

Love – A Fruit of the Spirit

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Introduction

Undiscerning and unscrupulous men have “wordnapped,” redefined, misused, and abused several rich and beautiful Biblical words. Among them are *grace, faith, miracle, elect,* and *predestined*. *Love*, which Paul names a “fruit of the Spirit,” is another of these words (Gal. 5:22).¹ Unspiritual men have dragged this word through their secular and sensual gutters, effectively stripping it in the minds of the masses of its pure and altruistic meaning. If order of appearance in listing implies relative significance, we infer that love is the premier quality of all lovely character traits, for Paul placed love first in this list of spiritual fruit. One might also consider the implication that love, because of its principal position in the list, is in some sense the root and basis of all the other traits. The apostle Peter also emphasized the primacy of love, but he did so by making it the final and crowning grace of the eight “Christian graces” (2 Pet. 1:5–7).

Paul wrote of the “fruit” rather than the “fruits” of the Spirit. Each characteristic he listed in Galatians 5:22–23 is part of the singular manifold fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of Christians as they develop and mature. One might conceive of this fruit as one with numerous individual sections, such as an orange has. However, unlike the orange whose sections all have the same flavor, the various “sections” of this spiritual fruit have their own distinctive “flavors.” Love is one of these flavors, joy is another, and peace is yet another, and so with the other characteristics. From the context, it is obvious that God wills that His children partake of every “section” and “flavor” of this fruit that is so universally desirable that “...against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:23b).

We will study this subject under the following headings:

- The Derivation of Love
- The Defilement of Love
- The Definition of Love
- The Demonstration of Love

The Derivation of Love

What is the source of the love that Paul in this passage sets before us as so desirable? We will spend only scant space here answering this, but it is appropriate to give it some attention here.

Paul identifies love as part of “the fruit of the Spirit,” indicating that it is the **product** of the Holy Spirit. I know of no one who has denied or even questioned this conclusion. It is fair to inquire about the means by which the Spirit of God produces love and its companion character traits. Until recent years, those counted faithful among the saints (regardless of their views on means by which the Spirit indwells us) understood and clearly taught that the Holy Spirit uses means to produce spiritual fruit in the lives of Christians. That is, He did/does not **directly**, apart from some medium, operate upon the hearts of saints in some mystical way to cause one to be loving, joyful, longsuffering, and so forth.

However, some, once counted among faithful brethren, began teaching a few years ago that the Spirit produces love and its companion traits by **direct impact** upon the spirit/heart/mind of Christians.² This effect the Spirit allegedly causes is an “extra benefit,” **in addition** to the provisions He gives through His Word (Eph. 6:17), and those benefits we realize through the inscrutable workings of God’s providence. Moreover, the chief protagonist of this view asserts that one **must** have the Spirit’s **direct** help in order to produce the fruit of the Spirit.³

In a very limited response to these assertions, I call attention to the following:

1. Galatians 5:22–23 says nothing of the way by which the Spirit produces His fruit, only the fact that He is its source.
2. Neither in Galatians 5:22–23, nor in any other passage, do we read that the Holy Spirit **directly** or **immediately** affects our hearts to cause us to behave in a certain way (e.g., be more loving).
3. In writing to the Colossians, Paul discussed the spiritual fruit we must bear as God’s children (surely this is not some sort of fruit that is different from the “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22–23):

Because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye **heard** before **in the word of the truth of the gospel**, which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world **bearing fruit** and increasing, as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth.... For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be **filled with the knowledge of his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, **bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God**” (Col. 1:5–6, 9–10, *emph. DM*).

