

Lovers of God, Part Five

By

Ginny Menard

Lovers of God: This is the fifth in a multi-series of articles pertaining to the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In this article I will examine the fruit of love. I know that many books have been written on this subject. You may ask, “What more can be said about love?” Well, for the most part, no one that I know of, other than what is already recorded in the Bible, has ever come close to the truth concerning the development of healthy attitudes about change and chance. You may ask, “What does that have to do with the fruit of love or any other fruit of the Holy Spirit?” Upon close examination of the fruit, one can not deny the fact that each fruit demands a choice on your part to change—IF we truly want to abide in Christ. This means that we must submit our will to change our attitude toward God, ourselves and others; if our attitudes are not “in-line” with God’s word. The central theme of the Bible is this: “Love the Lord your God with all of thy heart, and with all of thy being, and with all of thy mind ... love thy neighbor as thyself...” (Matthew 22:37–40). Jesus also said that “He who does not deny himself and pick up his cross cannot be my disciple” (Luke 9:23).

Some people will ask, “Aren’t these two Scriptures contradictory? How can you ‘love yourself’ and at the same time ‘deny yourself’?” If you are one who goes by feelings and worldly wisdom, these Scriptures will not make any sense to you whatsoever. However, if you have made the decision to live for the honor and glory of God and are diligently (I do not mean hit and miss) studying the Bible and have allowed the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort, strengthen and mold your life, you will be changed and you will be given the boldness (taking a chance/risk) to prove to the world what is good, acceptable, and perfect in accordance with the will of God (Romans 12:1–2). When one views him/herself according to how God looks at mankind as recorded for us in the Bible, then one can understand what it means to “love thyself” and to “deny thyself.”

This article is meant to expose readers to the lies, mis-beliefs and fears that prevent believers from having a true loving relationship with God, themselves and others. Together we will take a look at the fruit of love from three perspectives based only from the word of God.

1. What are the characteristics of our humanity?
2. What does it mean to “love” and to “deny” yourself?
3. What are the types of love and how should they fit into ones life according to God’s will?

This material will be looked at from a negative and positive standpoint, so that the reader can “see” both sides of the coin. This article is very frank and not meant to condemn, but only to help people to live for God in spirit and in truth. I only wish to edify, exhort, and comfort the body of Christ and lead others to Jesus Christ. Before I go any further, I will summarize the material covered in article four.

In article four I made a quick survey of Paul's letter to the Galatians. I briefly described three approaches that Paul used in his defense of the Gospel by engaging the false teachers in battle and convincing the Galatian Christians that all they needed was faith in God's grace.

I stated that Paul's first approach was personal (Galatians 1 & 2), in that he explains his authority by reviewing his own personal experience with Jesus and in proclaiming the Gospel.

The second approach was doctrinal (Galatians 3 & 4), and in them Paul presents several arguments to establish that sinners are saved by grace through their faith in Christ, not by works and Law.

The final approach was practical (Galatians 5 & 6). Paul explained the relationship between the grace of God and practical Christian living. What did Paul really do? He helped the Galatian Christians to locate the truth—Jesus the Christ. Then he helped them to argue against the lies or falsehoods by replacing them with the truth—the Old Testament and what the Apostles taught. Finally, Paul showed them by word and deed how to live the truth, not walking by the flesh (denying yourself), but by the spirit (loving God, yourself and others).

Part One

With the above approach in mind, let us proceed to examine the fruit of love. Our first area of concentration will be "What are the characteristics of our humanity?" In order to answer that this question, one should consider these three points before answering: What was mankind designed to do before the fall; what is the situation that now exists because of the fall; and is our fallen situation hopeless? Let's find out.

Before the fall, as one can read in Genesis 1:26–27, man was designed to have perfect trust in God, and be able to walk, talk, know, love and serve God eternally. From Genesis 2:18–25, we see that mankind was designed to enjoy oneness in marriage. God saw that it was "not good" for man to be alone, but that man and woman were to be complements/help-mates for each other. Men and women were meant to experience fulfilling love and sexuality in their complete acceptance of one another. From Genesis 1:28–31, we see that God gave his "sign of approval" on all creation because he saw all life as "very good." In Genesis 1:26–30 and 2:15, we see that man was meant to enjoy work. That is, man found meaning and challenge in his work. From this man became responsible and formed an integrated view of life. But most important, man glorified God with his work. In Genesis 2:19–20, we can see that God gave mankind a spiritual mind. They both had spiritual understanding and wisdom from being with God. They had an integrated view of life. God breathed into mankind the breath of life and gave man dominion over all his creation. Did God take a risk? Yes, God did take a risk in creating mankind, because he gave man a free will: A free will to choose him or to reject him.

