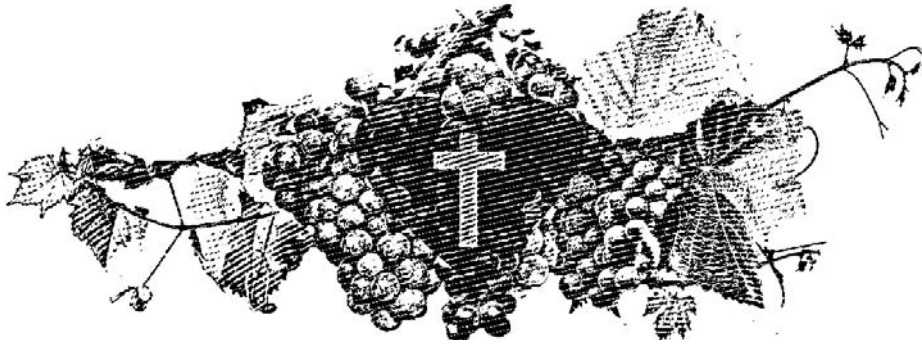


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love



SABBATH—JANUARY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 5:43–48; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:39; Luke 10:25–37; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

MEMORY VERSE: “The three most important things to have are faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NlrV).

IT IS NO SURPRISE that Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit begins with love. Love is at the top of the list for Christians because it best shows God’s character.¹ It was love that caused God to create us, to support us, and to make Himself known to us. Love also leads God to give us His Son to save us.

John says it so clearly—“God is love” (1 John 4:16). Because love is such an important part of God’s character, love must be important to us too. “Anyone who leads a life of love shows that he is joined to God. And God is joined to him” (verse 16, NlrV).

Sadly, the word *love* is used so loosely today. We often say 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 (read 1 Corinthians 13). It is something different. It is something that influences² our way of life and our way of relating to (fellowshipping with) others. Parts of love are a package. Love is not a list from which we choose those we like and then ignore the rest. That is not what true love is all about. This is what this week’s lesson will show us.

1. God’s character—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

2. influences—to have power or an effect over persons or things.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 3**LOVE HAS MANY SIDES
(Deuteronomy 6:5)**

“Jesus replied [answered], ‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind.” . . . This is the first and most important commandment. And the second is like it. “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” ’ ” (Matthew 22:37–39, NIV; read also Deuteronomy 6:5).

What makes one Bible translation different from another translation or version? The answer is in how words are chosen and the way they are expressed (written). For example, “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. So, to study the fruit of the Spirit, we can better understand meanings by going to the original language of the word. In Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew word for love is *ahab*. It can mean all kinds of love, from God’s love for his people to our desire for things. Men can “love” evil (Psalm 52:3), but they can also “love” good (Amos 5:15). The way that love is used helps us to understand its true meaning. With this in mind, the love Jesus speaks of in the greatest commandment is the noblest, purest, and highest form of self-sacrificing³ love. It is the kind of love that Jesus commands each person to have toward God and others.

The Jewish people already knew that the number-one command was to love God with their whole heart, soul, and mind. Mark also adds the word *strength* (read Mark 12:30). In pointing out all four parts of the person, Jesus is calling together all that a person is. Jesus is saying, “You need to love God with all your person.” Much could be gained by studying these four parts of the person.



We are to love God with the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What is the important point Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:39 make? How is this important to the whole understanding of love?

To love your neighbor as yourself means to love all people with your whole heart. The kind of love in this “second commandment” is the same as in the “first commandment.” It is love in action. It requires the will and action of the person who does it. To love our neighbor as ourselves means to take care of someone else the same

3. self-sacrificing—to sacrifice your own needs and wants to help another person.

way you would take care of yourself.

It is easy to talk about loving others as yourself. What is not easy is doing it. How well do you do in this area? How can you learn the hard lessons of death to self to help other people?

MONDAY—JANUARY 4

WHAT LOVE DOES (1 Corinthians 13:4–8)

Describing love is the first step to knowing what love is. To show love is the next step. We must be careful not to say too quickly that we love. Instead, we need to study carefully how we live and how well we use the principles (rules) of love as shown in the Bible.

Read about how love acts in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 and ask, How can I practice these principles in my own home?



**Love is the most powerful force
in all of creation.**

Think for a minute of what our homes would be like if we always practiced the principles of true love. Imagine the blessing of living in a home where the family members are positive and supportive of one another. Perhaps you cannot get others to do this. But if you were to practice these principles, you might just experience how powerful an influence⁴ they could have on others. You cannot argue against love. Love is the most powerful force in all of creation. People can argue against your religion, your lifestyle, your beliefs, your faith—everything. But they cannot argue against unconditional (without limits or end) love. This love is the kind of love shown to the world through Jesus. This love is also the kind of love we can share with others.

Which kind of love in the Bible do you find the most difficult to practice in your own life? How can you make a serious effort to develop more of this kind of love? Why is it important that you do so?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 5

WHAT LOVE DOES NOT DO (1 Corinthians 13)

Go back over 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Only this time consider it in a different way. Think about what love does not do. These things are stated in the negative (nots). But they are actually other positive sides of love.

4. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

Go through each one of the “negatives” in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Then write down the positive parts found there. Also, ask yourself how well or poorly you show these parts of love and how you might be able to do better.

