

Be Know For Love

Part Two

*1 John 4:19; Galatians 5:16-26; 1 John 1:9;
1 Corinthians 13:13; Matthew 22:37-40;
Romans 13:10; Matthew 5:43-48; John 3:16*

1. Completely Undeserved.

- Romans 5:8

2. Productive and Transforming.

- Romans 5:3-5; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:19

3. Unending love.

- Romans 8:35-38; Ephesians 3:16-21

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After hearing me preach, I've had one person tell me that they are convinced that I must be a liberal, and from the same sermon I've had another person tell me that I must be a conservative...and neither one of them sounded or acted like that was a good thing!

So let me settle this: the Lord is always for people; *all* people. That's what I want my position to be, friend; it really doesn't matter to me which party you *think* I'm affiliated with, as long as you know that my first allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that allegiance doesn't *disregard* political policies; it *informs* them. It informs me on how to respond to political opportunities in ways that are the best for *all* lives and *all* created life. And, by the way, that viewpoint is always above consideration of my own "rights" (whether or not they are spelled out for me in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or any amendments). I don't vote in ways that advance *my* rights; I try to vote in ways that advance the rights of *others*. And yes, I *did* vote. And no, I'm not going to tell you who I voted for. But I will tell you that I try to follow the advice that John Wesley gave about voting and elections. It comes from the diary of John Wesley. Wesley was a great intellect, theologian, preacher, pastor, and man whom God used to begin the Methodist Church movement, back in the 1700s. When he was asked by people in one of the Methodist Churches how they should vote, he recorded it in his diary, and it reads:

"I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them,

- 1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy:**
- 2. To speak no evil of the person they vote against: And,**
- 3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."**

That was written over two hundred years ago! Here's what Wesley meant: never let anyone buy your vote. In those days, like today, people literally could sell their vote. Rather than vote in a way that benefits yourself, vote instead for the person who is most worthy to fill the role they are running for. At the same time you should never, ever, speak poorly of the person or party you voted against or else you'll become hard-hearted, angry, spiteful. That means you don't post derogatory things on Facebook or Twitter about the other party or person.

I think if you can do *that*, it's an indicator that your primary allegiance is to the Lord, and not a political position.

So last week we began this series called, "Be Known for Love," because as followers of Jesus, the first thing that should come to someone's mind when they think about us is not what political party we belong to and not what particular issue we stand for or against, but the first thing that should come to their mind about you or me is, "that person is a loving person."

Last week we learned from the words of Jesus that love is not an option; it is a command. Love is not an idea; it is an action. And love is not invisible; it is visible in us – our actions reveal the condition of our hearts.

We are just a day and a half before our national election day. As you think back over these last days and weeks, what have your actions told about *your* character and nature? I hope you are known for love.

Today I thought we might want to look at exactly *how* we can we can be known for love – a love that informs our decisions, our votes, our attitudes and our actions.

So let me start with the bad news: if you just decide that you are going to start loving like that, you *will* fail. You can't do it in your own strength or effort. Remember the Scripture from John's letter that said:

"So you see, our love for him comes as a result of his loving us first."
(1 John 4:19, tlb)

The kind of love that we learned about last week, the kind of love that God has, is the kind of love we are commanded to have toward others, no matter who they are. But that is *not* a love that you can manufacture; you can't create it or generate it or work yourself into it. *That kind of love comes from God, and therefore it will only come by God's presence within you* – in other words, by the Holy Spirit. You must yield to the Spirit to allow him to work in and through your character in order for you to love others – in action.

So today we are going to look at a passage that explains how we can be known for love, a love that will inform everything we do toward others in this tumultuous time.

