

Gal 5:16-26; 1 John 3:11-18 // Transformed Love

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[0:00] Yes, thank you. So we're, I make this page 1226, or 1227, sorry, in the Pew Bible.

1 John 3, verses 11 to 18. He says this. But this is the message you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

[1:09] If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Well, good morning, everyone.

Let me add my welcome to Martin C. Said. My name's Andrew. I'm a leader and trainee here at the church. And it's our practice as a church to normally work through bits of the Bible sequentially passage by passage.

But as over the summer, lots of us are away at different points and we have lots of people visiting us for one-offs. If that's you, we're very glad to see you here this morning. You are very welcome.

Doing something a little bit different can be really helpful for us all.

So we're going to spend the next few weeks looking at different fruits of the Spirit together. And since we get that in Galatians 5, which we'll turn back to in a moment.

But let's start by bringing before our time together before the Lord. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, gracious God, what wonderful love you have shown to us in so many different ways.

[2:21] What a wonderful privilege it is to be able to show your love to those around us. And so as we think about the fruit of your Spirit that dwells within us, we pray that he will be powerfully at work in all of our hearts, that we may grow in the love we have for you and for each other.

In Jesus' name. Amen. As a society, as a world, we are obsessed with love. And we long have been.

Love seems to be the thing that we think is missing. Take music, for example. It's all over the songs. The black eyed peas, where is the love?

People killing, people dying. Children hurting, I hear them crying. Could you practice what you preach and learn to turn the other cheek? Father, Father, Father, help us.

Send some guidance from above. Because people got me, got me questioning. Where is the love? Where is the love? Love is the key.

[3:28] Love is the answer. Love is the solution. They don't want us to love. Love is powerful. Where is the love? I could keep going.

Taylor Swift, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Coldplay, Whitney Houston, The Beatles. As a world, we seem convinced that we need more love. It's hardly a controversial statement.

I think we'd all probably agree. If there was more love in this world, it would be a better place, wouldn't it? But will any kind of love do?

It would seem to me that over the years, if we've tried to have more love, it's not worked. What kind of love do we need? It's not self-love.

Will this world be a better place if we all go and just love ourselves better? Selfish love. Look after number one. And will the rest follow? Trying harder clearly isn't working.

[4:26] No, we need love that has been transformed. The love that we need is love that has been transformed by the Spirit from selfish love that uses and abuses to selfless love that lays down oneself for the love of others.

That is the love that our world needs. That is the love that each of us need. And that love can only ever come from hearts and lives that have been transformed by the Spirit.

True love is a fruit of the Spirit's work in our hearts, changing us to love as Christ calls us to love.

And as Christians, we should have the expectation of transformation.

Our first point this morning, if you look at your service sheets in the back, you'll find our headings there. If that's helpful for you, the expectation of transformation. Galatians 5, 16 to 26.

If you're not there, flick back to me. It's page 1172. Keeping that open in front of you will be a great help to us all. In the Christian life, we should expect to be transformed, to be more like Christ.

[5:48] It's not a static thing. We keep on growing. We keep on being more like him. But who does the transforming? Does a summer series on the fruit of the Spirit give us a mountain to climb?

Is it a call to say, this summer, St Silas, double down, be better, work harder, maybe finally you'll get somewhere. No, not at all. The headline of our passage in Galatians is verse 16.

Paul writes, so I say, live by the Spirit. The call is to live by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit. Walk by the power of the Spirit.

And let the Spirit redirect you to Jesus. This summer, double down on looking at Jesus, on looking at how the fruit of the Spirit is in his life.

Keep looking to Jesus and walk by the Spirit. It is by his power that we bear these fruits in our lives.

And in verse 17, Paul tells us of the great conflict, the great contrast between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit.

[7:06] Pulling in opposite directions, look down to verse 19 with me. Paul writes, the acts of the flesh are obvious. Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.

Sexual sin, false worship, pride, lack of self-control, all destructive things, all life-destroying things. And before becoming Christians, each of us lived in this way according to the desires of our flesh.

And these are hallmarks of sinful humanity. But what a contrast that is to the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul gives it to us in verse 22. He says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And these things aren't destructive. These are life-giving fruit, bearing gifts from the Spirit, that the Spirit works in our lives as he transforms us.

[8:32] These are the products of living in the Spirit by the Spirit's power. And they're hallmarks of Jesus' new humanity. So what marks us as Christians is we see the Spirit's work in our lives.

