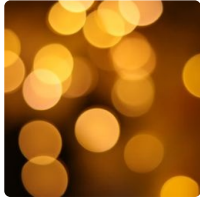


OpenTheo

First, Love



Charisma and Character - Steve Gregg

In this insightful message, Steve Gregg talks about the importance of the Holy Spirit and the role it plays in a Christian's life. While acknowledging the reality of suffering and pain, Gregg emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's transformation, which is evidenced by a changed character and the fruit of the Spirit. He argues that love is the principal thing desired in a Christian's life, and that it is greater than knowledge and all other gifts. In addition, Gregg stresses the importance of obedience to Christ as the measure of spiritual maturity.

Transcript

If you had been in the ordinary, average evangelical church 30-something years ago, it's very probable that you would not have heard very much there about the Holy Spirit. Not because the evangelical churches didn't believe in the Holy Spirit. I think evangelicals have always believed in the Holy Spirit.

But outside of the Pentecostal churches in those days, there was not, generally speaking, an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. In fact, devotional writers, Christian writers who wrote books back in the 60s and before, often commented on what they considered to be an unjustifiable dearth of focus and emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in the believer. Well, that certainly turned around, around the late 60s and early 70s, when the charismatic movement began to arise and become prominent in the evangelical denominations.

The phenomena of the Holy Spirit that is characteristic of the charismatic movement was always available in the Pentecostal churches, but what happened in the late 60s and early 70s was the spilling over of what was typically considered the Pentecostal phenomenon into the non-Pentecostal denominations. And as a result of that, many of the evangelical denominations began to have churches and leaders that began to emphasize the working of the Holy Spirit. And since that time, it would appear to me, in the past 30 years or so, there's not been any shortage of emphasis on the Holy Spirit in evangelical circles.

There's been an abundance of books about the work of the Holy Spirit. There's been

much discussion in churches. Even non-charismatic churches have felt the need to address the issue of the Holy Spirit since there's a general hunger to know more on the part of Christians.

Because, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit is that which makes Christianity something different than just another religion, really. Maybe that's too general a statement. There are other things that make Christianity different than just another religion, but certainly the dynamic power of the Christian faith and of the Christian walk, the impartation of a new specie of life to the believer, which is distinctive of Christianity.

All other religions basically just give the believers a new set of beliefs, a new ethical code, or something like that. And Christianity gives us those things, too. But the distinctive of the Christian faith is that it imparts to us more than a new set of beliefs and a new ethical code.

It imparts to us a new specie of life. We're born again by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us.

And because He is there, we have a new life. Not just a new life as someone might metaphorically speak of having a new life when they've turned over a new leaf, but rather a new life. An invader has come in and taken charge and imbued us with a new kind of existence.

And that invader is the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit in the life, there is no real Christianity. There may be Christian belief, there may be orthodoxy, but there's not really Christianity.

Because Christianity is knowing God through a personal relationship, which is brought to us through the rebirth accomplished by the Holy Spirit when He takes up residence in our lives. Now, I believe that all evangelicals have always agreed with what I just said. But as I said, until about 30 years ago, this was not discussed as much as it has been in the past 30 years.

It was not the focus of evangelical teaching to the extent that it is now. However, where the Holy Spirit's work has become the focus in evangelical teaching, many times it has been in the charismatic circles. There is emphasis outside of charismatic circles, too.

But when we think of churches that emphasize the Holy Spirit, we probably... What first comes to mind are what we call charismatic churches. And what we usually think of as being the characteristic of a church that emphasizes the Spirit is maybe a livelier form of worship than was known in the older traditional churches, and often an openness to the spiritual gifts. That there's sort of a more emotionally uplifting experience in many cases in some of these churches.

But probably the thing that many people in the modern churches that emphasize the

Holy Spirit are most aware of as a mark of the renewed interest in the Holy Spirit is a renewed interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So that if a person begins to talk about healing or about prophecy or about tongues or about the gift of working miracles or some of these things, there's going to be many people whose ears will perk up because they will say, Wow, now we're talking about something supernatural. Now we're talking about something great, something sensational.

And they're right. We are. Those are great and supernatural things.

But what many people do not realize is that the most important supernatural thing that is accomplished in the life of the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit is a transformation of character. As you know, if you've heard the previous lectures in this series, I certainly believe in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I believe they're relevant to us today.

I believe that they are available to us today. I believe the Holy Spirit is one who dictates who has what and how each gift is manifested and so forth. And I think some of the gifts are not as often seen as others in the church.

I think also there's a certain, I'm afraid I'd have to call it a carnality, though many would consider it spirituality, that becomes fascinated with the more sensational gifts. And where God does a healing or where God does something sensational, the people who witness it, the Christians who witness it, often want to see more. They have a thirst for more.

Now, I don't think there's anything wrong with the desire to live in the supernatural realm. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he said, Lord, if that's you, just command me to walk on the water. Jesus said, come on.

And Peter got out of the boat and he walked on the water. And then when his faith began to waver, he began to sink. And he said, Lord, save me.

And Jesus saved him. But Jesus rebuked him. But he didn't rebuke him for wanting to walk on water.

He didn't rebuke him for having a desire to live and walk in the supernatural realm. He rebuked him for not having the faith to do so. So there's not anything in itself unwholesome or wrongheaded about desiring to walk in the realm of the supernatural.

What I do think is a mark of immaturity and unspirituality is to only view as important the supernatural things which are sensational. Now, as I understand the scriptures, gifts, the more evident sensational gifts, I'm thinking, of course, of signs and wonders, gifts of miracles and things like healings and prophecies and things. Well, maybe prophecies shouldn't be listed there.

But the things that really are astounding, the things that actually get the attention even of the media when they happen, those things, as I read in the scripture, are principally for the confirmation of the gospel. They are not there because God, for example, is against Christians experiencing suffering or because God is somehow set himself at war against sickness in the life of the believer. Now, I'm not saying that God doesn't care about our sicknesses and about our sufferings.

I'm not saying that God is unsympathetic. But the Bible certainly teaches that sufferings can be in the hand of God a tool that is for our good, working on something that's actually more important to God in our lives than our comfort and then our relief and our exemption from suffering would be to God. The Bible indicates that our suffering is just for a little while anyway.

And if we're Christians, it works some good for us. There may be times, and there are times, I believe, where God wishes to supernaturally alleviate our sufferings, to heal and so forth. But principally, I believe the ministry of healing and other signs and wonders have been given for the confirmation of the word of God.

There's many scriptures that say that. In Mark chapter 16, the closing verses, actually the closing verse of the gospel of Mark, says that the apostles, whenever we're preaching the word, Jesus working with them, confirming the word through signs, following, through accompanying signs. It says in Hebrews chapter 2 that the word, the gospel that we've heard, was first spoken to us by those who heard Christ and was confirmed to us through signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

That is to say, when the gospel was preached to us at the first, there were signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit, Hebrews chapter 2 tells us, that were there to confirm the truthfulness of the message. Now you might say, well, when I got saved, I didn't see signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. And, of course, that wouldn't be the universal experience of everyone.

But it certainly indicates that this is what the signs and wonders were principally used for, confirming the word. And it's not surprising to me, therefore, that most signs and wonders of which we hear today are happening not in the American churches, but are happening out in the third world countries, out on the cutting edge of pioneer missions, out where the gospel has never yet obtained a foothold, where the powers of darkness have supernaturally been observed by the primitive peoples there. I use the word primitive, really, as a concession, the way most people speak.

