



Love Your Neighbour

(Part I)

Another August in the Algarve is almost over. How did this long, hot summer go for you?

Did you keep your cool with long queues, impatient drivers, demanding bosses; were your children at home screaming for all your attention – or was it you doing all the screaming?

This morning we will ask the question “**why is it so difficult to love my neighbour**”... but first who is my neighbour? I don't mean neighbour in the usual sense, those who live next door to you but rather those we relate to every day, people we work alongside, those we meet while out and about and those closest to us. The Portuguese translation for neighbour makes more sense ‘*o seu proximo* – those close to you’.

The Apostle John tells us in his first epistle **4:19** *We love, because He first loved us*. John is talking about loving God and the family of believers, which is easy...well at least loving God is! However, if we do love God, John explains we will love one another but Jesus did say in **Matthew 5:56** “*If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even tax collectors do the same*”?

The word of God calls us to express our faith in love to a world which is lost and seeking answers to life. The way in which we love them will have an impact on how they perceive the answers that Christians hold today.

Scripture goes on to declare that faith in Jesus will enable us to love those who are unlovable. So why is it so difficult to love everyone, all of the time? You may even say I don't even love myself much!

This summer everything seems to be so different with the over-arching shadow of Covid-19 darkening every aspect of life, yet, do the same old issues cause you to lose your patience as they did pre-Covid-19? And do the same people get on your nerves in just the same way?

Have you noticed that when trials come upon us and personal relationships are tested, we often find it impossible to experience the joy of the Lord, to know His transcendent peace and to live in the freedom to express our faith in love to those closest to us?

How do you respond when the going gets tough? Do you react in your old (carnal) nature or do you respond in your new (spiritual) nature – there is a night and day difference?

Well if you fall short and we all do, there is hope, so let's take a look at what scripture has to say on the subject of loving our neighbour.

Galatians 5:13-14 *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”*

The entire letter to the Galatians contrasts law and grace. The Apostle Paul goes into great detail to explain the doctrine of grace in chapters 1-4 and how in Christ we are no longer under law. Chapters 5 & 6 describe the practical outworking of grace and the new spiritual life, which we can only live in and through faith in Christ.

Scripture is clear that we cannot please God nor meet the standard of holiness in our old, carnal nature and we must be born again of the Spirit of God, through faith in Jesus – we know this truth since completing the grace course before the pandemic took hold but this morning’s message is not about how we are saved but rather how we experience the freedom to live and to love ‘in Christ Jesus’.

Paul explains well (as he does in the letter to the Roman church) that grace is not a license to disobey God’s laws but rather the power to fulfil them through the Spirit living in us. John Piper said “Grace is not just the pardon but power”.

The Problem is: Our old carnal nature, which theologically is dead.

Galatians 5:16-17 *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh...*

The Solution is: Our new spiritual nature, which is alive in Christ.

Paul already stated in **Galatians 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Paul reminds us again: **Galatians 5:24** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desire.*

Galatians 5:25 *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Love Your Neighbour

(Part II)

Last week we looked at the challenge of loving our neighbour, those closest to us. We learned, but already knew through experience, that there is a battle going on between our old carnal nature and the new spiritual life, which God has given us by His grace, through faith in Jesus, as we turned away from our old life to receive forgiveness for sin.

The word of God is clear that only the born again creation is capable of loving God, and loving others in a way which was impossible before conversion. The very heart of God’s agape love is sacrifice; the greatest expression of His love is demonstrated at the cross of Cavalry.

Jesus, when speaking to His disciples about the new life in Him said “*apart from me you can do no good thing*”.

This morning I would like to look at what scripture has to say about *Agape* love and how God the Son, is the perfect expression and representation of God the Father. His example of how to love will teach us through the dynamite (*dunamis*) power of God’s word, enabled by God’s Spirit to lead us into all truth.

This morning I would like to take Paul’s counsel to Timothy to not neglect the public reading of scripture; so be ready for a roller coaster ride through the bible!

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...

Les Cave once explained the 9 fruits of the Spirit like an orange – one whole fruit with 9 segments – it’s a good image to understand love has many parts. Agape love has characteristics which are entirely a work of the Holy Spirit living in us, and no amount of effort on our part can produce God’s sacrificial love - the carnal nature of man cannot love God nor can it love the unlovable, it always wants to live for self! Agape love is a supernatural result of spiritual growth, as the new creation matures in Christ through a life-long, life-giving faith relationship in Jesus.

Our new nature is put to test in a fallen world on a daily basis, as we live and work with people who may require extra grace – don't forget we too require extra grace!

Buckle up for the roller coaster ride!

1. But the fruit of the Spirit is LOVE:

- **Romans 5:8** *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through love (forgiveness)

- **Ephesians 4:32** *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

2. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, JOY:

- **Hebrews 12:2** *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross...*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through joy (in all things)

- **John 15:11** *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

3. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, PEACE:

- **Ephesians 2:17** *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through peace (the war with God is over)

- **Colossians 3:15** *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, for to this you were called as members of one body. And be thankful.*

4. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, PATIENCE:

- **2 Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through patience (give people time)

- **Ephesians 4:2-3** *...be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

5. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, KINDNESS:

- **Ephesians 2:6-7** *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through kindness (grace in action)

- **Colossians 3:12** *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

6. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, GOODNESS:

- **Psalms 34:8** *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through goodness (love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth)

- **Romans 12:9** *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

7. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **FAITHFULNESS:**

- **1 Corinthians 1:9** *God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through faithfulness (full of faith - reliable...)

- **Proverbs 3:3** *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

8. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **GENTLENESS:**

- **Matthew 11:28-30** *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through gentleness (grace to the broken and law to the proud)

- **Ephesians 4:1-2** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle...*

9. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and **SELF-CONTROL:**

- **2 Corinthians 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Our faith in Jesus, expresses itself through self-control (control of thoughts, emotions and actions)

- **2 Peter 1:5-7** *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love*

The challenge for us this coming week is to apply the word ‘love’ in our lives as a verb rather than a noun; we are encouraged by the Holy Spirit and God’s word to put His love into action. Therefore each time we are challenged by the unlovable, instead of reacting in the flesh, let’s respond in the Spirit and demonstrate the love, grace and forgiveness God has shown to us. In place of counting to 10 – count on Jesus – take that thought captive and surrender it to Christ.

Love is not activated primarily by an emotion but rather a decision of the will and the volition. God’s love helps us to sacrifice our needs and desires and consider others above ourselves, building them up in love – the essence of any relationship – giving of ourselves rather than taking for ourselves.

Remember the Apostle Paul’s words in Galatians chapter 5:6

“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Let that be the response to our neighbour, those closest to us.

AMEN