

The Fruit of the Spirit

Pastor Grant Williams April 01, 2015 Week # 2

“Love” Part 2

John 1:1-4 Amplified Bible (AMP)

1 In the beginning [before all time] was the Word ([a]Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [b]Himself.

2 He was present originally with God.

3 All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being.

4 In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.

John 14:15 Amplified Bible (AMP)

15 If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands.

John 14:23 Amplified Bible (AMP)

23 Jesus answered, If a person [really] loves Me, he will keep My word [obey My teaching]; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home (abode, special dwelling place) with him.

Hebrews 4:1-13 Amplified Bible (AMP)

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still holds and is offered [today], let us be afraid [[a]to distrust it], lest any of you should [b]think he has come too late and has come short of [reaching] it.

2 For indeed we have had the glad tidings [Gospel of God] proclaimed to us just as truly as they [the Israelites of old did when the good news of deliverance from bondage came to them]; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith (with [c]the leaning of the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness) by those who heard it; [d]neither were they united in faith with the ones [Joshua and Caleb] who heard (did believe).

3 For we who have believed (adhered to and trusted in and relied on God) do enter that rest, [e]in accordance with His declaration that those [who did not believe] should not enter when He said, As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest; and this He said although [His] works had been completed and prepared [and waiting for all who would believe] from the foundation of the world.

4 For in a certain place He has said this about the seventh day: And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.

5 And [they forfeited their part in it, for] in this [passage] He said, They shall not enter My rest.

6 Seeing then that the promise remains over [from past times] for some to enter that rest, and that those who formerly were given the good news about it and the opportunity, failed to appropriate it and did not enter because of disobedience,

7 Again He sets a definite day, [a new] Today, [and gives another opportunity of securing that rest] saying through David after so long a time in the words already quoted, Today, if you would hear His voice and when you hear it, do not harden your hearts.

8 *[This mention of a rest was not a reference to their entering into Canaan.] For if Joshua had given them rest, He [God] would not speak afterward about another day.*

9 *So then, there is still awaiting a full and complete Sabbath-rest reserved for the [true] people of God;*

10 *For he who has once entered [God's] rest also has ceased from [the weariness and pain] of human labors, just as God rested from those labors [f]peculiarly His own.*

11 *Let us therefore be zealous and exert ourselves and strive diligently to enter that rest [of God, to know and experience it for ourselves], that no one may fall or perish by the same kind of unbelief and disobedience [into which those in the wilderness fell].*

12 *For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the [g]breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.*

13 *And not a creature exists that is concealed from His sight, but all things are open and exposed, naked and defenseless to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.*

The following are instructions or commands to the believer...

Colossians 3:1-8 (Amplified Bible)

1 IF THEN you have been raised with Christ [to a new life, thus sharing His resurrection from the dead], aim at and seek the [rich, eternal treasures] that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 And set your minds and keep them set on what is above (the higher things), not on the things that are on the earth.

3 For [as far as this world is concerned] you have died, and your [new, real] life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, Who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in [the splendor of His] glory.

5 So kill (deaden, deprive of power) the evil desire lurking in your members [those animal impulses and all that is earthly in you that is employed in sin]: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires, and all greed and covetousness, for that is idolatry (the deifying of self and other created things instead of God).

6 It is on account of these [very sins] that the [holy] anger of God is ever coming upon the sons of disobedience (those who are obstinately opposed to the divine will),

7 Among whom you also once walked, when you were living in and addicted to [such practices].

8 But now put away and rid yourselves [completely] of all these things: anger, rage, bad feeling toward others, curses and slander, and foulmouthed abuse and shameful utterances from your lips!

1 John 4:20 (Amplified Bible)

20 If anyone says, I love God, and hates (detests, abominates) his brother [in Christ], he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (Amplified Bible)

31 Let all bitterness and indignation and wrath (passion, rage, bad temper) and resentment (anger, animosity) and quarreling (brawling, clamor, contention) and slander (evil-speaking, abusive or blasphemous language) be banished from you, with all malice (spite, ill will, or baseness of any kind).