I'm not sure that primitive is the right word for it. But the people who are locked into the occult and are certainly familiar with the supernatural aspects of demonism, these are the areas where we see the most consistent and dramatic exhibitions of the power of God in the area of signs and wonders, confirming the gospel when it arrives. But I don't know if you've ever wondered, I certainly have over the years, why it is that signs and

wonders may occur on the pioneering edge of missions, but where the gospel has been established for some time, like here in America, we don't see them anywhere near as much.

And the ones we hear about often are faked or exaggerated or whatever. I mean, I'm not saying there is no real miraculous stuff going on in this country. I'm sure there is.

I've seen some that I believe is genuine. But it doesn't happen anywhere near as much as I'd like. It doesn't happen anywhere near as much as most Christians think that they could if they had enough faith and so forth.

It just isn't happening very much. Real, indisputable, supernatural, sensational stuff. And I believe there's a reason for that biblically.

It's not that we don't have enough faith anymore. It may be that we're putting our faith in the wrong thing. We're putting our faith perhaps in these miracles rather than in another thing that God is doing supernaturally once the gospel has arrived and been established.

You see, Jesus said when he prayed in John 17, he prayed, Father, I pray that they may be one, even as we are one, so that the world may know that you have sent me. That is, the unity and the love among the brethren. Once there is a church, once there is a community of Christians, the relationships among the brethren, which spring out of changed lives, is the supernatural sign that Jesus believed would convince the world that he was sent by the Father.

You'll recall that Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room, in John 13, 35, he said, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another. That when a person who has been for his whole life committed to selfishness and subordinating other people to himself and to his own wishes, to promote his own agendas, has a transformation in his character so that he is now self-sacrificing, cheerful about it, patient, has changed character. This is not just a result of accepting new beliefs.

It is a manifestation of a new life. Good to see you folks. Glad you made it out.

It is a manifestation of a new life, the life of the Holy Spirit, working in the believer. And this becomes, I believe, the sign, the supernatural sign, par excellence, of the legitimacy of the Christian life. That is to say, once the gospel has been established, a more important confirmation of its veracity is found not in continuing signs and wonders, but in the sign and the wonder of persons who are known to have been just worldly, criminal, self-centered people, suddenly becoming Christ-like people.

Or maybe not so suddenly, but gradually, eventually, coming around and becoming like Jesus. That is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. And I dare say that the Scripture

indicates that is the principle supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that is consistent.

Signs, wonders, healings, these happen from time to time, place to place. I believe that they are totally dependent on God's sovereign will and providence in a given situation. Sometimes He wants to do it, sometimes He may not want to do it.

But what He always wants to do is to change people into the image of Christ, to transform our character from the self-centered things that we were to the self-denying, loving of others, self-sacrificing persons like Jesus is and like the disciples became. And so what we're talking about here is changed character as the most compelling evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. This is what Paul refers to as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 5, in verse 22 and 23, there, just as Paul listed nine gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, in Galatians 5, 22, he lists nine things that he calls the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The first of which is love, and that's all we're going to try to talk about tonight because there's a long list and we're going to take more than one lecture to go through them. But I'd like you to look with me at the list so we'll know the direction we're moving.

This is in Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23, as I said a moment ago. It says there, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Now, these things that Paul calls fruit of the Spirit, none of them have to do with what we'd call supernatural signs or wonders.

They all have to do with something inside of you, something in your character. They're all really character traits, and if we wanted to be quite simplistic, we could just say that this is the character of Jesus that we're to become like. Now, it's significant, I think, that he calls this the fruit of the Holy Spirit, whereas when he was talking about things like prophecy and tongues and miracles and that, he called those gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There's a difference between gifts and fruit. In an earlier lecture in this series, which was a very long time ago, in our introductory lectures, I mentioned an illustration that Juan Carlos Ortiz, formerly an Assembly of God pastor down in Buenos Aires, Argentina, had given. He, I think, now lives in the United States, last I heard, and he's not in the Assemblies of God anymore.

But he wrote a book called Disciple many years ago, back in the early 70s, and he gave this illustration comparing the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. He said, in Buenos Aires, we don't have very many trees. And so, at Christmas time, of course, many people like to have trees in their houses, and so they go out and they buy artificial Christmas trees, which are made of wire and paper and cellophane and stuff like that.

And they're pretty, but they're very cheap, cheaply made and cheap to buy. He said you can buy them for two or three dollars. Now, when they bring them into the house,

sometimes they'll, well, the custom was to hang gifts on these trees.

He said, now, the night before Christmas, a very cheap tree that costs two or three dollars may have hanging on its branches, gifts that were worth hundreds of dollars. They might have Omega watches. They might have expensive jewelry.

They might have very, very expensive gifts hanging upon them. And if somebody would look at that tree with all its glistening gifts, someone would say, whoa, that's a very marvelous tree. Look at the gifts that it has upon it.

But he said, the day after Christmas, all those trees are out on the curb waiting for the garbage collector to pick them up. They're not worth a thing, because the gifts have been removed. And the reason the gifts were removed is because they were never part of the tree in the first place.

They were put there by somebody else. They were not generated by the tree, and their presence on the tree doesn't tell you one thing about the tree itself. Their presence does not tell you whether that's a living tree or a dead tree, whether it's an expensive tree or a cheap tree, whether it's even a real tree or a phony tree.

The gifts tell you nothing about the nature of the tree, because they are external to it and placed there by somebody else. But he said, on the other hand, if you go to an apple orchard and you see a tree that has shriveled small apples and another tree that's got big, luscious, colorful, beautiful, fat apples, you can tell a great deal about the tree, because the tree actually produces the fruit. The fruit is produced by the tree, and because of that, you can judge the quality of the life of the tree, whether it's healthy or not, what kind of tree it is, by its fruit.

Of course, Jesus said that, too. Jesus said, therefore you shall know them by their fruit. And so the illustration he's giving, I thought, was a very apt one, because when we think about gifts of the Holy Spirit and fruit of the Holy Spirit, the difference is exactly the difference he was illustrating.

A person may have magnificent gifts. A person may be able to heal everyone they lay their hands on, and yet not ever end up in heaven. A person may prophesy at every meeting, and even get it right a lot of the time, maybe all the time, and not end up in heaven.

Jesus said on that day, Matthew 7, he said, in that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name. We cast out demons in your name. We did many wonderful works in your name.

And he said, I'll say to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you wicked. Now, you workers of lawlessness, he said, that's an incredible thing, because these people had apparently stunning spiritual gifts, but they weren't even saved.

And we all know that the devil can counterfeit spiritual gifts, but the fruit of the Spirit is that which is generated in the life by the Holy Spirit, his presence there. A person cannot love the way that Jesus loves, without having the same spirit that Jesus had, producing love within them. You know, Jesus, we know he was the Son of God, or God in the flesh, or whatever we wish to explain his existence as, but the Bible makes it very clear that what he did, he did through the power of the Holy Spirit.

He said so himself. He said, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. That's in Matthew 12, I think, verse 28.

It says in Acts chapter 1, and I think it's verse 1, it says that Jesus had, through the Holy Spirit, given instructions to his disciples. He did his mighty works, he even did his teaching through the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life was the manifestation of the character of God, of the Holy Spirit, in that case, a human body.