Do not miss how closely Paul identifies the Spirit’s **Word** with the spiritual **fruit** we are to bear. Paul credits the Word of Truth, the Gospel, God’s will as being the cause that produces

the effect of “bearing fruit” (twice). The fruit bearing occurs as one increases in “the knowledge of God.” Note the following principles:

1. The cause behind an effect is no less the cause when he/it employs means to produce the effect. Though Joab and the Ammonites were the immediate causes of the death of Uriah (David was nowhere near Uriah when he was killed), God assigned the principal blame to David: “Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword...” (2 Sam. 11:1, 14–17; 12:9). John recorded that Jesus baptized many, when actually His disciples did the baptizing and He personally baptized none (John 4:1–2). Both David and Jesus produced the respective effects, but they did so through **indirect** means. The Holy Spirit is no less the source of the “fruit of the Spirit” because He employs means to produce it.
2. The Word of God is the “seed of the kingdom” (Luke 8:11). When those with “honest and good hearts” hear the Word and “hold it fast,” it will “bring forth fruit” (v. 15). His Word is the means by which the Spirit produces His fruit in our lives.
3. The Holy Spirit-inspired Word is quite sufficient to produce all of the spiritual fruit God expects us to bear: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). One cannot consistently argue that we must have **direct** help from the Spirit – in addition to the Word of God – to produce spiritual strength, without implicitly denying the adequacy and sufficiency that the Word claims for itself.
4. As previously mentioned, Peter includes *love* as the final element of the “Christian graces” (2 Pet. 1:5–7). Rather than indicating that the Holy Spirit will directly supply love and its companion traits **for** us, Peter instructs **us** to “supply” love in our lives and “do” it (vv. 7, 10). **We** are to work diligently to produce these traits (vv. 5, 10), rather than expecting the Holy Spirit in some mystical way to produce them for us. Thus doing will prevent our being “unfruitful” and “stumbling” (vv. 8, 10). Note that Peter connects love with fruitfulness, just as Paul does in Galatians 5:22–23. Peter was obviously not of the persuasion that we could not bear spiritual fruit without direct, supra-literary activity by the Holy Spirit on our spirits.

Those who insist that we must – and do – have **direct** help from the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life successfully and triumphantly, dabble in Pentecostalism, Calvinism, Wesleyanism, and mysticism.

The Defilement of Love

There are numerous false concepts of love.⁴ By accentuating some of the things this most wholesome and lovely trait are **not**, we will be able thereby to demonstrate, at least to some degree, what it actually **is**.

Love Is Not Mere Words Spoken

John clearly stated the possibility that one may speak words of love without possessing love: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18). John is not here forbidding or even discouraging the speaking of loving words. We all likely need to do more of this to one another in all of our relationships (e.g., husband-wife, parent-child, among brethren). The apostle is saying that words of love **alone**, apart from loving acts, do not constitute love.

The statement in verse 18 is a conclusion and somewhat of a summary of what John began discussing in verse 14:

1. Genuine brotherly love is a signal of spiritual life (v. 14)
2. Brotherly hate constitutes figurative murder (v. 15)
3. Genuine love caused the Lord to lay down His life for us; it will cause us to lay down our lives for one another (v. 16)
4. Genuine love will cause us to help brethren in physical need, according to our abilities (v. 17)
5. Genuine love is demonstrated by our deeds, not merely by our words (v. 18)

“Word-only” love is as worthless as it is hypocritical. The Pharisees, scribes, and others frequently reviled and blasphemed our Lord. He denounced them as hypocrites on more than one occasion and for more than one reason. However, had they told Him they “loved” Him just after their bitter and hateful words of opposition and accusation, they would have but added to their hypocrisy. They may as well have claimed that they demanded His crucifixion because they loved Him so much!

Some who read these words have doubtless witnessed (and/or sometimes been on the receiving end of) cruel, heartless, and hateful actions merely for trying to be faithful to our Savior. Sometimes even brethren recklessly and without provocation spew out strong, loud, and abusive words of accusation and denunciation. Such railings are sometimes either immediately prefaced or followed by declarations of “love” for the subject of the abuse. It would be hard enough to deal with such if it came from associates at work or school, but it is made all the more imponderable and difficult to bear when a brother or sister in Christ is its source. All who so behave demonstrate hatred rather than love, and they become figurative murderers (v. 15). Such brethren are hypocrites in the fullest meaning of the term. They verily love in word and tongue only, which is all pretense and no love at all.

