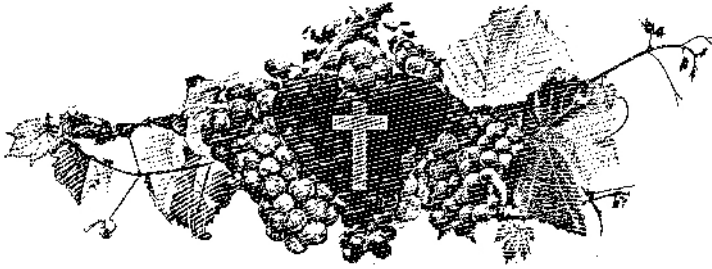


# The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love



## 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?**

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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?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Text:** *1 Corinthians 13:7, 8*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that love comes from God.

**Feel:** Trust in God's love.

**Do:** Express love to others.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Know: God's Love Comes to Us as His Gift

**A** First Corinthians 13 plainly states that God's love is the greatest power in the universe.

1. How can we define God's love?

2. How does God's love fill our hearts? (*See Rom. 5:5.*)

**B** Love must express itself. What are the evidences that love is working in our lives in relation to the following:

1. Other people?

2. God?

**C** How can love involve elements of pain? Self-denial? Joy? Peace? Frustration? Rejection? Sacrifice?

### II. Feel: God's Love Is the Basis of Salvation

**A** What reasons are there for confidence in the reality and inextinguishable nature of God's love?

### III. Do: God's Love as Demonstrated in Christ Challenges Us in Our Relationship to God and to Other People

**A** Why are there no reasons for doubting the reality of God's love for each of us individually?

**B** If we ever feel we are so evil that God cannot love us, what is the remedy?

**C** What harm and loss do we suffer if we doubt God's love?

▶ **Summary:** Love comes from God. It is inextinguishable. It brings peace, trust, and freedom to our lives. When God demonstrates it through us, it blesses and enriches other lives immeasurably. Loving, lovable Christians are priceless.

## 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?**

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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?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Love is the greatest of the spiritual gifts because it underlies, guides, and informs the other gifts and everything we hope to accomplish as Christians.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that love is not primarily a feeling but rather a consistent and disciplined way of relating to the world.

On June 25, 1967, the Beatles first performed “All You Need Is Love.” According to their manager, Brian Epstein, “The nice thing about it is that it cannot be misinterpreted. It is a clear message saying that love is everything.” —Wikipedia contributors, “All You Need Is Love,” Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_You\\_Need\\_Is\\_Love](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_You_Need_Is_Love).

But love can be and has been misinterpreted. One shouldn’t presume to know what the Beatles meant—they conveniently forgot to define *love*—but the New Testament is quite clear that love is not primarily a positive emotion but a way of being.

**Discuss With the Class:** Whom or what do you love? How do you show it? For example, if you love God, do you make an effort to ascertain His will for your life and act upon it?

**Consider This:** If “all you need is love,” then is that necessarily good news for us as humans if we are to assume that love is more than merely having positive feelings about something or someone? Where do we get love?

### ► STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** As 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 makes clear, love is the central principle of the Christian faith. To modern thinking, love is a nebulous concept. Emphasize that Paul clearly defines both what love is and what it is not. Much of his description—especially the negative, unfortunately—probably arose from his observation of behaviors in the Christian community.

## Bible Commentary

### I. *Philia* (Review 2 Timothy 3:4 with your class.)

The Koine Greek in which Paul wrote had four separate and distinct words

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## 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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

for love. These were *agape*, *philia*, *eros*, and *storge*. Of these, only *agape* and *philia* are used with any frequency in the New Testament. *Storge*, the needy love of a small child for his or her parent, is used only once—in the compound word *philostorgos* in Romans 12:10—to describe mutual love of parents and children or husbands and wives. *Eros*, while not necessarily referring to sexual love, does include it and appears only twice in Greek translations of the Old Testament (*Prov. 7:18, 30:16*).

*Philia* is the word that comes closest to the commonly understood meaning of the English word *love*. It refers primarily to the affection felt by someone toward another person, or possibly a thing or an idea. Most of us know, for example, that Philadelphia—the name of both an ancient and a modern city—means “brotherly love” or, more literally, “brotherly affection.”