Now, we have human bodies, and that same spirit, that same life of God, has come into us. Now, I need to clarify what I mean, because I don't want anyone to think that I'm saying that the way that God dwells in us is identical to the way that God dwells in Jesus. Jesus, in fact, was God incarnate.

We are not. But, we become partakers of the divine nature, according to 2 Peter chapter 1, and verse 4, that through what God has promised us, and our belief in that, and our acceptance of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, we become partakers of God's own nature. And that nature comes to control, comes to transform, comes to replace the old.

And that is where character is changed. And character change is the truest evidence that we are truly born again, and that we have a new life, because the fruit of the Holy Spirit is that which the Holy Spirit himself must produce in order for it to exist. Gifts can be put there.

God can even give gifts to people who aren't saved. And, of course, the devil can give counterfeit gifts. You might think it's strange that I'd say God could give gifts to people who aren't saved, but he did.

Caiaphas was not saved, and he prophesied, and the indication is given in John chapter 11, that he prophesied that God gave him a prophetic word. It seems that Balaam was not saved, but he prophesied by the power of the Holy Spirit. And there are others.

I'm not so sure Samson was saved at the time when he was killing Philistines, but the Bible said that he did that because the Spirit of God came upon him. His supernatural strength was a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts can reside in people who aren't spiritual in the least.

But the fruit of the Spirit is a certainty. It gives certainty that the Holy Spirit is there and at work. And the measure of a person's spirituality can be measured by the ripeness of

that fruit.

Alright? So we've just read in Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23, some things that are called the fruit of the Spirit. Now, the first is love. And I just want to comment before we talk about love in particular.

There are some who say that all the other eight items that are listed after the word love, in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, that the other eight items are simply components of love. Or that they are, what Paul is doing is amplifying what love is. That love is joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, and all these other things that he mentions.

And they say, in order to support that notion, that he says the fruit of the Spirit, singular, is singular, rather than the fruits are. Okay? Paul doesn't say the fruits of the Spirit are love and joy and peace and the rest. He says the fruit is.

So some feel that what Paul is saying is that the fruit of the Spirit is love, period. End of sentence. You could stop the sentence there.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. And love is all these other things. Love has all these as components within it.

Now, I don't know. I wouldn't want to be dogmatic in affirming that to be Paul's intention or in denying it. I will say this.

There are other places, and maybe we could look at a few of them. I have some in the notes I've given you. There are passages where Paul talks as if those things are components of love.

In other places, he lists love as something separate from them. And very distinctly listed as something separate from these items. It would seem that, in one sense, love does include all those things.

In another sense, love has its own distinctive range of meaning. But I will say this, that it would be reading too much into Paul's intention to say, well, the use of the singular there proves that he just means love is the fruit of the Spirit and the rest is sub points. Because the word fruit, obviously, like many agricultural terms, like seed, for example, is a word that can be singular or plural.

You don't have to add an S to it to make it plural. The fruit of the earth can simply mean the produce of the earth, that which the earth produced. And it can refer to a great number.

I mean, if you have an orchard, you can pick one orange and say, this is fruit, this piece of fruit. But you can say that all that the trees produced are the fruit of that orchard or the fruit of your labor there. So fruit can refer to a collective or singular.

And so we can't we can't really say for sure how Paul meant it. He might well have thought of all nine of these things as separate categories. But still, they're all the produce.

They're the produce that the Holy Spirit produces. And so I wouldn't want to make too much of a point, as some teachers feel they must, about that. I do think there's a relationship between love and the other things on the list.

But that's only because all of them are components of the same character, the character of Christ, the character of the Holy Spirit. And, of course, we'd expect there to be some overlap in their application. Let me show you, first of all, from a number of passages that are there in the notes I gave you.

Beginning with First Timothy, chapter two, that the most important thing in the Christian life is not how many dead people you raise or how many sick people you heal, but it is your character. Character is that which is to be pursued. Character is that domain in which we are to be examples to others.

Character is that which distinguishes good Christians, if we might use these terms. They're not exactly ideal terms. From bad Christians, or mature Christians, from immature Christians, or spiritual Christians, from unspiritual Christians, if we dare suggest there is such a thing.

In First Timothy, chapter two, and verse fifteen, it says of the Christian woman, nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control. Now, you may notice that love is listed among the things that Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. Self-control is also in that list, and although Galatians doesn't mention holiness, per se, certainly that would be a fruit of the Spirit and is listed as being in the same category with love and with self-control here.

And faith, by the way, the New King James, which I was reading, translated faith as faithfulness in Galatians, but here translates it as faith, but it's the same thing, same word. So we really have here some, really he's talking about stuff that's in the category of fruit of the Spirit, character stuff. Now, it's not my desire at this time to talk about what Paul meant by she shall be saved in childbearing.

The point is that the woman will have the blessing of God in some sense or another, and it will be manifested in the realm of childbearing, if she continues in these areas of Christian character, and that's the most, that's the point I want to draw from it. Other points could be made from it if we were talking on another subject. In chapter 4 of 1 Timothy, in verse 12, Paul says, Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Now, all of that has to do with character. Purity, faith, love, conduct, this has to do with

good character. It doesn't have to do with signs and wonders being manifested through him, though Timothy might well have had such in his life.

He has not said, that's not the area in which he's to be an example for others to follow. He's to be an example in terms of his godly character. In chapter 6, in verse 11, he says, But you, O man of God, flee these things, and in the context he means covetousness, or love of money, and pursue the gifts of the Spirit.

No, not pursue the gifts of the Spirit, though by the way, it's not wrong to desire the best gifts, as Paul says elsewhere, but the emphasis is certainly on another point here. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. You'll note that many of those things are in Paul's list elsewhere of the fruit of the Spirit.

Which means, what we're to be pursuing, what we're to be setting an example for others in, is in this realm of the fruit of the Spirit. By the way, we didn't look there, and we won't, but in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus chapter 1, we have the qualifications for elders and for deacons. And you'll find that there's no mention of their educational accomplishments need to be at a certain level.

But their character, their conduct, their holiness, their example to others in that respect, is what matters in qualifying a person for spiritual leadership. In 2 Timothy 2 and verse 22, it says, flee also youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Some of these words we've seen in all the lists we've looked at so far.

They have to do with Christian character. That's what we're to be pursuing, is character. In chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, in verse 10, Paul talks about his own example that he's set for Timothy.

He says, but you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance. Then he talks about persecutions, afflictions. But the things he lists there in verse 10, some of them are in the list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Others are not in that list in Galatians, but they are obviously in the same category. They have to do with Christian character. Just a couple of other passages to underscore this.

In Titus chapter 2, beginning of verse 1, Paul says, but as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. Now, doctrine means teaching. It's supposed to give correct teaching.

Well, what's correct teaching? The doctrine of the Trinity? The doctrine of the doctrines of grace? What is sound doctrine here? Well, he tells Timothy what sound doctrine is. Verse 2, that older men should be sober, reverent, temperate. That means self-controlled.

Sound in faith, in love, in patience. The older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine. That would also have to do with being self-controlled.

Teachers of good things, that they may admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands. That the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded.

In all things, showing yourself to be a pattern of good works. In doctrine, showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned. That one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

Exhort bond servants to be obedient to their own masters. To be well-pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that means faithfulness or integrity. That they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things.