Theological liberals pride themselves on their “love” for others (in contrast to those mean and hateful conservatives). Some, who will not actively teach error, nonetheless promote it by acting as “bodyguards” for those who do. Not only will these protectors not oppose or expose error and sin, but they do not want anyone else to do it either. So, when their pet false teachers and their false doctrines are exposed, these same “loving” folk often themselves become very skilled in their use of hateful words toward the teachers of Truth. They remind me of Joab, who with one hand pulled Amasa to him to kiss him and ask of his welfare, and with the other, stabbed him in the fifth rib with his sword (2 Sam. 20:8-10).

Deeds that seem to express love can also be hypocritical and false, as exemplified by the kiss Judas gave the Lord in Gethsemane (Mat. 26:47-50). Thus we need to remember that John said we should love not only “in deed,” but “in truth,” meaning truly, genuinely. Paul’s exhortation to the Romans is appropriate here: “Let love be without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9a).

Love Is Not Mere Emotion

Modern culture to a great degree has been caught up in romanticism. It is difficult to find persons today who are willing or able to think critically or who are even capable of rational or logical analysis and/or response to stimuli. The common – almost universal – operational procedure is emotional rather than rational. This being so, the definition of “love” by many is some touchy-feely, ooey-gooney, superficial, and syrupy feeling or expression of feelings. Unfortunately, this misconception of love that turns the brain off and relies solely on surface emotions is alive and well among brethren. This flawed philosophy explains how brethren can hear a man entertain them with stories and illustrations while he teaches false doctrine, and they can come away almost enthralled with how “dynamic” he is. Such emotional mush is far removed from love.

Having said that, it would be both foolish and erroneous to deny that love – including *agape* love – involves the emotions. The other common New Testament Greek word for *love* is *phileo*, which actually connotes tender affection, thus strongly involving the emotions. Several passages set forth the emotional factor involved in the love saints are to have for each other. For example, Paul urged: “In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). Peter makes an even fuller statement concerning the emotional ties brethren should have to each other: “Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humble minded” (1 Pet. 3:8).

These passages mention such emotion-seated traits as tenderness, affection, and compassion, all of which are noble and desirable feelings that we should entertain and cultivate toward others. However, until we express them in appropriate words and/or deeds, they remain mere feelings or emotions. Paul makes this plain in his personification of love (*agape*) in 1 Corinthians 13:1-7.

We learn from this marvelous passage that, even if we do not possess the emotion-based affectionate love (*phileo*) for a person, we still have the obligation to exhibit the mind/will-based love (*agape*) for him. This obligatory love will cause us to speak and act toward him, even if he is an enemy, so as to seek his good and benefit. Such is the very love that God had for sinful man in the giving of His only begotten Son, as John 3:16 so eloquently and simply declares. Love does not consist of the mere affectionate feelings or emotions themselves, but of the appropriate expressions of these feelings.

Love Is Not Mere Lust or Sexual Fulfillment

My father was a Gospel preacher, and many years before I was a teenager, he asked a class of teenagers to define *love*. When no one would volunteer a definition, he called on a young man who shrugged and said, "Just sort of 'huggin' and kissin,' I guess." The entertainment industry (TV, movies, song lyrics, books of fiction) has so corrupted *love* in the minds of the masses since the 1960s that *love*, *lust*, and *sex* have practically become synonyms. Pop singer, Jo Stafford, had a hit record in 1954 (before the sexual revolution of the 1960s) with her song, "Make Love to Me." It was an innocent song about courtship that leads to life-long marriage, as its lyrics indicate. However, to most people the phrase *make love* has gradually been warped almost exclusively to mean sexual activity.

God has made us with sexual instincts, and fulfillment of this desire is wholesome and honorable within the institution and the limits set by God. In marriage alone, and that between a man and woman who have a Scriptural right to be married to each other, may one fulfill one's sexual instincts honorably and innocently: "Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled" (Heb. 13:4a). The expression of sexual love is not only a privilege of marriage partners; it is also a duty:

But, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife her due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other,

except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

Sexual fulfillment outside of Scriptural marriage is forbidden by God and constitutes fornication and/or adultery, which will cause one to be lost eternally if not repented of: “for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:b). Paul wrote plainly of the eternal cost of sexual sins of which one does not repent and receive forgiveness:

Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; cf. Gal. 5:19, 21; emph. DM).

