

The Fruit of Love

DAVE BAST

What the world needs now is love, sweet love. Do you remember that old pop song refrain? Or how about this one: All you need is love, love; love is all you need. Well, the songs are right; we do need love—all of us; and the world could use more love, a lot more of it; but what the songs do not tell us is where to find the kind of love that lasts, and that satisfies our deepest needs. What the world does not tell us is what deep and lasting love is really like. To find the answers to those questions, we have to dig into scripture, and that is exactly what we plan to do right now on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, today we are beginning a new series of programs. It is going to be fairly long—nine programs long—because there are nine fruits of the Spirit from a famous verse in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Chapter 5, verses 22 and 23, where he says this: But the fruit of the of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So those are the nine fruit, and those are going to be...we will have one program for each of them in this series. It is a little longer series than we usually do on *Groundwork*, but it is going to be a good series to dig into these very, very important virtues...traits...fruit of the Christian; and for this program—and this will also be true of the third program in our series—we are being joined by a special guest; so we are happy to welcome Shiao Chong. Chong used to be a campus pastor for a while, but now he is the editor for the Christian Reformed Church’s magazine, *The Banner*; so, welcome Chong. We are happy to have you here.

SHIAO CHONG

Thank you; thank you very much, Scott and Dave. I am glad to be here.

DAVE BAST

We want to dig right into this first virtue...use the time that we have available to us...and talk about the greatest of these, as Paul calls it, in a passage we will look at in a bit: The virtue of love—the quality of love—which should mark the Christian life. Maybe to give some context, we should look at that larger passage from Galatians Chapter 5. It starts at verse 16, really, and leads up to the list of the fruit of the Spirit; so, just to excerpt some of the verses, Paul writes:

I say: Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh... ¹⁷But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, (and all the rest; and then he concludes): ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. So Chong, just for starters, it seems as though the list of fruit is in opposition to something else that is going on inside of us that Paul calls “the works of the flesh.”

SHIAO CHONG

Yes, it seems like there is. I think you want to understand that when he talks about the flesh he is not talking about just one kind of sin...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

Shiao Chong: Sometimes we have a tendency to think that; but actually, it is about our old self or our sinful self as a whole, and he lists out...I think in verse 19, is that right...sexual immorality by impurity, sensuality, but also idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, and anger, and a whole bunch of things.

DAVE BAST

Which are really in opposition to the great quality of love, in a sense. You could see all of those things of the flesh as somehow undermining our ability to love others—to love one another.

SHIAO CHONG

That is right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is also, I think, important to say that when we hear about desires of the flesh, we do tend to think only of sexual sins; but Chong, as you were just pointing out, there are some sexual sins listed as works of the flesh here, but it also includes, you know, idolatry and strife, and just being jealous of someone; because for Paul, flesh is a summary term for our fallen nature. It is also, I think, important to point out that Paul is not saying that our having physical bodies is bad. There is nothing wrong with our flesh as created by God. We are created to have a body. We will even have a resurrection body one day, as Jesus does already now. So, flesh does not just mean as opposed to being, you know, Casper the Friendly Ghost, having no body. Flesh is Paul's summary term for fallenness—being broken people.

DAVE BAST

The other thing is, I think, most people recognize some kind of struggle internally between what they feel like they should do and what they end up doing, but they think of it in terms of maybe conscience verses desire, or higher nature/lower nature. Paul describes it somewhat differently here, doesn't he?

SHIAO CHONG

Right, yes. I think if you want to think of how sometimes we think of a split between us, simply as a devil was this spirit kind of thing...external...

DAVE BAST

Yes, one on one shoulder and the other on the other shoulder...

SHIAO CHONG

Yes; but I think you can see a picture of this as a struggle that goes on in almost everything that we do. It is not just that some things are bad and some things good, but in all things that we do, there is always this tension and this struggle between us about, you know, we can do this in the right way—do this in a God-honoring way—or do this in a sinful way—a way that will lead us to idolatry and drunkenness and all kinds of things; or in doing things in a, you know, loving way or a way that shows the Spirit and the life of the Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting, too, when you look at that, and this is one thing we are going to do, I think, off and on throughout this series, is we are going to look at how these fruit of the Spirit also are at odds with a lot of features to our culture right now; and I was thinking when you look at Galatians 5:19, 20, and 21, where Paul lists the works of the flesh, it includes things that we see on television every night. In fact, there are some TV

shows that are premised on rivalries and fits of anger, and divisions. We have these split-screen commentaries; we have reality TV shows where they put people in a house and they have to live together, and they hate each other. For us, this is entertainment, but Paul says: It is the works of the flesh.
Dave Bast/

SHIAO CHONG

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You know, another thought just struck me, Chong, as you were speaking a moment ago, about the way that the opposition to the flesh for Christians is the Spirit of God; not something in us, but something that has come to us to make us new, to give us faith, to regenerate us, is the great term; and somehow this battle between the flesh and the Spirit can go on even in our good works—even when we choose the better thing, the flesh can kind of rise up and trigger pride.