Notice, different categories of persons are listed, and what sound doctrine, sound teaching Titus is supposed to give to these people, what does it have to do with? Does it have to do with their orthodoxy? Well, I'm sure that orthodoxy is important too. I'm not suggesting that Paul had no concern about that, we know that he did. But what he emphasized entirely, Titus, you talk to the old men, you talk to the old women, you let them talk to the young women, and you talk to the young men, and talk to the servants, and teach them, and he lists things, and what do they all have to do with? Good character, they all have to do with God-like character traits.

And he says at the end of that, that these people, by following such instructions, will adorn the gospel, decorate it, make it attractive. The gospel is not, I think we could say, all that attractive to a lot of worldly people right now in our society. And I don't think it's because the gospel itself lacks attractive features.

I think that many people have no interest in learning enough about the gospel to know whether it has attractive features or not. I think that most people just turn it off as soon as they hear it. Or even before they hear it.

And the reason they do has nothing to do with the defects of the gospel itself. But generally speaking, if you talk to these people, you'll find that it has to do with defects in Christian lives of people they've known. It is the defects in the lives of the Christians.

And by the way, non-Christians have failed to be converted en masse at healing campaigns. I mean, there are those. There are healing evangelists around.

And what people come there for is to get healed. And Christians go there to be pumped. But you don't see a lot of people getting solidly converted at these.

Not en masse, certainly. Although in the early church, we read in Acts chapter 2, that the godly lives, the unselfishness, the purity of the Christian lives caused them to have favor with all men. And people were being added daily to the church, such as should be said.

Because they noticed there was a difference in the quality of the character of these people. That there was a transformation that was accomplished by the gospel. And it changed life.

The purity, the integrity, the sober-mindedness and so forth of the Christian life. Once that is brought about by the Holy Spirit, is that which adorns, that makes attractive, the gospel. And I do believe that we are very largely to blame for the world's lack of attraction to the gospel, to a large extent.

When I say we, I'm not talking necessarily specifically about the people in this room. It's possible that some of the people in this room are exceptions. This is certainly not a characteristic gathering, such as you'd find at most church meetings.

But I'm sure that we could all see areas in our own character where we have not adorned the gospel. Because we have not walked in the consistent godly character. Look at one other passage on this point of character being the principal thing to be desired in the Christian life.

This is in 2 Peter chapter 1. 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 8 through 11. Actually, 8 through 11 presupposes a knowledge of the earlier verses. And maybe I should start reading at verse 5. Because Peter then there says, But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness love.

Of that list of things we've just read, several of them are duplicated in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. And even the ones that are not could be added to that list as among those that are fruits of the Spirit. That's 2 Peter 1. That was verses 5 through 7. Now verse 8 says, For if these things are yours and abound, as if you have these character traits in your life, in abundance, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful.

You want to be fruitful? Well, this is the fruit of the Spirit. You'll neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he who lacks these things is short-sighted even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you'll never stumble.

Now notice this. How do you make your calling and your election sure? Am I one of the elect? I wonder. How would I know? How could I possibly be sure if I'm one of the elect? Well, Peter says it's quite easy.

Be diligent to make your calling and your election sure. Because if you do these things, what things? These things that you keep adding on as you grow, your character develops. You add to your faith virtue, and then you add to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and brotherly kindness comes in there, and love.

These things, as they are added to your life, means you're growing. Your character is being formed into that of Christ. If these things are there, then you have made your election certain.

These, in other words, are the most certain indicators of true salvation in the life. Even though some people may be able to do much more sensational things. Some people may be able to sing, or preach, or teach, or do even more stupendous things than any of that, wonderfully, in the name of Jesus.

But if they lack these things, they're short-sighted, they may not even be saved, but the best way to make your calling and your election sure is to see that these things are yours in abundance, it says. And it says further, in verse 11, well, I like the end of verse 10, for if you do these things, you will never stumble. You ever seen any Christians stumble? You know any Christians who've ever stumbled? Now, stumbling means falling away.

It doesn't just mean that you kind of have a misstep, but there are some Christians who've fallen away, are there not? I'll bet all of you know more than one, who have. What was wrong? What did they lack? Why didn't they hang in there? Many of them were in, you know, exciting churches, they had exciting worship, and exciting things going on, great programs, but why did they stumble? Well, Peter says, if you do these things, if they're in you in abundance, you'll never stumble. I guess if the Bible's true, these things were not what they were adding to their life.

They were not cultivating Christian character. They were not cultivating the fruit of the Spirit, as Peter and Paul and the Scriptures generally tell us to do. Now, verse 11, for so, that is by cultivating these things and adding them to your life, for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Peter certainly makes it sound like these are the issues in the Christian life. You want to know that you're elect? You want to have an abundant entrance into the kingdom? You want to never stumble? I mean, what could be more important than those things? Well, they're all related to one thing. If you do these things, what things? Cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

This godly character is the thing in the Christian life that is necessary. Now, of the things that are listed as the fruit of the Spirit, and by the way, you could see just from the

passages we read, that just like 1 Corinthians 12 doesn't give you a comprehensive list of the gifts of the Spirit, though there are nine of them there, there are others mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, so also Galatians 5, 22 and 23 doesn't give a comprehensive list of what we could call the fruit of the Spirit. They are just a sampling from the general categories.

The gifts are multitudinous. We don't know how many there are, but there are probably scores, if not more. The same may be true of fruit.

Paul just gives a sampling in his list so we'll know what the category is of things he's talking about. But we see it by comparing these various passages that the list can be expanded. But no matter what list you read, love is always on the list.

And in many cases, it is emphasized above the others. It is the first thing listed in Galatians 5, 22, and it is the last thing listed in 2 Peter 1, the passage we just read, but it's listed last because it's an ascending list. You start here and you add that and add that and add that and add that, and when you get to the top, you're adding the capstone on Christian character, love.

Now, in all of these passages where you found the word love, it was the Greek word agape. Now, I don't want to go into a standard talk about the meaning and the nuances of the Greek words about love. For one thing, I don't want to pretend to be a Greek scholar.

I'm not. Most pastors and preachers will tell you that there's different kinds of love expressed by different kinds of Greek words, and that's probably true. Sometimes the differences in the Greek words are exaggerated in preaching for the sake of making neat categories.

For example, phileo, which is a different Greek word, is sometimes said to refer to an inferior kind of love than agape, and perhaps in some cases it does, although you can find cases in parallel passages of Scripture where one passage used the word phileo and the other passage, which is parallel, used the word agape, and seemingly the two words can be interchangeable in some context. So I would be professing to a higher degree of fluency in Greek than I possess if I were to say that I could tell you the difference between phileo and agape. I can only tell you what most pastors say, but most of them are not very fluent in Greek either.

They're telling you what someone else told them. All I can say is there are certainly different things that we call love, and there may be some suggestion of these different things in the different Greek words, but without going any further than that to profess to know about Greek, I will say that I know this, that all the passages we read where the word love was found, the word was agape. It is the word that is virtually always used in the Scripture, in the New Testament, when we're told to love one another.

It is that which Jesus said was the new commandment he was giving, and in John 13, 34, he said, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. The word was agape. It is the word that is used again and again in 1 Corinthians 13, which we call the love chapter.

But if I have this and I have that, and I don't have love, I'm nothing. Always in that chapter, the word is agape. Just so you'll know.

Just so you won't have any questions. One reason I bring it up is some people may be using the King James Version. In the King James Version, some of the passages we read have the word love, and some have the word charity.

The King James translators just sometimes translate agape as love, and sometimes they translate it as charity, just so you know they're all the same word. The same concept is there. And love is the ultimate in the fruit of the Spirit.

