

Life Behind the Curtain

1 John 4:16

10-12-2025

Integrity, Stephen Carter wrote, is like the weather, everyone talks about it but nobody knows what to do about it.

Integrity: The quality or state of being complete or undivided. Being whole and unified.

Being the same person on the inside that the world sees on the outside.

Integrity has to do with who you are and what you do when no one is watching.

For as someone wrote, "Too many of us are like the lead character in the Wizard of Oz. He lives behind the curtain, pulling off special effects and gets people to believe. They see the fire and smoke; they tremble from a distance. But he knows the truth. It's all a show. There is no magic. There is impressive technology but nothing supernatural. He lives behind the curtain."

Integrity is not just sticking our head out from behind the curtain from time to time, it's getting rid of the curtain so that the person others see is who we truly are at the core of our being

there is a tremendous crisis of integrity today.

People living behind the curtain of social media and internet postings, saying and advocating conspiracies and personal attacks from the safety of their living room where no one sees or knows who they truly are

Claiming Jesus but following the world pattern of how it treats and demonizes those they don't like or agree with, completely ignoring the fact that Jesus loves and died for them also.

Too many are like those Paul warned Timothy about when he wrote, they have a form or appearance of godliness, but they lack or disregard its power

The NLT puts this, they act religious, but they reject the very power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that.

for the next several weeks I want to look at this area of Christian character
what type of people we are intended to be because Jesus came to make us whole
and complete
to become the same people on the inside that the world sees on the outside

for ultimately, the gospel of Jesus isn't so much about behavior modification and
sin management but transformation and becoming a new creation
it's not about what we do but rather who we are and who we are becoming

it is this difference between doing and being that was the background of much of
the tension between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day
they wanted to control people's behavior through their rules and laws while Jesus
came to change their lives

Jesus referred to this in Matthew 15:8-11 when he quoted Gods word to Isaiah,

***““ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’”
Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.””***

Or as it says in the passage we looked at last week

“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:45)

It is in this light that we must look at what it means to know and follow Jesus
For discipleship and Christian maturity are not primarily about learning facts and
information about God but rather they are about our character development

Nor is following Jesus about rules and laws but the type of people God is shaping
us to become.

And when we talk about Christian character, one of the best places to seek understanding is Galatians 5:22-23 which contains a description of the traits which God is seeking to grow in our lives, to draw us nearer and become more like him, for they are a description of God's character

After calling out the works of the flesh which result in things like hatred and division, rage and jealousy, factions and selfish ambitions, all the things which seem so common today.

Paul contrasts this with the life of the spirit, life which is defined by what he calls the fruit of the spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – all the traits which our divided and highly partisan world is desperately in need of.

As we talk about the fruit of the spirit, there are a couple of points that must be made

1. It may sound obvious but still needs to be stated, it is the nature of the tree that determines the fruit

And since, He is the vine and we are the branches, what type of fruit we bear is dependent and determined by Him

when we talk about the fruit of the Spirit we are talking about the nature and character of God

If Christ lives in us, they become an extension and therefore a reflection of His character into our lives

As His children we are to reflect his glory and become like him

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

2. A second obvious but essential point about fruit which must be stated is that in order to bear fruit, we must stay connected to the source of nourishment, which is God

Again, in John 15 Jesus said it is God's desire that we bear much fruit and the only way this can happen is for us, the branches, to remain or abide or dwell in him fruit only comes as we stay connected to the vine

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."
(John 15:4)

3. Then one last point is that fruit is not something we produce by our efforts but rather by our abiding

It is purely and entirely a work of God, evidence of the Spirit's presence in our lives. It is a sign of health and the natural outgrowth of a living, active, growing union with Jesus.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Because they are a description of His nature and character, the place to begin is with the centerpiece and foundation of God's character. It is that trait from which all the fruit grows and John said that character trait is love.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7–8)

"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." (1 John 4:16)

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology states, love is not something God has to attain nor attempt to maintain, it is something He is, it is the very substance and nature of God.

NT Scholar and theologian CH Dodd wrote, to say God is love, implies that all His activity is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love.

And AW Tozer said, Love is not something God has and which may grow or diminish or cease to be. His love is the way God is, and when He loves, He is simply being himself.

God is love, it is a vital part of him and his nature
Therefore, if the Spirit of God is present in our lives, His love will be also, for it is first among the fruit of the Spirit and is that central trait from which all others flow

In 1 Cor. Paul calls love the most excellent way or as the NLT puts it, the way of life that is best of all.

It is best because it is God's way

And lest we forget what love looks like, he then describes it – love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, and it is not arrogant or rude, it does not demand its own way and is not easily angered because it keeps no record of wrongs. It does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, and endures all things, hopes all things and endures all things

That is what love looks like, Paul said, because that is what God looks like.

So, if you want to know the essential nature of Christian character and what the spirit filled life really looks like, it is first and foremost a life of love

Love which is not just feelings or words, saying we love others, but a love which reflects God and his care for the world and for others.

