



John 21:15-19
Do You Love Christ?

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

18 "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish."

19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

I don't know for certain, but I think C.S. Lewis probably had this scene in mind when Aslan restores Edmund after his betrayal. Lewis specifically has Aslan and Edmund walk off to talk after breakfast, after which Aslan declares his restoration. *"Here is your brother – and there is no need to talk to him about what is past."*

Here we see the restoration of Peter. Peter had publically denied Christ three times, betraying Him in his presence. "I am not his disciple" he had affirmed three times with OATHS in the courtyard of the high priest. This was not an incident that could be simply smoothed over or swept under the carpet. Both for Peter's sake and that of the church. The forgiveness of Christ know no bounds, but there is no cheap grace with Christ, when he restores he restores, but He does so via some real heart work, he brings Peter down before he builds him up again. Peter had denied him three times, so Jesus asks him three times to affirm his love to him, and Peter catches the connection, which is why he is grieved.

In restoring Him, Jesus also takes Peter back to his old name, he addresses him not as PETER, the name he had given him, but by his original name SIMON.

1) The first time Jesus asks Peter he asks not just Do you Love Me? But **do you love Me more than these?**

Now there is two ways that question can be taken, and both of them are relevant:

a) *Do you love me more than they do?*

You remember Peter's boast before Christ's arrest - Mark 14:29 Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be."

Really?

Or alternatively, it could be

b) Do you love me more than you love them?

Do you love me more than your friends, and business partners, do you love me more than all men?

Because he will need to love Jesus most if he is going to stay faithful to him and serve him

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in the ministry and in Christianity is loving people more than the savior. You become a man pleaser, you compromise.

Like I said both a and b make sense, but I tend to think that it probably means "**do you love me more than they do?**" because Peter DROPS the "than these" in his answer. "You know that I love you." *I am humbled, I am no longer claiming I love you more than all men. Perhaps there are some like the women who did not deny you, who went to the cross, and to the empty tomb at first light, whose love for you is stronger, but you know I love you.*

Christ responds to Him with words that indicate He has been forgiven and restored not just to fellowship, but that his calling is *still* to be a Shepherd of Christ's flock, the church - "Feed My lambs." And note that emphasis, if you love me Peter, don't just say so, Feed my Lambs, teach my people. Christ doesn't ask us merely for expressions of love, but for the actions that show the reality of it.

2) Peter probably expected that would be the end of that line of questioning, but Jesus asks Him again, **Do You Love Me?** Do you Love *ME*.

Do you love *me* Peter, or did you love an idea. Did you love the idea of the Messiah coming to His people with the Word and Power of God and perhaps beginning his kingly rule in Jerusalem with you at His right hand? Or do you love the beaten and crucified Messiah? Do you love the Jesus who was "**despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**" (Is. 53:3)

How about you? Do you love *that* Jesus? We can all love Jesus when doing so is easy, when we are surrounded by fellow Christians and he is esteemed. But can you love him when He is mocked and doubted and despised and cut down and when associating yourself with him will cost you everything? Most cannot, because they don't love him **THAT** much. Pilgrims Progress -

BY-ENDS. Yes, and my wife is a very virtuous woman, the daughter of a virtuous woman; she was my Lady Feigning's daughter, therefore she came of a very honourable family, and is arrived to such a pitch of breeding, that she knows how to carry it to all, even to prince and peasant. It is true we somewhat differ in religion from those of the stricter sort, yet but in two small points; first, we never strive against wind and tide; secondly, we are always most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers; we love much to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines, and the people applaud him.

CHR. If you will go with us, you must go against wind and tide; the which, I perceive, is against your opinion; you must also own religion in his rags, as well as when in his silver slippers; and stand by him, too, when bound in irons, as well as when he walketh the streets with applause.

Peter had to love that Christ, because that was the kind of ministry he was going to be called to. It is only if Peter loves Jesus that he will endure hardship and punishment and death for His sake. Imagine this, here's the plan Peter, I want you to serve my sheep, feed my sheep, to endure beatings and hardship and the abuse of powerful men, and then after almost 30 years of service, you will be put to death for my sake as a martyr. You will STRETCH OUT your hands. In the early church this referred to crucifixion. And that is what happened, Peter was crucified in Rome. Keep on following me Peter. Take up your cross and follow. No retirement banquet and pension, no gold watch, no retirement. This journey will take LOVE.

3) Still that isn't the end of the interview, He asks Peter three times, and Peter was grieved because it harkens back to his betrayal of Christ when he was asked three times in the high priest's courtyard whether he loved Christ, and each time He denied it, NO, I don't know HIM. Do you LOVE me Peter. **Not** do you know me, do you understand me, do you obey me, do you hang out with me, do you like me, do you prefer me to others, but do you LOVE me. Do you trust me so totally that will give up everything for me, and rest upon me alone?

