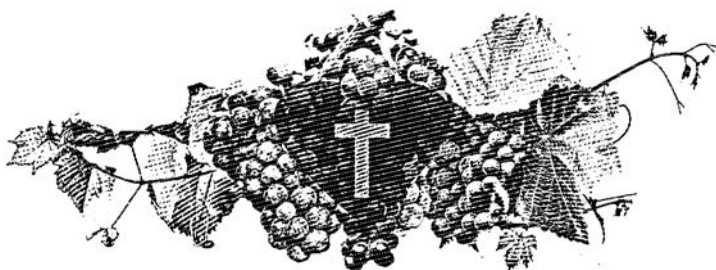


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 6:5, Matt. 5:43–48, Matt. 7:12, 22:39, Luke 10:25–37, 1 Cor. 13:4–7.*

Memory Text: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (*1 Corinthians 13:13, NKJV*).

It is no accident that Paul's list of the character traits that identify the fruit of the Spirit begins with love. Love is the paramount virtue for Christians because it is the trait that most characterizes God. It was love that motivated God to create us, to sustain us, to make Himself known to us, and to give us His Son in order to redeem us.

John says it so plainly and simply—“God is love” (*1 John 4:16*). Because love is so central to His character, love must be central to ours, as well. “He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (*vs. 16, NKJV*).

Unfortunately, the word *love* is used very loosely today. We often say that we love the weather, we love our favorite food, we love our dog. But these kinds of love do not pass the test of true Godlike love (*see 1 Corinthians 13*). It's something altogether different, something that impacts our entire existence, our way of life, our way of relating to others. The ingredients of love are a package, not a list from which we select those most appealing to us while we disregard the rest. That's not, as we'll see this week, what true love is all about.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 9.*

Love Is Multidimensional *(Deut. 6:5)*

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*Matt. 22:37–39, NKJV; see also Deut. 6:5*).

Bible translations, as with all written works, differ in word choice. For instance, “The bird was little” might read in one translation, “The bird was tiny,” or in another, “The bird was small.” And all these descriptions would be correct. Therefore, to study the fruit of the Spirit, it is helpful to define meanings by going to the original language of the word. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew word for love is *ahab*, which has a similar range of meanings as *love* in English, everything from God’s infinite affection for His people to the desires of sinful beings. Men can *love* evil (*Ps. 52:3*), but they can also *love* good (*Amos 5:15*). The context determines which aspect of love is spoken of each time. The love in Deuteronomy 6:5, which Jesus speaks of in connection with the greatest commandment, is the noblest and highest form of self-sacrificing love which each person is commanded to have toward God and others (*see Luke 10:25–37*).

The Jewish people already knew that the number-one command was to love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and, as Mark adds, strength (*see Mark 12:30*). In pointing out all four aspects of the human being, Jesus simply is calling together all that a person is. He is saying, “You need to love God with your entire being.” His intent is not to sort out the individual sense of each word; however, much could be gained by studying these four aspects.

Read Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:39. What’s the important point these texts make? How is this essential to the whole concept of love?

To love your neighbor as yourself means to love all people with your whole heart. The love spoken of in this “second commandment” is the same as in the “first commandment.” It is love in action, involving the will and intention. To love our neighbor as ourselves means to take care of someone else the same way you would take care of yourself.

It’s easy to talk about loving others as yourself; what’s not easy is doing it. How well do you do in this area? How can you learn the hard lessons of death to self in order to minister to the needs of others?

What Love Does *(1 Cor. 13:4–8)*

“Love suffers long and is kind; . . . thinks no evil; . . . rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” *(1 Cor. 13:4–8, NKJV)*.

Love defined is the first step; love applied is the next. We must be careful not to glibly say we love; but rather, we need to analyze carefully how we live and how well we apply the principles of love as expressed in the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Look at each individual aspect of what love is and ask, **How can I apply these principles in my own home?**

Think for a moment of what our homes would be like if by God’s grace we consistently practiced the qualities of true love. Imagine the blessing of living in an environment where the family members are positive and affirming of each other. Perhaps you can’t get others to do this, but if you were to apply these principles, you might just see how powerful an impact they could make on others. You can’t argue against love; it’s the most powerful force in all of creation. People can argue against your theology, your lifestyle, your beliefs, your faith—everything. But what argument can they use against unconditional love, the kind of love revealed to the world through Jesus, the kind of love that we can, through His grace, manifest to others?

