

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE

1 John 3:11-18

Newbegun United Methodist Church

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“The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” There are nine fruit of the spirit. Last week I asked you to promise to prepare your hearts to receive the messages about the fruit of the Spirit and I asked you to promise to practice each one as we talk about them.

Today we start with the first fruit – love. In the 80’s a popular band named Foreigner had a hit song titled, *I Want to Know What Love Is.*” Now that is easier said than done. That’s because the idea of love isn’t limited to mealy a few random verses in the Bible. It is all over the Bible. In fact, every book of the NT references the word “love” with one exception. Can you guess which book or letter that is? The word love doesn’t appear in the book of Acts. However, love is certainly **demonstrated** time and time again through the actions of the Apostles. And even then, I might add, it was a learning experience for the Apostles. It took them a while to know what love is, but they got most of it eventually.

So today we will look at how we can cultivate the fruit of the Spirit known as love. Remember, living out the fruit of the Spirit is not something you can accomplish by your own effort; neither can you accomplish it with no effort at all. Therefore, as I begin, let us take a moment for a prayer: Lord God, we promise to practice the fruit which is love and we pray with all our heart that you will help us so that, together, it becomes a real

part of who we are and what we want to be. In Jesus name, amen. The entire letter of 1 John is all about love but our concentration will be on 1 John 3:11-18. For starters I can tell you, very quickly, three things that 1 John tells love is not.

Love is not a feeling. In the NT and 1 John love is an action; something you do.

Love is not an option. John makes it clear that since you're serious about living the Christian life than loving others is a serious thing.

Love is not even a new idea. Love has always been at the core of the Gospel. In 1 John 2 he writes, "I'm not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning" and in 1 John 3:11 he writes, "This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another." For believers, the challenge is not to **know** what love is but to **show** what love is. I will offer some ways to practice NT love.

For example, practice NT love by treating others as your equal. We often think of the opposite of love as hate. But hate is just the last stage of many inward attitudes. Hate begins with pride, arrogance, condescension and contempt. One thing made the Christian church so unique in the Roman world is that it crossed all cultural boundaries. Each home church was made up of people from every element of society and all walks of life. Those who found themselves excluded elsewhere received a warm embrace among believers. Paul wrote these words especially, "In Christ there is neither Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female for we are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3) If you are entertaining the idea that you're just a little bit better, or a whole lot better, than someone around you, then you are incapable of loving them as Christ loves them. The love that is from the Spirit is a love that reaches, not up or down, but across – equally.

With dignity and respect because we are all in the same boat, all from the same Father, all sinners whom Jesus died for, and all share the same Spirit. Practice equality of love.

Another example of showing NT love is to treat other with compassion. One person defined it as this: Love is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too." 1 John 3:17 said this, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" Love means when someone is hurting, I refuse to look the other way. I will do what I can do to make this matter right.

When a neighbor had major car trouble the minister found out about it. And even though the minister couldn't pay for the repair cost he told his neighbor that he would take the kids to school and take his neighbor to work every day until the car was running again. That was a demonstration of compassion that took weeks to complete. Fruit of the Spirit love says that the cost is worth it to those in need. Or one might say this about fruit of the Spirit love: The true measure of love is how one treats someone who can do absolutely no good in return. Practicing fruit of the Spirit love is compassion.

Another way to practice fruit of the Spirit love is by taking the first step. Maybe you have heard someone say, "I'll forgive them as soon as she forgives me." That is not the NT way of fruitful love. Fruit of the Spirit love says. "I am willing to take the first step. I am willing to make the first move." Picture a husband and wife sitting at home. Suddenly the husband jumps up and grabs an afghan off a chair and places it over his wife's legs and feet. She says, "Thank you. I was chilly." The husband replies, 'I thought so for I saw you shivered a bit.'" Now some people might say, what's wrong

with her? Can't she get the afghan herself?" The apostle John might say, "That is the kind of love I am talking about. Taking the first step is to identify what the other needs and to be willing to help where we can."

When a major plague hit the ancient Roman Empire, Christians had surprisingly high survival rates. Why? Most Roman citizens would banish any plague-stricken person from their household. But since Christians had no fear of death, they nursed their sick, instead of throwing them out on the streets. Therefore, many Christians survived the plague. Love has no fear in taking the first step.

In conclusion, don't ask how can I know what love is; ask how can I show love? Then practice fruitable love this week by treating others equally; showing compassion; and taking the first step. As 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another." Amen.