

**“MAY YOUR LOVE INCREASE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**May 7, 2017, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Galatians 5:22-25; I Thessalonians 3:11-13**

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, we undertake this morning to talk about you and the evidence of your power and presence in our lives. Enable me by your grace to speak faithfully of these things and enable us by your grace to hear and understand and be convicted by Word and Spirit to seek your fruit and cooperate with you in its growth in our lives. In Jesus name, Amen.

### **Introduction.**

Thank you, GEMS girls, for leading us in worship this morning and for sharing what you shared. Your theme for this year is *Love Overflows*. It is based on such a great verse that I made it the memory verse for all of us this month.

**I Thessalonians 3:12** (NIV) May the Lord make your love *increase and overflow* for each another and for everyone, just as ours does for you.

That verse inspired me to begin a sermon series on the *Fruit of the Holy Spirit*. I want to give the GEMS credit for this new series.

In Galatians 5 Paul writes:

**Galatians 5:24-25** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

We just spent several weeks reflecting on seven serious sins and how we can crucify our fleshly desires. Now we want to spend several weeks reflecting on the other side, on living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit.

**Romans 8:5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

### **Fruit of the Spirit.**

If you want to create something beautiful, what do you need to do it? Well it depends on what it is you want to create. If you want to create a beautiful painting you need a canvas and paint. If a sculpture, marble and chisels. For a symphony you will need music, instruments, musicians and a conductor.

What about if you want to create a beautiful life? What would you need? We would need materials to work with and God has given them to us through His Holy Spirit. A beautiful life

consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are the nine fruit of the Holy Spirit, the nine graces given to us for living a beautiful life. These materials for creating a beautiful life are described to us using the *metaphor of fruit*. They don't come from a factory or off a drawing board. They aren't the results of engineering or manufacturing, they don't come in a box, they are organic and living.

The fruit of the Spirit comes from the *Spirit*. And the Spirit dwells in those who belong to Jesus Christ. This fruit is a *consequence* of grace through our faith in Jesus, of our being redeemed and set free in Christ.

They are not called works, but fruit because they are not produced by us but produced in us. They are the result of the life of Christ in us by the Spirit.

When Paul commands us to live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit he is commanding us to do something, not in our own power, but in Someone else's power, by God's enabling grace. The Galatians were having trouble getting this concept.

**Galatians 3:2-5** Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ... 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

To have the fruit of the Spirit is not a call to being better and trying harder. This is not a self-help plan or nine steps to a better you. This is not a call to counter the works of the flesh with works of morality. Our sin is too serious to be overcome by our own efforts.

The *source* of the fruit is the Holy Spirit. If we lack patience, we won't make much progress if we focus on being more patient. We will make progress by first focusing on God and seeking Him earnestly, and focusing on the life of Christ in us.

Notice the fruit of the Spirit is *singular*, one fruit. There are many gifts of the Spirit but just one fruit. These nine graces of Christian character are to be viewed as a whole. They go together. He doesn't work joy without patience. We are not free to say six out of nine isn't too bad.

This is a picture of practical holiness. This is what godliness and Christlikeness looks like. This is what glorifying God looks like.

Fruit takes time, character takes time. Be patient, trust the work of the Holy Spirit. Seek and pray, work and wait, trust and obey. It is a long obedience in the same direction. It is the work of a lifetime.

Where Jesus is loved and trusted, there the Spirit is this is what you will see. The fruit will flourish in the soil of God's Word and in worship and prayer.

Some think love is not just one of the nine, but the one from which the other eight flow. Like light through a prism that refracts into seven colors, love through the prism of our soul refracts into these eight virtues, they are part of love just as the colors are a part of light.

### **Character of love.**

The Greeks had at least four different words for different kinds of love and they were the better for it. We use one word to talk about our girlfriend, our kids, our country, our sports team, pizza, chocolate and God. The distinctions between the kinds of love gets blurred.

The love we are talking about here is called agape love, love that is selfless. It is I Corinthians 13 love. This is love that seeks the highest good for another person.

It is a feeling of the mind as much as of the heart, and maybe even more so. This love is born of the will, not of the emotions. Love wills the good of another and then acts to do it.

That's why Scripture can command us to love, why Scripture even says love your enemies. It isn't talking about having warm, fuzzy feelings toward them. Love seeks the best for them even if they seek the worst for us.

This is the love of God and this love is from God. Consider the nature and character of God's love.

### ***The Love of God.***

God is love. God is the source of all love. God creates love, God defines love. Apart from God there is no love. We only know how to love because He first loved us.

Scripture lifts love to a supreme place. This is story of the Bible. The God of love, self-giving, self-sacrificing, seeking our best.

God so loved the world He sent His only Son.

Of faith, hope and love, love is called the greatest of all the Christian virtues.

