

Nine
F R U I T S
of the
S P I R I T

A Bible Study on Developing Christian Character

Love

R o b e r t S t r a n d



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Introduction

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then ordered to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

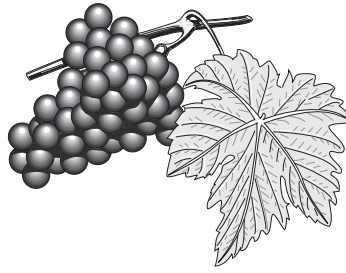
This fable expresses how many of us feel about the treasures of God's Word. There is coming a day when we will be thrilled because we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we had not gleaned much more. Jewels are best shown off when held up to a bright light and slowly turned so that each polished facet can catch and reflect the light. Each of these nine jewels of character will

be examined in the light of God's Word and how best to allow them to be developed in the individual life. That is how I feel about the following three verses from Paul's writings which challenge us with what their Christian character or personality should look like. Jesus Christ has boiled down a Christian's responsibility to two succinct commands: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and body, and love your neighbor like yourself. Likewise, Paul the apostle has captured for us the Christian personality in nine traits:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).


At the very beginning of this study, I must point out a subtle, yet obvious, distinction. The "fruit" of the Spirit is a composite description of what the Christian lifestyle and character traits are all about — an unbroken whole. We can't pick only the fruit we like.

Unlocked in these nine portraits are the riches of a Christ-centered personality. The thrill of the search is ahead of us!



Love

AGAPE, (Greek), meaning: God's fruit of love which gives itself away with a pure motive and most generously.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS . . . LOVE 

Miracles can be counterfeited and gifts can be imitated. History is full of examples of such pseudo-religious pretenders. But the fruit of the Spirit cannot be imitated! Why? Because the fruit of the Spirit is manifested by what a person is and not what a person does! Jesus Christ forever set the record straight when He said, "By their fruits you shall know them!" This fruit is internal and eternal-lasting, while miracles will fade.

The most important part of the message which Jesus preached and which His followers taught is that God is concerned about what is on the inside and the further development of these traits through the Spirit. The power of Christ

*And now
these three
remain:
faith, hope
and love.*

*But the
greatest of
these is love*

(1 Cor. 14:13).



was not really in the miracles which He performed but rather in the message which He left for us.

Our day is marked by the pseudo, the unreal, the false, the spin, and virtual reality which is not real at all. We shall be known and remembered by what we are rather than what we do. How about following this for a lifestyle principle?

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment. . . . Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

LET’S DEFINE LOVE



There are hundreds of definitions of love — but what does the Bible have to say about love and how is it to be defined and lived out?

Let’s start with reading 1 Corinthians 13:4-13.

In your own life — how has love's true meaning been confused?

Name the major positive characteristics which show what love is and does.

Name what love is not and does not do.

How long-lasting is this kind of love?

Think of someone you know who is loving. Name some of the specific ways in which he or she demonstrates love to and for others.

What are the gifts of the Spirit which Paul calls attention to in this entire chapter?

Why are the gifts worth nothing without love?

Compare the development of the fruit in the life of a believer with that of the maturing of a child.

Why do you think that love is listed as the greatest?