How do you answer that? What work can Peter appeal to that might prove that, especially after his betrayal? What infallible evidence can he give? There is only one way – as David said **Psalm 139:23** **“Search me, O God, and know my heart.”** So in the end the only thing he can appeal to is Christ's omniscience. *Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.* You know what's in my heart. We are reminded again that Jesus knows the content of the hearts of all men:

Mat. 9:3 *And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"*
4 *But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"*

He had known that Peter would betray him, he knows all things. Now remember, no prophet knew all things, they had things revealed to them by God, but they couldn't themselves perceive the secret thoughts of a man, no one KNOWS all things but God?

Three times He had been asked and denied, now three times he is asked and restored.

One final note on these verses before I get to an application. I used to be very impressed by a linguistic argument about the use of the Greek verbs for LOVE in these verses, Agape and Philia:

Jesus – Do you Agape Me, Peter I Philia you
 Finally – Jesus do you Philia me, Peter I Agape you

The reason I am not quite as impressed any more is the realization that the ORIGINAL conversation would have taken place in ARAMAIC, where there is not the same distinction, so the choice of Greek verbs was John's not Peter and Christ's.

Now it is possible that John who was there, heard the distinctions in their voices, LOVE and love but I don't know.

I should note there is also a variation in the nouns used for Christ's followers *Lambs and Sheep* and the verb for what he is to do as a shepherd Feed (Bosko) and Shepherd (Poimano). Take care of them, watch over them, make sure they are cared for. Tend includes feed, and we feed them because we that

is part of Shepherding. If someone tells you to take care of their dog while they are away, you assume that involves feeding them. If it doesn't please let me know, so we know not to ask you to take care of Penny while we are away.

2 Applications:

1) On the Price of Restoration: In the *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the price of the restoration of Edmund was the death of Aslan on the stone table. There was no other way for the traitor and rebel's death sentence to be commuted. And there I think the great allegory breaks down. Because of course it was not merely EDMUND who was a rebel and a sinner but all mankind.

Similarly it is not just Peter who betrayed Christ, all men have. Therefore for any man to be restored to fellowship with God, the debt had to be paid by Christ on the cross.

John 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In reality the price of forgiveness for Peter was the crucifixion, Christ died for that sin, and all of Peter's other sins that he might not only be forgiven, but restored and useful.

2) On the Availability of Restoration: Peter's pride had led him to a very great fall. But Jesus had not been done with Peter. That night that He betrayed Him, Jesus told Peter *Luke 22:32 "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."* Jesus never begins a work he does not mean to finish. He calls the people He has predestinated to faith in Him, and He himself causes them to persevere till they reach Heaven, even if the road there is a rocky one filled with many turnings out the way.

The greatest cause of stumbling and backsliding, particularly in men is usually pride. Peter's pride had caused him to consistently think too highly of himself and to depend upon his own abilities. In the courtyard, that pride had been blown up, and then again in night of empty nets it had again been cut down, and then in the three fold reminder of his sin starting with the prideful statement – "If all men desert you I never will" Jesus finally brought Peter down to earth. Christian, if you walk away from Christ and become entangled in sin, don't be surprised if the root cause is your pride, and that in restoring you God will have to strip you of it.

Of late I've been listening to Johnny Cash's last album, *American VI*, which has several songs that talk about death, both the death of his loved ones and loneliness, and his realization that his own death was approaching. But throughout Cash's faith and trust that because of Jesus death would not be the end

shines through. But where Cash at the end of his life, was a direct result of the Lord's work in restoring him after several episodes of backsliding.

In his autobiography, Johnny Cash talked about how his own sins and selfishness had caused him to walk away from Christ and how in restoring Him Jesus had to bring him crashing down to earth. He wrote of a time when he was at the bottom in 1967 "To put myself in such a low state that I couldn't communicate with God, there's no lonelier place to be. I was separated from God, and I wasn't even trying to call on him. I knew that there was no line of communication." Though he'd professed Christ at age 12, Cash wrote, "there was nothing left of me... I had drifted so far away from God and every stabilizing force in my life that I felt there was no hope." He decided to crawl into Nickajack Cave on the Tennessee River, get lost, and die. "The absolute lack of light was appropriate," he wrote. "My separation from Him, the deepest and most ravaging of the various kinds of loneliness I'd felt over the years, seemed finally complete. "It wasn't. I thought I'd left Him, but He hadn't left me. I felt something very powerful start to happen to me, a sensation of utter peace, clarity, and sobriety... Then my mind started focusing on God. He didn't speak to me—He never has, and I'll be surprised if He ever does—but ... I became conscious of a very clear, simple idea: I was not in charge of my own destiny. I was not in charge of my own death."

Later he wrote of his restored relationship with Christ: "The greatest joy of my life was that I no longer felt separated from Him. Now he is my Counselor, my Rock of Ages to stand upon." Now that didn't mean his life was easy after that, any more than David or Peter's was after their restoration. He often said that his life verse was Romans 8:13 *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.