

FEEDING OUR SPIRITUAL NATURE SERIES

Love

There is the lesson of a Cherokee man teaching his grandchildren about life. He says to them, “A fight is going on inside me. It is between two wolves. One wolf is evil—he is fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, anxiety, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, competition and superiority. The other wolf is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, faith and laughter.”

He then tells his grandchildren that the same fight is going on inside of them and also inside of every person. The children think about this for a moment and then one of them asks his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old man then replies, “The one that you feed.”¹

Today we begin a series of messages that are intended to encourage us to nurture and to **feed** our spiritual nature. When I refer to our spiritual nature I am basically meaning two things; first, that part of us that is connected to God, and second, that part of us that goes deeper than the physical body or flesh.

Read Galatians 5:22-25

In our scriptural text Paul uses the term “fruit of the Spirit” for that which the Spirit of God produces in us and for that which comes forth from our spirit; our living what God has produced within us. Paul then makes a fruit list, what I really consider to be a list of spiritual virtues: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul is adamant that believers should live these virtues. And that the way we do so is by being in touch with our spiritual nature; with what God has produced within us. Paul even teaches that believers do not need religious law. You see my friends, if I am feeding and nurturing my spiritual nature I do not need a religious law to instruct me to be kind—I will be kind. If I am being led by God’s spirit I do not need a religious law to instruct me to be truthful—I will be truthful. I will be kind and truthful because I am tapping into my internal spiritual resource, my spiritual nature.

Paul writes, “...*those who follow Jesus the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*” Paul wants the believer to know that their mind and body need to be subject to their spirit. Paul understands greed to be a fleshly passion and desire that needs to be replaced with generosity. Using his metaphor, one crucifies greed in order to allow generosity to live. One crucifies guilt and resentment in order to allow forgiveness to live.

As we study Paul’s fruit list we must be ever aware that the spiritual virtues he lists relate to our human relationships. This is clearly evident with the virtue that heads the list—love! Listen as I read from Paul’s words in verses 13-15. (READ)

There is a paradox here! Paul writes that believers are “*called to freedom*” yet he also writes, “...*Through love serve one another.*” Freedom! Serve! Serve is not a freedom

word! Aha! This is where we are reminded that when one embraces their spiritual nature they do not need a law to instruct them to love. For love is a virtue that flows freely from God's spirit, into our spirit, and becomes a part of our spiritual nature. And according to Paul serving others, caring for their needs, is a part of love. If I am in touch with my spiritual nature I do not need a religious law to remind me to assist a brother or sister who is in need.

Paul writes, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Reminiscent of Jesus—wouldn't you say? In John's gospel we see Jesus indicating that love for one another is a sign of being his follower. "*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"² To the church at Ephesus Paul writes, "*...live in love, as Christ loved us and gave up life for us.*"³ Then in I John 3:16 we read John's words, "*We know love by this, Christ laid down even life for us—and we ought to lay down even our lives for one another.*" To me this sounds like Paul and John are calling on believers to have sacrificial love; however, not in terms of sacrificing our lives for God but rather for each other. We need to be as enthusiastic about singing hymns like *Do You Really Care* and *Let Your Heart Be Broken* (315) as we are about singing *Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus*. The spiritual truth is, one cannot stand up for Jesus while sitting down on others needs. Can you imagine how life might be different if we were to truly love each other sacrificially?

It is Peter that gives us a very practical reason for loving others. "*Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.*"⁴ You see, it is because of love that we can forgive, that we can let go of vengeance, that we can eliminate grudge-holding and getting even. Love covers a multitude of sins!

Paul writes, "*If you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*"⁵ He is describing what could happen if love is absent from our lives. Without love Paul pictures us as being like wild beasts that rush each other clawing and biting; and everyone being consumed in the process. No one wins! All are losers! That is, when love is not present.

So what is love? Well, we once again turn to Paul and his love of lists for a definition. (READ I Corinthians 13:4-8a) Can you imagine how life might be different if we were to love each other as Paul defines love?

Friends, just as we care for our physical being and our mind so too do we need to care for our spirit. Today's virtue is love. Love is a product of our spiritual nature, and the more we practice love, the healthier our spirit becomes.

The grandchildren ask their wise grandfather, "*Which wolf will win?*" He answers, "*The one you feed!*"

¹ Donald O'Dell, *How the Bible became the Bible*, page 1.

² John 13:34b-35

³ Ephesians 5:2

⁴ I Peter 4:8

⁵ Galatians 5:15