**Colossians 3:14** Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Love stands at the head of the fruit of the Spirit as the inner disposition from which all the rest flow. It all starts here. God is love.

**God's love is steadfast**, relentless, faithful, constant, unchanging. It is unmerited, undeserved. While we were still sinners and had no love for God, He loved us.

God is rich in love and pours out love as a *gift*, to be received. It is always a gift.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

**Romans 5:5** God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

*God's love is concrete*, tangible. He came to earth in Jesus. His love has skin on, it acts, it does, it shows up. God doesn't love from a distance. His love is personal and intimate. It's real.

*God's love is compassionate* toward us as utterly lost sinners. We are like the shunned leper and God reaches out and actually touches us and heals our leprous hearts.

*God's love forgives much*. The greater our awareness of our sin, the greater our love for God.

*God's love is unlimited, unfathomable, boundless.*

Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky.

If we could modernize this hymn we might say if we could give every human being a keyboard to type the love of God, all the over 100 million computer servers on earth could not contain the infinite love of God.

Eternity will not be long enough to climb the heights of God's love or plumb the depths.

**Ephesians 3:17-19** ... the breadth and length and height and depth, of the love of Christ surpasses knowledge.

**I John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

This is the character of love. May we know the love of God so that we can respond in like measure, and love as He loves.

### **Obstacles to Love.**

We live in a consumer culture that has infiltrated our hearts and homes and churches. Everything is about us. The greatest obstacle to love is us, our self and our self-interest. We are wired to want, to get, to take, to receive. We use people as a means to our own ends.

I don't want to die to myself, I don't want to sacrifice for others, I don't want to give up what is precious or valuable to me, I don't want to give up my time or money or convenience. I don't want to have to suffer. I'm my biggest enemy to love and to loving.

In order for love to increase in me, I have to decrease. Love is about giving, about being others oriented.

It's easy to bring our consumer culture to church. What happens when church becomes about self-interest, "what's in it for me, what am I getting out of it." Rather ask, "what has God called me to be here, what has God gifted me to do here, how does He want me to love others in this context?"

### **Cultivating Love.**

How do we cultivate love in a consumer culture, and out of the sinful selfishness of our hearts?

A tended garden is more productive and fruitful than an untended one. If we tend to the fruit of love, we will find it growing in our life. As we rely on the Spirit and seek Him, He will use means to cultivate love in us.

*Love pays attention to others.* Some of us are better at this than others. For some it is almost second nature, for others it must be worked at.

Think about how much time a day we devote to ourselves, our concerns, our needs, our plans, and how much we devote to others.

*Love doesn't ignore the needs of others.* We say we love God, but how is our love for others?

**I John 3:17** If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Do you love others only after doing a little cost-benefit analysis in your head? Weighing the benefits to you verses the sacrifices?

If you say you love God, the proof of it will be seen in how you love your brother. We love God by loving our neighbor. If we don't love our neighbor, we don't love God.

*Love takes the initiative.* It goes first.

*Love forgives wrong done to it.*

*Love is supernatural,* and bears the marks of not being of this world but from beyond this world, from God and like God.

*Love grows.* It's hard to see in ourselves. The best test is to ask someone close to you. Just as living plants are not static, but dynamic, growing, so love must grow.

No couple when they marry has enough love for each other to sustain their marriage, it must continue to grow. Love must be cultivated, nurtured, protected, increased.

In Scripture love is never static, it is growing and increasing.

**I Thessalonians 3:11-13** May the Lord make you *increase and abound in love* for one another.

**Philippians 1:9** It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

Do you want to be a more loving person? Do you want to get along better with difficult people? Do you want to improve your relationships with those around you and those you care about?

Do what Paul did, pray for it. Pray that God will make your love increase.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to do a transforming work in you, to reveal and remove the obstacles, to increase your faith in Jesus which in turn will increase your love for God and others.

Consider how you can go out into this week to grow in love and show love.

Consider how God has made us into a church family and how we can love each other better in our words and actions.

Consider how you can love someone who is lost. Love reaches out.

This fruit is absolutely indispensable for showing the world that God is real, that Jesus came to earth, that we are His followers.

Atheists should not be able to deny there is a God if they see Christians and their love. They will know we are Christians by our love, they will know that we have been with Jesus by our love. We are living proof that there is a God and that He has come to earth. We make the invisible God visible. The world is watching, and by love they will know.

Does our character here make the Gospel believable?

Remember that story about Peter and John being taken before the Sanhedrin and questioned.

**Acts 4:13** When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Over the next nine weeks pray with me that we may experience in every increasing measure the fruit that leads to a truly beautiful and well-lived life. May others see the fruit and know we have been with Jesus.

Thank you, GEMS girls. May you increase in love and may you set an example for us all.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill us with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.