And seen one way, love is all there is. All the other fruits are simply functions of love, or angles or aspects or manifestations of love. But each one has its own kind of aspect.

Maybe they're like different aspects of a cut diamond. The diamond may be love, but you can look at it from different angles and see different reflections and different sides of it. We will, in the course of the next few weeks, talk about all of those things that Paul called the fruit of the Spirit.

We won't talk about everything that the Bible could conceivably include in that list from all relevant passages, simply because we take until the Lord comes for that, and we have other things we need to do with our lives. But we will talk about it in the next few weeks, and we'll do it rather rapidly. We won't take a full lecture for each one, not by any means.

But I do want to spend the rest of this lecture talking about the one thing, love. It is certainly not only the first thing listed in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit, but it is the most emphasized item on the list when taking all the Scriptures into consideration. I mentioned that there is a sense in which love is spoken of as if it does somewhat encompass these other fruits.

Let me give you a couple of examples in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 13, verses 4-6, it says, Love suffers long. Now, that's just the verb form in the Greek for the noun long-suffering.

Long-suffering, or patience, is one of the fruit of the Spirit. Well, love is long-suffering. So, if love is the fruit of the Spirit, and long-suffering is the fruit of the Spirit, well, love is long-suffering, he says.

So, that obviously suggests that that fruit of the Spirit is an aspect of love. Kind. Well,

kindness is also listed among the fruit of the Spirit.

So, love is long-suffering and kind. And that means that kindness and long-suffering, both of which are fruit of the Spirit, are a part of love. It does not envy, does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, nor does it seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, and so forth.

So, in describing what love is like, some of the words that really belong in the list of other fruit of the Spirit come into the picture. So, that would suggest that perhaps love is the cover term for the whole list. Perhaps.

Another place that we might get the same impression from would be Ephesians, chapter 4, and verse 2. Ephesians 4, 2. Paul says, "...with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love." Now, it sounds like he's saying that in love we are to be with all lowliness, gentleness, and long-suffering, and bear with one another. If that is the way he means it, then gentleness, which is one of the fruit of the Spirit, and long-suffering, which is another, is something that comes about because we are operating in love. In the realm of love, this behavior comes forth.

Yet, there is a place, and we looked at it a moment ago, in 2 Peter, chapter 1, where love is listed separately from those things. "...add to your faith virtue to virtue, knowledge to knowledge, temperance to temperance, etc., etc." And you've got brotherly to cousin at the top of it. And to all of that, add agape, add love.

So, these things are mentioned as separate things that you add separately to your life. You cultivate them as individual fruit. And love is at the very apex of it.

But it's not entirely clear how Peter means for that to be related to the previous one. Certainly, all of those things are of no use unless they come from love. So, perhaps what he's just saying is, you know, in addition to all these individual aspects of love, we need to be consistently, you know, in all respects loving.

In any case, I want to go on and talk about the important things the Bible says about love, because it is the principle fruit that is most often mentioned. We know from Scripture, for example, that love is the distinctive mark of being a Christian. Whatever a person says about their Christianity and base their claim to being Christians on any kind of evidence whatsoever, it is unconvincing unless that person exhibits love of a biblical sort.

We're going to talk about what biblical love is, what it looks like, and so forth. But it says in John 13, 34 and 35, I've quoted both those verses at various points in this lecture already, but Jesus said, A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

Now, if having this love is that which lets everyone know that you are really one of Christ's disciples, really a Christian, then it must be distinctive of Christians. Because if it is not distinctive of Christians to have this love, then a person might have it and not be a Christian, and then no one could know whether you're a disciple by you having it. He indicates that it is the sure sign, the dead giveaway, that you really are a Christian, is if you have love one for another.

Now, that might get a little confusing, because a lot of people who don't even profess to be Christians have a species of emotion that they call love, and in one way or another exhibit things that look like Christian charity. And we'll have more to say about what Christian love is, so we can be clear about how to know if it's true or false or whatever. There is certainly a counterfeit, an artificial product that many people would call love.

But at this point, I just want to establish the point that Christian love, Christ-like love, is a distinctive that guarantees that the possessor of it is a disciple of Jesus, is a true Christian. And the absence of such love is a pretty good indicator that they're not a true Christian, or if they are, they're brand new and haven't developed much of the fruit in their lives yet. There's another verse I didn't put in the notes, and I intended to.

And I'm sorry I didn't, because I don't know the verse number, but it's right around here. Let me see here. It's in 1 John 3. I'm pretty sure I didn't put it in the notes.

No, it's not in the notes. Oh, well. Is it 318? Let me see.

No, I plan to use that verse later on, but I'll tell you the verse. I mean, I don't know the verse number off the top of my head, but it's probably right under my nose. John simply says, Someone's going to know that reference.

Is it 314? Thank you. Yeah, there it is. We know that we have passed from death into life.

That is, we know we're regenerated. We know we're Christians. We know we're saved.

We can know that for sure. But by what evidence? By what indicator can we know that for sure? Well, he says, because we love the brethren. It's that certain.

It's that distinctive. Loving the way Jesus loved is an unmistakable indicator of true conversion, of true regeneration, of true discipleship. I put in the notes there Revelation 2.4. It doesn't really make the specific point that it's placed under so much as it just is a general statement about the importance of love.

That's where Jesus complained that the Ephesian church had left their first love. He said that they had plenty of good works and zeal and so forth, but they lacked their first love. And because they didn't have the first love, he was going to abandon them.

If they didn't repent, he was going to remove their candlestick. They would no longer be

among his people, because love is an essential ingredient of the church that is Christ's church. And to remove the candlestick would be to eliminate them from being the church.

Over in 1 Timothy 1.5, we have one of my favorite verses. One of my 10,000 favorite verses. 1 Timothy 1.5, Paul says, now the purpose of the commandment.

He means the instructions that he and his fellow apostles give to the church, the commandments they give. The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. That is, the goal of his instruction to the church is that they might have love in their lives.

And a pure conscience and a sincere faith. Actually, it's a love that springs from a pure heart and from a good conscience and from a sincere faith. Love is the whole thing.

The goal of the instruction is love. He could have ended the sentence there, but he wants to tell us what the love is coming out of. It's coming from a pure heart, from a clean conscience, and from sincere faith.

But love is the thing that is the goal. All Christian instruction has this as its goal, and that is to produce this pure, sincere love in the life of the believer. We'll say more about that in a few moments.

I want to point out, though, that the love that we're talking about is not natural love such as anyone who's not a Christian might have. We already saw in Galatians 5.22 that Paul spoke of it as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This love is a product of the working of the Holy Spirit, and such a product can only be produced in the lives of those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

Which is why the presence of that love is a surefire indicator that the person is saved, because the Holy Spirit must be present in their life in order for them to have this love. Romans 5 also mentions that this love is a product of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In Romans 5.5 it says, Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.

The love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who pours this love into us so that we may be able to exhibit it to others. Also in 2 Timothy 1.7, a very well-known verse, Paul says, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but he has given us a spirit of love and of power and of a sound mind.

The Holy Spirit that has been given to us is a spirit of love. He produces the love. Now this means, of course, that when we talk about love in the biblical sense, we're not talking about that which a person without the Holy Spirit can have.

And yet it's quite obvious that people who don't have the Holy Spirit definitely

experience things that they would call love. But the word is so watered down in the world that even among worldly people they wouldn't mean the same thing when they say love. When a person says, I love chocolate, they don't mean the same thing as they mean when they say, I love you, to somebody that they're romancing.

