

# “LOVE”

## The First Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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"The fruit of the Spirit" is the product that the Spirit produces by or through the Word which the Spirit has given us. This singular "fruit" is contrasted to the multiple facets of "the works of the flesh." Furthermore, it is characterized by: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23). These are not separate fruits but are characteristics of the one "fruit of the Spirit." A person may speak about a juicy red apple. We recognize juicy and red are characteristics of this apple. These characteristics describe this fruit. Thus, the same is true with "the fruit of the Spirit," and the first descriptive characteristic which Paul ascribes to this marvelous fruit is "love."

As Paul describes "the fruit of the Spirit," he begins with the most prevalent characteristic. It stands loftily above the others. Love stands in the heights because it directly stems from God. John wrote, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16). Furthermore, love stands exalted because all the other traits of this beautiful fruit stem from this first attribute — love.

In Koine Greek of the first century, there were four different words for love. The word used in Galatians 5:22 is "AGAPE." This love is a sacrificial love that seeks the highest good for its object. It is more than just mere emotions and affections for it is projected from the intellect. While mere emotions and affections are extinguished because of hatred, sin, and wickedness, this love is willing to give of itself. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Thus, it is a love not simply of words and tongue, but of deeds and truth (1 John 3:18). The best definition of this word is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 which says, "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth..."

When asked "which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:36-39). From this, we learn there are three proper recipients of love.

First and foremost, we are to love God. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Earlier in the same chapter, John explained how God manifested His love towards us. John wrote, "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). Certainly this is not the only way God demonstrates His love. He has given us life, breath, and our very beings. We are because of Him. He has also given us His word that we might know how to gain eternal life and how to live a happy and fulfilled life in this world. Because God has given us so much, and because we are fully dependent upon Him, we should love Him above all else. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:29,30). In this context, the heart is the center of our emotions. Love is an emotion and our love to God should reflect our deepest emotion. The soul is a person's spiritual nature, his inner being. Our love to God should stem from our inner most being. The mind is the center of our intellect. Though love is an emotion, it is more than just an emotion. Our love toward God is actions based upon our knowledge of God and His will. Finally, the strength is a person's physical being. Our bodies are used in our various expressions of love, and in expressing our love to God, we use "the fruit of our lips" to offer the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), our holy hands are lifted up in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8), and our feet takes us into all the world to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:18,19; Romans 10:15). All in all, Jesus commands all mankind to love God with our entire being.

Second, we are to love our neighbor. One of the most obvious question that arises is "Who is my neighbor?" To answer this question, Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan who helped a man who fell into the hands of thieves and was left half dead (Luke 10:29-37). While lying there, a priest and a Levite saw him but passed him by on the other side. Thankfully, a benevolent Samaritan saw him, helped him, and provided for him. To answer the question, Jesus asked a very pointed question: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" And the answer was "He that shewed mercy on him." In the end, we learn that a neighbor was one who showed mercy. In application, Jesus said, "Go, and do thou likewise." Thus, a neighbor would include our enemies (Matthew 5:44), our fellow man (Ephesians 5:1-2), and our brethren (1 John 4:20). In fact, love should be a distinctive mark of God's people. Jesus taught, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This is a serious matter! John in his epistle wrote, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8). In context, John is writing about our love one for another and makes this application, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1John 4:11).

Finally, we are to love ourselves. Though some have placed too much emphasis here, the principle is still taught. Certainly, we must be on guard not to love ourselves more than we should and not to love ourselves above others. Nevertheless, we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves without loving ourselves. In Ephesians 5:29, Paul wrote, "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." A general principle is stated. Generally speaking, a person does not hate his own flesh. Paul applies this general principle to marriage. Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28,33), and the man who neglects his wife, neglects himself. Instead of hating one's own flesh, a person nourishes and cherishes it. The word "nourish" means to nurture or bring it up. This is the same word translated "nurture" in Ephesians 6:4. The word "cherish" means to warm or keep warm, to foster with tender care. Thus, we should love ourselves by nourishing and cherishing ourselves.

Love is the great motivator. Because of God's love, He sent His Son to this world and to die for our sins. John wrote, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). His love should, first, motivate us to love Him. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Second, His love should motivate us to obey Him. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Furthermore, Paul wrote that a working faith is to be motivated by love. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). In fact, anything that a person does, if it is not motivated by love, it is empty profitless to oneself (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The greatest expression of love is for "a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Surely, we all realize that Jesus was speaking about His own sacrifice for us. Now, listen to the application, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."