**John 21:15 “**… *(Jesus said):* Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee …” KJV What does it mean to love God? Why is this an important question? And how can we be certain that we truly love God? We will explore these questions and more in this Spiritual Maturity lesson: *“Do You Really Love Jesus?”*

**“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ…” 2 Peter 3:18 (KJV)**



 **SPIRITUAL MATURITY SERIES**

 “Do You Really Love Jesus?”

 **Key Verses**: **John** 21: 15 - 17

**Defining Love on God’s Terms**

Because of the hundreds of references about love in the bible, it is certainly the most remarkable book ever written on the subject. In fact, the bible records the greatest love story ever written. By sending his son Jesus, God demonstrated what amazing love looks like! Love isn’t just something that God shows, love is what God is: **1 John 4:8** *He that loveth not knoweth not God;* ***for God is love****. KJV*  Love is the very essence of God’s nature and his work in the universe. In contrast to the language of the New Testament, the English language is starved for words to convey the meaning of “love.” In the English language you can: love your mother or love pizza or love winter. Consequently, in our society the word love gets thrown around quite a bit! No wonder so many people are confused about what love really is. One of the great aspects of the Greek New Testament is that it provides at least three different words for love. One such example would be the word “eros,” it describes a sensual, lustful or sexual type of feeling. We get the English word “erotic” from this root word. So we’ve heard the phrase “making love” – which generally refers to some sexual act. In addition, there is the Greek word “phileo, this describes the feelings we have for close family and friends – thus the city of “brotherly love” is Philadelphia. And, then there is the Greek word “agapa”- which is used to describe the unconditional all encompassing love of God for us.

**QUESTIONS**: Is it really possible for people to “make love?” In what ways is “agapa” love different from eros or phileo? Why would some people have an issue fully comprehending and accepting God’s agape love for them?

**This Is An Important Question**

Take a moment to read **John 21: 15 – 17**. This is a discussion Jesus had with Peter shortly after his resurrection. It is worth considering the fact that Jesus didn’t ask Peter “do you believe in me?” or “will you obey me?” or “will you honor me?”

**QUESTIONS:** What are some reasons why Jesus may have chosen to ask Peter the question “do you love me?” rather than any other? Why would loving Jesus be a prerequisite to ministry? Among the virtues of faith, hope and love, which is the greatest? **(I Cor. 13:13)** It’s wonderful to believe in the right God, and attend the right church, and work in the right ministry, but without the “right” love none of these things matter. It must be understood that those who do not truly and sincerely love Christ will not have sufficient love available to effectively minister to the needs of others. Those deficient in love for Jesus may manage to show momentary episodes of compassion, benevolence and empathy but such shows tend to be more for their personal recognition and are very short-lived.

**QUESTIONS**: Years ago our church published the names and amounts that members contributed each month. Some members actually gave more during that practice. Would you have an issue with your giving being published? Why? In **Luke 21: 1 – 4**; we find Jesus watching who was giving in the offering and what they were giving and then told his disciples about what he witnessed. Would such an announcement make some people uncomfortable? Why?

**This Is A Personal Question**

Erica Campbell makes the statement: *“I luh God, You don’t Luh God, what’s wrong wit chu?”*  Not sure if this song is the best witness; but at least she posses an important question. At first glance, the passage may appear very repetitious, when in fact each question provokes a different emotional response from Peter. The first question Jesus poses to Peter is … “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?...” (**John 21:15)** KJV Some bible scholars suggest that what Jesus was actually asking Peter was “do you love me more than these material things that you possess?” **QUESTION:** How would a person’s calendar and bank account be a reflection of their love for Christ? **(Matt 6:21)** Notice here that Jesus calls him by his given name “Simon”- not the spiritual name that Jesus gave him “Peter” *(meaning rock or stability)*; In so doing Jesus reminds Peter of his carnal composition; and suggests that he wants Peter to drop any titles, offices and pretences and respond to the question; “is the real YOU capable of really loving the real ME?” Earlier in Jesus’ ministry Peter made a profound declaration in **Matt. 26: 33 – 35.** Here Peter pledges his deepest allegiance to Jesus promising to never deny him. But between verse 69 and verse 74 of the same chapter, Peter had denied Jesus three times! Peter denied Jesus publically three times; now Jesus interrogates Peter publically with three questions. Having fallen Peter now is restored through the tender mercies and forgiving graces of Christ; this experience produces a deeper love in Peter for Jesus. **QUESTION**: Is it possible for some people to love Jesus more than others? **(Luke 7: 46 – 47)** This passage here in Luke suggests that the less a person sees themselves in need of God’s forgiveness the less they are motivated to truly love God. **QUESTIONS**: How would our pride coupled with our unrepented sins minimize our love factor for God? Can sinners love God?

**It Is A Performance Question**

How does: **I John 4: 20 – 21** speak to the matter that our love for Christ is a performance issue?Our love for Jesus is demonstrated in our love for others. Christian love is more than a simple handshake and pat of the back and saying “hang in there.” Christian love involves entering into the feelings of others and sharing their hurts and burdens in a way that encourages and strengthens them in their faith in God. Sometimes I feel like some many people come to church for all the wrong reasons. They want to feel like they belong somewhere, they have a need to feel important, they want to display their righteousness or simply scared of going to hell. Although the latter may have some credence, I don’t believe it encompasses all that God intended for his church. The church is the body of Christ. **QUESTIONS**: When Jesus walked on earth, how did he use his hands?, how did he use his ears?, How did he use his voice?, how did he use his energies? Now, in this dispensation, through the power of the Holy Ghost, Jesus desires to use your hands, ears, voice and energies in the same manner and fashion that he used his physical body while here on earth. **QUESTION**: How have you made yourself fully accessible to God? How can we avoid the sin of the Pharisee in **Luke 18: 9 – 14?** In closing, let us all fully acknowledge our sins and humbly accept the forgiveness of God – in so doing we will greatly increase our capacity to love Christ even more as well as express that love to others.