It is lamentable beyond description to observe the social and cultural crises that have resulted from the misconception and abuse of this beautiful and wholesome trait of love. Over the past several decades millions of marriages have been based upon the Hollywood concept of sexual lust rather than unselfish love (as defined by the Bible). Most of these were doomed to end in divorce from the start, and conveniently, state legislators came up with “no-fault divorce” laws to accommodate the increased number of divorce cases that increasingly flooded the courts.

The casual attitude toward divorce only intensified the ever-growing casual attitude toward marriage, which has practically become a meaningless “throw-away” contract. The next “logical” step has been to question the need for marriage at all, so now millions are “living together” (a euphemism for fornication), before and without marriage, in open and unblushing immorality. Many, not wanting to be “tied down” to one sexual partner even without marriage, just drift from bar to bar, looking for a “one-night stand,” likely rather easy to find after whatever inhibitions one may have had are washed away by a few drinks. Such behavior has come to be not only accepted, but glorified by entertainers, which provides them with a twisted sense of justification for their own barnyard “morals.”

This tortured definition of *love* has produced millions of “one-parent families” in which children are being reared by minimum wage daycare personnel because father is missing (and sometimes unknown) and mother has to fill the role of breadwinner instead of that of wife and mother. These children, far more often than those from normal two-parent families, have problems in school, turn to drugs, become involved in crime, and marry, divorce, and remarry repeatedly. What a terribly successful ploy the devil has used in redefining *love* to mean lust and sex and thus to advance his evil aims.

Love Does Not Give License to Sin or Freedom from Law

A large block of U.S. citizenry, led principally by some young people on college campuses, began openly defying authority, law, and established moral principles in the 1960s. Such people despise any limits of their behavior. One justification they offer for their philosophy is to drag *love* down from its high and lofty perch to serve their low and sorry goal. Psychologists have pandered to and encouraged these authority-haters. Many parents now excuse their utter lack of discipline because they “love Johnny too much to make him mind” or they “love little Susie too much to punish or set limits for her.”

In like manner, preachers and elders sometimes say that they “love” their brethren too much to rebuke and correct them. Theologically, many are advancing the idea that God’s love for us cancels His law for us and that these are somehow antagonistic to one another. They admit that God’s people in the Old Testament had to keep the law He gave through Moses, but they argue: “We’re under grace, rather than the law.” If they were speaking only of the Law of Moses, we could not agree more, for it was given only to Israelites. But its authority even over the Jews died when the Lord was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

Men in every age have always been accountable to the law of God. Rather than the withholding of discipline’s being a sign of **love**, it is the very opposite: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son; But he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Pro. 13:24). Therefore, children are commanded to obey their parents, and parents (led by the father) are to nurture and admonish their children in the Lord, which includes teaching them to obey (Eph. 6:1-4). The Lord “chastens” and “scourges” His children from time to time because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). The Bible also teaches that the faithful are to reprove and rebuke those who despise the Truth (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

The New Testament nowhere teaches that, this side of the cross, we are without law from God. It rather teaches the opposite. Only false teachers, whether through ignorance or deliberation, would dare assert that God’s love has freed men from accountability to law. Such antinomians that teach this damnable doctrine often flee to Romans 6:14: “for ye are not under law, but under grace.” This statement cannot mean that men are under no law, but rather are under grace alone, for only a little later in this same letter, Paul wrote, referring to the Gospel: “The **law** of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death” (8:2, *emph. DM*). Furthermore, if grace eliminates law, it also logically and practically eliminates sin: “But where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Since the need for grace

is predicated upon the existence of sin (5:20b), if there is no sin, there is no need for grace. Thus, those who would obliterate law, logically obliterate both sin and grace in one fell swoop.

What is the meaning of Romans 6:14? In this statement Paul used a literary device in which one denies one element in order to emphasize another. Thus the sense is: "For ye are not under law [alone], but [also] under grace." John used the same device in a passage earlier noted: "My Little children, let us not love in word [alone], neither with the tongue [alone]; but [also] in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). If we were absolutely and exclusively under grace, then all men would be saved unconditionally: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Tit. 2:11).

