

# Communion

## Do you love Me more than these?

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Imagine yourself for a moment as Peter in the closing chapters of John's Gospel. This is not such a stretch because, like Peter, we've all seen things in ourselves that are ghastly. Confronted with the impact of his behaviour on Christ, illuminated to see that it was his sin that sent Christ to the cross, Peter realised the utter devastation and failure of his self-righteousness (John 21).

If you and I haven't seen this about *our* self-righteousness, then I don't think we're Christians, because Christianity *starts* with knowing and confessing, 'There's nothing good in me. I thought I was good, but my goodness sent Christ to the cross to die - *my* goodness, that is only filthy rags and wickedness.'

### Not the good men we thought

Peter thought himself the good man until he was confronted with this. Seeing it, he would have felt like the Apostle Paul, who declared:

*"...the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."*  
(Romans 7:19)

Peter saw his condition, but he wasn't driven to despair and suicide as Judas was, committing the spiritual act of death some people choose when they feel they can't cope with what they see in themselves. In despair, they choose to embrace their own spiritual destruction as the only honest thing to do, which it's not. Peter didn't choose that, but a pathway of restoration delivered to him by the Lord.

Jesus addressed Peter because Peter needed to be taken beyond the light of his own perceptions; he needed to be delivered to the word Christ spoke to him so he could live by that word and not by his own light that was only darkness. Peter was painfully aware of his wretchedness but was not in despair and was able to meet the Lord. This is where we are, too. We're seeing and becoming aware of our condition, and rather than 'doing ourselves in' spiritually, we're here. We're committed and we're coming to church, each one of us needing a fellowship meal and the restoration of the Lord; needing to hear the Lord speak to us, just as He did to Peter:

*"...when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?'"* (John 21:15)

### What do we love more than Him?

I want to focus in on the second part of Jesus' question: 'Do you love me *more than these*?' When the Lord confronts us with our condition, He begins to bring to our sight what we love

more than Him. It could be a lot of things; it could be anything. It could be as simple as, 'I love being loved more than I love God'. Perhaps we love not being afraid, or having an untroubled life, more than we love God. Young people trying to negotiate their way through school and university can love their peer group more than they love God.

It's a big question, isn't it: 'Do you love me more than your friends?' 'Do you love me more than the domestic peace you're always trying to keep but are only hardening the condition in your home and worsening the problem?' 'Do you love me more than this thing you've set your heart on?' 'Do you love me more than the comforts you've installed around you? More than your safety net? More than your career? More than your lifestyle?'

The Lord is asking each one of us today, 'Do you love me more than these?' Can you answer Him? It's a serious question. Nothing leads us away from Christ more than privileging above God people or things that promise (but can never deliver) the good things and camaraderie we love more than Him.

Are you willing to face the issues of life that the Lord is bringing your way as He confronts you with what isn't working and never can? Many among us can testify that if we'd known at first the extent of our self-righteousness, a state we always knew was bad but never identified in ourselves, we may not have been able to bear the sight of it without falling into despair. But the question before us now is: will seeing our wretched condition lead us to despair, or to meet the Lord?

Peter met the Lord, who, in recovering him, asked this question of Peter's love just as He is asking us today. In answering Him, we must be very honest and confess, 'Lord, you're asking me a question that is beyond my capacity. I see

that this wretched person *doesn't* love you more than these; that I don't really love you at all. I need Your love to love.'

Alternatively, we *could* answer the question as Peter did at first:

*"[Peter] said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you.""* (John 21: 15)

Do you notice that Peter didn't answer the whole question? Jesus had asked Peter if he loved Him *more than these*, to which Peter had replied, 'Yes, you know I love you.'

### The real question

We too know that we love the Lord Jesus. But do we love Him more than all other things? Well, we're in a process through which God is delivering us from loving the world and the self-righteous justifications we make by our own law. 'I'm not ambitious. I don't want to be rich, just well-off. I don't want a jet. I'm really quite modest'.

On our own sliding scale, we convince ourselves we're not that bad. But can you see how self-righteous this is? How idolatrous our self-righteous measurement is that points at someone else and boasts, 'I'm not *that* bad'? That's the Pharisee, who stands in his self-righteous pride and says, 'Thank God I'm not like him! I'm not like that, so what *I* want is fine.' That is 'setting up a straw man', an old technique for winning arguments based on a fallacy made to look like the point in question but which is not the point at all. It is a distraction tactic. Those who use it may appear to win the argument, but the true question remains unanswered.

The true question is one of light or darkness and distinguishes between what is spiritual and what is carnal; what is of God and what is of our flesh. The Apostle Paul's main wrestle with the

New Testament churches was that the people to whom the Gospel had been delivered kept reverting back to the flesh. They hadn't stopped believing that Jesus was the Son of God or that He died for their sins. They hadn't stopped coming to church, giving or helping, but they were being carnal. We all turn carnal when we install, as the light within us, our own self-righteousness and pursue its priorities instead of the priorities of the Holy Spirit.

A young person who says, 'My friends out there in the world are the priority' will be led to pursue the things of the flesh. Seeking affirmation from our peer group, showing-off and trying to impress them, will always undermine our love for the Lord. A man who says, 'I'm a good provider for my family. We don't want to be rich, but we want to be well-off' will be driven to pursue material comfort as a priority. But if this is our priority, it won't matter how well-off we are, we'll always want a little bit more; we'll always want to be just a little better-off. If we're buying a house, we'll want to buy something in the next price bracket, or if we've received a pay rise we'll want a bigger one.

