

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF - Week #2

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

PATTI

Last week we introduced this new Bible Study by contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. The flesh is another way of talking about our old self-centered nature, but the Holy Spirit empowers us to live out of our new nature that was given to us at baptism... a new Christ-centered nature that reflects the image of God.

In many ways, learning to live beyond yourself is the task of discipleship and the goal of the Christian life.

But the problem, as we discovered last week, is that these two natures, flesh and Spirit, are always AT WAR with each other. So the one you feed will be the one that controls your thoughts and actions.

With that as background, we began to explore the fruit or the visible characteristics of the new nature in Christ, which reflect the character of God. We began with LOVE, because Paul insists that love is the greatest gift and fruit that the Holy Spirit grows in us.

1 Corinthians 13 is often called the love chapter and we began to explore these verses, ending last week in the middle of **verse 4**, which defines love by listing two things that it is (patient and kind), and now as we'll see – seven things that love ISN'T.

First, **Love does not envy.**

Envy or jealousy implies being DISPLEASED with the success of others.

Yet true love DESIRES their success.

So what's the cure for a bad case of envy?
 One surefire home remedy is to pray sincerely
 for the person of whom you are jealous.
 Because, as one of our pastor friends says,
 "You care about what you pray about."
 And jealousy simply can't coexist in a heart
 that is demonstrating love through prayer.

JEFF

Second, **Love does not boast.**
 The root word for "boast" in the biblical Greek
 is very descriptive and comes close to our
 English word, "WINDBAG".
 Love is not full of hot air.
 It is not big-headed, but big-hearted.

This means the more loving you become,
 the less boasting you need to do.
 And the greater your spiritual gifts, the less
 you will be prone to brag about them.

After all, whatever gifts you have
 were given to you by God.
 So when we brag, it is always done from a
 place of spiritual immaturity and insecurity.
 Or to state it positively, true humility is
 a mark of maturity.

Third, **Love is not proud.**
 A better translation might be ARROGANT.
 Arrogance is always grasping for power.
 This is more serious than bragging, which is
 only grasping for praise.

Prideful, arrogant people often push themselves
 into leadership, using others as stepping-stones.
 And they always consider themselves exempt
 from the requirements that apply to others.

Pride disrespects and disdains others, while
 God calls us to serve them and be
 gracious toward them.

PATTI**v. 5**

The fourth negative illustration that Paul uses is that

Love does not dishonor others (it is not rude).

There are some Christians who seem to take delight in being blunt, justifying it on the grounds of honesty. They'll say, "I'm just telling it like it is."

But love doesn't always tell it like it is.

Love doesn't always verbalize each and every thought, particularly if those thoughts don't build others up.

Fifth, **Love is not self-seeking.**

It's really the opposite of insisting on your own rights.

Needless to say, this is a rare quality these days.

Ours is a society where self-seeking is not only tolerated, but encouraged.

In fact, you can go to almost any bookstore and pick up titles like,

Winning Through Intimidation and *Looking Out for Number One* and even *Creative Aggression*.

But a self-absorbed, narcissistic person can't act in love, because love is not possessive or demanding. It's not stubborn, or dominating.

Love listens more than it talks. It is always willing to defer to others.

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Sixth, **Love is not easily angered.**

It isn't given to emotional outbursts.

Or exasperated by petty annoyances.

It refuses to let someone else get under its skin. This is the one I

Question: When someone provokes you, whose fault is it really?

Can you ever legitimately say,
 “So and so made me angry?”
 We always get to CHOOSE how
 we will respond.

We don't have to get irritated, and if
 we're walking by the Spirit, we won't.
 Because we'll be demonstrating love instead.

One English version of the Bible translates
 the phrase this way – “Love is not touchy.”
 Do you know people who are so quick to
 take offense that you have to handle them
 with kid gloves?

Usually this is because people are trying to be
 righteous or right in themselves rather than
 trusting that Christ has made them righteous.
 You try to avoid talking with them and when you can't
 you measure every word with precision,
 lest they be offended somehow.

But still the person seizes upon something
 and twists it to make you look bad.
 That kind of person knows nothing of
 agape love, for divine love is not touchy.

PATTI

The seventh thing Paul says negatively about love is that
 Love keeps no record of wrongs.
 Paul uses the ancient word here for BOOKKEEPING.
 Love doesn't keep a ledger of offenses.
 It doesn't write down each injury incurred and
 keep the account open to be settled someday.

Do you know anyone who is an accomplished bookkeeper
 with regard to injuries they've sustained?
 Who are you keeping a book on?
 Are there some ledgers you need to
 burn tonight before you go to bed?

v. 6

Eighth, **Love does not delight in evil.**

One of the reasons I dislike watching the news is that the bulk of the stories concern people's misfortunes and misdeeds.

There's something in our old human nature that causes our attention to be drawn to murder trials, FBI probes, natural disasters, and other human tragedies.

But love is not like that.

Love takes no joy in evil of any kind.

It takes no malicious pleasure when it hears about the inadequacies, mistakes, and sins of someone else.

Love is righteous.

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Now, after 8 seriously sober negatives, come 5 encouraging positives:

First **Love rejoices with the truth.**

When I was in seminary, I studied an ethical system that author Joseph Fletcher labeled, "Situation Ethics."