If Paul meant in Romans 6:14 that we are absolutely free from law, then he directly contradicted himself when he wrote that he was "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21) and that we must "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Furthermore, James described the Gospel as "the perfect law of liberty" (1:25).

We will do well to notice that our love for God and His Son is measured and demonstrated by our obedience to Their Law:

If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.... Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my words: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).

John repeated this great principle: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Whatever love **is**, it most certainly does **not** free us from obeying God's law and commandments, nor does it give us license to sin or adopt the fatal and fallacious philosophy of situation ethics. May the learning of what love **is not** help us understand what it **is**.

The Definition of Love

Love in the "fruit of the Spirit" translates the Greek noun *agape*. This word is by far the most frequently occurring "love" word in the New Testament, appearing 116 times. The verb form, *agapao*, appears an additional 142 times. The *agape* family of Greek words represents the very highest concept of love. This word conveys the idea of seeking the best for others, with or without affection for them, and whether or not they are worthy of our benevolent attitudes and actions. This love arises not from the worthiness of its recipient, but from the benevolent nature of its giver. Thus God **loved** wicked and sinful men although they were completely unworthy

and He certainly did not **like** them or approve of their conduct (John 3:16). *Agape* is basically an act of the will that can be commanded (John 13:34; Eph. 5:25; 1 John 3:23; et al.), rather than a spontaneous emotional response of the heart, which no man can command. W.E. Vine describes *agape* love as follows:

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered....⁵

Paul gives us the fullest treatment of the meaning of *agape* in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Ironically, he did so, not as an isolated definition of the word or as an essay designed to explain the concept, but in the process of correcting the attitudes and behaviors of the Corinthian saints regarding the exercise of miraculous spiritual gifts. From reading 1 Corinthians 12-14, it is evident that Paul therein addressed and sought to correct serious tensions among some of the Corinthians relating to these gifts. Apparently, those who possessed the gift of tongues acted as if this were the superior gift and were flaunting it (13:1; 14:1-25). They were promoting themselves as being especially important because they possessed this gift. This unloving and unspiritual behavior seems to have moved some to envy and jealousy. Paul's discussion and description of love are against the backdrop of this dissension, and the characteristics of love he presents are likely, at least in some cases, pointers to the unloving behavior these brethren were manifesting toward each other in this controversy.

The spiritual gifts were exceedingly important in the process of bringing the church through its "childhood" period and in keeping it pure until the completed revelation could be written down for all perpetuity (1 Cor. 13:8-12; 14:1-5, 22b Heb. 2:3-4). Paul first discussed the one source of the many gifts (the Holy Spirit), second, the necessity of maintaining unity among themselves in light of this single source, and third, the importance to the body of those members often considered least significant (1 Cor. 12:1-27).

He then directed their attention to the universally available attribute of love and identified it as more significant than the Spirit's miraculous powers over which they were quarrelling (12:28-13:2). Love is so important that, if one should give all that he had to the poor and offer his body as a burnt offering, but did so from some motive other than love, he would not be rewarded thereby (v.3).

The apostle makes it clear from these powerful illustrations that love – the first-named part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit – is so honorable, beautiful, and powerful that it is absolutely

indispensable. Thus interestingly, this common **“fruit of the Spirit”** exceeds in importance any spectacular **“gift of the Spirit.”**⁶ With the foregoing material for perspective, in verses 4–8 Paul lays out his description of the way love causes one to behave. He personifies love, whereby we see it in action and in its practical application in daily life. He declared that love...