SHIAO CHONG

Yes...

DAVE BAST

And the Spirit opposes that, too.

SHIAO CHONG

Well exactly; I mean, rivalries and envies...stuff that Scott was talking about, too, we can do that when we are doing ministry...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SHIAO CHONG

You know, we can have this rivalry with other ministries competing with one another. I remember that when I was a campus pastor sometimes in the past, you know, we have all these different Christian organizations doing mission work on campus; and sometimes it comes across like you are competing...a rivalry, you know...envying one another and jockeying with one another, trying to see which one is better...

DAVE BAST

And that is all flesh, isn't it?

SHIAO CHONG

Exactly, yes! I mean, you are doing God's work, although his people are doing it in the wrong way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, the main point, of course, is not only that there is this opposition between the flesh and where the Holy Spirit would lead us, but also that there is just generally a better way to live if you know who Jesus is; and if you know Jesus, and if his Spirit is in you, then you are going to bear these fruit; and we want to get right at now that first fruit that is listed of love, and we will take that in a concentrated way in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and joining our conversation today is a special guest, Shiao Chong, who is the editor of the magazine, *The Banner*, and a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. So, once again, we welcome you, Chong, to the program.

SHIAO CHONG

Thank you.

DAVE BAST

Today what we are talking about is the fruit of the Spirit. We have looked at them in general terms from Galatians 5, but now we want to focus on the head of the list, the chief fruit, which is love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It makes some sense to go to the passage most people think of first when they think of love, the great love chapter: I Corinthians 13; and so, let's listen to that, where Paul writes:

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

DAVE BAST

So, here Paul introduces what is the ultimate gift or fruit of the Spirit. Interestingly, those are the two words that the New Testament most often uses for the things that the Spirit of God imparts to us in our new life as Christians. It sometimes speaks about gifts, as though the Spirit gives these to us; it sometimes speaks about fruit, as though the Spirit causes these things to grow within us; and Paul has just been talking about some of the spectacular gifts that some Christians tend to focus on. Things like speaking in tongues or healing, but now, he says: Look, I want to show you a better way; I want to show you the one gift that, if you do not have, nothing else matters, and that gift is love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think it might be interesting, too...and Chong, I think you know this, too, that we tend to carve out I Corinthians 13 as the great wedding passage, right; but we forget that, indeed, it was previewed—or preceded, rather—by I Corinthians 12, and there Paul is addressing a problem, really, in the Corinthian congregation, right?

SHIAO CHONG

Yes; so, there is a lot of conflict in the Corinthian church, right? I mean, their gifted...but when you read the whole I Corinthians, you recognize they are really dysfunctional in many ways, right? They are one of the most gifted churches; they have all these gifts of healing and speaking in tongues and prophecy, and whatnot; but at the same time, they have so much division in the church, and a lot of conflict; and I think those are some of the things that Paul is dealing with in his letters to the church; and I guess love is one of the key virtues—gifts—that he is talking about in terms of helping the Corinthian Christians kind of deal with that conflict.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and I pointed that out sometimes when couples have chosen this for their wedding. I have sometimes said this is more appropriate than you think; not just because it is about love, but because it is being spoken into a situation of conflict, and you may as well get used to it if you are going to get married. That is where your love is going to have to grow.

DAVE BAST

That is where you are going to be, right, right; but it is love of a particular kind, isn't it? And it even has a special word that many of us, if we are familiar with the Bible have heard about.

SHIAO CHONG

Right, yes; in Greek it is *agape*. That is the original Greek translation, and that kind of special kind of word that means a kind of love that is not based on any kind of conditions about loving the person or how lovable the person is or how adorable or attractive the object of love is; although that person is worthy, even, of love. It is kind of interesting to know how, if you contrast this with other Greek concepts or words about love, like *eros*, which is one Greek word where we get the English word *erotic* from, which is the Greek word for romantic love...

