

A dark blue vertical bar runs down the left side of the page. A blue arrow points to the right, overlapping the vertical bar and pointing towards the title.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Christian Love

Several thin, curved lines in shades of blue and grey originate from the bottom left corner and sweep upwards and to the right, creating a sense of movement and growth.

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OCTOBER 16, 2021

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

I. Background

a. The unity of the fruit

- i. Paul wrote in Romans 6:22 that our fruit is unto holiness. And by way of reminder, James Boyce wrote that, "Holiness is, however, not a distinctive attribute, but rather the combination of all the moral attributes. We may suppose a being in whom there may be love without justice, or truth, or any one of these to the exclusion of the other two; but no being can be holy who does not combine in himself all of these, and all other moral perfections.... It is evident, therefore, that holiness is the sum of all excellence and the combination of all the attributes which constitute perfection of character" (James Boyce, Abstract of ST, 92-93). Thus our fruit is unto the unity of all moral attributes – holiness is all-in-one simple.
- ii. By way of analogy, white light can be refracted into the colors of the spectrum as the white light of the sun is refracted by the water in the clouds into the rainbow. As white is a marvelous unity of the colors of the rainbow, so the fruit unto holiness is the unity of all the individual fruits in just the right measure and proportion. Not enough blue and not enough red in the spectrum will yield a ugly greenish off white tint, and likewise lacking joy or peace from the fruits of the Spirit and the fruit is no longer unto holiness but unto something else, unto a false holiness.

b. The framework of the fruit

- i. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9). I will take these three, (goodness, righteousness, and truth) as the dimensions in which we can evaluate and analyze the individual fruits. As colors can be decomposed into various admixtures of the three primary colors, so the idea is that the fruits of the Spirit are aligned along the three dimensions of goodness, righteousness and truth.
- ii. These three dimensions in which the fruit is expressed correspond to the three faculties of man: the intellectual, the affections and the will. Righteousness is external and corresponds to the will, goodness is internal and corresponds to the affections, and truth is intellectual. Thus, the fruition of the Spirit or the production of fruit by the Spirit is in us to restore the image of God in all its fullness and proceeds in the 3 principal directions of the image of God in man.
- iii. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in the mind, the affections and the will. The mind must be renewed and this produces a transformation in the person (Rom 12:1). The affections must be transferred from earthly things to heavenly things (Col 3:2). And the change of the affections must cause the will to be brought into conformance with the commands of the Lord who said, if you love me keep my commandments (John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6).

c. The individual fruit

- i. Paul lists nine individual fruits in Galatians 5:22-23. This study will only consider the first fruit. So, let's consider the spiritual fruit of Christian love.

II. Development

- a. What is Love? That is a simple enough question to ask, right? but it is not as easy to answer as it is to ask. Wikipedia begins its article on love with a smorgasbord ideas.
 - i. Love encompasses a range of strong and positive emotional and mental states, from the most sublime virtue or good, the deepest interpersonal affection, to the simplest pleasure. An example of this range of meanings is that the love of a mother differs from the love of a spouse, which differs from the love of food. Most commonly, love refers to a feeling of a strong attraction and emotional attachment. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love>)
 - ii. This is helpful in showing the range of ideas associated with the term, love, which is very broad. We most often, or maybe even exclusively, think of love as a feeling or an emotion. The concept of love applies to self, food, pets, brothers and sisters, to spouse and to child, to the stranger and to God – there is self-love, food-love, pet-love, brotherly love, spousal love, child-love and God-love, each of which can be placed on a spectrum of sorts which runs from selfish love to selfless love, from what C.S. Lewis calls “need-love” to “gift-love”.
- b. The Love Spectrum – three Greek words
 - i. Eros: Selfish need-love
 - 1. Our own cultural view of love is predominantly that of eros. It is the subject of countless popular songs, running the whole gamut of romance experience from the lofty “I Will Always Love You” to that other extreme of “Love Stinks.” This is the love in which people are in when they are in love. The idea of an “unrequited love” highlights the neediness of this kind of love. If something wasn't being sought for oneself, then why is there any concern about being unrequited?
 - 2. This need-love isn't necessarily sinful. The newborn babe cries out for its mother because this is all that a baby can do. A baby is a bundle of needs and so need-love is natural to us from our first moments. There may be sin involved in this, as some babies are more demanding than others.
 - a. I think we can safely assume that Jesus was the best baby ever of whom, not having a sin nature, it could be said, “I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly” (Psalm 22:10).
 - b. But the wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies (Psalm 58:3). We all went astray from the womb, crying to get the things we wanted for ourselves, even making our situation out to be very terrible beyond words!
 - 3. In its later and higher forms, eros can mimic the higher forms of love by tender forms of expression and praise of the beloved. In the poem, Love's Philosophy by Percy Bysshe Shelley, he waxes eloquent with lofty