1. **“Suffereth long”** (v. 4): One who loves is longsuffering and patient toward others. This includes one’s patient endurance of wrongs suffered from his enemies.
2. **“Is kind”** (v. 4): Rather than passive patience, love practices good toward others. One who loves is gentle and sweet in disposition, rather than being mean and harsh—character flaws often bred by lack of being longsuffering. Love does not seek to avenge itself.
3. **“Envieth not”** (v. 4): One who loves does not desire or begrudge the possessions or the successes of others, but is content with what he has. Envy may have become evident among some who desired spiritual gifts that others possessed.
4. **“Vaunteth not itself”** (v. 4): Love causes one to be humble. He is not a boaster and a braggart. Some who had the coveted gift of tongues may have flaunted the gift and boasted of it before others. One who loves does not in any way promote and extol self. He rather leaves praise of himself to others, while extolling praiseworthy traits in others.
5. **“Is not puffed up”** (v. 4): Literally, love is not “full of hot air.” This trait is the opposite of arrogance, pride, pomposity, and vainglory, which are completely incompatible with loving behavior. Again, some of the Corinthians may have been exhibiting this attitude regarding the gift(s) they possessed.
6. **“Doth not behave itself unseemly”** (v. 5): One who loves is not ill-mannered, disorderly, or crude. He does not engage in embarrassing conduct. He avoids even the appearance of indecent or vile behavior. Rather, he is courteous and considerate of the feelings of others. Perhaps some of the Corinthians had forgotten the meaning of civil behavior toward one another.
7. **“Seeketh not its own”** (v. 5): One who loves is not consumed with selfishness, the root of all sin. He does not demand or expect recognition, applause, or even due consideration. He is less obsessed with his own “rights” than his duties. Jealousy over the Spiritual gifts was provoked by seeking selfish advantage.
8. **“Is not provoked”** (v. 5): One who loves does not “flare up,” but controls his temper and remains calm under stress. Some of this behavior may have characterized some of the Corinthians.
9. **“Taketh not account of evil”** (v. 5): One who loves does not look for the worst in others, but for the best. Neither does he keep a list of wrongs, injustices, and wounds others have inflicted for a time of vengeance and retribution. This attitude in no way encourages overlooking sin, nor does it mitigate the numerous Scriptural mandates to oppose and expose evil and error (Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 4:2–4; et al.).

10. **“Rejoiceth not in unrighteousness”** (v. 6): One who loves does not find satisfaction in discovering the sins or errors of others, even those of his enemies. He grieves when wickedness prevails.
11. **“Rejoiceth with the truth”** (v. 6): *Truth* here likely stands in contrast with *unrighteousness* above. Thus the statement would refer to joy over the exposure of such things as falsehood, lying, and slander. However, *truth* may refer to *the Truth*, the Gospel. In this case, one who loves delights in each advancement of the Gospel and the kingdom. One who loves is always on the side of the truth, whether in reference to the Word of God or to honor and integrity.
12. **“Beareth all things”** (v. 7): One who loves makes every possible excuse for the behavior of others to avoid hasty judgment. Concerning love’s attitude toward our fellows, Charles R. Eerdman wrote: “Love...throws a kindly mantle over their faults.”⁷ This facet of love recognizes that human frailties are present in all of us, and “bears with” these failings in others, even as one desires others to bear with his.
13. **“Believeth all things”** (v. 8): One who loves believes the best about others until he has no choice but to believe otherwise. Love and eager suspicion do not dwell in the same heart. However, let none suppose that there is any refuge for gullibility in this feature of love.
14. **“Hopeth all things”** (v. 8): Love causes one to hang on even when people disappoint us and situations look dismal. Realistic optimism is a product of Biblical love.
15. **“Endureth all things”** (v. 8): Love produces perseverance and steadfastness to continue one’s righteous pursuits in spite of wicked environment and enemy assault. Love keeps us going.

“Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing” was another very popular song in the 1950s. What it stated about romantic love is an accurate assessment of *agape* love as well. As the fruit of the Spirit has numerous facets (of which love is one), so love likewise has its own multiple and marvelous facets.

In his quaint but powerful style, Matthew Henry observed of love:

How lovely a thing Christianity would appear to the world, if those who profess it were more actuated and animated by this divine principle, and paid a due regard to a command on which its blessed author laid a chief stress! ...Blessed Jesus! How few of thy professed disciples are to be distinguished and marked out by this characteristic!⁸

The Demonstration of Love

It is good to define the moral attributes the Word of God sets before us. Definitions can be abstract at times, but demonstrations of these attributes bring them into the realm of things concrete. When the Bible student begins considering those who have exemplified a superior degree of love, many persons come to mind.

