

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love

Lesson #2 for January 9, 2010

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 5:43-48; Matthew 7:12; 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

1. This lesson seeks to explore the meaning of the word *love*—*agape*—where it comes from, and what it could and should mean in the lives of Christians.
2. In Galatians 5:22,23, Paul described the fruit of the Spirit. The list begins with “love.” Why is love such an essential part of the Christian message? Is it because “God is love”? (1 John 4:8,16) Shouldn’t those who profess to represent God be loving also? Is it because the two great commandments described in Matthew 22:37-40 (compare Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18) say that love is the one Christian requirement? Or, is it that the Ten Commandments are all based on those two “love commandments”?
3. Unfortunately, we realize that today the word *love* can mean almost anything! We use such expressions as “The place was filled with love,” or “I love my new car,” or even, “I love to shop.”
4. So, if *love* is used so loosely today, how do we clearly distinguish between that loose usage of the word and the core value of Christianity which we are talking about today?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13—the “love chapter.” How many Christians do you know who are actually living out that experience described in 1 Corinthians 13? Could we exhibit some of the characteristics described in 1 Corinthians 13 and not exhibit others?
6. Our lesson suggests that *agape* love, the true Christian type of love, is “self-sacrificing love” toward others and toward God. The Hebrew word for that kind of love is *ahab*, but the Greek word is *agape*. How would you describe this kind of real love? Would it be “a mother’s love”?
7. Is it hard to love? Is it even possible? What does it mean to *agape* God? Or even other people? What if a drunk is asking you for money?
8. The “golden rule” found in Matthew 7:12 is one of the hallmarks of Christianity. After reading the Old Testament, would you summarize it like that? If you go back to sources before the days of Jesus, there are several of those sources which say, “Don’t do unto others the things you don’t want them to do unto you.” This is a typical exhortation from mothers to their children! Mothers repeat this very often, especially to brothers! But, Jesus turned this around and said, “Do unto others the things you would like them to do unto you.” If we really did that, would there be any place to stop? Is this significantly different from the previous command? There is a huge difference between those two commands. You could be dead and fulfill the ancient command, but you have to be very much alive to fulfill the golden rule. What does the golden rule have to do with love? Would that be the ultimate expression of *agape* love?
9. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37 tell us that we should “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind.” Mark 12:30 adds, “strength.” Is that a way of saying that all our social, mental, intellectual, and physical attributes should be involved? Or, is that simply a way of saying that we need to love God and others with our entire being? What does that mean? Does “strength” add an action component to the love for God?
10. Is our best love for God significantly different—even in quality—from our love for another human being? Do we need to truly die to self in order to truly love others? Is that easy?
11. It is very easy to talk about love, but it is another thing entirely to actually live it. How well are

we doing?

12. 1 Corinthians 13 seems to suggest that God's love is the greatest power in the universe. What does that imply? Romans 5:5 tells us that God gives us His Holy Spirit which generates love in our lives. How does that actually work?
13. Christians love to say that God is love. We have sung from childhood that "Jesus loves me." Where is the evidence for that? Are we demonstrating that evidence today? How often do we set aside what we want to do in order to meet the needs of someone else?
14. When we study the life of Christ, we notice that He related to different groups of people in different ways. Consider what He said to the Pharisees and scribes. (John 8:31-33,39-44; Matthew 23—especially Matthew 23:13,15,16,25,27) Do those words sound loving? Do you think there were "tears" in His words as He spoke those scathing rebukes? How does that relate to His love? Didn't Jesus realize that those religious leaders were taking the whole Jewish nation down to hell with them? Isn't that reason enough to speak strong words? Animals protect their young. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68kM>) What would you do if someone was threatening your child? Would you speak kindly and softly to him and ask him please to stop?
15. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is certainly one of the most significant statements about love in Scripture—perhaps in all of literature. Look at the list of things that Paul mentioned that love does. Love is patient, and kind, not jealous, not proud, not selfish, not conceited, not ill-mannered, not irritable, does not keep a record of wrongs, not happy with evil, happy with the truth; it never gives up. Its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Have you ever seen such love actually exhibited in the life of a human being? Paul suggested that love never fails, but all else passes away. Why do you think that is?
16. In addition to describing several positive attributes of love, Paul gave a long list of negatives regarding *agape*. *Agape* "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," and "does not rejoice in iniquity." Can you describe each of those negatives in positive terms? For example, "happy when others prosper," "supportive and praising of others," "true and humble," "considerate and kind," "seeks the good in others," "generous," "unflappable," "calm," "speaks only good of others," "thinks good of others," "always gives others the benefit of the doubt," and "enjoys goodness." An old lady in one church had a reputation for always saying something good about everyone. So someone asked her about the Devil. Her response: "He certainly is a persistent fellow!"
17. Ellen White had some very significant words to write about loving, lovable Christians. "The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."—*Ministry of Healing* 470 (1905). People may argue with us about theology, about our ideas regarding God, about our lifestyle, about our faith, about what we believe, in fact, almost anything. But no one argues against real love. How could you argue against love? How can people resist God's love? How could Satan rebel in heaven?
18. When reviewing the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13, do you find them easy to carry out? Does the Holy Spirit give us all of those characteristics? Or, do we have to work on them ourselves? Is it a cooperative effort? What barriers are preventing progress?
19. When babies are first born, they cannot think about anything except their own personal needs. That is a very selfish approach. Fortunately, mothers still love them! But, as time goes on and they grow, we trust that they will eventually reach the place where they will look beyond themselves. How does that happen?