And which marks shall we bear? Well, verse 24 tells us that if you are in Christ this morning, then in the Spirit has already triumphed in your life.

The Spirit has triumphed over your flesh, over its passions and desires. They have been crucified.

And so we are able to live in the Spirit. We are able to have these fruits.

And so we should expect to be transformed in them. as we live in the Spirit to greater love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As we live by the Spirit, we expect to see the Spirit producing this fruit in our lives. and normally, it doesn't happen overnight.

[9:39] It's not like one of those wee toy car transformer things where one moment it's a toy car, you push a couple of buttons and, whoa, look, it's a lean, mean, fighting machine. Two seconds, instant transformation.

Normally, that's not how this works. No, it is much more like a fruit tree that you plant. You plant an apple tree and the first round of apples is probably quite small.

They probably don't taste very good, but it's progress, it's something. And then, as it grows, as it is pruned and paired, as you cultivate it to produce this beautiful fruit tree, it starts to produce lovely apples just in season.

So, as the cold winter rolls in, you can make your apple crumble, you can get your dollop of ice cream on that, you can settle down and those are some good apples over time, the transformation of the fruit tree.

And that is, like us, the spirit works slowly in us, often changing us steadily over our lifetimes to bear these fruit. And so, whether you're one month into faith or 60 years of living in the spirit, the spirit is transforming you.

[10:55] We should expect it. And as we look at the fruit of the spirit together this summer, I'm sure each of us will have ones that we're better at and ones that we're worse at.

Ones we think, yeah, I get that. And ones we think, it just doesn't really sound like me. But that means that there's hope for us all. Maybe you've been a grumpy so-and-so for the last 30 years. And the idea of having joy in your Christian life doesn't sound like you at all. Well, there's hope for you, my friend. Walk by the spirit and grow in joy.

Or maybe you find it really difficult to love people who are nothing like you, difficult to love the people next to you. Well, ask the spirit to help and seek to grow in it.

Expect the transformation of the spirit and embrace his work. And one thing that the spirit does is he transforms our love so that we produce love that is of the fruit of the spirit, not destructive love of the flesh.

[12:02] Turn back with me to 1 John chapter 3 and we're in verses 11 to 18. It's on page 1,227 of our church Bibles.

1 John is a letter all about love and keeping on going in the love of God by loving each other. And John gives us a contrast here from the hatred of Cain to the love of Christ. A transformation from hatred to love or from selfish love to selfless love.

Our second point, the expectation of transformation from Cain's selfish love. Verses 11 to 15. Loving one another is at the heart of the Christian faith.

Verse 11, John writes, for this is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another. The proper response to the gospel is to love God and you do that by loving his people.

[13:12] The proper response to Christ dying for us is to love Christ and we love Christ by loving his church. And John uses Cain to show us how before the spirit we hated and were lovers of self rather than others.

He writes in verse 12, do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Back in Genesis 4, Cain murdered his brother Abel. Hating his brother in a fit of anger and jealousy, he struck him down, murdered his own brother.

Why? Well, Abel's offering to God was looked upon with favour from God. He approached with the right heart. But Cain's was not, his offering was not looked upon with favour.

He came with the wrong heart, the wrong type of love. And one way to think about hatred is to think of it as disordered love.

[14:23] Cain's love should have been to God and to his brother. But instead, his love curved in on himself. And so he loved himself.

He loved his desires. And so he indulged them and he lashed out at his brother. He killed him. He killed Abel who did right.

And John continues, verse 13, don't be surprised if the world does the same and hates you. For there is something in humanity that when we see others doing right, we can get awfully riled up by it when someone does better than us and we're trying to do the same thing.

We often don't really like it. Perhaps it's insecurity, jealousy, pride, envy, selfish ambition, whatever you want to call it. It's all over the world.

We have a hard time celebrating other people's success. It's a little bit like tall poppy syndrome where people who do well and who achieve things and have a win where instead of being celebrated and going, isn't that amazing work that the Lord has done in their life?

[15:36] Sometimes we can find ourselves thinking instead, oh, I really resent that person actually. I resent what's happened there. I want to try and knock them back down to my level.

It's selfish love like kings. It's prideful. It's jealousy. But it's not just an out there problem. It's not just a problem out there in the world, although it is.