After reading chapter three of Genesis, mankind did reject God and access to extended life with the "tree of life" to eat from. Eventually man no longer trusted God. Fear, guilt, shame and alienation became their way of life. Man no longer walked with God (Spoken in a general sense, for Enoch walked with God!). From Genesis 3:12, 4:8, we read that conflict in earthly relationships arose. Man for the first time experienced

loneliness and competition instead of completion. Man blamed others for his problems instead of working together and accepting each other. Man became dishonest, selfish and uncompassionate. Instead of enjoying life, life became meaningless. There was no lasting happiness and/or satisfaction between spouses, families and friends. Genesis 3:16–19 shows us that work became a burden. Man became lazy, bored and irresponsible. Some over-worked to the exclusion of other responsibilities and therefore all their work was done for the wrong motives. And of course, we can find many examples from the Bible in which mankind abused his sexuality. It got so bad, that his quest for the flesh caused man to pervert his thinking abilities. His view of life became distorted with lies and foolishness. Man's wisdom was built upon his own greed and pride.

As you can very well see, this situation goes on today. But are we left hopeless in this fallen mess? NO! We can be restored in Christ! Psalms 23 brings this point out in a very personal and beautiful way. As we read in Genesis 3:15, God had a plan to send unto mankind the Gift of his Son. The sins of mankind were to be washed away by the blood of Jesus the Christ. We can be forgiven! Revelation 3:20 says, "Behold, I (Jesus) stands at the door, and knocks; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me." It is through our acceptance of this gift of salvation that our personal relationship with God is restored.

From reading Philippians 2:1–4 we can see that those who are in Christ are to be filled with joy. They are to love each other and to esteem or build up one another. It is by this bond of love that the believer can experience oneness in human relationships. In John 10:10 Jesus said of himself, "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." As we can see from Colossians 3:23, work for the believer takes on a proper perspective. We can have a new purpose, challenge and meaning to our work. We will strive to glorify God in all that we do in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit that helps us to keep going. If we have given our lives totally over to Christ, we can as 1 Corinthians 2:16 and Philippians 4:8 points out, have the mind of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who help the precepts of the Bible to come to life for us. He gives us the wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual discernment to live by them. It is by living these Bible principles in love that man can develop an integrated view of life.

As I mentioned before, we are not left alone. We have the gift of God's Son—our savior. We also have the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us to know the "will" of God and also the power to do it. If you have not given your life to Jesus, will you please take time and submit your will/mind, spirit and body to him? Below is only a guide to help you make your decision. Find a quiet place and open you Bible. Consider these points as you make your decision.

1. God loves everyone and wills that all people become members of his family (1 John 4:9 and John 3:16).
2. Sin prevents us from becoming members of God's family. The Bible says all have sinned. Therefore we must agree with God that we have fallen (Romans 3:23).
3. The punishment for sin is death—final death in the Lake of Fire. This means being separated from God and the joys of heaven because such a one will not have any life. (Romans 6:23 and Revelations 20:11–15).
4. Jesus took this punishment for us by dying on the cross (Romans 5:8 and 1 Peter 2:24).

5. Salvation is a free gift; we cannot buy it nor “do penance” to “earn it” (Ephesians 2:8–10).
6. We ask the Lord to forgive us for our sins. This means that we must deal with the cause of our falling or we will not enter into the Kingdom in heaven (Galatians 5:19–21)
7. We then receive the free gift of salvation. Express from your heart, praise and thanks to God for this gift. No formal prayer is needed. God already knows what is in your heart and the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us with perfect understanding (John 1:12, Acts 16:31, and Romans 8:26–27).

Now that you have thought on these things from God’s word, start to read the Bible daily; praying from the heart everyday; worship with people who are obedient to God’s commands, and not necessarily in a church building—it can be done in your own home! This means that we actively return to the way of the Lord (Acts 2:42–47): And worship in spirit and in truth, not in any ritual of man in special places (John 4:21–24).