DAVE BAST

Right...attraction love, we might say.

SHIAO CHONG

That is right, yes; love that is something that is attractive and worthy of love; and there is the other one, there is *philos*, which is kind of brotherly love or love of friendship—love something is noble—and you get Philadelphia from that...

DAVE BAST

Yes, the city of brotherly love.

SHIAO CHONG

And so, you contrast those two and I think, if I am not mistaken, the ancient Greek culture would actually have kind of a hierarchy of values of which love is of greater value—of greater worth. So, they have names for these different loves, right: Eros, philos, and then agape; but I think often agape is seen as sort of the afterthought...kind of the bottom of the totem pole...kind of valued in their society. They are kind of arguing whether eros is better. Plato talks about eros, and then, no, philos is better; but agape is almost always sort of seen to be, you know, well, it is there. We need something to kind of categorize it, but you know, it is not really something that we look up to; and yet, the surprising thing is that the New Testament, and Paul especially, takes...the Christians took that—agape—and turned it upside down and said this is the most important love...above everything else.

DAVE BAST

And...well, here is a typical passage, too...another famous passage. This is from John, from I John Chapter 4, but it not only puts it at the top of the human spectrum of loves, it ascribes it ultimately to God. So, John writes:

⁷Beloved, let us love one another because (and the word is *agape*) because agape is from God. Everyone who agapes is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not agape does not know God, (I mean, it is just over and over.) for God is love.... ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I really like, Chong, what you brought in there, that Paul is kind of flipping the pyramid here. He is putting at the top of the pyramid the thing that the Greeks esteemed the least, which is the self-giving love that John is talking about; and indeed, God is love, and if we are full of God by God's Spirit, then we are going to be people of love; and John also says in that same I John letter, if you say you love God but you are not loving yourself, that cannot be true, because if God is in you, you will have love.

We can maybe just quickly think about a few characteristics of God's love, because this translates to how we are supposed to love; and so, one of the things that the New Testament makes clear is that God's love is selfless. God is not doing this out of any need...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is doing it as a sheer gift.

DAVE BAST

Yes; one of the things that led Augustine, the great Church father, for example, to the doctrine of the trinity is the idea that if God is love, he has to have someone to love, and before there was any creation, before there were any people, he had all that he needed in himself. So, his act of creation, in a sense, was selfless. He did not do it so that he could have something that would give him pleasure or give him an object to love. He did it just out of love.

SHIAO CHONG

Yes, and another characteristic, I think, of God's love...of agape here...is that it is a sense of...it is a commitment...a decision, and it is not just a feeling. I think sometimes in our culture we very often kind of reduce love to just an emotion of the heart, right? We love somebody...we fall in love. I think agape love here is one whereby God makes a conscious decision to love us, even though we are sinners and though we rebel against him. I think it goes back also to the Hebrew Old Testament, where it has said, I think, covenantal love, that love that is framed within God's covenant and God's promises and God's commitment to his people; and so that is the kind of love that we are talking about here; not just a feeling of whether we like somebody or not, but we are committed to loving people regardless.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And with God it is just inevitable. I mean, you were talking earlier about Augustine, Dave, and the creation. Theologians are sometimes asked the question: Why did God create? Well, he could not have been under any external pressure to do something because there is nothing external to God; but a lot of theologians have said: It was just so like God to want to create a universe full of other creatures so that he could love them, because that is who God is. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been loving each other from all eternity, so it just makes sense. Of course he is going to create more creatures, because that is just who God is. So, God is love, and if we are full of God by his Holy Spirit, we have to show that love; and as we close this program, in just a minute we are going to consider some practical ideas of what that means.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

SHIAO CHONG

And I am Shiao Chong.

DAVE BAST

We are just talking about the nature of love in the sense of agape, the biblical, the New Testament sense—and Old Testament—*chesed*—as you mentioned, Chong. This commitment of God...a decision to love, to behave in a certain way; and I was struck by something you said a moment ago, Chong, about in our culture we mostly think of love as a feeling; and in fact, that understanding of love even causes people to break their commitments to love in the fuller, truer sense. So, you will often hear of a marriage where one partner just said: Well, I fell in love with someone else. I cannot help it. I cannot stay committed to you, I have to follow my heart. And this is so antithetical, really, to the authentic kind of love that we are talking about.

