

CAN WE DO BETTER?

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT) - ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

INTRODUCTION TO OUR STUDY

This series of discussions are intended to cause us to look at ourselves in the mirror of God. The standard God sets is simple. It is himself.

According to **Genesis 1:26**, God created man (mankind) to be in his image and likeness. Everything following in scripture is to help us to become more like him. This is why Spiritual Growth is mandatory and not optional. It is through the process of Spiritual Growth that we move from our natural, carnal selves into our Spiritual selves. We move from carnal minds to Spiritual minds equipping us for our Spiritual home.

The Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church in Galatia helps us focus in on the characteristics of God. As we consider these characteristics, the question we want to consider is, "Can we do better?"

The answer to that question for all of us is a resounding YES. Not only is it yes, it is yes to every individual characteristic. No matter where we are on the ladder of discipleship, there is another rung for us to step up to. To be pleasing to God, we must always strive for the next level.

Prayerfully at the end of our study and discussions, each of us will identify ways in which we can do better and be more like God. The ultimate goal is to become one with Christ (**John 17:21**), and when anyone interacts with us, it will be just as if they encountered Jesus Christ himself. Amen.

I. LOVE

1) *Loving God*

Matthew 22:36-38 (NLT) - ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?”³⁷ Jesus replied, ““You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’^[e] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

a) What does it mean to love God? How do we know if we are loving God?

John 14:15 (NLT) - ¹⁵ “If you love me, obey^[d] my commandments.

John 14:21 (NLT) - ²¹ Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

If we are not following the commandments of God (Jesus), does that mean we do not love him?

b) Let’s talk about the “Commandments of God.” We must be sure that we have the correct perspective when looking at the Commandments of God.

1 John 5:2-3 (NLT) - ² We know we love God’s children if we love God and obey his commandments. ³ Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

c) Why does the Apostle John state that the commandments of God are not burdensome? The world, non-believers, and even some believers think otherwise. Have we heard someone say the laws of God are restrictive, meant to control, accusing Christians of being weak-minded or other statements like these?

d) It is imperative for the Believer to understand that everything God does is based in love. His laws, or commandments, are likewise. They are rooted in his love for us, his children, his crown creation.

e) When there is an infant child in the house, we child proof the house. We try to move everything dangerous out of reach of the child. We install child locks on the cabinets, we move hanging cords, we cap the electrical outlets, etc. God is doing likewise with his laws. He is trying to help us avoid unnecessary pain and suffering. Who among us have suffered pain

ourselves, or caused suffering for someone else, because of the decisions we made that were against the commands of God???

- f) God created the earth and the laws that govern it. His commands are a manual for us to follow. If we will live our lives according to it, we will enjoy the best life upon the earth. This is how we must see God's laws. They are an expression of his love for us.

2) Loving Other Believers

Proverbs 6:16-19 (NLT) - There are six things the LORD hates— no, seven things he detests:¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent,¹⁸ a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong,¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family.

- a) We all must be on watch! There are those among us that would sow seeds of discord in the family of God. Why would someone seek to do this?

Job 1:6 (NLT) - ⁶One day the members of the heavenly court^[a] came to present themselves before the LORD, and the Accuser, Satan,^[b] came with them.

- b) Every time (not sometimes) the Family of God comes together, Satan will be present! Not everyone in the assembly is there because they love God. How do we know who they are???. Discuss.

Luke 13:10-14 (NLT) - One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, ¹¹ he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!" ¹³ Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!

¹⁴ But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath."

- c) What does it mean to love other believers? Do we have to love everyone? If not, why not?

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT) - ⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

- d) Can we imagine a group of people that interact with one another based on what Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13**? Just imagine if we could consistently apply this attitude in the church, in our marriages and families!
- e) Let us consider this concept gaining traction in the church of “individual Christianity,” especially since the pandemic. The idea is that my salvation can be between God and myself alone. The underlying premise isn’t new. We’ve heard, “I’m spiritual, but not religious, or I don’t need or believe in organized religion.” What are some of the problems with this way of thinking? Discuss.
- f) From Scripture, we know that Heaven, God’s holy dwelling place, is a communal place. Nowhere in Scripture do we get the idea that heaven is a place of isolation, or it has corners of isolation
- g) With this being the case, then learning to love our fellow brothers and sisters become essential. Once again, it is the training ground for our eternal home.
- h) I submit that no one that does not learn to love and sow seeds of unity among the family of God can make Heaven their home. True or false?
- i) It is God’s desire that all of his children, those that have accepted his hand of grace through Christ, are gathered together with him in his holy dwelling place forever. It is imperative that we “learn” to love one another and work alongside one another in unity. How many scriptures tell us this?
- j) What does it take to love other believers?

Luke 17:3-4 (NLT) - “If another believer^[a] sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. ⁴ Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, ***you must forgive.***”

k) **Forgiveness** – how do we know when forgiveness has truly taken place?

Ephesians 4:2 (NLT) - Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, **making allowance for each other's faults** because of your love.

l) **Forbearance** – Do we need to do better here???

3) Loving Unbelievers (Evangelism)

Matthew 22:39-40 (NLT) - A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[1] ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

Let's talk briefly about this pandemic, and how it has affected the church and evangelism. Is God unhappy with us???

- a) Love (agapao) – A decision to love, love without conditions, a determination to act in another's best interest regardless of how one feels, or what the other person does, does not do.
- b) As we grow in our discipleship, we strive to possess this type of love in our hearts. From this type of love springs forth evangelism. Our love for our neighbor overcomes all of our fears, obstacles, and inhibitions.
- c) Not only do we talk about and teach the gospel, we must become the gospel in word, thought and deed.
- d) Our evangelistic efforts should be thought out, careful and tactful. Our evangelism radar should be searching for people who have an ear to hear. What does this mean? How can we tell someone has an ear to hear?
- e) Continuing to evangelize to someone that has made it clear that they do not have an ear to hear is not the best use of our time and energy.

Matt 7:6 (NLT) - "Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your **pearls** to pigs! They will trample the **pearls**, then turn and attack you.

Conclusion: Real love must involve a choice. Thus God did not create us to automatically love him. Why do you think God created man? Not how to function upon the earth, but why?

Lastly, Love is action. It cannot be spoken only. When there is no action, question the love being expressed.