Part Two

Let us now go on with part two of this article. How can I “deny myself” and “love myself” at the same time? There are, as you already know, many books written, and many seminars devoted to help people to learn how to “like” themselves. Most people obtain a great deal of success from these “helps,” but later on down the “road of time” they feel unfulfilled and in many cases end up in worse shape than they were before. “Why?”, you may ask. It is because these people were taught to view everything from a worldly standpoint: what is called a false foundation.

Proverbs 23:7 says, “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.” What we think about ourselves, we become. I know that most psychologists and psychiatrists believe that a lot of what we are is due to how we were conditioned to think as children. They feel that if they can help a patient to re-live their childhood, they can find the problem and help the patient to overcome it. This is not all that bad, if these doctors will help their patients replace these lies or problems with the truth.

Jesus said of himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6). Jesus also said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The Scriptures encourage us to examine ourselves! Haggai, and Old Testament prophet, exhorted the Jewish people to “consider thy ways.” James 4:4 says, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Consider these two questions: Are you free? Are you happy? Check yourself out with this list of “self-examination” questions to find out what you think about yourself. It is very important that you be honest when answering these questions, for it is only yourself you have to uphold.

1. Do you ever wish you were like someone else?
2. Do you often daydream, wishing things had been different?
3. Are you easily hurt or disappointed by people?
4. When you’ve gone through a lot of effort, are you disappointed when the compliments don’t come?
5. Do you get jealous easily?

6. Do you tend to tear yourself down, expecting other to disagree and build you up?
7. Do you boast about your accomplishments, expecting others to join in and praise you?
8. Can you accept constructive criticism?
9. Do you take on too many responsibilities, attempting to please too many people?
10. Do you worry to much about your appearance?
11. Do you tend to judge others by their exterior looks, background, job, etc.?
- 12 Do you demand that things be done “your” way?
13. Are you critical of others if they don’t do things “your” way?
- 14 Do you always have to be “right?”

If you have answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are looking in the wrong place for security and acceptance. You are basing your beliefs on worldly falsehoods. You are making friends with the enemy. Let us check out some of these lies. Note that the world places great emphasis on four areas.

1. Possessions—“What do I have?”
(See Matthew 6:19–21 and 1 John 2:15–17.)
2. Performance—“How well do I do?”
(See Psalm 119:96 and 2 Corinthians 10:12.)
3. Position—“How important am I?”
(See James 2:2–8.)
4. Appearance—“How do I look?”
(See 1 Samuel 16:7.)

The other traps that we fall into are that we look up to people (Proverbs 29:125, Jeremiah 17:5–6, and 1 Corinthians 3:21). We try to “prove” our worth (Ephesians 2:8–9), and we “try” to change ourselves by using our own wisdom and strength (Jeremiah 17:9 and Mark 7:20–23). None of these can satisfy because they are based on lies: they are superficial. When man relies totally on himself, he becomes full of pride and greed. This false striving and wisdom causes separation from God. Man loses reality with himself and others because he is so competitive and is always comparing himself or his needs with some one else, or with something else. Check these Scriptures out to read what Jesus and others had to say concerning the ways of the world: John 15:18–19, John 17:14–22, John 18:36, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 6:12, and 1 John 5:19.

“What is to be the true foundation for liking ourselves?” We look to a solid foundation—the word of God (Matthew 7:24–27, 24:35, and 1 Peter 1:24–25). Upon studying the word of God we find out who we are “in” Christ. Below is a list of some of the results of being “in” Christ. Look them up!

1. We are forgiven. See Romans 3:25, Ephesians 1:7, 4:32, Colossians 1:14, 2:13–14, and Hebrews 10:17.
2. We are accepted. See Romans 8:1, Ephesians 1:6.
3. We have immortal life. See John 6:47, 17:3, 1 John 5:11–13.
4. We become a child of God—One of the Lord’s kids! See John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Galatians 3:26, 4:4–7.
5. We are a new creation. See 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:10, 4:24.

6. We are identified with Christ. See Romans 6:2–11, Colossians 2:12.
7. We become the dwelling place of Christ’s Spirit. See Romans 8:9–11, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 1:13.
8. God’s strength is available to us. See Ephesians 1:19–21, 3:20.
9. We are delivered from the powers of darkness. See Colossians 1:13, Hebrews 2:14.
10. We have direct access to God through Jesus the Christ. See Ephesians 2:13, 17–18, Hebrews 4:16, 10:19–210.
11. We are heirs to God’s Kingdom. See Romans 8:17, Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18, Colossians 1:12, 1 Peter 1:3–4.
12. We are made complete in Christ. See Ephesians 1:3, Colossians 2:9–10.
13. We have more that the world seeks. See Romans 10:12, 11:33, 1 Corinthians 2:16, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Ephesians 3:8, James 1:5–6.

