

**Galatians 5:22-26**

**Gal 5:22 (NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.<sup>24</sup> And those *who are Christ's* have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.<sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Up to this point in the study, we have seen several things about this passage. First is that the word “**fruit**” is referring to the effect and result of God’s work in a person’s life. Spiritual fruit is something that is always apparent, visible, noticeable, and discernible, and it is the evidence of spiritual life. It is the evidence and visible expression of the Holy Spirit’s power working inwardly and outwardly in the believer’s life. One very key point that we saw was that this fruit is not the by-product of the believer’s personal efforts or will. These are not attributes that a believer can just cultivate and develop because of their personal resolve or will. If that were the case, then the Holy Spirit would not even be needed. The phrase “**of the Spirit**” in the Greek language is called the “genitive of source” which simply means that the Holy Spirit is the **ONLY** source for the realization of this fruit in our life. The source of the fruit is the Spirit. It is not my fruit. The believer is not producing anything, but simply responding to what the Holy Spirit is doing in their life. They are the by-product of [John 15](#) and “**abiding in the Vine**”.

We have also seen that the word for “**love**” (“*agape*”) is the highest level of love possible, and so very often God allows people into our life as a God-ordained test to demonstrate how shallow this quality may actually be in our life. We all know people who have made being an inconvenience to others as a way of life. What is very critical to understand about this kind of love is that it is not an emotional love, but what we called a volitional love. What it does is express the nature and character of the one who is showing the love. It is the visible expression of Christlikeness in the believer.

The primary characteristic of this “*agape*” love is that it is supremely self-sacrificing in its nature. One of the greatest verses that describes how this love is actually demonstrated for us is found in [Romans 5:8](#) which says,

**Ro 5:8 (NKJV) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

This verse is the epitome of the supreme demonstration of God’s love. Nothing in our life can even approximate what this verse actually means. Just trying to grasp the magnitude of this kind of sacrifice is virtually impossible for the human mind to conceive. This is not just anyone doing this. This is God doing this – sacrificing His own Son.. We all know what it would be like for us to be asked to actually sacrifice one of our children for someone who literally deserved nothing from us. It would be unthinkable, unimaginable, inconceivable, and absurd if we even considered it. To the contrary, we would do everything in our power **NOT** to let that happen. Stated another way, this verse is simply one of the reasons why it is so difficult for us to even appreciate what the “*agape*” love of God is like. Why is that? It is because we personally have nothing in our life to even approximate this kind of love. We have no example or model to look at and reference this kind of love. Our love is simple. We love those who love us, and so we show a kind of reciprocal love back to them. We are probably inclined to help those who help us. We are nice to those people who are nice to us. This kind of love, though, is

completely without equal and without any kind of reasonable earthly example or model to follow. This kind of love is so dramatically different that when we come to addressing it, it almost seems unreasonable and unfair to ask us to love this way. However, and this is what we need to take away from this passage, it is the simple fact that this is exactly the kind of love that the Holy Spirit is working into our life. All I can personally do is just stand in awe and utter amazement, and almost feel confused that God would even try.

One simple conclusion that I want to make concerning this kind of love is that when we do demonstrate a sacrificial love for other people, it is a sure sign of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Listen to how [1 John 3:14](#) and [1 John 4:7](#) state this reality,

**1Jn 3:14 (NKJV) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.**

**1Jn 4:7 (NKJV) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

Paul wrote these words in [Ephesians 5:2](#) when he marked loving as God loved as a command and not an option for the Christian life.

**Eph 5:2 (NKJV) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**

The verb “**walk**” in this verse is in the present tense, imperative mood, and active voice. That parsing is as strong of a way of expressing a command as there is in the Scriptures. There is nothing about this verse that makes any of this optional, and it is something that we are to always be living out. What we have seen so far in our study of this word, however, is that we personally cannot produce this quality in our life. This is a “**fruit of the Spirit**”. This is not your fruit or my fruit, but this is God’s fruit, God’s work in the believer’s life. This is not us loving, but this is God loving in and through us. We cannot do this on our own simply because this is a supernatural love. I am encouraged by that simple reality because I personally know that I never could love this way. It has to be a supernatural endowment, or none of us would ever love the unlovable and undeserving in this way. One other point that should be observed is that the love that Paul is addressing in [Galatians 5:22](#) is not a love for God, but a love for other people, a love for difficult people, for unkind people, for demanding people.