sentiments about the realm of nature in which rivers run to the ocean and the sky touches the sea, yet ends with the need-love on the surface, "What is all this sweet work worth if thou kiss not me?"

4. The Song of Solomon, that great Song of Songs, has some aspects of a blushing love song, but it is altogether imbued with holiness, and expressive of the holy love of Christ for the Church in a way which is uniquely condescending to a romantic love between a man and a woman. We must note that the self-love of the Bride leads to a loss of fellowship with the Beloved and a period of correction follows in which the Bride is harried, beaten and ridiculed (Song 5:1-9). Though this is expressed in the form of eros, the Song is of a far loftier love, as I will try to show in a few minutes.
- ii. Philia – Sharing, community quid-pro-quo love
1. The term philia also has a wide range of compound forms from the most broad to express a love for all mankind, such as in the word philanthropy, which is the promotion of the welfare of people generally, given that we are all the children of Adam and children of Noah, and all members of the fallen human race. Nowadays, philanthropy generally involves the giving of large donations in exchange for having things named in one's honor.
 2. There is a compound form of this word in the name of our nearest big city, Philadelphia, which as everyone knows means brotherly love. But what is brotherly love? Brotherly love is the bond of affection and care among the members of a tight-knit group, such as our natural families and the church. We are all part of one body, says the Apostle, and no part of the body ever hated another part. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it (Eph 5:29) so each part of the body ought to have that same mutual affection for one another.
 - a. Though we ought to have mutual affection in the family, yet animosity is not uncommon among natural families, even as our Lord's brothers and sisters had animosity towards him before the resurrection, as we read in the John 7:3-4.
 - b. But we must grieve over animosity in the church. Paul commands us to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10). And Peter wrote, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22).
 3. Brotherly love is wonderful in principle but difficult in practice, as everyone will readily admit! As the Psalmist says, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Psalm 133:1) and yet sin can easily creep in and bring division and a root of bitterness can spring up and defile many. How difficult it is, brothers and sisters, to

dwell in unity unless there is a higher and a deeper love than brotherly love!

4. We read in Acts 15, that the contention was so sharp between [Paul and Barnabas], that they departed asunder one from the other: (Acts 15:39). Oh how a little leaven can leaven the whole lump!
 5. Peter urges us to add, “to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (2 Peter 1:7). The same Greek word, philadelphia, is here translated “brotherly kindness” but everywhere else as “brotherly love.” Perhaps the translators thought it was confusing to say “add love to brotherly love”, as if there was no love in brotherly love and it needed to be added. But, there is a sense in which that can be the case, and so Scripture commands us to must make this addition and to incorporate this higher form of love with our brotherly love. It is commanded in Hebrews 13:1, that “brotherly love must continue” and yet small aggravations and irritations overlooked for months or years among people in close community may accumulate until brotherly love is strained to the breaking point. A failure to add this higher form of love to our philadelphia may mean that brotherly love will not continue. There are untold stories of grief from countless families and churches in which brotherly love has been breached by the building of a wall of small grievances; as it may be built up brick by brick over months or years. Finally, though, separation occurs and the breach can be very difficult to heal.
 6. So we must, as Peter commands us, add love to brotherly love. That is, in terms of our adorable Greek words, we must add **ἀγάπη** to our **φιλαδελφία**.
- iii. Agape – Selfless love
1. The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament says, “though it would be going too far to say that this important Biblical word was *formed within the bosom of revealed religion*, it is remarkable that there have been only three supposed instances of its use in *profane* Greek, two of which are now read otherwise and the third is doubtful.” But, then, one must wonder, how is it going too far to say that the word *agape* was formed within the bosom of revealed religion if the word is used nowhere else but in the Scriptures?
 2. Though the word **ἀγάπη** is used 14 times in the Greek translation of the OT, yet it makes its grand appearance in the LXX in the Song of Solomon which accounts for 10 of the 14 uses. From 2:4, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” A commentator says, “Well knowing that she, the poor and sunburnt maiden, does not properly belong to such a place, and would rather escape away from it, he relieves her from her fear and bashfulness, for he covers her with his fear-inspiring, awful, and thus surely protecting, banner; and this

banner, which he waves over her, and under which she is well concealed, is "love." [6]