The Bible is replete with examples of unselfish love between human beings. In his love for the unworthy and rebellious Israelites, Moses besought God to remove his name from the Divine record book if God decided not to spare them. The account of Ruth and Naomi furnishes a touching example of dedicated love. It is so appealing that Ruth's loving words have served as wedding vows in countless wedding ceremonies through the centuries: "Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

The tender story of Esther, who so loved her fellow-Jews that she was willing to risk her life for them, is unforgettable (Est. 4:15-16). David and Jonathan were bound to each other in an exceptionally strong relationship of human love (1 Sam. 18:1-4; 20:17; et al.). (It is near blasphemy that evil-minded and immoral men seek to turn the beautiful and pure love between David and Jonathan into a relationship that justifies their own abominable perversions.) David's love for his son Absalom, even when he stole his father's throne for a brief time, is a study in powerful, unrequited love (2 Sam. 18:33).

We see a superior quality of love in Joseph, who, believing Mary had been unfaithful to their betrothal vows and thereby perhaps having his romantic love for her quenched, still was "not willing to make her a public example," but "was minded to put her away privily" (Mat. 1:19). An unnamed Roman centurion had such an unusual love for the Jews of Capernaum that he had built a synagogue for them (Luke 7:1-5). And who can overlook in such a list the special, loving "father-son" relationship Paul and Timothy enjoyed (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2-6)?

We see the perfect demonstration of love in Deity. This includes all of the expressions that Jehovah God the Father has manifested toward us. All of these manifestations flow from the fact that "love is of God" and "God is love" (1 John 4:7-8, 16). Man did not and does not know the meaning of love until he sees God's love: "We love, because he first loved us" (v. 19). He taught us by example and precept what it means to love someone.

The beautiful world in which we live, with all its life-sustaining powers, is proof of a loving and beneficent Creator (Psa. 19:1-4). But the ultimate statement of His love is the gift of His Son for our sins:

For God **so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16, emph. DM).

But God commendeth **his own love toward us**, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, emph. DM).

Behold **what manner of love** the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are (1 John 3:1a, emph. DM).

Herein was **the love of God manifested** in us, that God hath 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, emph. DM).

No wonder Paul described God's love as "his **great love** wherewith he loved us" and ascribed this love to God's "being rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4, emph. DM).

Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father and our Savior, possessed and possesses the same deep and intimate love for the souls of all men. In Paul's words to the Ephesians he revealed the extent to which Christ loved us: "And walk in love, even as **Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us**, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell" (5:2, emph. DM). A bit later, Paul also wrote: "Husbands, love your wives, even as **Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it**" (Eph. 5:25, emph. DM).

Just as the love of the Father taught us the meaning of love, so does the love of Christ: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Shortly before His death, the Lord told the apostles: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He knew that He would soon be doing this very thing for them, but not for them only: "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6b). The Son of God "...gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). If there is no greater demonstration of love than for a man to lay down his life for his **friends**, then we can scarcely conceive of the greatness of the love that moves one to lay down his life on behalf of his **enemies**. All of this becomes the more amazing when we remember that our Savior had it in His power to halt the action of His slayers at any moment He chose. Surely, Paul had just such things in mind when he wrote: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Conclusion

We have considered the following matters in this chapter:

1. The Holy Spirit does not directly infuse into our hearts "love," which Paul sets before us as part of the "fruit of the Spirit." Rather, God's Word commands us to cultivate and practice this characteristic in our own lives as we study God's Word and associate with those who exemplify love.

2. "Love" has been misused and corrupted in various ways: Some think it consists of mere words, some identify it with mere emotions and feelings, others corrupt it by associating it only with sexual passion and fulfillment, and yet others use it as a license to sin.
3. "Love" as a "fruit of the Spirit" is the beautiful *agape* trait that unselfishly seeks the best for others, regardless of their worthiness, comeliness, or likeability. This is the kind of love alone that can be commanded because its source is the human will, rather than human emotions.
4. The ultimate exemplar of this love is Deity, seen in both the First and Second Persons in the Godhead. God so loved the world that He gave up His Son, and the Son so loved the world that He gave up His life. Both the Father and the Son manifested this superior and incomparable characteristic of *agape* love toward men, not because they were likeable, deserving, or righteous, but contrariwise, because they were none of these and were hopeless without that love.