But what is the Holy Spirit saying? Jesus has promised that *He* will provide for each one of us (Matthew 6:25-33) So, you don't have to stay up late at night obsessing over whether you're going to eat, or where you're going to live or what you're going to do. Your anxiety about these things will kill you.

Rather, godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). Paul came to regard as complete rubbish any gain other than Christ, everything he'd previously achieved in his self-righteous view of what life should be like.

*"...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be*

*loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord..."* (Philippians 3:7-8)

He counted all his carnal gains as loss for the sake of knowing his Lord.

### **Come with Him in the offering He asks**

Being asked by the Lord, 'Do you love me more than these?' is a question that shakes us, particularly when we don't feel very loving. But what does the love He is asking for mean? It is this: 'Can you come with Me and make the offering I'm asking of you, laying down your life where I'm asking you to lay down your life, for the people I'm asking you to lay down your life for? Not for the people you love more than Me: those colleagues at work, those friends who want you to run with them into dissipation. Rather, for these people here in the household of faith: your brother, your sister, your wife, your husband, your brothers and sisters in Christ. You may not feel like it, but will you come with Me and lay your life down where I've asked you to?'

If we can't make offering here, if we're not laying our life down here, whatever else we're doing is worthless! You can give your body to be burned, you can give all your money away to the poor, but if you're not loving Him more than these, it will count for nothing. It will only be a projection of your own goodness measured on the scale of your own self-righteousness (1 Corinthians 13:3). By this measure, on your scales of justice and goodness, you will appear to have gained but in reality will have won nothing. This is the point about our self-righteousness and comfort.

Thank God He is undoing all of this in us! Thank God that in His love He is taking us, like Peter, where we don't want to go (John 21:18). We wouldn't go there if in His love our Heavenly Father didn't take us there. We can't bring

about our recovery; we can't prescribe the remedy to ourselves; we can't self-medicate the righteousness of God. He brings it to us; it comes to us as something *He* does.

When Peter answered the Lord's question with, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love you', Jesus set the pathway for him by His word, saying to Peter, 'Feed my lambs.' (John 21:15). He wants us, too, to be poured out for His lambs in the Body of Christ, for those who follow Him and know His voice (John 10:27). We're to lay down our lives for our brethren, not for all this other stuff we've loved more than Him. Jesus Christ has given us His Body as the context and place for our offering to Him.

The Lord is bringing us back to the simplicity of this, exhorting us towards our name which only has expression in the Body of Christ. Taking your name and gifts from Him out into the world is not offering. It's taking your inheritance and leaving Him to wallow in the pigpen and be led to destruction, perhaps spruiking yourself on social media as you go.

(We really do need to be made alive to the fact that social media is not relationship or life. For the most part it is active in telling and selling us things that completely undermine what God is saying and wanting to do in us. It is not neutral but an active poison coming to us through our engagement with it. Young people, do not think you can feed on this without harm. Older people, do not think your sophistication makes you immune so you can imbibe whatever you wish and whatever is presented to you. It may be permissible but is not helpful or edifying (1 Corinthians 10:23)).

### **Not condemnation but His provision**

God is calling us back to the simplicity of loving Him more than any of these things. Loving Him in this way will reboot the culture of our

personal lives and our homes. How we need each other's encouragement today and when we're feeling a little bit wretched! We're here at the communion table, and the Lord is not leaving us in a wretched state. Here at His table, where there is no condemnation, He is giving us His full provision.

So, when you see in yourself the thing that put Christ on the cross, turn to Him. When He asks if you love Him more than these, and you know you don't, and you can't, His reassurance is that He has full provision for you at His table. Can we partake of His provision today in faith as we commit to the week ahead, knowing that this word He has delivered to us is His full provision of bread for us and for our households this week?

In the season of the Lord we are in, He has been 'unravelling some of the seams in our quilts'. Major seams. The very seams we though were so important but that He never made part of us and therefore never liked. In the face of this we haven't known what to say at first, but we are becoming increasingly thankful that God has loved us so much that He has persisted with us for so long and is taking us where we didn't want to go. Thank the Lord!

If God did not love us enough to do this with us, there would be no hope. None of us could or would persist with us the way God does, consistently exposed to our worst moments, our complaints, our whinging, fuss and bother. Only God can do that, and it is His love that is delivering us over to manifest the righteousness that is *His*.

To love God more than these, we need the love of God. If you've got a big reputation somewhere, that's a real opportunity to make offering and die to it. In God's scheme of things, whatever it is you think you're good at is about

as important to Him as your being the tiddlywinks champion of Betoota.

### **By the faith, love and grace of God**

Having received the ministry and heard the word that's been delivered to us by the Spirit today, let's allow the Lord to direct our hearts towards feeding His lambs instead of being fed ourselves. Can we allow Him to renew our minds and change our focus from our own needs to the needs of these ones in the Body of Christ who are following the voice of the Lord their Shepherd? Can we look to see His Body built up?

God will provide for all your needs: your career, housing, food, finance, next steps - for *all* your needs. If you're finding things difficult, the Lord is probably trying to get your attention. Seek Him and don't go looking to the world as your provider. We live and work in the world but it is God who provides for us there. There is no need for us to worry about any of these things. The Lord has them in His hand.

We do love the Lord, don't we? But we need His deliverance so that when we say we love Him, we're not making a self-righteous statement but speaking by the faith of God working by His love within us. We know that we are inadequate, yet by the grace of God we can answer Him, 'Yes, Lord, I *do* love You more than these.'