I think it would be accurate to say that a loveless life is an ungodly life. The kind of love Paul is addressing always centers itself on the needs and welfare of the other person. It is always the kind of love that gives and is never expecting something in return. It is completely unselfish and always generous.<sup>2</sup> Now, having said that, I want to clarify at this point that I do not see anything in this word or the concept of love that says that believers are to always be giving and loving to the point that people begin to take advantage of them. As best as I can tell from the Gospel narratives, outside of the crucifixion and what led up to it that week before the cross, that Jesus never one time let people take advantage of Him. They wanted to throw Him over a cliff one time, but He simply walked through

<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, 165.

<sup>2</sup> Precept, *Galatians 5:22*, ep.

them. The Pharisees and Sadducees railed at Him His entire ministry, but He never let them take advantage of Him until it was what He called “**My time**”. For instance, [John 7:6-8](#) says,

**Jn 7:6 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. <sup>7</sup> The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. <sup>8</sup> You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come."**

In reality, Jesus actually rebuked these individuals for their efforts to destroy Him. It was mentioned previously that the kind of love that God demonstrates is a love that gives someone what they need, not what they may want. There will always be people who are more than willing to take advantage of someone who is trying to help them. It is as if the person being helped sees that as a weakness, and so it often becomes easy for that person to begin to use another person’s goodness and benevolence towards them for their own selfish benefits. Just giving and helping people indiscriminately is not what this word “*agape*” is addressing. Stated another way, if we just allow people to take advantage of our generosity and benevolence, then in essence we are allowing them to use us and to actually abuse God’s kindness that is being shown towards them. In the final analysis they most likely will not change and will simply continue to misuse and manipulate people. That scenario is not the thrust of the word “*agape*” or “*agapao*”. When a genuinely sincere person does have a legitimate need, we should do everything possible to help meet that need. That is one of the great treasures of a God honoring church in that we are able to share the load, share the burden.

Now, I know that someone is going to ask the logical question that follows which is “*How long do we allow someone to possibly take advantage of our benevolence or love? Where does God allow us to draw the line?*” I have no idea where that point may be relative to benevolence - none. In the context of God’s “*agape*” love is there even a limit? From a practical perspective, I think there has to be. Other very legitimate biblical and godly qualities like patience, longsuffering, and forbearance must come into focus in these circumstances. They have to have significance. I am glad that God did not give up on any of us after our first or second refusal of His salvific offer. If that had been the case, then no one would be saved. The simple answer to the question is that the believer just has to “**walk in the Spirit**” and to “**be led by the Spirit**”. That is a somewhat subjective experience that provides no direct answer for how far we are to go with someone. How it works out in our life is probably a direct by-product of our personal relationship to Christ and His Word, and what we are personally able to forbear with someone. The Bible does not give a clear answer for every situation, but simply gives general principles that we have to determine how they are to be exercised in any given circumstance. This is just one of those areas where we have to exercise a high level of discernment – which is really a very good thing. The simple truth of the matter is that we may or may not make the right decision. Learning how to properly exercise discernment and meaningful judgment is just as much a part of the Christian life as loving someone unconditionally. They are both valid areas of spiritual growth and the sanctification process, but they are not automatic and there is no guarantee that we will do what God would do in any given situation.