3. Many waters cannot quench agape love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for agape love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised. (Song of Songs 8:7)
 4. That is, this is not a selfish love but a giving love. It cannot be purchased or obtained with any form of quid pro quo – it is utterly free, utterly above the natural realm.
 5. Where do we see this agape love most greatly displayed?
 - a. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)
 - b. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)
 - c. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)
 - d. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)
- c. The Distinctive Nature of Christian Love
- i. Scripture tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). I know you've heard this many times. I ask you to consider it again, as it were, for the first time. For a moment, think how staggering this concept is – that the Creator of the universe is love. Truly when we look around at the universe, we see marvelous and majestic things. The stars are incredibly numerous and varied and yet, don't they seem cold and distant and separated by vast, forbidding distances? We look around at this planet see an astonishing variety of interdependent ecosystems in harmonious arrangement. And yet, don't we see nature red in tooth and claw, that creatures live by the death of other creatures? And don't we see the history of tragedy writ large in violent upheavals, earthquakes, floods and volcanoes? Yes, the universe declares the glory of God, the power of God, the majesty of God and much of the wisdom of God. We see that He sends rain on the just and the unjust and yet we dare not evaluate the Creator in the light of the fallen creation. Were we to do this by some form of cosmological argument, beginning with the existence of this fallen world, and arguing backwards to the existence of God, we would be projecting the fallen reality back into the nature of the God and proving the existence of some other God, not the God of the Bible.
 - ii. And so the only way to be able to comprehend what the Bible means when it says, "God is love," is to start with the Bible and continue with the Bible all along the way. We read that God created all things perfectly good, that His loving care was evident in every single aspect of creation. There was no death until Adam sinned – death entered the world through Adam's sin (Rom 5:12) – and in the beginning there was no "nature red in tooth and claw." The lion ate straw like the ox. And yet, still we must realize that Adam in his state of innocence would have not been able comprehend that "God is love". Surely Adam knew the love

of God by creation, providence and personal relation – yet it is one thing to say that “God is loving” or “God is the kind of God who loves” and it is a more profound thing to say that “God is love” or “God, in His incomprehensible nature, is that boundless and eternal spring of holy love.”

- iii. Love is relational, it requires a subject and an object. While men can be said to have love, as Paul prays that “your love may abound yet more and more”, yet having love is quite another thing from being love.
 - 1. Consider the Islamic concept of God: a singular, unitary, solitary, eternal being. How could it be said of such a being that Allah is love? A singular, solitary being has no proper internal or external relations and so such a solitary being could only be conceived to have a “need love” such as a baby would have for its mother. But that would establish a dependence of the Creator on the creation. So-called Allah needed to create in order to have a thing to love and so that god must be thought as in some sense subordinate to the creation – this is a very serious problem with the coherence of all unitarian theology. As Muslims and other unitarians reject the doctrine of the Trinity as incoherent, quite the opposite is the case. Though we cannot fully comprehend God’s triune nature, we must believe it in order to explain everything else. As Augustine was fond of saying, “crede ut intellegas” – “believe and you will understand.”
 - 2. Scripture says that “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (John 3:35). And Jesus said, “that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:31). And the Holy Spirit is that infinite, eternal bond of love – He is the Spirit of the Father (Mat 10:20) and the Spirit of the Son (Rom 8:6). “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (John 3:34).
 - 3. The perfect union of Father and Son in the eternal Holy Spirit is the highest and most glorious expression of love. There is no external dependency (or hint of “need love”) but rather an eternal, blessed fellowship in perfect unity, holy and simplicity. And this Biblical conception of God makes it easy to understand the truth of the idea that God is love, though we comprehend not the fullest depths of it.
 - iv. We must also consider love in terms of humility. Humility is not so much a fruit of the Spirit as the emptiness of the soul into which the Spirit of God pours Himself to the production of the fruit. There can be no fulness of the Spirit where there is no death to self. Where the heart is not laid low in the dust before the Lord, the Lord stands afar off. For “thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). And where God is, there is the love of God poured into the heart, for God is love.
- d. Analysis
 - i. Goodness
 - 1. There is none good but God and by that we understand that God is the fountain of all good. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the

