



As we begin looking at the different characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit, what better place to start than love? Not only is it at the beginning of the list, 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us that love is “the greatest”; *“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* As we look at 1 John 4, we realize that love is an important concept for John. This book has often been referred to as the “Love Book” due to the number of times the word is mentioned. What important things does John have for us as we read these verses?

First, we’re reminded that we are God’s *Beloved*. This is how John addresses the recipients of this letter because this is how he experiences his relationship with Jesus. In the Gospel of John (which he also wrote), John refers to himself as *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. He knows his identity as one loved by his savior and he wants us to start there as well. Our identity as the beloved children of God. John then goes on to tell us how beloved children of God ought to live.

Every Christian is **called** to love. 1 John 4:7 says, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”* This calling is not optional. This calling is for everyone. Let us love one another. This call doesn’t make loving others any easier, but is the serious call of all who believe.

The good news for us is that we don’t have to live into this call alone because God is the **source** of love. In 1 John 4:8 we read that “God is love”. It doesn’t say that He is loving (He is) and it doesn’t say that He does loving this (He does). It says that He literally *is* love. We don’t have to try and be more loving on our own because God is love and therefore He is the source of our love. Want proof?

The **proof** that God is love is found in the fact that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Love is not, first and foremost, about us loving God. Love is about Jesus being sent as a sacrifice to fix our damaged relationship with God. This means that God is love and He demonstrated it for us!

What’s the **outcome**? When we realize these truths, we live into the way God created us – into our design to love. Not only that, when we love each other God’s love is made perfect and we help make an invisible God visible to the world around us.

Bottom line: You cannot be serious about God without being serious about love. It just doesn’t work that way. Embrace your call, lean into the source, remember the proof, and let the Spirit guide you to the outcome.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the teaching, we talked about how it's important to remember that the fruit in Galatians 5:22-23 comes from the Spirit and not out of our own strength. Why is it important to remember this as we begin looking at these nine characteristics? What happens in our lives when we refuse to or forget to rely on the Holy Spirit to produce this fruit and try and do it ourselves?
2. John calls the people he's writing to "Beloved". He shows them in 1 John 3:1 that God's love has made us His children. Why do you think that John starts with reminding them (and us) of our identity as God's beloved children?
3. As you look at 1 John 4:7, we see that John calls us to love one another. This calling is not optional. What are some of the different ways that we try to make love an option in our lives? What are some of the ways that you justify not loving the people around you?
4. The statement "God is love" is both incredibly important and mind-boggling at the same time. If someone were to ask you to explain this statement, what would you say?
5. "_____ is Love". What some other words or ways that you have filled in the blank in that statement with other answers than "God"? What happens when you go down that path?
6. The word "ought" in verse 11 (*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*) is not a word of obligation but a word of design. What does it mean that love is a part of our original design? If it's built into us, why does it seem so difficult sometimes?
7. Verse 12 reminds us that no one has ever seen God, but when we love one another we can help make an invisible God visible to the world around us. Explain how this process works.
8. What are some things you, your group, your family, etc. can do this week to love others and make God visible in the world around you?