Often times a good sign as to whether or not we are being tested in this area is when we do not have a good feeling about someone else who has a need. Why say that? It is because God’s divine love for people is unmerited and unconditional. It is never based on how attractive someone is or how responsible or irresponsible they may be. It is not based on how they measure up to our personal standards. Jesus

did not sacrifice Himself because we were so loving and so responsible that it was just impossible for Him not to love us the way that He did. To the contrary, we deserved nothing of His love. When we choose to love people conditionally rather than unconditionally, at that point we find no obligation to love them simply because they have not met our conditions to love and not met our standards of who deserves our love. If we do not get from them, then we have absolutely no inclination to give to them. All we have to do at that point is to realize that we never met God's conditions or God's standards, yet He loved us anyway. He is our example to follow and to imitate.

When we think of love in our relationship with other people, it always has a very emotional element to it. My love for my wife certainly has this emotional element embedded within it. However, even though that element may be present, it does not characterize the kind of love that God has for us. [John 15:13](#) illustrates this kind of love when it says,

**Jn 15:13 (NKJV) Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**

[1 John 3:16](#) says,

**1Jn 3:16 (NKJV) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.**

I love [1 John 4:9](#) which says,

**1Jn 4:9 (NKJV) In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.**

What has to be appreciated about “*agape*” is that it refers to the love that is being developed, molded, and shaped in the believer by God as **the guiding principle of their Christian life**.<sup>3</sup> This is such a critical reality for the believer to understand and embrace. Becoming a Christlike believer means that we are being shaped by God's love. It is always leaving its DNA, leaving its mark on our life. It is what God wants to define and characterize our life – that we love like He loved.

[1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#) is probably the best known passage in the Scriptures describing this kind of love.

**1Co 13:4 (NKJV) Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

This is the way that the “*agape*” love of God behaves, this is how it is demonstrated in a person's life. In fact, these attributes may be the most convicting list in all of Scripture. From a purely biblical perspective, this passage is the way that God's “*agape*” love is described. For instance, the first quality is that the type of love that God wants us to have is a love that “**suffers long**”. It is the Greek word “*makrothumeo*” and it means to be “long-spirited”, to be forbearing with someone, to be patient with them. It means that we do not lose heart with them and are willing to persevere with them.<sup>4</sup> This is one of those attributes that can be very trying at times, especially if the person that we are dealing with is a very difficult individual. The issue, however, is never the other person, but us – how we respond. Are

<sup>3</sup> Renn, 611.

<sup>4</sup> Strong, 1219.

we personally willing to be patient and forbearing with someone that does not seem to merit that kind of response – and there are many people out there exactly like that. If I can say it this way, it means to have “long patience” which is not always easy. The prefix “*makro*” means long, and “*thumos*” means wrath and anger, and refers to our temper.<sup>5</sup> It refers to a person being willing to exercise a prolonged restraint before reacting or over-reacting to someone or something they did or did not do.<sup>6</sup> We are not going to go over each of these qualities here in [1 Corinthians 13](#), but suffice it to say that this is a very convicting list of godly attributes. There are 15 specific defining words or phrases depicting what God’s love is actually like, so this passage becomes a very strong model for each of us to emulate in our personal lives. When I read this passage, I can honestly say that it simply convicts me.

The enduring and godly attributes of these characteristics of God’s love cannot be overstated. They are what define the practical side of biblical Christianity in the most meaningful way. They are the substance, the evidence, and the crux of who we are and what we represent, and if these qualities are absent in our life, then we have simply missed what it means to be a Christian. Listen to how [1 John 4:8](#) states this,

1Jn 4:8 (NKJV) **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

How strong of a statement is that? How do we address a verse like that – the person who does not show and demonstrate love in their life simply does NOT know God? You cannot make a stronger statement than this verse. Now, as we go through the other “**fruit of the Spirit**” in [Galatians 5](#), I think that it would be correct to say that this “*agape*” love of God is the source and the stimulant for all of the other graces and virtues that follow in this listing. This quality is so rich and so powerful in what it accomplishes that no one but God could produce it in our lives, so it deserves our very highest attention to its outworkings in our life. In essence, to not love is to not know God.

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<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, 939.

<sup>6</sup> Verbrugge, 3429.