Such matchless love as our God has manifested for us is not something we are merely to admire. After speaking of the motivation the love of Christ was in his life, Paul drove home its practical application: "And he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). To "live unto themselves" is not possible for those who have inculcated this "fruit of the Spirit" called "love." As we have seen, love "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own," all of which describe the lives of those who "live unto themselves." No, love compels us to live for Him who died for our sakes. When we keep this motivation before us, it will cause us to behave toward both men and God so as to please the both.

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Apostate liberals in the church have taught this "semi-Calvinistic," "semi-Pentecostal" doctrine for many years. Mac Deaver, once counted a stalwart defender of the faith, has joined the liberals on this doctrine. He first stated his "direct operation" conviction in his 1994 debate with brother Marion Fox on the indwelling of the Spirit. In this debate he referred to the "supra-literary" (i.e., beyond, in-addition-to, the Word) work of the Spirit in our lives. He also stated in the debate that he would be willing to advocate/defend the premise that the Spirit "personally strengthens" (i.e., directly) us "in addition to the Word" (*The Deaver-Fox Debate* [Spring, TX: Bible Resource Pub., 1995], pp. 246, 292). After refusing debate challenges from various brethren on his "direct operation" doctrine enunciated in his debate with Fox, Deaver sought out an opponent of his own choice (the once faithful Bill Lockwood) and persuaded him to debate him on the "direct operation" issue in 1998. Brother Jerry Moffitt also debated Deaver on this issue in 2000, in which debate Deaver affirmed the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the saint
3. Mac Deaver, *Studies in Philipians and Colossians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 2000), pp. 520-21. Note: this source is not the actual Moffitt-Deaver debate book. However, Deaver used the argument referenced in this source in his debate with Moffitt. A major part of Deaver's argument was that "the Word alone in a heart cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit" and since "the saint must produce the fruit of the Spirit, then the Holy Spirit must directly affect a saint's heart."

4. I originally wrote the material in this section in a slightly different form as an “Editorial Perspective” in *The Gospel Journal* (July 2003), 4:2–6.
5. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966 reprint), 3:21.
6. Those who possessed miraculous “gifts of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12 and 13) received them because the Spirit divided “to each one severally even as he will” (12:11). No one ever received these gifts or achieved these powers merely by studiously applying and obeying the Word of God. Men could receive them only as the Holy Spirit chose to give them; they are thus “gifts of the Spirit.” Apparently, not every saint received one of those gifts (vv. 29–30). In contrast to those gifts, Paul urges upon every saint the trait of love, a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22). Love is not a gift, but an indispensable character attribute that each one must achieve for himself by applying the teachings of the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:4–8). While they were to “desire earnestly” (14:1, 39) the miraculous gifts, our brethren of old could not receive them merely by seeking to have them. They had to be miraculously bestowed by the apostles (Acts 6:6, 8; 8:6–19; 19:5–6; et al.). The Lord never commanded any disciple to possess a spiritual gift. However, He did command us to acquire and practice the attribute of love (Mat. 5:44; John 13:34; 1 The. 4:9; 1 John 4:7–8; et al.). Every saint in every age can/must possess to some degree this and the other elements that compose the fruit of the Spirit. We will never bear spiritual fruit by expecting the Holy Spirit to give us these character traits directly. He produces these (including love) in us through such media as His Word and through our providential associations with faithful saints who influence us by their noble examples. The fruit is no less the Holy Spirit’s thereby. If the “fruit of the Spirit” were given to us directly, perhaps Paul should have written in Galatians 5:22: “But the **gift** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace....” Some among us would doubtless thus change the wording of this passage if they could, for this is the meaning they seek to impose upon it. Surely, it is significant that the Holy Spirit did not use such terminology.
7. Charles R. Eerdman, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983 reprint), p. 135.
8. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 6:575.

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