Which characteristics of biblical love do you find the most difficult to implement in your own life? How can you make a concentrated effort through God’s grace to cultivate more of this aspect of love? Why is it important that you do so?

What Love Doesn't Do

Go back over 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, only this time look at it from a different perspective. Look at what love does not do. Though these are stated in the negative, they are actually other positive characteristics of love.

Go through each one of the “negatives” in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 and write down their equivalents in positive terms. Also, as you do, ask yourself how well or poorly you manifest these aspects of love and how you might be able to do better.

Does not envy = _____

Does not parade itself = _____

Is not puffed up = _____

Is not rude = _____

Does not seek its own = _____

Is not easily provoked = _____

Thinks no evil = _____

Does not rejoice in iniquity = _____

As we contemplate the meaning of love detailed in the love chapter (*1 Corinthians 13*), we are able to appreciate the character of our heavenly Father, who is the personification of love. We also are able to see that the word *love* as used in the popular culture falls far short of a correct understanding of the love of God.

The Test of Love *(Matt. 5:43–48)*

Read Matthew 5:43–48 and then paraphrase in your own words what Jesus said. What’s the main point Jesus is telling us about love?

If we are to love our enemies, we had better discover who exactly are our enemies. If an enemy is only the one who threatens your life, you may think this text doesn’t apply to you, inasmuch as you probably have not had your life threatened lately.

But by definition, an enemy is an opponent, a rival, a competitor, a challenger, a contender. An enemy is one who hates you or who mistreats you. It might even be a spouse or another member of the family. There may be times when a family member isn’t very loving. He or she may even look for ways to irritate you—or worse. When that happens, it is easy to get caught in the trap of retaliation and pettiness.

Sometimes you may experience conflict on the job, and those you have worked with side by side over the years may begin to think of you as an opponent. An enemy could be someone you have cared a great deal for or even may be someone in your church.

We need to realize that the enemy Jesus referred to is not limited to someone who would threaten our lives but is anyone who causes us enough consternation to tempt us to retaliate.

Read Proverbs 15:1, 25:21, and 1 Peter 3:9. How do these texts help us understand this important principle regarding love?

Loving our enemies? Many folk have a hard time showing love to their friends, much less their enemies. How can we learn to follow Jesus’ example here? How can our hearts be changed so that we can love our enemies? How might praying for them play a large role in helping us reach this Christian ideal?

Love in Action *(Luke 10:25–37)*

A seminary professor set up his preaching class in an unusual way. He scheduled each of his students to prepare a sermon on the story of the good Samaritan. One by one they were to go from classroom to classroom, preaching love and compassion for others. There was only a short break between classes, which forced the would-be preachers to rush in order to meet the schedule. Each of the preacher students had to walk down a certain corridor and pass by a beggar who had been deliberately planted there by the professor.

What happened was a powerful lesson! The number of would-be preachers who stopped to help this man was extremely low, especially those who were under the pressure of time. Rushing to preach their sermon on the good Samaritan, almost all walked right past the beggar at the heart of the parable!

In yesterday’s lesson, we talked about the question of **Who is my enemy?** Today the question is, **Who is my neighbor?** How does Jesus, in Luke 10:25–37, answer that for us? How does this parable tie into the whole question of what true love is? Also, as you read this parable, ask the question, **Why did Jesus specifically place religious people, even religious leaders, in the role of the “bad guys”?** What lesson is there for us, as well?

Consider these words: “I was hungry, and you formed a humanities club to discuss it. I was imprisoned, but you complained about the crime rate. I was naked, and you debated the morality of my appearance. I was sick, and you thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me about the shelter of God’s love. You seem so holy and so close to God; but I’m still hungry, lonely, cold, and in pain. Does it matter?”

Be honest. What kind of lifestyle changes should you make so that you can become a good Samaritan to others? Whom do you know right now who is at this moment on the other side of the road in the world of hurt? How much death to self will it require for you to treat this person as a “neighbor”?