If it truly is the love of God it will be directed both toward God and toward others

1 John 4:20 goes so far as to say that if we can't love others who are right in front of us, we don't really love God.

And quite frankly, too much of what we hear nowadays is little more than words and platitudes about love but not love itself

I. Christian Character must be built on the fruit of the Spirit which is love and it must be demonstrated

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

And 1 John 4:9 says,

“this is how the love of God was manifested/revealed, made evident in us, God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.” (1 John 4:9)

We talk about love and sing about it in so many of our songs, but do we show and demonstrate it towards others?

Is it made real, or as verse 17 says made complete, through our actions and the way we treat others?

Because ultimately people are not going to care how much we know or say until they see how much we care

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:” (1 John 3:18–19)

Authentic love, John Stott wrote, always expresses itself in humble service and that is the only way the world will be able to identify us as His disciples.

Because Jesus did say that the world will recognize us as his followers not by how we feel or what we say but by how we love.

II. Not only is Christian Character built on the fruit of the Spirit which is love and therefore must be demonstrated, it is to be built on a love which is extravagant

We see this so clearly not just in a love which led him to the cross, but is evident throughout so much of Jesus' teachings

- Extravagant love seen in stories like the Prodigal son who even though he brought shame to his father and his family, is welcomed back with open arms and a party
- The farmer who pays the workers who only put in an hours' worth of work the same amount as those who worked all day
- God leaves the 99 sheep and goes in search of the one that was lost
- A God who throws a wedding banquet and invites even the outcasts

Over and over in his teachings, Jesus paints a picture of the love of God which goes over and above what we would consider reasonable

His love is extravagant

So 1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

It is never based on who you are or what you can do or how to earn it, but solely on the fact that God is love, when he loves he is simply being himself

And as our character reflects his through the fruit of the spirit which is love, when we love, we are simply being ourselves also, since we are becoming like him

Our love is to be given not because someone has earned it or done something for us but we love simply because he loves and sets the example

It seeks the good of others even above our own

It loves those who will never be able to return it and may not even accept it

In One Church from the Fence, Wes Selinger wrote,

I have spent long hours in the intensive Care waiting room...watching with anguished people...listening to urgent questions: will my husband make

it? Will my child walk again? How do you live without your companion of thirty years?

The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. They can't do enough for each other. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. A person is a father first, a black man second. The garbage man loves his wife just as much as the university professor loves his, and everyone understands this. Each person pulls for everyone else.

In the intensive care waiting room, the world changes. Vanity and pretense vanish. The universe is focused on the doctors next report. If only it will show improvement. Everyone knows that loving someone else is what life is all about.

Long before we're in the intensive care waiting room, maybe we can learn to live like that.

With an extravagant love

We love because he first loved us.

III. Christian character which is built on the fruit of the Spirit which is love, must be demonstrated, is extravagant, and it is also self-giving

From his birth in the manger to his death on the cross, the life of Jesus was all about the giving nature of God and his love for us.

"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." (1 John 3:16)

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:10–11)

It is a love in which we give of ourselves, whether in time or money or expertise

We can live such busy, hectic lives, too stressed and harried to stop, but love stops even in the midst of the business and sits down with someone who may simply need someone to hold them

It may mean foregoing that meal out so you can sponsor a hungry child or provide for a need from a missionary on the field or give to world hunger

It may mean giving up some time to help with family or at a homeless shelter

As John Stott said, love is essentially self-giving. And since our most valuable possession is our life, the greatest love is seen in laying it down for others. Just as the essence of hate is murder, so the essence of love is self-sacrifice

Jesus said ***“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*** (John 15:13)

1 John 3:17 even asks the question,

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”

A tree is known by the fruit it bears.

The fruit of the spirit, of God’s presence and activity in our life, is love

What type of fruit are we bearing?

““A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”” (John 13:34–35)

What does love look like?

Ultimately it looks like a cross

Detrich Bonhoeffer said the New Testament answers the question, What is love? Quite unambiguously by pointing solely and entirely to Jesus

Christ. He is the only definition of love. And of course, he said he came to give his life for us.

Stott said for a definition of, love we should not look in a dictionary, but at Calvary

For it is at the cross, we see a love which is demonstrated

God demonstrated his love for us in this, while we were yet sinner, Christ died for us. So may we love not just with words or tongue but with actions and in truth

At the cross we see a love which is extravagant

It wasn't Pilate or the Jews which sent Jesus to Calvary and kept him there when he could have called down a legion of angels to protect and save him
It was God's love and what can be more extravagant than that

For how great is the love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

And at the cross we see a love which is self-giving

He didn't have to go to the cross, he chose to and gave his life for us

**For this is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.
And therefore we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

It's time to get rid of the curtain we may be hiding behind and come to the cross and be changed

For God loves you so much he gave his own son for you

Will you accept his love?