32 And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you.

Romans 6:6 (Amplified Bible)

6 We know that our old (unrenewed) self was nailed to the cross with Him in order that [our] body [which is the instrument] of sin might be made ineffective and inactive for evil, that we might no longer be the slaves of sin.

Matthew 7:13-29 Amplified Bible (AMP)

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and spacious and broad is the way that leads away to destruction, and many are those who are entering through it.

14 But the gate is narrow (contracted [a]by pressure) and the way is straitened and compressed that leads away to life, and few are those who find it.

15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you dressed as sheep, but inside they are devouring wolves.

16 You will [b]fully recognize them by their fruits. Do people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, every healthy (sound) tree bears good fruit [[c]worthy of admiration], but the sickly (decaying, worthless) tree bears bad (worthless) fruit.

18 A good (healthy) tree cannot bear bad (worthless) fruit, nor can a bad (diseased) tree bear [d]excellent fruit [worthy of admiration].

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire.

20 Therefore, you will [e]fully know them by their fruits.

21 Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven.

22 Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name and driven out demons in Your name and done many mighty works in Your name?

23 And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [disregarding My commands].

24 So everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them [obeying them] will be like a [f]sensible (prudent, practical, wise) man who built his house upon the rock.

25 And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a stupid (foolish) man who built his house upon the sand.

27 And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great and complete was the fall of it.

28 When Jesus had finished these sayings [the Sermon on the Mount], the crowds were astonished and overwhelmed with bewildered wonder at His teaching,

29 For He was teaching as One Who had [and was] authority, and not as [did] the scribes.

Galatians 5:16-26 (Amplified Version)

16 But I say, walk and live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit]; then you will certainly not gratify the cravings and desires of the flesh (of human nature without God).

17 For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the [Holy] Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], so that you are not free but are prevented from doing what you desire to do.

18 But if you are guided (led) by the [Holy] Spirit, you are not subject to the Law.

19 **Now the doings (practices) of the flesh are clear** (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency,

20 Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies),

21 Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you beforehand, just as I did previously, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit **[the work which His presence within accomplishes]** is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness,

23 Gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a charge].

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus (the Messiah) have crucified the flesh (the godless human nature) with its passions and appetites and desires.

25 If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit.]

26 Let us not become vainglorious and self-conceited, competitive and challenging and provoking and irritating to one another, envying and being jealous of one another.

Tonight we are going to be continuing our study on love which is just one component that makes up the fruit. Remember, there is 9 elements or characteristics of the fruit of the spirit. I like how the amplified says it is *[the work which His presence within accomplishes]*

Love as a element or component of the fruit of the Spirit is a verb. It's not a feeling, and much like faith, if only expressed in words it's essentially meaningless. Though we like to hear the words "I love you" they mean nothing if not accompanied by loving action - God says so.

Jesus says this is the fruit, not fruits, of the Spirit. So though we will deal with each one separately, all of them are the fruit. So as we look at this Agape love, the first thing I would like to show you is that this kind of Love is:

I. Love is Sacred (1 Jn 4:7-8, 16)

1 John 4:7,8 and 16 (Amplified Version)

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is (springs) from God; and he who loves [his fellowmen] is begotten (born) of God and is coming [progressively] to know and understand God [to perceive and recognize and get a better and clearer knowledge of Him].

8 He who does not love has not become acquainted with God [does not and never did know Him], for God is love.

16 And we know (understand, recognize, are conscious of, by observation and by experience) and believe (adhere to and put faith in and rely on) the love God cherishes for us. God is love, and he who dwells and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him.

We have read in the word about Walking in the spirit... you want to know if you are walking and living in the spirit? are you loving people like God loves? are you progressively knowing Him more and having a clearer understanding of who He is and not stopping there but being more like him?