Further Study: Scientist Arthur Zajonc filled a box with light. But he did it so that none of the light reflected off any internal surface. Inside the box was light, and light alone. Now, if you looked inside, at the light, what would you see? What does light look like?

Pure darkness, that's what you'd see. Unless reflecting off of something, or unless you stare directly into it, light is invisible.

Zajonc then took a rod and moved it through the darkness of the box. The rod itself, on the side from which the light entered, was illuminated. It looked as if a thin light was shining on just the rod, nothing else, even though light was everywhere in the box (as if filled with water). Only when it reflected off from something (the rod) did it become visible. Otherwise, the light was darkness.

On earth, sunlight pouring down on the sky turns it blue, gray, or red, depending upon the weather and time of day. On the moon, no matter how much sunlight pours down, if you looked up you'd see what you'd see in Zajonc's box, pure darkness, the darkness of empty space. And that's because the moon has no atmosphere, no air, no moisture, and none of the gases and fumes that, reflecting sunlight, turn it into the panoply of color that reigns overhead here.

Light, unless reflected from something, appears as pure darkness.

Discussion Questions:

1 What spiritual lessons about love might we be able to draw from what was written above about the nature of light? See 1 John 1:5, 2:9–11, 4:8, Luke 11:35.

2 Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ ” (NKJV). Do you pray for your enemies? It is difficult to have the right attitude toward those who hate us, mistreat us, or persecute us. But praying for our enemies has a way of changing our hearts and attitudes toward them. When we pray for our persecutors and those who hate us, we will begin to see them as people in need of God's grace just as much as we need it. It will give us the power and the desire to bless them when they curse us and do good to them when they hate us. How can we cultivate the attitude of praying for those whom we would really rather curse?

3 A person saw someone with a broken-down vehicle. He pulled over, offering to help, and for his trouble was beaten and robbed. “That's it,” he said. “I'll never go out of my way to be a good Samaritan again.” How would you respond to this person?

Breaking the Chains

Niyara [Nee-YAH-rah] sighed heavily and looked around the gloomy room. She was in a hospital for drug addicts in Central Asia. Only 29, she felt old and tired. She wandered through life with no purpose and no hope.

She had liked the feeling of forgetfulness she experienced when someone first gave her drugs, and she quickly became addicted. She lost interest in work and family, and her life spiraled into her own private hell. Her parents took her daughter from her and told her to get out. With no place else to go, she moved in with her addicted friends. She wanted out, but she didn't know how to escape.

A man entered the hospital room to visit another patient. Niyara listened as they talked. "God will help you overcome your addictions," the man, Sergey, said. "Ask Him for help and trust Him to deliver you."

Niyara wondered if it was true. She didn't know this God Sergey spoke about. What did He think of her and her life? Could He forgive her? Would He help her? Sergey saw her interest and gave her a Bible. She searched it for answers to questions that plagued her and for assurance of forgiveness.

Niyara was released from the rehabilitation center and met a woman she knew from her addict days. Niyara was amazed at the change in her and asked what had happened. The woman told her that she had become a Christian and had joined a group of former addicts who met to help one another. "Come with me," she urged. Niyara attended the meetings and found hope that she, too, could truly overcome her addictions. Niyara surrendered her life to Christ.

A month later the group's leader left the city and asked Niyara to take over the group. Niyara feared that she couldn't do it. She cried to God for help, and felt an overwhelming love for God and for her fellow addicts. While helping others, she found victory over alcohol and drugs and assured the other women in the group that they, too, could live a sober and happy life.

Niyara knew that former addicts need to live away from the temptations of drugs and alcohol, a place where they can find strength and support to reestablish their sober life. But where could she find such a place? Niyara asked God for help, and He is answering her.

Niyara has learned that with Christ as the center of her life, life can be beautiful without drugs and alcohol. Today her goal is to help others learn that God is the secret to living a fulfilling life free of drugs. Pray for Niyara and for those seeking freedom from the chains of addiction throughout the world.

NIYARA has been baptized and shares her faith in Uzbekistan.