

The Fruit of the Spirit: Love
1 Corinthians 13
October 27, 2019

Those of you, who love pop songs, might remember the names Hal David (1921-2012) and Burt Bacharach (1928-). They are song writers. Hal David was a lyricist and Burt Bacharach was a composer and singer.

They wrote songs like “I Say a Little Prayer for You,” “Close to You,” “One Less Bell to Answer,” “Rain-drops Keep Fallin’ on My Head,” and many others.

They wrote songs that captured the hearts of many, not just Americans but people around the world. One of the songs they wrote is called “What the World Needs Now.” It illustrates human loneliness and hunger for a real love.

What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some but for everyone;

Lord, we don’t need another mountain,
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb,
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross...
Enough to last ’til the end of time.

What the world needs now is love, sweet love,
No, not just for some, but for everyone
It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.¹

“It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.” Well, it is true that the world really needs love, and not just for some but for everyone. But, what the world needs is not the kind of mushy, fickle, conditional love that we often see in movies or novels. What the world needs is the kind of love that Paul describes in First Corinthians chapter 13.

I am not sure if any poet or writer has ever captured what real love is, but in such a short passage Paul has described what love really is. Every time I read 1 Corinthians 13, I wish every marriage, every family, and every relationship had this kind of love.

¹ Hal David and Burt Bacharach, "What the World Needs Now" (Los Angeles, California: Blue Seas Music Publishers & Jac Music, Inc., 1965). Lyric by Hal David; music by Burt Bacharach, Copyright © 1965 Blue Seas, Inc., Jac Music, Inc., International Copyright secured. Made in USA. All rights reserved. See also, Charles R. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1983), p. 114.

In Galatians 5, Paul talks about the Fruit of the Spirit. Fruits are not produced over night. A tree needs to grow and mature before it can bear fruit, and once a fruit is formed, it takes months to mature. Fruit is something that takes time to form and to mature. The Fruit of the Spirit is no different. The Fruit of the Spirit Paul talks about, is a different character that becomes evident in our lives as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul talks about the nine characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the characters that are formed in us as we become obedient to the Lord. These characters take years to grow and mature.

The Fruit of the Spirit is different from the Gifts of the Spirit. The Gifts of the Spirit are something that we receive from the Lord for a common good, for the benefit of everyone. Different gifts are given to different people. To some a message of wisdom, to some a message of knowledge, to some a gift of healing, to some a gift to prophecy, to some a gift of speaking in different languages, to some to organize, to some to teach, so on and so forth. These are gifts that are given to us so that we may use it for the benefit of everyone. No one has all the gifts. But none of us is without a gift. We all have some gifts. We may not recognize them or develop them or use them, but we all have some.

However, the Fruit of the Spirit is character that is formed in us as a result of being obedient to the Lord. Without being obedient to the Lord, we will never have them. The first evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is love. When the Holy Spirit lives in us and we become obedient to him, we will have the evidence of love.

The love the Bible talks about is not of the emotion. It is not just a matter of feelings. In the Bible, love is a commandment. “You shall love your God.” “You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Love is a commandment. You cannot command a feeling or emotion. Rather, love is volitional; it is a matter of the will.

Some countries in the Eastern part of the world still practice arranged marriage. Sometimes, the young people who are to be married in an arranged marriage, have never even met each other until their wedding day.

A young lady from India was arranged to be married to a young man she had never met. One day, she received a letter from her fiancée in which he wanted them to begin a relationship and get to know each other prior to their wedding.

The young woman, however, returned the letter unopened, saying she believed love should be developed after wedding and not before.

She explained why she believed this by saying: “When we are born, we cannot choose who will be our mother or father, or our brothers and sisters. Yet, we learn to live with them and to love them. So it is with husband and wife.”²

In societies where this philosophy is accepted and practiced, divorce is very, very rare. Please don’t get me wrong. I am not promoting arranged marriages. I am just making a point that love is a commitment. It is not something we fall into, but rather something that we commit to.

When we read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 we cannot help but have this romantic feeling. We often use this section of the Bible in wedding ceremony. “Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud; it is not rude; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.” Isn’t that beautiful? So, we use it in the wedding ceremony all the time.

Ayako Miura (1922-1999) was a Japanese Christian novelist. Her best-known novel is her award-winning debut novel called “Freezing Point.” It is a novel about a man’s revenge on his wife, thinking she had been unfaithful to him, although no physical infidelity actually happened. In the process of his revenge, he ruins his own happiness and the happiness of everyone around him. It is a very thoughtful and well written novel.

She has written many books. One of her books is a collection of her Essays called “Truly Important Things.” One of her essays in that book is entitled “Many Forms of Love.” In this article she quotes 1 Corinthians 13, the very passage I quoted earlier. She challenges the readers to change the word “love” with the word “I” and read it again. So, it would sound like: “I am patient; I am kind; I do not envy; I do not boast; I am not proud; I am not rude; I am not self-seeking; I am not easily angered; I keep no record of wrongs; I do not delight in evil; but rejoice with the truth. I bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things.”³

She challenges the readers if they can truly confess that. She also challenges the readers to replace the word “I” with someone’s name, someone you respect or

² From James Merritt’s sermon, “If You Are Not Loving, You Are Not Living”, www.esermons.com

³ Ayako Miura, Truly Important Things, Translated into Korean by Keeho Cho, (Dupoong, Seoul, Korea: 1992) p. 281-283.

someone you dearly love and read the passage again. Is there anyone who can truly fit into that?

What this exercise reveals is that our love is pitiful, derisive, and scornful. So, what can we do to truly learn to love?

C.S. Lewis once said, “When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now... When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.”⁴ In other words, when we learn to love God the most, we will love others the best.

Proverbs 12:12 says: “The root of the righteous yields fruit.” The root of all love is God, because God is love. As our love for God deepens, our love for others also increases.

The great Swiss physician Paul Tournier (1898-1986) once said, “If a person will love God the way he ought to love God, he will then love others the way he ought to love others; and when he loves God and others the way he should, he will never need a psychiatrist.”⁵

So, what we need to work on is our relationship with the Lord. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we learn to love God and when our love for God grows, our love for others also grows and matures. This is why Paul mentions that one of the true evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit is love; the love that is growing and maturing. When you love God, you will love others, and when you love others, you will learn to appreciate yourself. That is a blessing.

⁴ From Letters of C.S. Lewis, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/204118-to-love-you-as-i-should-i-must-worship-god>

⁵ From James Merritt’s sermon, “If You Are Not Loving, You Are Not Living”, www.esermons.com