Although in some cases they may mean exactly the same thing, but they intend to be understood differently in those two statements. But what makes Christian love distinctive is that it is. I'm going to have to use a word that some of you may not be may not understand correctly.

It's disinterested. The word disinterested doesn't mean uninterested. OK, this is a lot of people who don't know the word, I think disinterested.

No, disinterested means you don't have a vital interest or a stake in it. Like you have an interest in a business proposition that you've invested in or something like that. You don't have something to gain by it.

It's disinterested. That means it is independent of any consideration for any benefit to you. That's what disinterested means.

A disinterested love is one that you love people for no other reason but that God loves them and has put his love in your heart for them. And you will find yourself, if you have this love, loving people whom you would never be capable of loving if you did not possess Holy Spirit. You'll find yourself genuinely loving people who hate you and who wrong you.

People who are not the least bit attractive to you and from whom you cannot derive any satisfaction in a relationship. In fact, a person who you would not even want to have a relationship with if not for the fact of the Holy Spirit producing love in that person in your heart. Now I'm not saying that even unbelievers can't have compassion for people that they find unattractive.

Even unbelievers can know a measure of compassion for a poor person that they've never known. Or for someone like Elephant Man. You know, did you ever see that movie about this guy who was born so horribly disfigured? Even a person who is not a Christian who sees someone in that horrible situation, he's very unattractive, but almost anyone could have compassion on someone like that.

There's a trickle of divine love possibly still resident in every human heart. Unless it's fully extinguished by a person who's just tried to shut God out so much. Even a non-Christian still has something of the image of God in him.

And you can find a bit of it here and there, but the consistency of it is that which marks a Christian. That a person walks as Jesus walked. They walked toward love in all their dealings.

And it doesn't matter whether they have something to gain or not by loving that person. It doesn't matter whether that person is injuring them at the moment or has injured them in the past. It doesn't make any difference.

Their love for that person is seamless and constant and unconditional. Now, like I said, there are persons who are not Christians who may appear to have something like a disinterested unconditional love. People who, you know, you've got a bunch of soldiers standing around and a live hand grenade falls in their midst.

And a guy just, you know, one of them just jumps down on it to absorb the whole shrapnel into his body to save his friends. You know, soldiers do that sometimes. That happens sometimes.

In fact, usually at the funeral it turns out the guy who did it was a Christian. But that's not necessarily always the case. Just some kind of a good breeding and a sense of, you know, heroism or something can cause a person to do a thing like that.

And one can get the impression, well, that person must certainly have Christian love in him. Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't. Depends, I guess, the only way to know is whether he was a Christian or not.

If he was a Christian, he may well have done that out of Christian love. But if so, his entire life would have exhibited that self-sacrificing spirit, not just the crisis of the moment. There's many people who do not live in love, generally speaking, but who in a crisis situation, they rise to the occasion and do a tremendously heroic thing.

And we might say, well, certainly only a Christian could do a thing like that. Not necessarily. Adrenaline does a lot of things for people when they're in a crisis that do not necessarily reflect the nature of their general behavior.

It is, as I say, a consistent, loving pattern in the life toward all persons, not just the attractive, not just the friendly, not just the lovable, but toward all persons that God loves. That is the mark of Christianity. And the presence of that love is the proof of a person being a Christian.

The absence of that love is one of the best indicators that they're not a real Christian. Or if they are, they've only begun to be a Christian and have yet a great deal to learn and a great deal of cultivation to do of the fruit of the spirit in their life. Now, love is not just an important thing.

It is the most important thing in the Christian life. It eclipses other things of great importance. Certainly we know that knowledge is an important thing.

The knowledge of God, knowledge of Scripture. These things are very valuable. There's a gift called the word of knowledge.

In the Old Testament, Hosea says, my people perish for lack of knowledge. Obviously, knowledge is important, but love is more important than knowledge. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 8. And he says in verse 1, 1 Corinthians 8, 1. Now concerning things offered to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

But knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Obviously, he's saying love is superior to knowledge in that it edifies, it builds up people. Love puffs you up, makes you proud.

I mean, knowledge does. But love builds up you and others. That's superior to knowledge.

It doesn't mean knowledge isn't good. It just means that knowledge is not as good or as important as love. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 13, he said in verse 2, And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and have all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I'm nothing.

So if I had all knowledge but didn't have love, I'm nothing. All knowledge, it seems like that should count for something just by itself. I mean, even if you didn't have love, if you had all knowledge, that should count for something.

Paul says it doesn't count for anything. Now, if you have love and knowledge, that counts for something. But if you have only knowledge, it doesn't matter ever so much you may have, it's nothing.

Nothing if you don't have love. Love surpasses it in importance by so great a degree that if you had all the knowledge possible for a human to have of God and of the Scripture, it would mean nothing if you weren't living a life characterized by love. Okay, so love is more important than knowledge, as important as knowledge is.

Love is also more important than the gifts of the Spirit, as important as those are. We see that in the same passage we were just looking at, 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul says in the opening verse, Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, which elsewhere in the same discussion he says is one of the greatest of the gifts.

Or he says, If I have all faith to remove mountains, or in verse 3, Though I can bestow all my goods to feed the poor, That's not a gift of the Spirit. Well, that's a gift of giving, I guess. It is a gift of the Spirit.

And though I give my body to be burned, even to be a martyr, but if I don't have love, it profits nothing. It's quite clear that no matter what gift you have, or how magnificently it's manifested in life, if you don't have love, it doesn't show up on the charts. It doesn't even register on the scale.

It profits nothing at all. So love exceeds in importance both knowledge and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it even exceeds some other very important things.

In 1 Corinthians 13, 13, Paul said, Now abide faith, hope, and love, and these three, but the greatest of these is love. Now, faith and hope are very, very important. Especially faith.

We're saved by faith. And we need to live by faith. But it's not even in itself as important as love.

Now, if love is more important than knowledge, than faith, than hope, than the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, then there's really nothing that is more important than love. It eclipses all the other things in the Christian life. It is also the one thing that has to permeate everything we do.

There are other duties in the Christian life, other activities in the Christian life, but they must be shot through and permeated and motivated by love. And we see that in a number of scriptures. In the outline I gave you, it's point number E, or letter E, that love is what governs all of our other activities as Christians.

In 1 Corinthians 16, 14, 1 Corinthians 16, 14, Paul says, Now that encompasses everything in the Christian life. All the activities and duties of the Christian life, all are to be done with love. And that means, of course, that nothing can legitimately be done in the Christian life that can't be done in love.

Nothing is appropriately Christian if it doesn't spring from love or can't be done in love. There are some things that people do that are just unloving. And there's no way that they can be done in a loving manner, because by nature they're simply unloving things.

Those things obviously can't be done by a Christian, because all that you do must be done in love. Love has to permeate and govern every action of the Christian's life. In Galatians 5, 6, Paul said, Now faith working is an important thing in the Christian life.

Faith without works is dead. Faith is very important. And faith in the Christian life working is essential.

But it has to be working through love. Faith working through love. Love has got to govern the works.

Our works, all the things we do, must be governed through love. In Ephesians 4, 15 and 16, Paul says, Now, what does this mean? We speak to each other the truth, but it must be in love. We minister to one another as joints in the body, as members of the body.

We minister and supply what we do, but we must do it in love, he says. Whatever we do has got to be done in love. Whether we speak, whether we work, whatever we do must

be done through love.