Father of Lights. God is that “Fountain of Living Waters” (Jer 17:13) and so it is in the essential nature of God to be that fountain of holy blessing, the source of all good. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

2. When Paul wrote that “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19), he wrote on the basis of his knowledge of God’s boundless goodness as the fountain of life. God’s goodness is an abundance of riches in glory and these are mediated to us by Christ Jesus, the Son of His Love. He is the ultimate goodness – none is good but God alone – and our God is love.
3. Goodness then is related to love as fountain is to stream. Love is the overflow of goodness from one to another.
4. As goodness is a fountain overflowing, so love is that goodness in motion, goodness in motion toward a particular end, to satisfy some lack or need or want, or simply for the delight of the beloved –
 - a. When Jesus said, “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Luke 6:27) we understand by the parallelism that loving our enemies means doing good to them.
 - b. And so, in general, loving is doing good. Love that says “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:16) Unless the good overflows its container so as to flow from us to them to supply the want, then love has not been manifested.
 - c. Micah tells us that God “hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8) And this explicitly tells us that love is active – love is doing good, doing justly and loving mercy, and in such a way as to walk in humility with God.
5. In Acts 10, Peter says that “Jesus went around doing good” (Acts 10:38) and so Paul commands us saying, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all [men], especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

ii. Righteousness

1. The relationship of love and righteousness is also a very helpful dimension. In the eyes of the world, there is no positive association between love and righteousness. According to the popular idea, love is a feeling that mysteriously comes upon you and fills you with desire for some object. People imagine themselves shot by Cupid’s arrow and thereafter quite helplessly bound over to desire for the object of desire. And these feelings of desire, commonly called love, may be and most probably are, contrary to righteousness.

2. On one occasion, a man came up to Jesus and asked him, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). This is a fascinating assertion – that all the law and the prophets, that is, the entire moral law of personal righteousness expressed in the Ten Commandments and applied with rigor to every aspect of the life by the prophets – all of that written code of moral law is summed up in the two commandments of AGAPE love to God and AGAPE love to neighbor.
3. Paul wrote that “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if [there be] any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:9-10).
 - a. Here Paul considers the law in its negative aspect, the “thou shalt not” commands, by saying that love does no wrong to his neighbor therefore the commands are all fulfilled by acting in love.
 - b. But AGAPE love does and will go beyond the bare negative prohibition to do no harm because its nature is to overflow as a fountain into a stream of goodness to become a blessing by providing for the wants (spiritual and physical) that abound on every hand.

iii. Truth

1. Having come to consider the dimension of truth, we may again be at somewhat of a loss to think of the relation between love and truth. The worldly relation to love and truth extends no further than to “she loves me”, “she loves me not”, etc. True love is an important idea but is commonly degraded – the TL scraped into the bark of 10K trees has lasted far longer than the romantic hand that recorded them there. So, what is the relationship of truth and love?
2. Paul wrote that love “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (1 Corinthians 13:6) and exhorted us to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).
3. Nevertheless, in the midst of the vast cultural revolution dumpster fire of the 1960s, a man named Joseph Fletcher dropped a gasoline bomb, adding much fuel to the fire when he published his infamous book, Situation Ethics. Published in 1966, it introduced a so-called new morality which was rather to turn ethics on its head and to

fundamentally substitute the idea that “love is God” in place of the true saying that “God is love.”

