

# Ambassador III - Character

## The Fruit of the Spirit--Love

*White Board Exercise:*

*Describe for me what the world, the culture, means by "love"*

*How would you differentiate this from how God defines love?*

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

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<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 12:30-31** And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

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### *Scaling the Language Barrier--Love*

Rather than seek a precise definition<sup>1</sup> from the start, let's characterize and contrast biblical love from worldly love.

Yes, of course, love should mark every part of our evangelism. And the Christian community has done a good job teaching about God's Love. But here's the concern: if we only speak of God's love while forsaking God's other attributes (such as holiness, righteousness and justice), we are tailoring God to a popular image, an idol really and not the God of the Bible.

The lenses of culture distort the concept of love. As a result, the love popularly ascribed to God is often not truly biblical love. When we speak to the culture about God's love, we need to be sure we're talking about the same thing.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Idol of Worldly Love*

Speaking of a novel many of us read in high school, Jonathan Leeman writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Be careful of "word studies" of the Greek. "It is doubtless true that the entire range of *agapao* (to love) and the entire range of *phileo* (to love) are not exactly the same; nevertheless, they enjoy substantial overlap, and where they overlap, appealing to a "root meaning" in order to discern a difference is fallacious." [D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*]. He goes on to demonstrate his point appealing to 2 Sam 13:15 where the LXX renders Amnon's incestuous lust as *agapao*.

<sup>2</sup> Stiles, J. Mack, *Marks of the Messenger*, IVP Books, Downer's Grove Ill. 2010. p 93.

... Hawthorne manages to hit all of today's panic buttons; the church has subsumed the state; the private has become public; religious hate-mongers scorn the young, beautiful, and free. Even the innocent daughter is indirectly made a victim.

So what kind of love story is *The Scarlet Letter*? It is one that well illustrates the assumptions about love that many people were beginning to make in the nineteenth century when Hawthorne wrote his book, **assumptions which I believe are pretty much unquestioned today. ... We assume not that God is love but that love is God.** In other words, we don't go before the real creator of the universe and say to him, "Please tell us what *you* are like and therefore how *you* define love." Rather, **we begin with our own self-defined concept of love and allow this self-defined concept to play god.** When I say it "plays god," I mean that **we let it define right and wrong, good and bad, glory-worthy and glory-less, even though such valuations belong to God alone. Love becomes the ultimate idol.**

For example, was it wrong for Hester to commit adultery? Would it have been wrong for her and Arthur to run away and begin a new life together, despite the fact that she was married to someone else? ... The implicit urging of Hawthorne's novel and of everything in our culture today is, "No, it's not wrong because they *love* each other. Or, even if it's kind of wrong, it's justified, because love covers over sin. **Love justifies!**"<sup>3</sup>

Leeman goes on to describe some basic assumptions that characterize this idol of love, the first of which is "no boundaries can be placed on love."

Rather, love establishes all the boundaries. There is no conception of truth or holiness or wisdom to condition or give structure to such love. Love runs free, unbound by truth. In fact, it alone constitutes truth, and it's the source of ultimate justification. You can justify anything these days by saying that it's "loving" or "motivated by love."

Consider for a moment what people today mean by "love" when they talk about the love between two homosexual men. What do they mean by love when they use it to justify heterosexual sex before marriage, or outside of marriage, or divorce? What do they mean by love when they spoil their children? What do they mean by love when they move from one church to the next, or never sacrifice themselves for others in their church? It's true that love is the greatest good, and it's true that love justifies, but the question remains what--or who!--defines love.<sup>4</sup>

Stiles then goes on to identify three primary ways the biblical view of God's love differs from that in pop culture and how culture's view has seeped into Christian thought.

1. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is \_\_\_\_\_  
 – *trivializes love--becomes very weak in the face of real difficulties*

To love wisely and well, to love appropriately, to love faithfully, to love in line with biblical expectations... is commonly a very difficult thing to do.<sup>5</sup>

2. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 – *this pop-understanding fills the churches...*

<sup>3</sup> Leeman, Jonathan, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Ill. 2010. pp. 23-24. Italics in the original, bold emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Leeman, p. 24 Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, D.A., *Love in Hard Places*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Ill. 2001. p. 18. Quoted by Stiles. p 94.

The problems start when Christians begin communicating God's providential love (for everyone, unconditionally) as if it's God's saving love (not for everyone and conditional). Because the world sees God's love as universal, there appears to be no need to commit or repent since "he loves us just the way we are."<sup>6</sup>

- *Where sentimental love trivializes love, pop unconditional love trivializes sin.*<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Pop Culture Believes God's Love Is \_\_\_\_\_

- *Where sentimental love gives up truth, and universal love gives up justice, me-centered love gives up sacrifice... a synonym for selfish sin... We start thinking God's love is about my world and me. We start treating God as a celestial butler, and singing songs that make it hard to tell if Jesus is a savior or a boyfriend...*
- *is a particular challenge to healthy evangelism (and by extension Ambassadorship). We are tempted to offer a me-centered message because it gets results... fills stadiums, sells books... "but what is offered is a grossly distorted mix of Santa and Baal... It is another gospel (Galatians 1:7-9)."*<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Fruit of the Spirit--Marks the Ambassador***

***A key text for this second half of Amb-III: 2 Peter 1:3-8***

- Promises:
  - If \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ assure effectiveness/fruitfulness (v. 8)
  - Provide assurance of salvation<sup>9</sup> (v. 10)
- Implications: *Effort required.* (v. 5). Though God's Spirit alone is the source of our power (for change, fruit bearing, ... everything!--v. 3), we are still to obey. Gal 5:25

### ***"These Qualities"***

- *faith*
- *virtue*
- *knowledge*
- *self-control*
- *steadfastness*
- *godliness*
- *brotherly affection*
- *love*

Peter ends here where Paul begins in Galatians 5, with love. Brotherly love and a more general goodwill love for all. ***So what is love?***

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<sup>6</sup> Stiles, p 95.

<sup>7</sup> Stiles, p 96.

<sup>8</sup> Stiles, pp 96-97.

<sup>9</sup> Assurance of salvation is an important topic for all Christians. Ambassadors for Christ, growing in these gifts and attributes can be sure of their salvation as evidenced by this evidence.

## Breakout--What is Love?--Teach One Another!

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<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends.

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1. (*Ref. 1 Cor 13:4-8*) **What is the relationship between this kind of love and:**
  - The truth
  - The fruit of the Spirit
  - Pride/Humility ---*Dig deep here... it is where we'll spend our last couple of weeks!*
  
2. **Teach/persuade one another how utterly dependent we are on the Holy Spirit to really love one another and our neighbor this way.**
  
3. **In discussions with people there are basic (wrong) assumptions about what love means. Practice scaling the language barrier with one another.** (*Prior students, practice your Columbo questions. Which questions will guide the conversation in a productive direction?*)
  - Love Is Sentimental
  - Love Is Universal and Unconditional
  - Love Is Me-Centered
  - God is Love (only...)

### Schedule for Upcoming Sundays:

May 22 - Wk 7 -- Fruit of the Spirit--Humility I

May 29 - Off-- Memorial Day weekend

June 5 - Wk 8 -- Fruit of the Spirit--Humility II

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### Suggested Reading:

*Marks of the Messenger*--Chapters 8-10

*The Heart of Evangelism*--Chapters 11-13