If it is not done in love, it is unacceptable. It may be impressive if it is especially a spectacular sacrifice of some kind, but God knows whether it is done in love or out of a desire for self-aggrandizement, a desire to be noticed, a desire to be thought of as a loving person. But if it is not done in real love, then it is not worth anything whatsoever.

All that we are called to do must be done through the motivation of love, which God has put in the heart for the person that we deal with. Now, if you have been around here very long, you have heard me make the next point many times, because it is hard to teach the life of Christ, or even to teach the Bible at all, without making this point frequently. And that is, not only is love the most important thing that eclipses all others, not only is it the thing that shoots through and motivates and governs all that we do, but love is the only thing.

It is the sum of all duties. All Christian duties boil down to nothing else but love. And we have this both from the mouth of Jesus and from the mouth of Paul.

From Jesus, in Matthew 22, bear with me, I know these are extremely familiar scriptures, but to make the point, I want to read the scriptures that are relevant to making it. In Matthew 22, 37 through 40, Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. All the law and the prophets means everything God has ever required of people.

It is subsumed under these two heads. Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said the same thing a little differently, a little more practically in Matthew chapter 7. It is the same command, the same teaching, but it is put in more practical terms.

This is in Matthew 7 and verse 12. Jesus said, Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets.

Now you see both passages, he says, this summarizes everything that the law and the prophets say. In one case he says, love your neighbors as yourself. The other he says, what you want men to do to you, do that to them.

That is just another way of saying love your neighbors as yourself. But the second statement, the one in Matthew 7 points out, is that love is not just a fuzzy feeling you have for people. It has to do with what you do to them.

And this is something that will come out in the course of this study too. And that is that

love, in the world's eyes, is a feeling, an emotion. In God's eyes, love may or may not be accompanied with an emotion.

But it always is seen in action. Love is something you do more than something you feel. And you may do the right thing even with very little emotional gratification attached to it.

But you do it because you are committed. And because you want to do the thing that is good for the person that you are doing it for, even though you don't have much attraction to them, you may not even like them. You know, when I was a child, we were always taught that you don't have to like people, but you have to love them.

And when I got older, I thought, well, that sounds like a bunch of double talk. How can you love somebody you don't like? I mean, to say you don't have to like them, but you have to love them. Then when I got older still, I realized that is true.

That is true. No one can insist that somebody like anything in particular. You might find somebody's laugh irritating.

Someone else might find their laugh cute. You might find somebody's nose or eyes or mouth or the shape of their body repulsive. Someone else might find it attractive.

You might like chocolate ice cream. Someone else might hate chocolate ice cream. I mean, what you like is not part of your spirituality.

Liking something means it suits you well. It pleases you well. You don't have to like everything.

I doubt if a person likes somebody who always does cruel and harsh things to them. If they like being around that person, does that please them? I doubt it. That is what liking is.

Liking is being pleased by a certain thing. A certain thing pleases me or doesn't. I like it or I don't.

I don't have to like people. Although, of course, I make every effort to like people because I love them. Love means I will do to them the thing I would want done to me.

They may be someone I don't like very much. I might find their voice, their personality, their looks, their mannerisms irritating, unpleasant. I can't claim to like those things about people or those people who have those as dominant characteristics.

And I don't think the Bible says we have to like such things or such people. But it does say we have to love them. And that underscores how that in the Bible, love is not something you feel.

Like is something you feel. What most people call love in the world is an attraction, which is a good feeling. Somebody pleases them well.

Their looks please them. Their behavior pleases them. Their personality pleases them.

What they really talk about is they like somebody. And they like them a lot. They like them so much they want to call it love.

And they can call it love if they want to, but they're not speaking about the same thing as the Bible calls love. Because you really can't. It's not just double talk.

It's not just Christian cleverness to try to make up some kind of a maxim like you don't have to like everybody if you love them. It's a fact. It's not how you feel about someone that you're commanded to do something about.

It's just exemplifying charity and generosity and kindness toward people regardless of whether you like them or not. That's what love is made of. That's what love is manifested by.

Now Jesus indicated that doing to the other person what you would have them do to you, that is the whole of the law and the prophets. Love your neighbors as yourself. That's the law of the prophets.

Obviously love your neighbors as yourself means do something to them. It is something you do most of all. Secondly, it may also be accompanied with feeling.

And it's always much more gratifying than what it is. But that's a second and less important issue. Paul twice essentially said the same thing Jesus did on this subject.

In Romans chapter 13 is one of the two places. He probably intimated it many more times than this, but he states it in almost the exact terms Jesus did in a couple of places. Romans 13 and verses 8 through 10.

Paul said, Namely, you shall love your neighbors as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Notice what he said. Love does no harm. Again, love is something you do or don't do.

It's not something you feel or don't feel. Love is doing no harm. You not only don't commit adultery, you don't lust after them.

You not only don't kill them, you don't encourage emotions in yourself that would tempt you to kill them. In your heart, you choose to do what you would want them to choose to do toward you. You do no harm to them because you want no one to do harm to you.

That's love. Love, therefore, again is emphasized both by Jesus and Paul as something

related to what you do more than what you feel. In Galatians 5.14, Galatians is sort of a short version of Romans.

Some people think Galatians was maybe a rough draft of Romans. It was written before Romans. But in Galatians 5.14, Paul said, For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, You shall love your neighbors as yourself.

Okay, that's it. All the law. Jesus said so too.

What we're seeing here from Paul and from Jesus is there's only one thing that comprises the entirety of all duty of the Christian. Everything God requires is this one thing and nothing more. Love.

Because love does no harm. And therefore, if you love, you won't murder, you won't commit adultery, you won't steal, you won't bear false witness. Because that's harming people.

If you love someone, you don't want to harm them. Therefore, rather than memorizing a whole lot of laws and rules, if you simply are governed by the Spirit, and you're allowing Him to love others through you and producing you the fruit of the Spirit, and making you into a loving person like Christ, that is going to fulfill all the duty. Now you might say, well then, I just have to kind of go out and emanate love, and I can go out and I can lie a little bit, I can get involved in sexual impurity a little bit, as long as I'm loving about it, right? No, that's again mistaking what love is.

The point is, if you are breaking the commandments, you're not loving. Because all the commandments are how God unpacks the commandment, love your neighbors yourself. Well, what's that mean? Don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness.

That's what loving is all about. You don't do those things. You don't harm people.

And so, we can see that there's one thing to remember, one thing needful, and that is to love your neighbor as yourself, and that is the whole of Christian duty, at least with reference to your earthly relations. Furthermore, the Bible indicates that spirituality can be measured upon this scale, upon this barometer. Yes.

Thank you again. Appreciate that. The scale by which spirituality is measured is simply in the area of love.

If you look at Colossians 3, this is a very good passage for making that point. Colossians chapter 3, it's a lot like that passage in 2 Peter, add this and add that and add that and finally add love. Well, Paul has a passage like that, similar to Peter's.

In Colossians 3, verse 12, Therefore, as elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, by the way, a lot of these things are in the list of

the fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, but above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. It's the seal of maturity. The seal of perfection is love, charity.

You add these things, you put these things on, but the seal of true maturity, the word perfection and maturity are the same in the Greek, is love. You can measure your spiritual maturity by how much you love. Now, I don't recommend that you do that.

I don't actually recommend that you spend an awful lot of time measuring your own spiritual maturity. The more time you spend doing that, the less maturity you have. Because love, by definition, looks out, doesn't look in.