Many commentators will say that *philia* is conditional love, and that is true in the sense that affection arises from appreciation of the qualities of its object. But it is not conditional in the sense that *eros* or *storge* are, both of which imply some selfish use of their object to satisfy needs or lusts.


The writers of the New Testament regarded *philia* as a serviceable and somewhat morally neutral word and used it many times to describe everything from “love of money” (*philarguria; 1 Tim. 6:10*) to love of God (*philotheos; 2 Tim. 3:4*).

*Philia*, however, was first and foremost a “feeling” word. To describe the love of God as shown in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the New Testament needed a different word, one that existed but was rarely used. That word was *agape*.

**Consider This:** Why is *philia* love not sufficient to describe the love of God? (See *Matt. 5:46, 47*.)

## II. Agape (Review 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 with your class.)

The word for love used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 is *agape*. While this word had a history as a Greek word, it was little used. It referred to love as a general emotion, as opposed to the particularity and partiality of *philia*. In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, *agape* was used quite frequently to render the Hebrew *ahaba*, possibly because of the similar sound of the words.

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## 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?

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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?

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**Loving our enemies? Many folks 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?**



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

*Agape* probably was used so extensively in the New Testament for two reasons. First, the early Christians for whom Paul and other New Testament authors wrote were either Greek-speaking Jews or Greek Gentiles who drew most of their knowledge of the Old Testament from the Septuagint. Second, the word *agape* best conveyed the generality and impartiality of God’s love as seen in Christ.

Perhaps the best illustration of the difference between *philia* and *agape* is the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15–17. In English this sequence is very nearly incomprehensible. It might appear that Jesus is repeating Himself for emphasis or is doubting Peter’s sincerity. Or possibly Jesus is giving Peter a chance to affirm Him three times whereas he had denied Him three times before. While there may be some validity to these interpretations, it is important to know that the first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, he uses the word *agapeo*, and Peter answers with the word *phileo*, indicating that his devotion is not quite what it should be. Imagine telling God that you like Him a lot. Why is Peter hurt when Jesus asks him a third time whether he loves Him? Because Jesus pointedly uses the same word Peter uses, *phileo*, indicating that he notices Peter’s less-than-complete commitment.

**Consider This:** What does Peter’s use of the term *philia* tell us about his commitment up to that point? Might it shed some light on his behavior in the events surrounding the Crucifixion?

For other factual information, see “Love in the OT” and “Love in the NT,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 3, pp. 164–178.

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Love is crucial to life itself, and in God’s love we see love in its perfect form.

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 Given that love as defined in the Bible is more a matter of will, mind, and actions than of emotion, it still would be rather sterile and cold if it did not involve the emotions at all. What is the place of the emotions in

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## 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?**

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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”?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the biblical scheme? Why is it fair to say that they should be subject to will, mind, and actions, rather than guiding them?

**2** Jesus said to love one’s enemies (*Matt. 5:44*). Who were Jesus’ enemies? How did He show love to them?

**Application Questions:**

**1** Jesus says we should love our neighbors as ourselves (*Matt. 22:39*). As such, it is assumed that we love ourselves and that it is right and proper that we do so. What does it mean to love ourselves? How does it fit in with the advice to die to oneself given in Romans 8:13? How is the biblical love of self different from the selfishness and self-indulgence people take to be love of self?

**2** According to John 13:35, Christ’s disciples will be known by the fact that they love one another. Arguably this may be the distinctive point of Christian life and practice. And yet, it is the hardest thing to do. In fact, many of us find it easier to “love bomb” strangers and prospective converts than to show common kindness to church members or family members we have known for years. Why is this? How can we make a habit of showing our love and appreciation for *one another*?

**► STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is meant to emphasize the centrality of love to the Christian life and experience in such a way as to make love real in the approach to one’s own life.

Look at the positive and negative qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Create a short skit to dramatize one or more of these qualities. For example, you could portray someone reading this verse in a church service and then leaving the pulpit and doing or saying something blatantly envious, boastful, etc. The character in the skit is then confronted with his or her behavior. Does he or she rationalize it away? Does he or she get offended? Does he or she repent?

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**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 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:

❶ 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.*

❷ 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?

❸ 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?