

JOHN CHAPTER 21, STUDY NO. 64  
LOVEST THOU ME?

We have looked at the text where this question is found. We looked at it primarily from the teaching standpoint, and without much application. In this study we will try to make more application to ourselves and trust it will affect our lives. There will no doubt be some repetition, but that is always beneficial for us.

This is one of the greatest questions ever asked of any man in the Scriptures. What we need to do is put our own name in the place of Peter's name. This will make it very personal. A disposition to love somebody is one of the commonest feelings which God has implanted in us. Yet how often we set our affection on unworthy objects. The Scriptures admonish us about loving the wrong things. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). The scribes loved to pray in the marketplaces to be seen of men (Mark 12:38). There are those who love the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15).

We need to guard our hearts and minds that our affections are not set upon the wrong things. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

We must note the tenderness, the lovingkindness, and the grace of our Lord. In the times that Peter had seen the Lord since His resurrection, the Lord had not spoken directly to him. This undoubtedly made Peter apprehensive of his relationship to his Lord. Where exactly did he stand? He had wept bitterly when the Lord had looked at him, and was very sincere, but there was still a thought in his mind what the Lord would say to him. Christ does not reproach Peter, as we see in His question to him. The question is not, "how much have you wept?," or "how much have you done for Me?," or "are you ready to obey Me?," or "how much have you believed?," but "Do you love Me?" This question is not a trivial question, but one which deserves our utmost attention. Is not our salvation bound up in it? Life or death, heaven or hell depend upon our answer.

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Corinthians 16:22). Paul leaves no escape or excuse for the man who does not love Christ. (1) A man may lack clear head knowledge and yet be saved (Poor huckster). (2) A man may fail in courage and be overcome with fear, but still love the Lord (Peter). (3) A man may fall tremendously, yet rise again and love the Lord (David). But if a man does not love Christ, he is not in the way of life. "Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me" (John 8:42). They were satisfied with the fact that they were Abraham's children, yet they had no love for Christ. There was no sonship.

Knowledge, faith, hope, reverence for God, and obedience are all in a true believer, but the true believer goes beyond, he loves. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Is our love a formality, or lip service, or is it our heart and life? Contrast these Scriptures. "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8,9).

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Ephesians 6:23,24).

### **What are the distinguishing marks of a true believer that loves Christ?**

(1) The true believer loves God because he knows that God first loved him. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The realization of God's electing love and grace becomes the basis of our love for Him.

(2) The true believer loves Christ for who He is. Christ is the God-man who humbled Himself to be our Saviour. Christ is holy, righteous, just, sovereign, merciful, gracious, and loving. The true believer casts himself upon God for mercy, and agrees with John Newton when he said, "If God were to send me to hell, He would give me the grace to stay there."

(3) The true believer loves Christ for what He has done for him. Christ has sacrificed Himself as the substitute for our sins, and paid the price of our redemption. He has brought us from death unto life, from darkness to light, from bondage to liberty, from the guilt of our sin to peace with God, from uncertainty to hope, and from the state of ungodliness to the state of holiness.

(4) The true believer loves Christ for what He is presently doing for him. Christ ascended back to glory and is seated at the right hand of God ever living to make intercession for us. He is daily sanctifying and cleansing us with the washing of the water of the Word that He might present us to Himself holy and without blemish. He is supplying all our need according to His riches in glory. He supplies us with grace for every temptation and need. He lives in us.

Have we seen Christ to be what our soul needs for salvation? A man may have an intellectual faith and not have love to Christ. Love cannot join the soul to Christ, or justify, faith does that, but where there is true justifying faith in Christ, there will be a heart of love to Christ. "Biblical love is not the gushy love of the pulpit of today, i.e. God loves everybody, but the will of the heart to acknowledge God and bow to His right in my life." (A.W. Tozer)

"And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment . . . Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:37,38,47). She loved much because she had been forgiven much. To love Christ is to know forgiveness. If we have no sense of debt to Christ, perhaps we have no sense of having gotten anything from Him, and so there is no reason to love Him.

Love to Christ is the center of devotion to Him, for little is done from a sense of duty. Those who have done the most for Christ have been lovers of Christ. It may be true that they held a creed, but most of all they loved a Person, Christ Himself. Love to Christ will be the mark of all in glory. Our journey through this world, if we love Christ, will fix itself on Him and seem very short.

### **How do we know that we love Christ?**

(1) By having our thoughts dwelling on Christ, talking of Christ, and meditating on Him.

Christ and the Word cannot be separated. "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works" (Psalm 145:5).

(2) We find pleasure in hearing about Him. Personal study, corporate study, and testimony, whatever gives and brings attention to Christ is our delight. Does our heart leap at the mention of His name? The story is told of an elderly Welsh lady who loved the Lord, but couldn't understand English. She walked miles every Sunday to hear a certain English preacher. When asked why she did this, her reply was, "Because he speaks the name of Christ so often in his sermons."

(3) We delight in the Scriptures because they tell us of our Beloved Saviour. It is no wearisome task to read them. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2). "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word" (Psalm 119:14,16). ". . . in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, . . ." (Acts 17:11).

(4) We delight in pleasing God by obeying His will and commands. Obedience reveals submission to Christ. ". . . Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). ". . . and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). ". . . but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

(5) We delight in those who also love Him. There is a bond which binds the redeemed together, and their company and communion is our delight. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34,35). "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

(6) We delight to maintain His cause, His interests, and His character. We have a jealousy for His name. This includes standing for His absolute Deity, His blood redemption, His hatred of sin, and His Holy Word as our rule of life.

(7) We delight in prayer by which we can commune with Him.

(8) We have a desire to be with Him. Paul wrote, ". . . having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). This world is not our home. We are only passing through on our journey to glory. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). This is our longing for we shall be done with sin and sinning, and the very presence of sin will be banished. Thus we should be, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The more we are looking heavenward, the less appeal this world will have for us.

To love Christ is not the mere believing of a certain set of tenets or opinions. The devil believes and trembles. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). It is knowing, trusting, and loving a

Person, Christ Jesus the Lord who loved me and gave Himself for me. Does our heart sing, O to grace how great a debtor? Free grace has taught our heart to love, worship, and adore our Saviour.

What should we do when we are perplexed with doubts and fears? whether our faith is real? when our love is cold? when we doubt that grace is real? when the light is so dim we cannot clearly see our election and calling? If we can testify that we love Christ, when there is true love for Him, there is faith and grace. We would not love Him if He had not done anything for us. This love is a token for good.

"May we never think we can love Christ too much, live to Him too holy, confess Him too boldly, or give ourselves to Him too heartily. Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning is probably this, that we did not love Christ more while we were on this earth." (J.C. Ryle)

May we claim a place from Him who alone is worthy of all our heart's best, and give ourselves to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Hear the question again, "lovest thou me?"