

John 21:15-19

"Do You Love Me?"

I. Agape Love Is

A. Love is greater than faith and hope.

q agape love shows whether or not we are Christians.

q four Greek words for love – eros, stergo, philos, agape.

q agape love is a giving love that seeks the good of the other person and is willing to make sacrifices for the other person.

q agape love is long-suffering and compassionate.

q agape love often falls shorts.

q agape love forgets about itself.

q agape love hates evil and delights in the truth that is Christ.

q agape love never ends.

B. Today, I want you to hear and answer Jesus' question to Peter: "Do you love me?" (read text...)

"Do you love me?" That what Jesus asks Peter three times. "Do you love me?"

"Do you love me?" This question gets right to the heart of the matter. It deals with the central issue between us and God.

What other question would He ask? This question is more important than any other question. You get this one right and everything else falls into place...

God focuses on our hearts. He asks if all that we do and say and are flows out of our love for Jesus Christ.

In many ways husbands our wives are like God, not just the power to kill and destroy... But, the need to hear from us, "I love you." Kathy wants to hear if my heart has any passion for her. She wants to know if in the deepest part of my being I love her.

Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" He, like my wife, wants to know if I have any passion for Him. He wants to know if in the deepest part of my being I love Him.

"Do you love me?"

II. The Reason for the Question

A. We all know why Jesus asked Peter this question. The reason goes back to what happened in the high priest's courtyard after Jesus was betrayed and arrested. Three times Peter was asked if he was one of Christ's disciples. Three times Peter denied this because he was afraid: he was afraid that what was happening to Jesus would happen to him; he was afraid he would be arrested; he was afraid he would be slapped and beaten; he was afraid he would be condemned to die by crucifixion.

But notice what Jesus does: not once does He bring up Peter's fear and denial; not once does He remind Peter He had predicted this would happen. Jesus does not ask, "Simon, why did you deny me?" Rather, He asks, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

B. One of the many lessons from this text include this idea: Jesus is telling Peter and us that all moral failures point to a collapse of love. Faulty behavior, wrong behavior, immoral behavior, disobedient behavior all reveal an imperfect love. Pick any saint and any sin. Think of Samson and his relationship with a heathen woman like Delilah. Think of David and his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. Think of Ananias and Sapphira and their lie against the Spirit of God. Think of Paul's persecution of the church. Everyone of their failures, everyone of your failures, everyone of my failures, points to something lacking in love for God and Christ.

"Do you love me?" If your love is lacking, then you are bound to fail and fall and sin.

C. But there is also another lesson here. If all moral failure points to a collapse of love, then all moral triumph points to a flourishing of love. Pick any saint and any moral triumph. Think of Joseph as he faced Potiphar's lonely but lovely wife. "Come lie with me," she said. Joseph got out of there before he sinned against God and Potiphar. Think of Daniel praying to God at the open window facing Jerusalem even though such prayer was against the law. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remaining on their feet while everyone else bowed before the golden statue. Think of Elijah and the 7,000 who refused to worship Baal. Think of King Josiah who repaired the Temple, reestablished the Law, and restored the priesthood. In each and every case their moral triumph indicates that their love for God was alive and real and flourishing. And it drove them to be faithful.

"Do you love me?" If your love is flourishing then you are bound to lead the victorious Christian life. Love is such an incredible motivator. Another definition of love that I came up with while studying for this lesson was, Love gives pleasure to the performance of service...

D. "Do you love me?" What happens when we answer: "Yes. Yes, God, I love You. Yes, Jesus, I love You. Yes, Spirit, I love You." What happens? Notice the final two words Jesus says to Peter: "Follow me!" Do you see the connection? I can follow Jesus only when I love Him. I can be His disciple only when I love Him. I can deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Him only when I love Him. I can profess Him and join His church only when I love Him.

Have you ever wondered how fans can stand in line for hours to buy tickets to a rock concert or a football game? It is because they love the band or the football team. Have you ever wondered about those folks who stood in a line overnight to get Nintendo's Wii or Apple's iPhone? It is because they love gaming and technology so much. Love makes sacrifice a privilege, service an honor, suffering a joy. We see that in the life of the Lord Jesus. We see that in the life of the disciples. We see that in the life of the Apostle Paul. We see that in the life of the first century Christians.