- a. Fletcher said that “An action someone makes should be judged according to the love influenced in it, so the user must always ask: what is the most loving thing to do?” He rejected all revealed norms or laws but the one command – to love God in the neighbor. [4]
- b. Fletcher’s situation ethics focuses on the ends and consequences of actions; he then justifies actions according to whether they are effective and efficient means in bringing about those ends and consequences. By contrast, Christian ethics holds that the ends and effects of action can only justify some means – those means which pass an independent moral audit or inspection.
- c. That is, if as Situation Ethics makes out, “love is God”, then the end justifies all kinds of means. If a man was broke and his son was sick and needed medicine, and he stole money to get the medicine, then did he do good? Fletcher would say that the love he showed to his son justified the theft. To Fletcher, love is disconnected from righteousness and in certain situations he argued that it was necessary to set aside the moral law to satisfy the law of love.
- d. But, if “God is love,” as the Scripture declares, then we must submit each means to an independent moral audit or inspection – Paul rejects the idea that we should do evil that good may come (Romans 3:8).
- e. The same Scripture which says “thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15) also says “thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13). Scripture also says that God will make a way of escape. The man who stole to get money for medicine for his son did not trust himself and his situation to God --
 - i. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it]. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- f. This brings us to the relationship of love and truth. As goodness is the overflowing fountain and love the flowing stream, so the path of the stream must be in accordance with righteousness and truth – love can be somewhat blind and so needs the governance of the truth in order to be directed in the paths of righteousness.
- g. It is not hard at all to convince oneself that a certain course of action is justified because it involves a small sin and a large

benefit – but this is not the way of holiness but the broad way that leads to destruction. Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope;

4. We know full well that there are many ethical dilemmas and conflicts that can arise, or maybe it would be more correct to say that we can perceive there to be ethical conflicts when in reality there is a way that God makes through the difficulties, as the Israelites were boxed in on every side, yet the Lord opened the way for them to pass through on dry land. So, we are promised that God will make a way when things seem too knotty and thorny for us to resolve. God's providence can overrule our ethical dilemmas and he has promised to do so, but we must look to Him and wait upon Him and that requires loving Him with all our heart and all our mind and all our strength –
5. So a true love of neighbor must ultimately be governed by a true love to God. Since God is truth, righteousness and goodness, a perfect unity in holiness, if we love God wholly and above all things, then our love to our neighbor will be a holy love and then we will choose rather to suffer than to do evil that good may come.

III. Humility and Love

- a. I want to bring this to a close with a few words about the relationship of love and humility. If we let our love to God govern our love to man, then we must have a true love to God. And a true love for God must be a humble love because the God we love is infinitely greater than ourselves. We stand as infinitesimally small and utterly insignificant specks before the incomprehensibly glorious Holy One. My love beholds the object of its love and stands in love relation to that infinite, eternal, sum of all good – and shall I compare myself to my fellow specks? Is one speck better than another speck? Nothing is nothing all around and each stands in relation to the infinite, eternal God. For one nothingness to say to another nothingness that he is the greater – what could be more laughable to the Holy One? Jonathan Edwards said, “We are little, despicable creatures, even worms of the dust, and we should feel that we are as nothing, and less than nothing, in comparison with the Majesty of heaven and earth.” [1]
- b. Christian love, agape love is a humble love: Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; [love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [Agape] love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
- c. Therefore, in order to exercise Christian love, we must do good to all men, and especially to the household of faith. We must love those who persecute us and do good to them. To do good to all men requires us to get involved in outreach efforts. We must do good to our brothers and sisters – Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given to a brother in His name was, as it were, done unto Him. As David would not give to the Lord what cost him nothing, so true agape love can be costly.
- d. But even if we give all our goods to give our bodies over to the most cruel torture, yet have not this agape love, it has no value whatsoever. In the Old Covenant, the

commandment to love our neighbor was in relation to our love for ourselves. But now our motivation is that Christ died for us, as He said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13). And that Apostle whom Jesus loved wrote "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

- e. Only by God graciously revealing Himself as awesome, majestic, sovereign AND loving can God humble a man before Him such that this kind of selfless, agape love, as selfless as laying down one's life for his brethren, can exist in the heart of a man.
- f. This is most definitely a gracious work of the Spirit but it must be earnestly sought with tears and strong crying unto God through Christ, whose mind we must have to put on such humility (Phil 2:5).

References

1. Charity and its Fruits, Jonathan Edwards, 1738.
2. Christian Love, Hugh Binning, 1653.
3. The Four Loves, C.S. Lewis, 1960.
4. Situation Ethics, Joseph Fletcher, 1966.
5. Franz. Keil & Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament (Song of Solomon 2:4).