We see that often in our workplaces, people disliking those who have gotten ahead. It's a problem in the church too. John writes to Christians who have just been betrayed and walked out on by those who were a part of the church.

They said, actually, we don't love you anymore. We don't think that you've got a right. We don't think you're important. They stopped loving their brothers and sisters and church history is full of

examples of Christians doing the same, of people behaving horribly to one another, pride running unchecked, people using the church as a vehicle for power or for money, saying you either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus.

And John says, we mustn't love like that. There's not true love at all. Look at verse 14 with me. He says, we know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other.

[17:05] Anyone who does not love remains in death. The fruit of the Spirit is love of one another, not selfish love of self. Instead of being inspired by his brother's faithfulness, instead of being inspired by his brother's offering, Cain felt shorn up, he felt exposed, and so he lashed out at his brother Abel and murdered him.

Paul wrote in Galatians, the acts of the flesh produce hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy.

Many of these things being in Cain's heart. So what might it look like for us to love selfishly like Cain when instead of love do we show hatred and envy and jealousy and fits of rage?

I think often this happens when we forget that the Christian life is one that we do together. The Christian life is a race but it's not a competitive one.

We mustn't try and tear one another down. And so sometimes when we forget that instead of celebrating and cheering on one another going that is amazing. Look at how God has grown you in this last year.

[18:28] Look at how useful you've been for the kingdom. We can turn inwards. We can become obsessed with ourselves. Our insecurities can come to the fore.

Instead of celebrating and being inspired by them, we're insecure and begrudge them, resent each other. It can mean that we look for other people's flaws and make them a bigger deal than they need to be.

Rather than loving the sinner like me who is beside me, we can put ourselves over them and say, I will judge you as a sinner beneath me.

And that is so much of what we see online. So much of what is posted, so much of what we read or watch on Instagram reels, is people giving judgment on situations that they're not a part of, criticizing others, stoking divisions, causing tensions, instead of trying to love them and help them. From our comfy sofas, it is easy to judge, to criticize, to hate one another, rather than to help love and understand. selfish love that stands in prideful judgment over one another and curves in on ourselves, only serves the devil and not the Lord.

[19:51] All of this is disordered love, selfish love like Cain's that sprouts jealousy, hatred, envy, and needs to be transformed. It's worldly love.

Where is the love? Is this the kind of love that we want to see all around us? Is this the key, the answer, the solution? Certainly not.

We mustn't stay selfishly loving like that. But have our love transformed? Our third point, verses 16 to 18, to Christ's selfish, selfless love.

That was always going to happen at some point. What is genuine love? What kind of love is the answer? Love like Christ's.

We keep looking to him. John writes verse 16, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

[20:54] Short and sweet, let me say it again. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

What is love? Love is Jesus Christ laying down his life for us. How do I know what love is? Because Jesus Christ laid down his life for me.

True love is demonstrated at the cross as Jesus laid down his life for each one of us, for sinners like you and me.

That is the defining moment for what love truly is, Christ on our cross. love. And so John continues, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Love, true love, selfless love, is to lay down our lives for each other. How much am I called to love you, each one of you here?

[21:58] Well, right up to the point and over of laying down my life for you. Christ has set the example and so we follow him.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed by one of his friends, he said these words, John 15, my command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. you are my friends if you do what I command.

Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. And of course, this is exactly what Jesus went on to do.

The very next day, he was lifted onto a cross, willingly and deliberately laying down his life for his friends. but not just his friends, but the whole world.

[23:01] Paul writes in Romans 5 that Christ died for us while we were still ungodly sinners, not friends. And that means that we have been loved to the fullest extent that anyone can be.

There is no greater love than the love that Christ showed us by laying down his life for us on the cross. each of us is as loved as we ever could be because of what Christ has done.

And the end of Romans 8 tells us there is nothing that can ever, ever separate us from that love. If you are in Christ, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus, death and resurrection as your only means to be in relationship with God, then you today, this morning, are perfectly loved by God.

because of what Christ has done, eternally and perfectly loved. And we will never ever not be perfectly loved. Loved better than a husband who lays down his life for his wife, loved better than a daughter whose mother laid down her life for her.

Amidst the horror of the recent earthquakes in Venezuela came a beautiful yet tragic story. Andrea Bello saved the life of her one-year-old daughter, who as the earthquakes happened and the building they were in started collapsing, she used her own body to shield her one-year-old to protect her from the falling rubble.