E "Do you love me?" The bottom line is this: the Lord Jesus wants our love. Think of the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength." God, in Christ, wants our love. And, He wants our love no matter what. He wanted Peter's love, even though Peter denied Him three times. The Lord Jesus wants your love: no matter how faithful or faithless you have been, no matter whether you denied Him or professed Him, no matter how strong or weak your faith may be, no matter how you have fallen into sin or practiced righteousness, no matter what!

"Do you love me?" What is your answer?

III. The Proof of Peter's Love

A. Whenever I start my computer it does a self-test. It checks that everything is working before I can start working on it. It checks the ROM, the RAM, the hard-drive, the graphics card, the floppy controller and drives, the internal clock, the keyboard and mouse. They all have to work before the computer will proceed. In the same way I need to do a self-test to make sure that all systems are go. I need to do a self-test to determine my answer to Jesus' question: "Do you love me?"

What do I look for? What test do I give myself? How do I know if I love Him?

B. To know if we love Jesus we have to do the Peter test: do I confess Christ before men or do I deny Christ before men? There is a reason Jesus asked Peter the same question three different times: do you love me? do you love me? do you love me? Jesus didn't have to remind Peter of the awful thing he did. The three questions mirrored the three denials in such a way that Peter was cut to the heart. Jesus didn't say it, but Peter certainly was left thinking, "If I love Jesus how could I deny Him three times?"

If I love Jesus then I confess Him and do not deny Him. I think of what Jesus says in Matthew 10:

(Mt 10:32-33) "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (33) But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Those who love Jesus are not ashamed to confess Him before men. If we love Jesus, if we truly love Him, then we do not deny knowing Him the way Peter did. If we love Jesus, if we truly love Him, then we stand before the world and the church and say: "I believe in Jesus. He is my Savior and my Lord." If we love Jesus we are not scared or ashamed to make our faith public.

C. We know that Peter did confess Christ. We know from church history that because of this confession Peter died like the Lord: he was crucified. Imagine that: the one who loudly denied the Lord ended up gladly dying for Him. There is no doubt that Peter died loving the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

"Do you love me?" Jesus knew the answer. He knew Peter loved Him. And the apostles knew that too because Peter – fallen Peter – ended up being one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. Here is a lesson that within the grace of God even the greatest of saints can have horrible sins and yet be a leader in the church.

D. "Do you love me?" God stops us in our tracks with that question. In our headlong rush through life He wants us to look at our hearts, to do a self-test.

But a hypocrite will not and cannot love Jesus Christ. "He will not delight in the Almighty," (Job 27:10).

If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed," (I Corinthians 16:22).

Although love is an invisible entity, its fruits are clearly seen. If we truly love the Lord, we will show this by obeying His Word. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Matt. 22: 37-40, "And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Also, consider the fruit of the Spirit: Gal. 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Conclusion:

I think there is something cooking here theologically and that's why John wrote this the way he did. The first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, the Greek is the verb agape. But both times when Peter replies, the Greek word on Peter's lips is philos. So Jesus asks twice, "Peter, do you agape me?" but Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, I philos you." Finally, on the third time, Jesus gives up asking about agape and himself switches to ask, "Peter, do you philos me?" It is this shift in verbage that makes Peter sad.

If you are going to make anything of this exchange, the typical argument goes like this: Jesus inquires about that deep, sacrificial kind of love, of agape, that Jesus himself had shown on the cross. But given his recent and dismal failure to stick with Jesus once the heat was on, Peter maybe doesn't feel he can properly claim that kind of love, and so he replies by proffering to Jesus the more friendship-oriented love of philos. Having given that answer twice to his Lord, Peter sadly sees on the last go-round that even Jesus condescends to his level and settles for asking about the philos type of love. Even though Peter himself had not dared to claim more than that, still it was disappointing to see Jesus lower his expectations. Of course, what we as readers should not miss is that even so, each time Peter answered this way, still Jesus gave him the highly spiritual task of tending the flock.

It seems as though Jesus is willing to meet us where we are. There is hope for all of us in that. And it's well to note, too, that Jesus implies no judgment on Peter despite his less-than-optimal replies to Jesus' questions about the strength of his love. And don't forget, too, that this entire scene has traditionally, and correctly, been viewed as the restoration of Peter despite his multiple denials and betrayals of Jesus. Seldom is grace more glaringly and beautifully on display than in this story right here.