Love is something you do toward others. It is an attitude of self-denial and service to others. And therefore, the more of it you have, the less you'll be thinking about how much of it you have.

But you can certainly spot a false profession of spiritual maturity if the person who seems to be mature or thinks himself mature is deficient in love. You know that whatever it is he's measuring his maturity by, it's the wrong standard. Because the bond of perfectness, the bond of maturity, is love.

In your notes I put 1 Peter 4.8, which is also another one that indicates that love is above all other things. 1 Peter 4.8, it says, Now, love will cover a multitude of sins. It doesn't mean that you can go out and do a multitude of sins, but if you love, God will just cover over it and He'll be like, Oh, well, you're a very loving person.

I don't mind that you went out and did all these sins. What it means is that if you are loving toward others, your love for them will cover their sins in the sense that you will not hold their sins against them. Love is able to absorb a great number of injuries charitably and graciously.

And that's what it means, love covers a multitude of sins. It doesn't mean that loving people will atone for your own sins. That is not how we get our sins forgiven and covered.

In 2 Peter 1.7, which we read earlier, it said, Again, it's the capstone. It's the top. Maturity is measured by the presence or absence of that factor in the life.

Now, in 1 John 3.18, it says, Meaning that love is something you do. It's done in deed. It's not done by talking about it.

It's not present because you say, I love you. You may say, I love you, and what you have may not be love at all. In fact, you could be lying entirely.

You might not even think yourself to love someone. You may say you love them if you want to use them enough. And you think that that will get you where you want with them to say that.

Love is measured in doing, in deeds, not in saying. Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. John said in 1 John 3.18. What kind of deeds? How do we practice love? Well, I've given six points in this outline.

And I may not have enough time to go over them. I certainly don't have time to look up the scriptures on them with you. But the first one is in obedience to Christ.

We have two scriptures given there, but we'll read one of them. We'll let one be sufficient. In 1 John 5.3, it says, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

And his commandments are not burdensome. Now, this is what I said a moment ago. You can measure love by whether you're keeping God's commandments.

If you say, well, I'm loving. I just happen to commit adultery a lot. But I do it in love.

No, that's not love. That's not the love of God. That's some kind of love.

It's carnal, fleshly, what the world calls love. But love is seen in keeping God's commandments. Why? Because his commandments are simply the amplification of what it means to love.

And if you're not keeping his commandments, you're not loving. It's that simple. So love is measured in terms of your obedience to Christ, to God, to what he has commanded.

Second point. The practice of love is seen in the committal of yourself to others. Giving of yourself, committing yourself or your own life to others.

Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, but that a man lay down his life for his friends. Giving up your life. And you may not be able to lay down your life in the sense of dying for people.

That's a great privilege to be able to do that. Not all have the opportunity. If someone walked in right here and said, and they had a gun, they said, listen, I'm going to kill one of you.

Any volunteers? You might say, take me. And you'll know that by you getting shot, you're sparing someone else who would otherwise be shot. You've laid down your life for your friend.

Wonderful. But most of us won't get a chance to do that. Probably no one will ever walk in and make that kind of an offer.

And many of us will simply not, the call of God in our life will not bring us into mortal danger for the faith. Some will. But even if we are not in the position to die for others, we can still lay down our lives.

We can lay down our pride. We can lay down our prerogatives. We can lay down our rights.

We can give up our selfishness in order to put somebody else's needs or wants or desires or pleasure ahead of our own. This certainly is laying down your life. Your self-life.

Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, so that he lay down his life. It says in Ephesians chapter 5, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Lay down his life.

He gave up himself for her, for her needs, for her well-being. This is love. That you commit yourself.

You commit your life, even to the point of death if necessary. A second aspect is committing your resources. Love is seen in what you do with your money.

If your money is largely spent on things that are for your pleasure, for your comfort, for the enhancement of your life, or on the other hand if they're spent on the needs of the world, of the poor, of those who've never heard the gospel, to meet the real needs of others, this is how love is seen also in action, by where your money goes. The committing of your resources. In 1 John 3, verse 17, it says, if you have this world's good and see your brother in need, and shut up your bowels of compassion from him, that means you don't do anything for him financially.

How does the love of God dwell in you? That's not the love of God. There's other scriptures there we don't have time to go into. The committal of your service to others is another mark of love.

Serving others. It says in Galatians 5, verse 13, you're called to liberty, but do not use your liberty as an occasion of the flesh, but through love, serve one another. Through love, serve one another.

Acting in love is seen in serving. And that, of course, often means giving up the thing you'd rather do with your time to do something someone else needs done. Volunteering to do a job that, if you sit quietly, someone else may take, but by you taking the job, someone else will be free to do something that they might like to do.

Serving others is a mark of love. Now, the other two points on that list are kind of two sides of one coin. On the one hand, let's look at Philippians 1.9. Philippians 1.9, Paul says, In this I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.

In other words, your love is not supposed to be indiscriminate in the sense of, you know, you don't use wisdom in your kindness. I mean, you can give all your money to the first person who asks for it and say, Look how loving I am, but in fact it might have been a very unworthy cause. You need to use a little judgment.

You need to use some discernment, a little bit of wisdom. You need to govern your love, not just kind of gush it all out all over the place and give all your time and your energy to things that aren't worthwhile. You need to be a steward of the things God's given you, and the stewardship must be exercised in love, but you need to use knowledge and discernment and wisdom, because otherwise the person who's the pushiest or the person who's the most, the best con artist or something will get all that you have to give, and it may not be what God wants you to give your time or your money to.

You need to use wisdom and discernment, and your love shouldn't just be unrestrained and poured out without any boundaries. You need to know what the best use of your service and your resources and your time is, and that requires discerning between different options. There's more than one person who could use that money.

There's more than one person that could use your help right now. Well, how do you decide what to do? Well, you've got to weigh those things. You've got to use some discernment as to what's more worthy, what would be more pleasing and glorifying to God, what's a more important need? That requires some thought.

That requires some discernment. But on the other hand, while your love should be discriminating in that sense, it should be indiscriminate in another sense. That is, it should not be dished out only to people who are loving towards you or who reciprocate your love.

A lot of people will give only to those who give back to them or will greet those who greet them. And Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5, if you only do that, you do no more than what the publicans do. But if you do good to those who hate you, if you are kind to those who are unkind to you, if you bless those who curse you and love those who persecute you, then you're being like the Father.

Then you have the love of God, a love that is truly divine, not just the love that anyone would have. Anyone might love somebody who loves them. But for you to be indiscriminate in the sense that you don't just love those who will reciprocate in kind, but you may love those who can never reciprocate or who are indisposed to reciprocate, who would never wish to do you a kind deed, you should be as eager and willing to do kindness and service and help to people like that as to your best friends.

And in this sense, love needs to be more indiscriminate. In some senses, it must be discriminating. In other senses, it must avoid being too discriminating.

That is to say, we need to be careful not to favor those from whom we would get back some gratification, from whom we get back some repayment, or those who are friendly toward us and who we would naturally like. We must love equally those that we wouldn't naturally like and who will not reciprocate in kind. Well, we've run out of time.

We certainly have not run out of things that you can say about the subject of love from the Bible. The Bible is so full of it. But we've made what I consider to be a general overview of the theme.

And in the remaining lectures, which are only a few left in this series, we'll talk about the other things that Paul lists as the fruit of the Spirit. And we'll come to those in succeeding weeks after this.