

# THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

## STUDY TWO

### What the World Needs Now

*John 13:34–35; 1 Corinthians 13:1–7*

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*Love is the ultimate Christian virtue. There is no greater evidence of our faith than love.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**ow do people recognize followers of Christ? By the cross they wear around their necks? By the fish symbol, the *ichthus*, affixed to their bumpers? By the Bible they carry, or the type of clothing they wear? It's easy to substitute a symbol for the real thing. Jesus told us the true sign of His followers:

*“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34–35)*

No matter what church we belong to, no matter what badges we attach to ourselves or our possessions, no matter what we look like, love is the distinguishing mark of a true disciple.

But not just any love. Only divine love shows we belong to a divine Savior. Natural human love, even its highest form, falls short of Jesus' selfless love. So pure is His love that the biblical writers assigned a special Greek word to identify it: *agape*. When the world sees *agape* in us, they see Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul painted a portrait of *agape* in simple but eloquent prose. Let's enter this passage as if stepping across the threshold of a cathedral, ready to be enthralled and inspired by the wonder of something truly divine.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus loved His disciples “to the very end” (John 13:1), which means, to the fullest extent. And then He washed their feet as a demonstration of love. They had to receive His love before they could pass it on. As you study Paul’s description of love, ask the Lord to show you His love through this passage.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

From a human point of view, the Corinthian believers had it all. Living in a trade-rich port city, they enjoyed wealth and a metropolitan lifestyle. God blessed this church with excellent Christian teachers and an array of spiritual gifts to build up the body and embolden their witness.

Beneath the impressive religious veneer, however, the believers’ hearts were bankrupt. They had it all, but they lacked love.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 13 to highlight their need. He situated his love chapter between two instructional chapters on spiritual gifts. At first glance, Paul’s love chapter seems out of place, a digression, but in fact, it is the apex of Paul’s argument and the crux of the Christian life.



## **Observation: The Ultimate Christian Virtue**

*Observation* lays the groundwork for *Searching the Scriptures*. We must see what the passage says before we can accurately know what it means and effectively put its truth into action.<sup>1</sup>

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## The Primacy of Love—1 Corinthians 13:1–3

Use your skills of observation to note the literary features of *1 Corinthians 13:1–3*. What if-then clauses do you see? What repeats with the rhythm of a drumbeat? (Note: the Greek word for “love” throughout this chapter is *agape*.) How did Paul heighten his impact with hyperbole? What was Paul’s point?

*If I lack agape love, I am nothing. I have nothing. I’ve gained nothing. Others may be impressed but not God. A simple formula summarizes the point: everything minus love equals zero. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## A Picture of Love—1 Corinthians 13:4–7

What does *love* mean? We toss around the word in so many ways that it has lost its significance. We love our family, but we also love our favorite recliner. We love our country, but we also love sports. We love coffee, chocolate—anything that makes us feel good.

In *1 Corinthians 13:4–7*, Paul lifted love out of the muddled ambiguity of feelings to portray its unvarnished form. He looked at *agape* love, the virtue, from all sides and told us what it is and isn’t.

In this passage, we find *seven positive aspects* and *eight negative aspects* of love. Use the following chart to list these aspects. Read the passage in more than one Bible version and note alternate ways the words are translated.

<b>Positive Aspects</b> <i>1 Corinthians 13:4a, 6b, 7</i>	<b>Negative Aspects</b> <i>1 Corinthians 13:4b–6a</i>

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*Agape* is less of a feeling and more of an expression of character. It's a matter of the will. We *decide* to express agape love toward someone, and then we act, regardless of how we feel. Summarize your impressions of Paul's portrait of love. What surprises you? What appeals to you?

*The highest form of love is not reciprocal. You may show agape, but you may not receive it in return. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Interpretation: The Role of Love in the Body of Christ**

*Interpretation* looks to the context of a passage to determine its meaning. “A text is best understood in context” is the first rule of interpretation. In our passage, Paul mentioned certain spiritual gifts. Compare *1 Corinthians 13:1–3* with the list of spiritual gifts in *12:7–11*. What gifts appear in both places? Who gave these gifts?

These spiritual gifts should have enabled “harmony among the members” in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:25), but “jealousy and strife” clanged like cymbals in the membership, provoking a cacophony of conflict (3:3 NASB). The Corinthian believers had “become arrogant” (4:18). They were “concerned for [their] own good” rather than “the good of others” (10:24). Everything love is *not*, the Corinthians had become.

What principle was Paul teaching about giftedness in the body of Christ and the vital role of love?

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Now, look at Paul’s positive side of love in your chart above. How would these characteristics of love be a healing balm for bickering and infighting in a church? Why do you think Paul chose these qualities as evidence of love?

Perhaps you’re in conflict with another person. You’ve been wronged or felt provoked. Where can you find the love you need to bring harmony out of discord? Let’s look to our supreme model of love in the next section.



### **Correlation: Love in Action**

*Correlation* sifts through other Scriptures to support the theme of our main passage. Read Christ’s demonstration of love in *John 13:1–5*. Jesus was Messiah, the divine One who had “authority over everything” (John 13:3), but instead of a royal robe, He donned a servant’s towel. What aspects of love from 1 Corinthians 13 did Jesus demonstrate by washing the disciples’ feet?

After finishing, Jesus told His disciples, “I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Then, later, Jesus commanded, “Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other” (13:34). What’s the connection between washing feet and loving one another? How are they linked?

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Great love leads to great acts of service. The greatest act of service was Christ's death on the cross, which required the greatest love—divine love. As humans, we can't love to that extent, but as Christ's followers, we draw cups from His vast sea to first quench our thirst and then to share with others. Let's look at a few ways to love like Jesus.



## Application: How to Love like Jesus

*Agape* is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, not of the human spirit. And so, it is not of this world. It has its *source* in the heart and character of God (who is love, *1 John 4:16*), its *expression* in Jesus, and its *enablement* in the Spirit.

How can you draw upon the resources of the Trinity to fill your heart with the love you need to love others?

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we've admired Paul's portrait in 1 Corinthians 13 and witnessed Jesus' model in John 13. Pick one aspect of *agape* that you can put into action today. Perhaps it's to show kindness or to forgive an offense or to seek the good of another person without expecting anything in return. What element of love can you ask the Lord to help you express? To whom? How?

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As the foremost fruit of the Spirit, love embodies and inspires all the other virtues—joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So, as we venture into “joy” in the next study, keep Christ’s love beating in your heart.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, Your love floods my soul as I ponder Your Son’s sacrifice for me. Love so amazing, so divine. Draw me into Your vast ocean of love. Help me as I seek to show others the love you’ve shown me. Guard me from pride, jealousy, and seeking my own good so that I can love purely and selflessly . . . just like Jesus. In His name, amen.*

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2023, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