Colossians 3:1-8 (Amplified Bible)

1 **IF THEN** you have been raised with Christ [to a new life, thus sharing His resurrection from the dead], **aim at and seek** the [rich, eternal treasures] that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 And **set your minds and keep them set on what is above** (the higher things), not on the things that are on the earth.

3 For [as far as this world is concerned] you have died, and your [new, real] life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, Who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in [the splendor of His] glory.

5 **So kill** (deaden, deprive of power) the evil desire lurking in your members [those animal impulses and all that is earthly in you that is employed in sin]: sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires, and all greed and covetousness, for that is idolatry **(the deifying of self and other created things instead of God)**.

6 It is on account of these [very sins] that the [holy] anger of God is ever coming upon the sons of disobedience (those who are obstinately opposed to the divine will),

7 Among whom you also once walked, when you were living in and addicted to [such practices].

*8 **But now put away and rid yourselves [completely] of all these things:** anger, rage, bad feeling toward others, curses and slander, and foulmouthed abuse and shameful utterances from your lips!*

We have the responsibility of putting these things off, God said if you love me and are progressively changing to become more like me in obedience to my commands - we can do this - if we want to - if we love him.

This simplifies the idea of abiding or living and walking progressively in obedience to God if we see it as abiding in love because God is love.

Love is from God, we don't have this kind of love if we don't know God and have his Spirit in us. If we are abiding in love, keeping it always in the forefront of all our interactions and choices, we are abiding in God. (walking by the spirit of God - the holy spirit).

Have you ever wondered why some people seem so much more loving than professed Christians? The word tells us there is a measure of love that we can have and don't be like your old self. There seems to be a lot of non christians who are more loving than some christians...

Now the context of the love we are talking about is for the believer and this letter John was writing was to the church mostly to Corinthian believers who were being anything but loving, and the point of this is for them to get back to Christ and love as He loved.

So really this message is to let Christians know that if they are not loving, they are not in God, they do not know God, they are not allowing His nature to abide in them, even if they profess belief in Jesus Christ. So, love God - be obedient to what He says - love people. Get rid of the junk in your life!

II. Love is Selfless (Php 2:1-3, Eph 3:18-19)

Philippians 2:1-3 (Amplified Bible)

*1 SO BY whatever [appeal to you there is in our mutual dwelling in Christ, by whatever] strengthening and consoling and encouraging [our relationship] in Him [affords], by whatever persuasive incentive there is in love, **by whatever participation in the [Holy] Spirit [we share]**, and by whatever depth of affection and compassionate sympathy,*

2 Fill up and complete my joy by living in harmony and being of the same mind and one in purpose, having the same love, being in full accord and of one harmonious mind and intention.

3 Do nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] **or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance**. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves].

Participation of the holy spirit - there it is again - the measure of what we allow the holy spirit to move - you choose.

Genesis 1 (New Living Translation)

The Account of Creation

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

Ephesians 3:18-19 (Amplified Bible)

18 That you may have the power and be strong to apprehend and grasp with all the saints [God's devoted people, the experience of that love] what is the breadth and length and height and depth [of it];

19 [That you may really come] to know [practically, through experience for yourselves] the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge [without experience]; that you may be filled [through all your being] unto all the fullness of God [may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself]!

So love is selfless or another word for selfless here is humble, to differentiate it from sacrificial which is coming next. **Besides the sacrifice on the cross, how did Christ love us?** By always acting, and teaching that others are more important than he is, than we individuals are.

Paul says this love is difficult to comprehend and surpasses all knowledge. Yes it is. We come out of the womb entirely self absorbed, egocentric, existing to get our needs met. You know what, we don't change much, we just find ways to make it look like getting our needs met is actually helping someone else. Until we understand this kind of love and allow it to work in our lives, it is impossible to consider others more significant than ourselves.