[24:42] And so as the rescuers worked through, in time they found her daughter alive and well, saved by her mum's body who had shielded her from the impact of the rubble.

What amazing love that is to display. Andrea laid down her life so that her daughter could live. And so her daughter will grow up now every day knowing how much she is loved by her mother.

If she ever questions, am I lovable, am I worth anything? Well, she can look back to the sacrifice that her mum made for her. And as amazing love as that is, and it is truly amazing, Christ loves us each to a greater extent.

We are eternally and perfectly loved by God, who showed the greatest love of all by laying down his life for each of us. And that love frees us to love as he loves.

When we feel insecure, when we feel prideful, we turn back to remember how greatly we have been loved by God. And that frees us to love selflessly as he loved us.

[26:03] I am called to lay down my life for my brothers and sisters. And so I gave of my comfort, my resources, my health, my sleep, to be there for them, to love them.

when someone in your growth group loses their dad unexpectedly, you gladly go and sit with them. At 2am in the morning, you sit with them, loving them, trying to help them process.

We cancel our weekend plans, we drop a lasagna at the doorstep and just leave it there for them if that's what they need. when someone loses their job or has been unemployed for a long time.

We welcome them into our lives and our homes. We do everything we can to make sure they're not lonely or struggling and show them the love of Christ, even at cost to ourselves.

Our love is free. They don't owe us anything in return. When one of our friends starts deconstructing their faith, when they wander away from Christ, we chase after them.

[27:11] Night after night we go after them and we try and tell them again and again that they need to come back to the Lord. We plead with them earnestly to come back to Christ.

It might cost us our sleep, our comfort, our time, our resources, but we sit with them doing all we can to show them the love of Christ and we get down on our knees before our Heavenly Father, pleading earnestly for the Lord to help them see Christ's love again.

Christ saw our very real need to be reconciled and to be brought back to the Father and he met it. And he met so many others as well, so many other needs.

Throughout the Gospels we see lots of examples of Christ practically loving people. He heals the sick, he casts demons out of the possessed, he calms storms, he feeds the hungry, he dines with the lonely, he sits with those who mourn.

He loved the unlovely, the people that his society said weren't worth loving, didn't have anything to offer back, weren't pleasant to be around.

[28:29] People who were rude, dishonest, violent, thieves, generally not much fun to be around. He laid down his life in love of the unlovely.

And so we should lay down our lives to love all of our brothers and sisters, not just for those that we get on with really well, that we love to be around, but everyone, right up to and including the person in church that you find it hardest to love.

The person, if it was up to you, you'd never sit next to them, you'd sit at the opposite end of church. We are called to lay down our lives for them.

And our last verse, verse 18, dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with action and in truth.

Selflessly loving like Christ is to meet people's needs, both spiritually and physically. To take in a student who couldn't find a flat over the summer.

[29:36] To look after someone's kids for a day so their parents can invest in their struggling marriage. To pay someone's mortgage for a month so they don't default on it. Costly, sacrificial love, but genuine love.

Selfless love like Christ. The love that the world truly needs. As one commentator butte, if you want to know love best, learn what it means to lay down your life.

Yes, our times are complicated and it's tough to know what the right thing to do is, but when has it ever not been so? We have the Holy Spirit to help us.

He helps us. Jesus Christ, the one who laid down his life for us, has given us his helper to transform our love from Cain's selfish love to Christ's selfless love.

We expect him to transform us and help us lay down our lives for one another. This kind of love is the answer, the key, the solution. Where is the love that the world needs, that we all need?

[30:52] Well, it's in the local church. As we faithfully try and love one another by laying down our lives, we don't always get it perfect, but we're committed to working hard and loving each other as Christ has loved us.

And Galatians 5 ends with the exhortation, since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. This week, St. Silas, and every week, let us keep in step with the Spirit and love each other as Christ loved us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, what amazing love you have shown us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you that thinking little of himself, he made himself nothing by taking the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

What wonderful, selfless, sacrificial, and practical love our Savior shows us. Thank you that whatever happens in this life, we are safe in your love, and there's nothing that can separate us from you.

Help us to be people who keep in step with your Spirit in how we love, and may your Spirit continue to transform our love, that we may better glorify and worship you together.

[32:26] In Jesus' mighty name, amen. Amen. Amen.