We find it in Paul's letter to the Galatians, 5:16-26. This is our primary passage today, so would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me, whether you are here in the worship center or joining us in our online campus. This is what Paul says:

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the

like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”
(Galatians 5:16-26, niv)

This is a well-known passage called “The Fruit of the Spirit” – describing the nature of the Holy Spirit. In order to understand this divine nature that can be *in* us, we first have to look at what keeps us from it, and that’s our human nature. This passage starts out talking about the *sinful nature, or our nature without the Holy Spirit*. There’s quite a list of sins there at the beginning of this passage, and as we read it, we might assume that list of sins is describing people who are not Christians. But remember that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the *Christians in the church at Galatia*—he’s talking to *believers*. So listen to me, Church: don’t think that list doesn’t apply to you and me. Paul is saying that, as believers, we have a decision to make. We either live according to the sinful nature, or what he calls “the flesh,” or we live by the Spirit of God. This passage gives us the choice; either we try to be content to live “according to the flesh” – out of our own human resources – or we can live our lives in total dependence on what only God can do as we live “according to the Spirit.” If you are a Christian, you can’t live both ways at the same time. So in order to live by the Spirit we need to first look at, and confess and repent of any acts of the flesh, or sin.

What’s interesting about the list of sins in that passage is that there are actually four *categories* of sin: sins of the body, spirit, soul, and community. By “body,” it doesn’t mean that your physical body is bad – it’s *what you do* with it that is sinful. This is talking about choosing sins for the selfish pleasure of the senses.

There are also sins of the spirit – these are religious sins. Essentially, *anything* that we worship or love more than God is a sin of the spirit. But there are also sins that involve anything spiritual outside of God; messing around with the paranormal, witchcraft, sorcery, seances, horoscopes, even using hallucinogens.

Then are the sins of the soul, or psyche – these sins involve your attitudes, thoughts, moods, and emotions. These kinds of sin damage your own psyche, but they also have a negative impact on your relationships, because then the passage lists sins of the community – quarrelling, discord, divisions, gossip, sniping or badmouthing others, unresolved bitterness – anything that divides you from others and others from you.

So listen: be careful when you complain to others about something you don’t like, whether it is something your church is doing or is not doing, or about someone else in your church, or even about politics. If you have a critical, complaining spirit, you are guilty of the sin of dissension in the church, which leads to “divisions” or “factions.” Factions are organized dissension. Factions are when you gather those

who have the same critical attitude as you. Kind of a “misery loves company” thing, but it’s done in order to get leverage. Whenever I hear someone complain to me about something, and then they say “and I’m not the only one who feels that way...” then I know they are turning their dissension into a faction. But listen: when you try to get people on your “side” against others in the church, you are sinning. Even if you have a valid concern, there’s a right and wrong way to be heard.

We don’t want to be known for any of those sins! But think about those things in light of what’s going on in our culture today. Think about recent conversations you’ve had about any of the big three things that we are all dealing with: Covid (and masking), Politics (and elections), and riots. do you want to be known for your complaining spirit, or do you want to be known for love? If I were to look at your Facebook page, and read your posts from the last three months – even the last month – what would I learn about you? Would I learn how much you love Jesus and others, how much you pray for others and for our country, or would I learn your complaints and opinions about guns? Or immigrants? Or masks? Or Covid? Or people of a different color or culture than you? Or political opponents?

As you think about this, perhaps you are realizing that you are guilty. If you are practicing these things, love is the *last thing* you’ll be known for. In fact, this passage says that *you won’t enter heaven*.

So I encourage you to pray; in fact, it would be good to do so now...

Now we want to look at the fruit of the Spirit, which is how we will be known for love. When you compare the two lists in that passage, you see the list of sins is called the *acts* of the sinful nature and the other list is the *fruit* of the Spirit. Our sinful nature is described as “acts,” which is plural, and the Holy Spirit is described by “fruit,” which is singular (The original language does not say “fruits,” it says “fruit” – a singular character).

There are several things worth noting about that:

First, without the Holy Spirit our lives are made up of several attempts or “acts” to do what we want or what we think is best for ourselves – we are, at best, fragmented and incomplete. Ours are ultimately selfish *works* – efforts, acts, actions.

But God’s is *his nature* – it’s a natural result, or fruit, of his character. The Spirit is complete and whole – so in him we can be whole and complete, too.

That’s important, because without Him, our only hope is a fragmented, splintered life, at best – to get better by our own effort or acts. But, in HIM it can be our nature to be better with love, to *be* our best and always *do* what’s best.

But there’s something else you need to see: in that list of the fruit of the Spirit, there is a reason that LOVE is listed *first*. That’s because it is the most important, and *love* is the motive behind all the rest of them! If you genuinely have the character or nature of God, which is love, you will find that you have all the rest, as well.