Until we know that survival is not our primary purpose in life, our behavior will be motivated primarily by self-preservation. This selfless, humble love that washes feet, (and act representative of that today) **seeks to build others up so they are better than us,** is foreign to the human nature and our culture, but by the example of Christ we can practice this kind of love, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can achieve this kind of love.

So, love is selfless and humble,

III. Love is also Sacrificial (Eph 5:25, Ro 5:8, Jn 15:13)

Yes these are related - selfless and sacrificial, but here we are specifically talking about behavior. We can consider others more significant than ourselves - we can think it, but if we don't show it in our behaviour, it's lost.

Ephesians 5:25 (Amplified Bible)

*25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and **gave Himself up for her.***

Romans 5:8 (Amplified Bible)

*8 But God **shows and clearly proves** His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) died for us.*

John 15:13 (Amplified Bible)

*13 No one has greater love [no one has shown stronger affection] than to **lay down** (give up) his own life for his friends.*

Love is an action - not a thought. Love always requires sacrifice, whether it be giving up our time, interests, or to the far extreme, our lives. If you say you love someone, but have never given up something for them, chances are it's not real love. More likely they are probably really loving you.

But there is another aspect to this that the church should feel very guilty about. That being loving those people who are hard to love. This may be the biggest sacrifice. It's easy to love those who are attractive and likable, who are on your side, but what do we do when someone isn't like us? doesn't think like us - I'm not talking biblically...we need to sacrifice our comfort and our attitudes to make people feel loved. It's not easy, and only the Spirit can make it happen. That is why love is called a fruit or a gift. This is not a natural make up.

IV. Love is Supportive (2Co 8:1-8, Jas 2:15-16)

Define Supportive: furnishing assistance, backing up, provision

2 Corinthians 8:1-8 (Amplified Bible)

*1 WE WANT to tell you further, brethren, about the grace (the favor and spiritual blessing) of God **which has been evident** in the churches of Macedonia [arousing in them the desire to give alms];*

*2 For in the midst of an ordeal of severe tribulation, their abundance of joy and their depth of poverty [together] **have overflowed in wealth of lavish generosity on their part.***

3 For, as I can bear witness, [they gave] according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability; and [they did it] voluntarily,

4 Begging us most insistently for the favor and the fellowship of contributing in this ministration for [the relief and support of] the saints [in Jerusalem].

5 Nor [was this gift of theirs merely the contribution] that we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us [as His agents] by the will of God [[a]entirely disregarding their personal interests, they gave as much as they possibly could, having put themselves at our disposal to be directed by the will of God]--

6 So much so that we have urged Titus that as he began it, he should also complete this beneficent and gracious contribution among you [the church at Corinth].

7 Now as you abound and excel and are at the front in everything--in faith, in expressing yourselves, in knowledge, in all zeal, and in your love for us--[see to it that you come to the front now and] abound and excel in this gracious work [of almsgiving] also.

8 I give this not as an order [to dictate to you], but to prove, by [pointing out] the zeal of others, the sincerity of your [own] love also.

James 2:15-16 (Amplified Bible)

15 If a brother or sister is poorly clad and lacks food for each day,

16 And one of **you says** to him, Good-bye! Keep [yourself] warm and well fed, without giving him the necessities for the body, **what good does that do?**

Love is always alert to the needs of others. I said earlier that love without deeds is the same as faith without deeds as James indicates, so the words faith and love could be interchanged in that passage of James. So not only is love alert to needs, it does whatever it can to selflessly and sacrificially meet those needs.

V. Love is Soothing (1Co 4:21, 13:4)

1 Corinthians 4:21 (Amplified Bible)

21 Now which do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of correction, or with love and in a spirit of gentleness?