Love does not envy (feel jealous)

= _____

Love does not parade (boast) itself

= _____

Love is not puffed up (proud)

= _____

Love is not rude (unkind)

= _____

Love does not demand to have its own way

= _____

Love does not easily become angry

= _____

Love thinks no evil (thoughts)

= _____

Love does not rejoice in (enjoy) iniquity (sin)

= _____

Study the meaning of love described in the love chapter (1 Corinthians 13). It helps us to be able to appreciate the character of our heavenly Father. He

is Love in person. Knowing this helps us to realize that the world’s understanding of love does not equal the Bible’s understanding of God’s love.

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 6

THE TEST OF LOVE (Matthew 5:43–48)

Write in your own words what Jesus said in Matthew 5:43–48. What is the main point Jesus is telling us about love?

If we are to love our enemies, we had better know who our enemies really are. If an enemy is only the one who tries to kill you, you may think this verse does not hold any meaning for your life, especially if no one has threatened to end your life lately.

But an enemy may be an opponent,⁵ a rival,⁶ a competitor,⁷ or a challenger. An enemy is one who hates you or who treats you wrongly. It might even be a spouse (husband or wife) or another member of the family. There may be times when a family member is not very loving. He or she even may search for ways to make you angry or worse. When that happens, it is easy to get caught in the trap of trying to get even with him or her.

Sometimes you may experience a bitter challenge on the job. Those you have worked with side by side over the years may begin to think of you as an

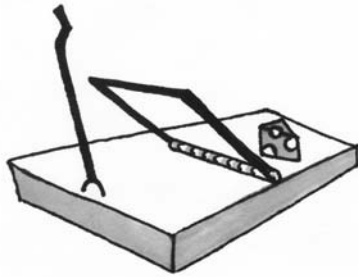
5. opponent—a person who takes an opposite position to someone else.

6. rival—a person who competes against another person to gain or win something; someone who tries to do something better than someone else.

7. competitor—one of two or more persons striving to reach or obtain something that only one can possess (win).

enemy. An enemy could be someone you have cared a great deal for or may even be someone in your church.

We need to understand that the enemy Jesus spoke of is not limited to someone who would threaten our lives. He or she may be anyone who causes us enough bitterness to tempt us to fight back.



It is easy to get caught in the trap of trying to get even with the one who has hurt you.

How do the verses in Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 25:21; and 1 Peter 3:9 help us understand this important principle (rule) about love?

Loving our enemies? Many folks have a hard time showing love to their friends. But loving our enemies is tough. How can we learn to follow Jesus' example? How can our hearts be changed so we can love our enemies? How might praying for them play a large part in helping us reach this Christian goal?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 7

LOVE IN ACTION (Luke 10:25–37)

A university professor set up his

preaching class in an unusual way. The professor 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 to preach love and compassion (mercy) for others. A short break between classes forced the would-be preachers (students) to hurry to meet the schedule. Each of the student preachers had to walk down a certain hall and pass by a beggar. The beggar had been placed there on purpose by the professor.

What happened was a powerful lesson! The number of would-be preachers who stopped to help this beggar was very low. The guiltiest ones were those who were under the pressure of time. Almost all student preachers hurried to preach their sermon on the good Samaritan, and they walked right past the beggar at the heart of the parable (story)!



In our rush to do God's work, we must be careful not to rush past those who need our help the most.

In yesterday's study, we talked about the question, Who is my enemy? Today the question is, Who is my neighbor? In Luke 10:25–37, how does Jesus answer that for us? How does this parable tie into the whole question of what true love is? Also, ask the question, Why did Jesus name religious leaders as "bad guys"? What lesson is there for us too?

Consider these words: "I was hungry, and you formed a literature club to discuss it. I was imprisoned, but you complained about the crime rate. I was naked, and you debated how well I did My work. I was sick, and you thanked God for your health. I was homeless, and you preached to me about the protection [safety] of God's love. You seem so holy and so close to God. But I'm [I am] still hungry, lonely, cold, and in pain. Is it important?" (adapted).

Be honest. What kind of lifestyle changes should you make so you can become a good Samaritan to others? Whom do you know right now who is hurting? How much death to self will it require for you to treat this person as a "neighbor"?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 8

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Scientist Arthur Zajonc filled a box with light. But he did it so that none of the light would come from any surface inside. 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, the darkness of empty space! That is what you would see. If the light does not come from any surface, or if you do not stare directly into it, light is invisible.

Zajonc then took a rod and moved it through the darkness of the box. The rod itself was lighted on the side where the light entered. It seemed as if a thin light was shining on just the rod, nothing else. But light was everywhere in the box (as if filled with water). When light shone off the rod, then it became seeable. Otherwise, the light was darkness.

On earth, sunlight pours down on the sky and turns it blue, gray, or red. Of course, the color depends upon the weather and time of day. On the moon, no matter how much sunlight pours down, if you looked up you would see what you would see in Zajonc's box. It would be pure darkness, the darkness of empty space. And that is because the moon has no air, no moisture, and no gases and fumes to reflect sunlight and turn it into the many colors that rule overhead here.

What is the point? Light, if not shining off of something, appears as pure darkness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① What spiritual lessons about love might we be able to learn from the story about the nature of light in Friday's lesson? To help answer the

question, read 1 John 1:5; 1 John 2:9–11; 1 John 4:8; Luke 11:35.

② Think more about this question of loving our enemies. 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 not easy to have the right feelings toward those who hate us or hurt us. But praying for our enemies has a way of changing our hearts and feelings toward them. When we pray for those who hate and hurt us, we will think of them as people in need of God’s help. 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 develop the desire of praying for those whom we would really rather curse?

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

④ Have you ever known people who always seemed to show love? What were these people like? What did they do? How was this love shown? How much personal suffering do you think they went through to show the love that they did?