It’s inevitable that love should stand at the top of the list because God IS love:

“But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
(1 John 1:9, nlt)

...and...

“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13, nlt)

In fact, love is in itself the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament, according to Jesus:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37-40, nlt)

And so said the Apostle Paul:

“Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.”
(Romans 13:10, nlt)

When we think of the word “love,” our one word covers a lot of territory; I love my wife, I love my dog, I love sports, I love the outdoors, I love God...but all of those are different applications of the same word; love.

In the Greek language, there were several words for love. One was *eros*, which is physical or sexual love. The Bible *never* uses that word. Another word was *phileo* - brotherly love - deep friendship kind of love. Another word was *storge* - that’s the love parents have for their children. The word the New Testament uses most is the word *Agape*. This word was hardly ever used in Greek culture; they didn’t understand it. This is a Bible-exclusive word, and is a God-kind of love. It is unconditional love. It is the love that Jesus spoke of:

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:43-48, nlt)

This love is unconquerable kindness; it is undefeatable good will for someone else. It will never seek anything other than the highest good for someone else. It doesn’t matter who it is or how they treat you. On our own, we love with conditions attached. But agape love pursues the highest and best for someone else without condition, with nothing expected in return, no expectations, no strings attached. This is how God loves YOU—right now, just the way you are, not the way you think you should be. Not the way someone else says you should be. God loves you just the way you are. For God so agape—loves you he sent his one and only Son to die for

you so that you wouldn't die but could have life abundant and eternal. (John 3:16)
This love God has for you, and that *you* can be known for too, is...

1. ***Completely Undeserved.***

Not only do we *not* deserve it, God gives it to us even while we are hostile toward him. The Bible says:

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:8, nlt)

You and I don't deserve it, but if we've accepted it and have submitted to his Spirit, we can love others this way, too.

It's *The Fruit of the Spirit*. Are there people you need to love instead of hate or even dislike? There are for me! I won't say any names...the point is that to be known for love means we don't just love those who we think deserve it; we love them whether they deserve it or not.

This love of God is also...

2. ***Productive and Transforming.***

In other words, it doesn't just *feel* good—it isn't just nice to *know* about it; it produces a profound transformation in your life, giving you Christ's own character, and you can *act* out of, and act on, that love. According to Romans 5:3-5, God gives you his nature by the Holy Spirit:

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. *For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*” (Romans 5:3-5, nlt)

This isn't about just choosing a different ideology, nor does it describe a *slight* change in us. This is an inside-out, total restructuring and change in our nature and behavior and attitude.

The cool thing is that when this happens in us, then when we love others with Jesus' character of love, it creates in *them* a desire for that same kind of love in their own lives. That's what Jesus said would be the recognizable characteristic of those who are his followers.

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35, nlt)

It's because of his love that we can love each other.

“We love (agape) each other because he loved (agapao) us first.”
(1 John 4:19, nlt)

What do others say you are known for? Do you dare even ask them? If you are afraid to ask them, well, there’s your answer.

This love is completely undeserved, it is productive and transforming, and it is an...

3. ***Unending*** love.

There is nothing in time or eternity that can stop God from loving you. The Bible says:

“Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-38, nlt)

It is an incredible, unending love. But not only is it *to* you and *for* you, it can be *in* you and flow *from* you. If you have the Holy Spirit in you, you have this never-ending source of love to give to others. This is impossible on your own—but with the Spirit filling you, you can. The Bible says:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how **wide** and **long** and **high** and **deep** is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:16-19, niv)

God’s love is four dimensional – wide, long, high, and deep.

Agape gives depth to eros. Because the sexual relationship with your husband or wife will have unconditional giving, acceptance and commitment, eros will become an expression of agape in a solid, loving healthy marriage and family.

Agape gives length to phileo—because no matter what happens or what your friend does you will always love them and seek the best for them. Even if your friends abandon you or turn their back on you, you will keep loving them.

Agape gives height to storge—because not only do you love, respect, and accept your family but you love all of God’s children, whether they know Jesus yet or not. All people are now your family. *Agape is a wide love that includes all people!* That is the character or nature of Christ in us through His Spirit!

Jesus said *that* is how all people will know you are his—by how you love others. What do they know about you?

Pray

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:16-21, niv)