When we look to God, we recognize that we are created special (the acceptance of ourselves). The Bible tells us that we are special and unique (Psalm 40:5, Ephesians 1:4, Isaiah 29:16, 45:9–10, and Romans 9:20–21). Paul tells us that each of us has a special job to do (Romans 12:4–8, 1 Corinthians 12:12–31, and Ephesians 1:18, 4:1, 11–12). The Bible tells us that God does not make mistakes and that he is not finished with maturing us—we are kids under construction (Isaiah 55:8–9, Romans 8:28–29, and Philippians 1:6, 2:13). And as 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and Hebrews 12:15 says, “We need to thank God for the way we are.”

“How do we become this special person?” We do this by letting God change us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We abide in Christ by meditating on the word of God (Psalm 1, Romans 10:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 4:8 and Colossians 3:1–3); by walking in fellowship (1 Corinthians 2:14, 3:3, and 1 John 1:3); by confessing our sins (Psalm 66:18, and 1 John 1:9); by thanking him for his forgiveness (Colossians 2:13), and by giving him his rightful place in our lives (Romans 12:1–2 and Galatians 5:19–23).

Part Three

Now to the third and final portion of this article: What are the types of love and who do we build upon them? The first type of love is what the ancient Greeks call “eros.” In Plato’s time this love was directed to intellectual excellence and was often related to the ecstatic. Today we come to know it as egotistical love. This is a love of the self. It is a love that is not concerned for the needs of others, but carnal and is only after pleasure. It is erotic in that it slays what it loves and, while loving, turns into hate when it is not satisfied. Consider that aspect of abortion or rape, then you will understand what I just said.

The next type of love is what the Greeks call “philia.” This is a love directed to people who share in the same beliefs and goals. It is intellectual in nature in that it will only treat those who are a “part of the group.” Take a look at all of the “clubs,” and to say nothing of the “churches” that exist today. These are all extensions of “brotherly” love.

The third type of love called by the Greeks is “agape.” When Jesus appeared on this earth, it was necessary to find a word for this love that Jesus demonstrated to the people. Most people could not figure it out. The Apostles and Greeks use “agape” for its description.

Just what is this “agape love?” The best place to look is in the Gospel of John 13:1–17. The night of the “Last Supper,” Jesus gathered his Apostles about him. As they came into the upper room they began to fight for “first place.” Despite the three years of familiarity with him, there was still a drive for superiority among the apostles. (One wonders why it is called a superiority complex when actually it is an inferiority complex). As they struggled for first place, they addressed him as “Lord.”

At this point Jesus gave the lesson that the nobler one is, the more one must serve. Many great men cannot bow to another man—they want to “be served.” Despite integrity, rectitude, nobility, and self-respect, true love is not achieved until they can stoop and serve. As we read on in this account, Jesus picked up a towel, circled it about his waist, knelt down, poured water into a basin and began to wash their feet. Girding himself with a towel was a symbol of how divinity has girded himself with our suffering humanity, becoming the servant to do the dirty work, such as the washing away of our sins. Though they fought for the first seats, none of them fought for the towel. So Jesus said to them, “You call me Master and Lord and you say well, for so I am. If I, then, the Lord and master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet, for I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” What Jesus was showing the Apostles was that they were to serve all people, not just the ones in their own group. This kind of love is active. Notice that Jesus did something: he served others to the point of putting aside his own interests. This is what we must do also (See 1 John 2:6 and understand it).

As I said before, the Greeks had a word for this unselfish love that Jesus demonstrated for us. It appears 320 times in the New Testament, the model being the Father above, who so “loved” us, that his Son sacrificed himself for us. (See John 3:16).

The difference between eros and agape love is this: eros is egotistic and agape is sacrificial. Eros is attracted to that which is beautiful; the agape pours out love and makes others beautiful. Eros is the circle enfolding upon itself; agape is the arms of Jesus extended on the cross to embrace all humanity. Agape loves even when that love is not reciprocated. It extends to both the deserving and the undeserving. “He makes the sun shine on both the just and the unjust.” In other words, love is the condition of service.

Paul defines agape love in a very beautiful way in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7: “Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty, selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when other do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him; always expect the best of him; and always stand your ground in defending him.”

Go now in the LOVE of the Lord!

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