

**ALIVE: The Marks of a Christian**  
**“Knowing God, Knowing Self”**  
**Love: I John 4:7-16**

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.  
8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.  
9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.  
10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.  
11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  
12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.  
13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.  
14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.  
15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.  
16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

**Introduction**

An ancient story from the Middle East tells about three merchants crossing the desert. Crossing over a dry creek bed at night, they heard a voice commanding them to pick up pebbles from the creek bed and put them in their pockets. The voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. They were told then to go on their way.

They did as they were told. In the morning, as they pitched their tents for another long hot day, they reached into their pockets and found a handful of precious jewels. Sad and happy: they were happy they picked up some pebbles as told; sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

You and I can be thrilled with what the Lord offers us in life and faith. But we can also feel sad when we realize we didn't glean as many precious jewels as we could have.

This morning, Pastor Chris and I begin a sermon series on the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists these jewels of character that are the marks of a Christian. In Galatians 5, he encourages the church: "The fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." So, as you travel in sometimes the desert of life, fill your pockets with these pebbles.

**I. Love is First**

We start out with (where else would the fruit of the Spirit start) with love. Love tops the list. The rare Greek word is *AGAPE*. This book is one of 10 volumes known as "Kittel," one book of the many scholars who researched and wrote *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. It's the standard

work for the history and meaning of every word in the New Testament. *AGAPE* is a rare word because it's rarely used in classical Greek and has a weak, colorless, variable meaning; almost slang like "cool" or "I'm down with that" or "What's up?"

But then, Jesus uses it as his specialty word for love.

*AGAPE* is God's fruit of love which gives itself away with a pure motive and most generously. "Dear friends, let us love one another (like this), for love (like this) comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God... Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." This kind of love is the birthmark of a Christian; sort of God's thumbprint in your life.

In Matthew 21 and 22, the religious leaders are all trying to trip up Jesus with their carefully crafted questions. "By what authority do you do these things?" And, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar?" And the like. Jesus was a master at getting to the underlying objections they had toward him.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

*AGAPE* also translates the rich Old Testament word *ahab*, here quoted by Jesus from Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God... because God is love." John is being very clear about this love of God. That love has its origin from God; he is the source. And if love is an integral part of our relationship with God in Jesus Christ, it follows that we should "love one another."

Paul writes another great "love" chapter in I Corinthians 13: "If I do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal... I am nothing... I gain nothing."

## **II. Love Defined**

At the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle a week ago Saturday, millions were watching from around the world (the Nielsen company says more than 29 million in the United States). Bishop Michael Bruce Curry preached on the "power of love." That the power of love brought all these people together for the wedding, the rest of the message really spoke of a very different kind of love.

He quoted Martin Luther King Jr: "We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world, for love is the only way." He also quoted this passage from I John.

Going on, he said, “There's power in love. Don't underestimate it. Don't even over-sentimentalize it. There's power, power in love. The New Testament says it this way: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and those who love are born of God and know God. Those who do not love do not know God.” Why? “For God is love.” Bishop Curry then said, “There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can... to lift up and liberate when nothing else will.”

As the camera panned the congregation at St. George's Chapel, the royal family, celebrity guests, and hundreds of others, I wonder how many understood God's message of love. The bishop left out what I think the most important verses in the passage. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The power of love to “help and heal, to lift up and liberate” comes only through the atonement, only through God's sacrificial love in Christ

Enthralled with a beautiful bride, witnessing the biggest event of the year, did they get it? The wedding ceremony was filled with the biblical kind of love ascribed to a marriage. It was quite beautiful.

Prayers certainly for Harry and Meghan, but also that through the Holy Spirit, God's Word brought encouragement or challenge to the guests present and those who watched the wedding ceremony.

John writes, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.” This is the Lord's supreme desire for all people. A lovely, loving wedding and marriage is a wonderful thing. Far greater, lovelier, and most wonderful is a redeemed relationship with God through Christ.

## **Conclusion**

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” From the past: “Because he first loved,” we now love. In the present: Because of the Holy Spirit we “know and believe the love God has for us.” For the future: our hope is sure in the love of the Lord.

John says it twice. “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” For “the fruit of the Spirit is love.” Let's start gathering pebbles. Let us pray together.

**Psalm 139:1-6, 13-14, 17-18**

**1** You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

**2** You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

**3** You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

**4** Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

**5** You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

**6** Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

**13** For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

**14** I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

**17** How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

**18** Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.