20. Where are we supposed to learn love? Wasn't that God's original reason for establishing the family? Is there a better place to learn about love than in a truly Christian family? Small children think that their parents stand in the place of God. In fact, they think their parents are the highest authority. Things certainly change when they reach teenage years. Teenagers often question everything about their parents. What happens to love at that time in life?
21. In the original *Koine* Greek in which the New Testament was written, there were four words for love: *agape*, *philia*, *eros*, and *storge*. *Eros* and *storge* are very infrequently used in Scripture. *Storge* is used once in a compound word in Romans 12:10 describing mutual love between parents and children and between husbands and wives. *Eros*, while not always referring to sexual love, does include that and appears only twice in the Greek translations of the Old Testament. (Proverbs 7:18; 30:16)
22. The word that comes closest to our modern use of the word *love* is *philia* which could best be described as "affection" or perhaps in some cases "attraction." It is an affection which grows out of an appreciation of the object of the love. This word is used even in the New Testament for such things as the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10) and the love of God. (2 Timothy 3:4)
23. But, the Greeks had another word which was seldom used—*agape*. That word describes a general principle of love—the act of doing something for the benefit of someone else because they need that love and not because they are in any way deserving, or the giver is in any way expecting something in return. That kind of love is not natural for humans?
24. So, why isn't *philia*—the general word for love—sufficient to describe God's love? Matthew 5:46,47 reminds us that even pagans and tax collectors love (*philia*) their friends. But, the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13 is not that kind of love.
25. Read Matthew 5:43-48. This passage should turn the world upside down! The word "perfect" in that context means "mature." Have you ever been successful in practicing those guidelines? What is the best way to love your enemies? Abraham Lincoln is reported as having asked, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"
26. Not many of us are literally suffering persecution at the hands of others. What might be the equivalent of that in our day? What do we need to do to qualify to be called "children of God"? Do we need to be like Him? If we think of enemies as only those people who might literally threaten our lives, we probably do not have many of them. But, what about opponents, rivals at work, competitors, challengers, even contenders for an advanced position at work? An enemy might be described as someone who does what he can to lower you and raise himself in the eyes of others.
27. Read Proverbs 15:1; 25:21,22; 1 Peter 3:9. What do these verses suggest about dealing with those with whom we perhaps do not get along well? How often do we practice gentle answers? How often do we give food and drink to the needy? How often do we pay back curses with blessings?
28. Have you tried praying for your enemies? How does that impact you? How do you feel about it at the time?
29. Look at John 21:15-17. That is a record of Jesus' conversation with Peter on the shore of Lake Galilee. Jesus kept asking Peter if he loved (*agape*) Him. Peter repeatedly responded by saying, "I love (*philia*) you." In the first two questions, Jesus asked Peter if he loved (*agape*) Him. But the last time, Jesus asked, "Do you even love (*phileo*) Me?" What does that imply? What was Jesus asking for? Did Peter believe that he was not capable of true love (*agape*)?
30. In modern times we often speak of love as "coming from the heart." What does that imply? Can *agape* love come from the "heart"? What does *heart* mean in this context? The Bible seems to suggest that true love (*agape*) is a matter of the will, the mind, and even our actions.

31. Another outstanding example that Jesus used to describe true love is found in Luke 10:30-37. It is particularly significant to note that this story featuring a Samaritan is not mentioned by any of the Jewish writers of the New Testament. Why do you think that only Luke mentioned this story? Is it possible that he did not have the same prejudices against Samaritans that the Jews—and even the disciples—had? Remember that Mark—written for a Roman audience—and John—written to the whole church after the fall of Jerusalem and after the fall of the Jewish nation—were not written for a Jewish audience.
32. 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!
Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for January 7, 2010.
33. One of the conundrums of love is the second great commandment. We are told that we should not love ourselves. Selfishness is not the right Christian approach. But, Jesus said that we need to learn to love our neighbors as we love ourselves! (Matthew 22:39; contrast Romans 8:13) What was being implied?
34. Read John 13:34,35. Is it really possible that if we exhibited true Christian love, the whole world would immediately recognize that we are different? What does that tell us about the status of the Christian church today? The Seventh-day Adventist Church? Are Seventh-day Adventists clearly known as the most loving people in the community? Why? Or, why not?
35. God is described in the New Testament as “light.” But light shining from the throne of God is not visible to our physical eyes here on planet Earth. It needs to be reflected in the lives of Christians. (1 John 1:5; 2:9-11; 4:8; Luke 11:35) Is it?
36. Virtually no true Christian would argue with the fact that Jesus Himself was the best example of love. That leads us to ask questions about places like John 8 and Matthew 23. What about the death of Jesus on the cross? How could He possibly look at the people who were nailing Him to the cross and say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34, *NKJV*) What kind of love does it take to do that?
37. For those who understand and espouse the “larger-view, great-controversy, trust-healing model” of the plan of salvation, it should be obvious that the number one criteria that separates God and His people from Satan and his followers is this: God is the essence of love, and Satan is the essence of selfishness. Which government do you want to be a part of? Are you?

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