SHIAO CHONG

Yes, and I think that in biblical terms they would understand marriage, the relationship, as based on agape first with eros as something that sort of highlights it and emphasizes and builds on agape; but our society tends to make marriage based on eros instead, which is the Greek word for romantic love; and so, it is all based on or centered around romantic love—eros—and agape only kind of comes in here or there wherever it can, but in biblical terms, it is the other way around. It is based on agape love—commitment—is the foundation, and then eros is what highlights it and enriches it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which, as probably all of us have pointed out at marriages we have done, you have to have it in that order because the eros—the romantic part—can come and go...

SHIAO CHONG

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It can fade over time. We get older, and so forth. If the foundation of the marriage is the eros, then as soon as the zip seems to go out of things because you have gotten so used to each other after twelve years of marriage...or the seven-year itch, as they sometimes refer to it...if agape isn't the foundation, that is where you are going to split apart: I am going to find somebody more exciting; I want that zip back...that eros...that erotic...romantic. So, agape is the right foundation for marriage, but also for all of life for believers because it is the Godlike part of us. Indeed, it does not depend on the other person being attractive. In fact, the Bible says: While we were yet sinners, God loved us.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

While we were as unlovable to a holy and righteous God as we could get, he still was able to love us; and maybe, too, one of the things we can talk about as we close out this program, Chong and Dave, is kind of how does this live itself out in the context of our congregations or our communities? And maybe we go back to that I Corinthians 13 passage just to pick up a few of love's opposites, right? Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous; it is not boastful; it is not arrogant; it is not rude; and those are things I think we all struggle with. That is the opposite of love, being arrogant or rude, but Paul says: No, you cannot do that.

SHIAO CHONG

Yes, and I think that arrogance is a big deal when it comes to conflicts in churches and divisions among people. Arrogance, boasting, rudeness, they are all kind of related to one another and they all stem from pride—spiritual pride often; and I think that...pride is kind of like a thinking of yourself more worthy than you should be, especially pride often comes when you compare yourself to others; and often our human psyche is such that we tend to want to compare ourselves to those who are worse off than us, and elevate ourselves and think of us highly—that kind of pride and arrogance—then you come to a point that you think that, you know, you are always right or you should be right. You should get what you want, what you deserve for yourself, or whatever; often in terms of only in a selfish way over and above what others should be getting or deserving.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You mentioned that word *elevated* a minute ago. It is interesting that all of the metaphors and images we have for pride have to do with height. She is so high and mighty. He is on his high horse. He is looking down his nose at us.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he has his nose stuck up in the air.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are all height imagery, and you are right. Pride is the first of the seven deadly sins; love is the first of the fruit of the Spirit...

SHIAO CHONG

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are, indeed, opposite.

DAVE BAST

And a lot of these behaviors that Paul describes in I Corinthians 13 are things that we are going to see later in the list of the fruit of the Spirit, like patience and kindness and gentleness, you know, the kind of humility that acts... So, if I am asking myself the question: How can be more loving in this authentic sense? How can I develop the fruit of agape in my life? The answer is, it is all about how you choose to treat other people, isn't it?

SHIAO CHONG

Yes, but I think I want to focus on our relationship with God first. I think that flows out of that. I think, as we said with pride earlier, we tend to compare ourselves with others, but I think when it comes to love and humility, our starting point is you are very aware of where you are and how you are in the presence of God. When you are in the presence of an almighty God, a holy God, an all-loving and all-gracious God, you start realizing how unloving you are and how ungracious you are, and where you are, and you kind of come down a few notches—at least a few notches—you feel small, but you begin to sense where you are really before God's love; and so when you experience yourself correctly, then you can properly love others better, and you can be more humble and you will be less proud about yourself, and be more caring of others.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is the two commandments, right? So, the first commandment is to love God. We have been talking about love on a horizontal level, but if we begin with love on the vertical plane and a proper relationship toward the God who loved us first...

SHIAO CHONG

Right.

DAVE BAST

Then it can flow out in the other direction as well, to others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, with pride and envy it is all about comparing yourself to somebody, and Chong, that was a good thought. We compare ourselves to God first of all, and we see his supreme love, then we are not only put in our proper place, but then we know what we have to do; and maybe we can let John have the last word here from scripture:

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and our guest today was Shiao Chong. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of the fruit of the Spirit with biblical passages that help us better understand and

experience joy.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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Printed on April 21, 2025