1 Corinthians 13:4 (Amplified Bible)

4 Love endures long and is patient and kind;

Life is hard and we all need a place where we can lick our wounds, be ourselves, rest, and feel safe and cared for. That is what love is supposed to do. Love makes us feel safe and soothed rather than pressured to perform, or live up to some standard. Love comforts us when we are struggling. Jesus said He will give us rest and peace. We all need to ask ourselves, do the people I say I love feel soothed by me? Can my loved ones completely let down their guard around me? Are they emotionally safe?

If we all treated each other this way we wouldn't have to worry about not getting it back from others. We do it with babies, but I will suggest that there is never a time in our lives when we don't need that kind of soothing, where we can just surrender and be completely exposed in the presence of another person without fear.

In my opinion, the opposite of this love is judgment. When someone says something out of turn, makes a mistake, does something that we get angry about (notice I didn't say makes us angry), and we judge them, we are coming with the rod. We need to learn to let people be who they are. Not that they can do whatever they want if it is sinful and causes strife - the bible talks about that, but that they can be themselves.

This is not just with our close loved ones by the way. Christians are to display this love to all people including our enemies. You know the best way to "get" someone who hurts you? Love the part of them that hurts so much that they have to ooze that pain out to others. Why not try to sooth that part of them and help them heal as a way to get them to stop, rather than hurting them back? Be a person who others feel soothed by, and seek out those who are able to sooth you when you need it. Ideally that would be everyone in the church.

VI. Love is Sincere (Ro 12:9, 1Pe 1:22)

Romans 12:9 (Amplified Bible)

9 [Let your] love be sincere (a real thing); hate what is evil [loathe all ungodliness, turn in horror from wickedness], but hold fast to that which is good.

Romans 12:9 (Amplified Bible)

9[Let your] love be sincere (a real thing); hate what is evil [loathe all ungodliness, turn in horror from wickedness], but hold fast to that which is good.

In these verses we see the purity of love. Hate evil (or as we learned, worthless or hurtful things), and hold fast to what is good. Purify your soul through obedience, and love from a pure heart. Purify your soul through obedience.

Sounds like abiding again to me.

We are being told that we can only love in a genuine, earnest way when we allow only goodness into our hearts and minds, and obey the truth (Jesus is the truth). The love that only comes from God as a fruit of the Spirit cannot be manifest when our minds are focused on sin or impure thoughts.

For instance, is it a sincere and pure love if you tell your wife you love her when she goes to bed, and speak bad about her? Are you loving your husband when you speak in a derogatory way about him to your girlfriends? Are you loving Jesus if you are not obeying his words?

VII. Love is Stubborn (1Co 13:7, Ps 118)

1 Corinthians 13:7 (Amplified Bible)

Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening].

Psalm 118:1-4 (New Living Translation)

*1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.*

2 Let all Israel repeat:

“His faithful love endures forever.”

3 Let Aaron’s descendants, the priests, repeat:

“His faithful love endures forever.”

4 Let all who fear the Lord repeat:

“His faithful love endures forever.”

Psalm 118:29 (New Living Translation)

*29 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.*

The love that is from God never ends. Could you imagine if it did? Humans would have been obliterated eons ago. God bears with us, He believes in us, He hopes with us, and He endures our constant disobedience and wandering away from him. We are the prodigals.

This love is not dependent on other's behavior, it is unconditional for the person, but may not be accepting of sinful behavior. Unconditional love means you love the person, but still confront the behavior. That is why God's love sometimes looks harsh, but the motive is always our good.

I always shake my head when I hear couples split up because they are not in love anymore. What does that have to do with anything? What does in love mean? I think it means my selfish desires are getting met - Eros love. When we fall out of love it means we're bored with the person. That's not love, real love cannot be shaken, you cannot stop loving if it is real agape love, the essential nature of this love is that it is endless.

Basically love never gives up on anybody, no matter what they do, no matter what we feel. ... And finally,

VIII. Love is Supreme (1Co 13:1-3, Mt 22:37-38)

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (Amplified Bible)

I IF I [can] speak in the tongues of men and [even] of angels, but have not love (that reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion such as is inspired by God's love for and in us), I am only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I have prophetic powers (the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose), and understand all the secret truths and mysteries and possess all knowledge, and if I have [sufficient] faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love (God's love in me) I am nothing (a useless nobody).

