

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Fruits of Love

Just as loving God with the totality of our being is the foundation of heeding *all* of His will for us (**Matt. 22:37-38, 40; 1 John 5:3**), loving others as ourselves is the foundation of treating people the way God desires (**Matt. 22:39-40; Rom. 13:9-10**). When *agape* love is genuinely directed toward others, it produces fruit that gives proof such love exists.

For instance, **1 Corinthians 13:4** teaches that "*love suffereth long.*" If we love as we should, we won't be short-tempered with others or retaliate when treated poorly. Instead, we'll show others patience, doing what is right even toward those who have done wrong toward us (cf. **1 Thes. 5:14-15**).

1 Corinthians 13 also shows us that love is *forgiving*. The end of **verse 5** says that love "*does not keep a record of wrongs.*" If we love others as we should, we won't keep a mental list of their mistakes to use it against them. We won't harbor bitter grudges or resentment. Just as God's love toward us is seen in His willingness to forgive, our love toward others will be shown by a forgiving spirit (**Col. 3:13**).

The forgiving spirit love shows toward others is further manifested by a sincere desire for others' good. **1 Corinthians 13:7** teaches that love "*believes all things,*" indicating that love gives others the "benefit of the doubt," rather than assuming the worst in them.

Beyond this, loves "*hopes all things,*" which seems to indicate that love *wants* to find good in others. While envy is discontented at others' good fortune (especially when others are blessed with something we're not), "*love doesn't envy*" (**verse 4**), and desires the best *in* others and *for* others.

Beyond *desiring* others' good, love *seeks* others' highest good. This principle is also taught in **1 Corinthians 13. Verse 5** notes that love "*doesn't seek its own way.*" An illustration of this is in **1 Corinthians 10. Verse 23** of that chapter speaks about things God permits but does not require, and says, "*All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable. 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things build up.*" **Verse 24** follows this up by saying, "*Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbor's good.*" The point is that instead of only asking, "what does God permit me to do that pleases me?", we ought to think about what we can do that would best influence others. This is the attitude of love.

This illustration exemplifies the fact that love is proven through selfless acts. Notice **1 John 3:17-18**: *But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does God's love remain in him? My little children, let's not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.* Benevolent deeds such as that mentioned in **verse 17** give evidence that one's love for others is true.

Such acts demonstrate the principle that love “*is kind*” (1 Cor. 13:4). Love treats others with compassion and kindness, both in deeds and in speech. This is taught in **Galatians 5:14-15**. The word “*But*” in **verse 15** shows that biting and devouring one another, as the verse condemns, opposes the love promoted in **verse 14**. Love opposes contentious, quarrelsome attitudes.

This isn't to say that love tolerates sin or “sugar-coats” the truth. Genuine love discourages sin out of concern for others' souls. This is taught in **1 Corinthians 13**. **Verse 6** notes that love “*doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.*” Love doesn't delight in others' disobedience, but in their obedience. Such is exemplified in Mark's account of the rich young ruler. Before Jesus' “*one thing you lack...*” statement, the Holy Spirit through Mark says “*Jesus looking at him loved him*” (**Mark 10:21**). Jesus truly cared for the eternal well-being of the rich young ruler's soul, and thus told the man what he *needed* to hear, though the man clearly did not *want* to hear it.

Sincere *agape* love is also manifested in its opposition to the sin of partiality. This is taught in **James 2:8-9**. The word “*But*” in **verse 9** shows that the sin of “*show[ing] partiality*” condemned in this verse opposes the command in **verse 8** to love our neighbors as ourselves. **Verses 1-7** of the chapter elaborate on what the sin of showing partiality is. The example is given of showing favoritism toward one who is materially rich over one who is materially

poor. While there are times we must make distinctions between two or more people (cf. **1 Thes. 5:12-13**; **2 Thes. 3:14**), love will lead us to avoid treating one as if he or she is better than another based on wealth, ethnicity, popularity, education, etc. We must let go of any such prejudices and be *fair* in our treatment of others. This is the spirit of genuine love.

Love is also the root of overcoming sinful gossip. The fact that love “*bears all things*” (1 Cor. 13:7) might be alluding to this principle. When the “golden rule” is followed, “juicy details” heard about others (whether true or not) won't be repeated unless a situation calls for it (also see **Proverbs 17:9**).

While some people gossip to bring others low, others boast to exalt themselves high. Such boastfulness is also overcome by love. The end of **1 Corinthians 13:4** notes that “*Love doesn't brag, is not proud.*” If we truly love others as ourselves, we will not care to be esteemed above others, but will have the attitude of humble servitude commanded in **Philippians 2:3-4**.

These examples demonstrate that biblical love for others is far deeper than the shallow concept of love often promoted by the world. Genuine concern for others is proven through actions, words, thoughts, and attitudes that mimic Jesus' view of and treatment toward us (cf. **John 13:34-35**). Such good fruits are characteristic of those heeding the Lord's teachings about love.

- *Michael Hickox*