



FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

29 August - LOVE

Song of Songs 2:10-14

¹⁰ My beloved spoke and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. ¹¹ See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. ¹² Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig-tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.'

1 Corinthians 13:13

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

John 15:9-13

Jesus said to the disciples, ⁹ 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

'That love should assume pride of place is no surprise. Paul has already accorded it such a place in this [section of Galatians (5:6&13-14)], a place it always holds in his ethics. The reason for this is that in Paul's theology, resulting from his long life in the OT, this word captures the essence of the character of God as it is seen in his relationship to his people.' (Fee p446)

And it's clear from the way Jesus talks to his disciples about love in this section of the Farewell Discourses in John's Gospel that everything stems from God's love. His relationship with Jesus is the pattern first for Jesus and the disciples and then, when Jesus has gone, between the disciples. Thus it is the pattern for us as latter-day disciples.

This raises the sights for the idea of love well beyond what the word is typically used to mean in our contemporary world. In fact this one word has to bear such a weight of meaning, on a spectrum from the profound to the trivial, that it has almost lost any serious meaning.

But if we look at the list of vices which provoked Paul to set out his list of Fruits of the Spirit - sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies - we see that love is an antidote to all of them. Love disables them and leaves them no air to breathe.

It's worth remembering that when Paul described the vices as *Sins of the Flesh*, he was not referring to *Flesh* in the sense of *Body* as being inherently sinful. The Creation accounts in Genesis honour human bodies. And it's clear that the temptation and fall have nothing to do with sex. That's perhaps one of the reasons why the Song of Songs has always remained as part of the Jewish and Christian Bibles. Maybe we should take this beautiful book more seriously as a model of the kind of loving relationships that God wants his people to have.

George Herbert's poem *Love* takes us back to Jesus and his words in John 15:13: 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

Love

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sinne.

But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd any thing.

'A guest', I answered, 'worthy to be here:
Love said, 'You shall be [s]he.'

'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord: but I have marr'd them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste My meat.'
So I did sit and eat.

Quotation from Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.