Fletcher taught that any action – whether lying, adultery, or even murder – can be absolutely moral if it is done in love.

But if an action doesn't conform to the truth of God's Word, it can't be done in love.

Truth and love go together like a hand in a glove, in the sense that truth must make our love discriminating, and love must make our truth compassionate and forgiving.

If our actions are in accord with agape love, we will always welcome the bible's truth, and not resist it.

v. 7

Second, **Love always protects.**

Think of a cover that you would put on something

in order to protect it, like a roof that covers your home and protects it from the elements.

1 Peter 4:8 says that “love covers a multitude of sins,” which is precisely the meaning here. Love protects others people. It doesn’t broadcast bad news. It goes the second mile to protect another’s reputation.

There are two really relevant applications here.

1) Love doesn’t nitpick
It doesn’t point out every flaw.
Please be careful if you are with your spouse right now NOT to glance sideways...

2) Love doesn’t criticize in public..
This is likely Paul’s primary meaning.
That love doesn’t air it’s dirty laundry for the entire world to see.

That’s why I cringe whenever I hear someone criticizing their spouse in public.
It makes me wonder what happens in private.
And I don’t know about you, but there are plenty of times in my life when I’ve been sorry that I opened my mouth, but there has rarely been a time I’ve been sorry that I kept silent.

PATTI

Third, **Love always trusts.**
It’s always ready to allow for extenuating circumstances, always ready to give the other person the benefit of the doubt and to put the best construction on their motives and behavior.

Many of us have developed a certain DISTRUST of people because of our negative experiences, We’ve heard stories about how a person who stopped to help someone was robbed or even killed for their kindness.

We've been warned never to loan money to someone without a legal document guaranteeing repayment, even if the other person is a believer.

But there are worse things than gullibility... namely suspicion and mistrust.

It is also good to remember that even in a court of law an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Love says, "I'm willing to wait for the evidence to come in before making a judgment, and in the meantime, I'll give the benefit of the doubt as long as there's no reason not to."

Some of us treat our loved ones nearly the opposite way. "Guilty until proven innocent."

But people tend to become what we believe them to be. They either live up to or down to your expectations. If you treat a person as trustworthy, they will likely strive to prove themselves worthy of trust.

If you tell a child, "Take a big swing, you can hit that ball," they'll go to the plate and swing like Babe Ruth.

That's what Jesus did.

To a vacillating Simon he said, "You are Peter, the Rock."

To a prostitute he said, "Your sins are forgiven."

To a woman caught in adultery he said, "Go and sin no more."

It is the simple power of believing and proclaiming the best about people.

JEFF

Fourth, **love always hopes.**

There are times when you face situations so difficult that faith is not possible.

You would gladly give another person the benefit of the doubt, but there is none to give.

Paul isn't advocating an unreasoned optimism here that fails to take account of reality,

nor is he teaching the power of positive thinking.

He's simply suggesting that love refuses to accept failure as something that's final, either in one's self or in someone else.

In other words, love never gives up on people, because God never gives up on us! He's in the business of turning absolute failures into spiritual giants.

He can do it with you or your child. He can do it with your mom or dad, or your grandchild, or the neighbor down the street, or the person in the pew across from you.

Of course, "always hoping" doesn't mean we just sit back and watch God do His thing. It means we get actively involved in the process, giving prayer and encouragement as He molds the future according to His perfect plan.

Love hopes and expect the best. It never loses faith in people no matter their shortcomings.

Fifth, **Love always perseveres.**

This is a military term that means to hold a position at all costs, even to death. Whatever it takes. The battle may be lost, but the soldier keeps on standing their ground, protecting wounded comrades, and fighting to the end.

Love never gives up on anyone. It won't stop, even in the face of rejection.

PATTI

The reality is that none of us can have a totally happy conscience after reading through these fifteen expressions of love.

But this love list defines God's gift of Himself to us in Jesus. Go back through these verses again and everywhere you find the word "love" substitute the name, "Jesus". If you do that, all these statements will still be true. Because they are part of Christ's character...

Because the kind of love being described in 1 Cor. 13 has its source in God, and as we look at each of the phrases, it becomes obvious that we are defining a lifestyle that is beyond our human ability to attain.

It's impossible unless we ABIDE in Christ and rely on the Holy Spirit to live His supernatural love in and through us.

Love is greater than any spiritual gift.
It is expressed in supernatural responses.
And now we see in verse 8 that...

v. 8

Love is eternal.

All the other gifts are temporary in nature.
The manifestations of the Spirit and the ministry gifts of the Holy Spirit will not be necessary in heaven.

But the fruit of the Spirit, including love, will endure forever.
So how will you grow in your love for others?
You can't do it apart from a vibrant relationship with God.

Luke 11:13 says,

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Let's pray:

Father, we pray for the fullness of your Spirit in our lives. Because if we are not filled with your Holy Spirit, we will be filled with a spirit of anger or bitterness or regret or anxiety. So Father, fill us over and over again. Take the words we have studied tonight and draw our attention to situations this week where we'll have opportunity to practice these qualities that you are building into lives. Empower us for this in Jesus' name.
Amen.