same place at the same time. But phile love is also limited over the long haul.
- This is the problem with most relationships – they are built on limited love, eros, storge and phile. So when the body of your spouse gets older, eros love fades; when there are serious conflicts with the teenagers in your home, storge love falters; when your friends are constantly insensitive to your deepest needs, phile love is fickle.
- Love does affect my feelings powerfully, but love is more than just a quiver in my liver! (In fact, if it's just a feeling, we are in deep trouble because feelings change so often!)

(1) ... but God says love is a matter of CHOICE!

- **AGAPE:** By far, the kind of love the Bible refers to most often is agape love. It has nothing to do with romance or natural affection or sentimentality. It is not dependent on physical attractiveness, personality, or even a harmonious atmosphere.
 - Agape love is a DECISION that commits itself to the well being of another, regardless of the REACTION of the one being loved.
 - We must have agape love in our lives as a SHIELD for the other kinds of love in our lives, or they will never become all they can be. When eros love is tempted to be unfaithful, when storge love is tempted to walk out and slam the door, when phile love is tempted to write someone off forever, agape love is the only thing that can help!
 - Agape love is not a love that we PRODUCE, but it is the love of God that He produces in us!

2. The world says love is UNCONTROLLABLE ...

- A lot of people use words like, "I'm in love, I feel giddy, my head's spinning, I'm weak in the knees." That sounds more like getting seasick than love struck!

- We've all heard people say, "I fell in love." It's like you're walking down the street one day, you trip and bang – you fall in love, you can't help it. When you say, "I fell in love," what you're really saying is, "It wasn't my fault, it just happened." The problem is that these people can easily turn around and say, "I fell OUT of love – it wasn't my fault, it just happened."

(2) ... but God says love is a matter of CONDUCT!

- John outlived all the other apostles, and thus had an incredible perspective on the church of the New Testament – he was around for the first seventy years of her history! After seeing the church's struggles and triumphs, he placed "love" in a place of utmost importance in the epistle of **1 John (NLT)**:

3:10 So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the Devil. Anyone who does not obey God's commands and does not love other Christians does not belong to God.

3:11 This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

3:14 If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

3:18 Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

3:23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

4:7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

4:12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.

4:16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

4:19 We love each other as a result of his loving us first.

- LOVE IS ABOUT OUR ACTIONS! You can talk until you're blue in the face, but your heart will always reveal itself in your actions.
- Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 13 for a moment, because that chapter tells us WHAT LOVE IS SUPPOSED TO ACT LIKE!

- The first seven verses of 1 Corinthians 13 show us SELFLESSNESS in nine distinct facets, which we know as the Fruit of the Spirit. That's what real love is – being selfless, not selfish. Let's look at just a couple of these characteristics of real love:

A. Love is patient

- Love is alive when it has TIME
- Love is dying when it is hurried
- Love is dead when it cannot wait
- Patience means I take the time to wait for someone else to change, to recover, to get motivated. Patience means I make allowance for someone's faults. That's the tough part of love.

B. Love is kind

- Love is alive when it CARES
- Love is dying when it forgets
- Love is dead when it ignores
- Kindness means the ability to care for each other in the practical details of everyday life. It knows how to turn the grand vows that you make in a wedding ceremony into doing little tasks for each other. Kindness means adapting and inconveniencing yourself.
- Greeting cards: "If I had an ice cream cone, I'd give you half. If I had six candies, you'd get three. If I had two apples, one would be yours. If I won the lottery, I'd send you a postcard from Tahiti." "Valentines Day, that one day of the year when we all like to hear these three little words -- Chocolate Isn't Fattening."
- One of the basic truths of life that most people have yet to discover is that human beings do not change their actions by first changing their feelings. Rather, the opposite is true – our feelings will change when we first change our actions!
- Newspaper columnist and minister George Crane tells of a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband. "I do not only want to get rid of him; I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has me." Dr. Crane suggested an ingenious plan. "Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really hurt him." With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. Will he ever be surprised!"

And she did it with enthusiasm. Acting “as if.” For two months she showed love, kindness, listening, giving, reinforcing, sharing. When she didn’t return, Crane called. “Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?” “Divorce!” she exclaimed. “Never! I discovered I really do love him.” Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promise as by often-repeated deeds.

- Our world has been staggered this week by the terrorist attacks on the United States, and our lives will literally never be the same. Max Lucado said yesterday, “People keep saying, ‘when things get back to normal,’ but maybe this IS normal in God’s eyes. For the past five days, we’ve actually been LOVING each other!”
- What if your life were to suddenly be shattered today? Look with me at these three snapshots of a tragedy:
 - What if you were FIVE FLOORS ABOVE where the plane struck the World Trade Center Tower, you saw the flames and knew that you had FIVE MINUTES to live. You have a cell phone – who do you need to make things right with?
 - What if you were FIVE BLOCKS AWAY from the tower and saw your office, your entire career, crumble into dust before your eyes? Are you sacrificing your family, your marriage and your relationship with God for things that don’t matter?
 - What if you were FIVE FLOORS BENEATH the tons of rubble that descended in an instant. Today you would be in eternity. Would you be saved or lost? God loves you, but you have to let Him in your life! **Do you have a hope?**

Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.