3 Even if I dole out all that I have [to the poor in providing] food, and if I surrender my body to be burned or in order that I may glory, but have not love (God's love in me), I gain nothing.

Matthew 22:37-38 (Amplified Bible)

37 And He replied to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (intellect).

38 This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment.

There it is, nothing is more important to God than love. But as we have seen it is not the cultural romantic notion of love, or the feeling of love. It is the sacrificial, humble, persevering love that he has shown throughout the history of humanity. It is the love that confronts and disciplines so that the person being loved will not stray and end up in hell.

Vernon McGee calls Love the “energy of the Spiritual gifts”, because Paul makes it very clear that any gifts without love are useless. It is the first fruit of the Spirit.

But let's return to the great and first commandment in **Matthew 22** for a minute. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is like it, to love your neighbors. When God says something is first, it is first. Love is the first or supreme fruit, and loving God is the first or supreme commandment.*

He means that without this first foundational commandment, the others are unattainable, and in these first two, depend all the Law and the prophets.

First of all notice it says the Lord your God, emphasizing the lordship he has over us and the obedience that is our way to love him. Then it says with all your heart which is the feeling center of our being, with all our soul, which is the seat of our will, and with all our mind, the thinking part of us.

This is said in this way to represent the whole of our being. We are to love God with our feelings, our will, and our rational mind, and let me suggest that if even one of these is missing, the others are probably lacking as well. This is especially true of the soul or will. It is only by surrendering our will to the Lord that we experience Him fully.

We can love Him with our mind by reading all the great things he has done for us, we can have warm loving feelings toward him because of these things, but may I suggest that this is where many Christians are stuck.

The part that is lacking is an experience of Him that makes the thoughts and feelings about Him real to us. By letting him use us, do we really experience who he is, and the extent of His love.

The best example I can think of is when people fall in love by chatting on the internet. All they have experienced are words and possibly pictures of the other person, but have had no real experience of them. Most of the time when they finally do meet in person the experience is very disappointing. It's the same person but the actual personal experience of them leaves us uncomfortable and disappointed. Anyone can look great on paper, including God, and if that is all we have without personal experience of Him, it will be a shallow love.

Other times we can experience a person without ever talking to them previously, having no previous feelings for them and fall in love.

Even if there is no physical attraction, and they talk funny, or aren't as smart as we would like, we love them even if our heart and mind are not completely sold. We love them in spite of how we feel and who we think we should love. Often then, our hearts and minds come in line with our soul and the love is complete. We love our children without knowing who they are or who they will become.

So, do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind. Now I know it's easy to say yes, but if your entire life was on video tape, would anyone be able to tell that this is true?

Sometimes Christians try very hard to love other people, but their love for God is weak, and Paul says this gains us nothing. You can't make up for not loving God by trying to love others more. You will pay an emotional price for this because you are not tapped into the source.

You might be saying, that it's an awfully tall order to love like this, and you would be right. It is not only the first and most important of the spiritual fruit, but it's also the hardest to do through human will. That is why it is a spiritual fruit and not an inherent human character trait, and why we are commanded to do it so often. It is not in our nature.

The love we require in order to love God and others like this comes from God (it's a bit of a dilemma, I am asked to love God but I can't unless I get the love from him, which requires me to love him).

But I remind you again that loving Him is defined by obedience to his commands, something we can in our souls, will ourselves to do with the help of the Holy Spirit), so the other question is, do you have a deep intimate, obedient relationship with the Lord that allows this fruit to be manifest in your life?

So, if you do not love God like the commandment says, as John tells us, you don't really know Him, you haven't really experienced Him, and that is why the church should exist, to help you build that relationship. God wants us to be that church, and I want us to be that church.