

QUESTIONS FROM JESUS: "DO YOU LOVE ME?"

THESIS: Love The Lord

TEXT: Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75/John 21:1-23

OPEN: Many people understand God's grace and mercy towards the ungodly so that they may believe in Christ and be saved, but what about His forgiveness towards a follower who has sinned even in a grave way? Is there hope for restoration and renewal in the Lord? Let's discover that by examining an apostle's life in **Matthew 26** and **John 21**.

Matthew 26:31-32 "Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of Me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

What does Jesus mean when He says that all His disciples would fall away? **Fall away** (Greek: *skandalizo*) means to cause to sin or to go astray. Jesus prophesied that His disciples would soon encounter an obstacle that would make them stumble and fall away from their devotion—that obstacle would be Him. Why?

Luke 22:31-34 "Simon, Simon, satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.' But Peter replied, 'Lord, I am ready to go with You to prison and to death.'"

Matthew 26:33-34 "Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will.' 'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times.'"

Disown (Greek: *aparneiomai*) means to deny, renounce, or discard. How is it possible for a follower of the Lord to go astray or fall away? Did they never really believe in the first place as some theologians say?

Considering all that Peter and Jesus have been through together, he wouldn't discard the Lord, would he? Listen to his response to Christ's prediction in **v35**: "But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You.' And all the other disciples said the same."

Mark 14:66-68/Mtt 26:69-70 "While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. 'You were also with that Nazarene, Jesus,' she said. But he denied it. 'I don't know or understand what you're talking about,' he said, and went out into the entryway.

At that particular time Jesus was on trial before the High Priest Caiaphas and the Jewish court referred to as the Sanhedrin. Scripture reveals that Peter can see from a distance what's going on. John's gospel records that Peter was eventually allowed into the room where Jesus was.

No doubt Peter witnessed what **Matthew 26:66** says, "'He is worthy of death.' Then they spit in (Jesus') face and struck Him with their fists. Others slapped Him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit You?'" What happens to a leader could happen to his followers. Peter's scared.

Matthew 26:71-72 "Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' (Peter) denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!'"

Oath (Greek: *horkos*) means a promise or enclosure—binding oneself to something. Whether he realizes it or not—means it or not—Peter's calling upon the Heavenly Father as a witness to his deceit. Perhaps

he was angry, frustrated, embarrassed, or frightened. Whatever the reason, Peter denies his association with Jesus.

Matthew 26:73-75 “After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away. Then he began to call down curses on himself (*possibly something like ‘May God kill and damn me if I am not speaking the truth’*) and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. **Luke 22:61-62** “Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

It sure helps to know that Jesus prayed for Peter and it’s good to know that Jesus has prayed for us, too (**John 17**).

***John 17:20-21** “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

What about God’s forgiveness towards a follower who has sinned even in a grave way? Is there hope for restoration and renewal in the Lord? If so, what are we to do if forgiven by Him? Let’s find out in *John 21*.

John 21:1-6 “(After Jesus’ resurrection appearance to the doubting Thomas in the upper room) He appeared again to His disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’ ‘No,’ they answered. He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”

Historical: The “Sea of Tiberias” is the same as the “Sea of Galilee” where Jesus did a lot of teaching. It was at the Sea of Galilee that three years earlier Jesus invited these fellows to be “fishers of men” as His disciples.

Perhaps by saying, “I’m going out to fish,” Peter was interested in a “meantime” activity until him and the other disciples met up with Jesus in Galilee. The resurrected Lord told the women who had just exited His empty tomb that they should tell the disciples He would see them in Galilee.

Perhaps by saying, “I’m going out to fish,” Peter was fading in his commitment to Christ. Maybe he thought the resurrection was too good to be true. You may recall that before Jesus ascended to Heaven. **Matthew 28:16-17** says, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.”

Perhaps by saying, “I’m going out to fish,” Peter was giving up on the whole “church thing.” Maybe he thought there was no way God was going to use him ever again for ministry in Jesus’ name. Remember that only a few days earlier during Jesus’ trial, Peter denied knowing the name of Jesus not once, not twice, but three times and with cursing. He did so for fear of persecution.

Perhaps by saying, “I’m going out to fish,” it was nothing more than that—fishing—something familiar to him since it was his trade before becoming a disciple. Whatever his reasons, the presence of the Lord dramatically changes the situation for this “hot and cold” disciple. It’s easy to be hard on Peter, but perhaps we may see ourselves in Peter.

When we’ve messed up or when things don’t go our way, it’s tempting to withdraw from our commitment to Christ and go back whence we came, isn’t it? When we want to say, “Go fish!” to this

whole church or Christian “thing” the Lord calls out to us. This call may come through encouragement or correction from a friend, spouse, church member, an acquaintance, or even a stranger.

Why did Peter deny the Lord? Is there hope for full restoration and renewal in the Lord? Let’s find out by skipping ahead to **John 21:15-17**.

John 21:15-19 “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?’” (*Remember that after the Last Supper, Peter had boasted that he would have a greater devotion to Jesus than the rest of the disciples*). ‘Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘You know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed My lambs.’ Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love You.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of My sheep.’ The third time He said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ He said, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed My sheep.’”

Do you remember another time when Peter was questioned about his association with Christ three times? Ah, yes, by some people who were observing Jesus’ trial. They wanted to know if Peter was a follower of His. They asked him three times whether or not it was true and each time he denied it emphatically with a curse.

This time Peter is face to face with the risen Lord. Despite his past failures, Jesus had not forgotten Peter or what God had called him to do—“strengthen the brothers.” The reminder for Peter is the same for you and me: Do we love the Lord? If so, then we are to strengthen and refresh others.

Illustration: In his book *I Ain’t Much, Baby—But I’m All I Got*, Jess Lair says, “Praise is like sunlight to the warm human spirit; we cannot flower and grow without it. And yet, while most of us are only too ready to apply to others the cold wind of criticism, we are somehow reluctant to give our fellow the warm sunshine of praise.”

Proverbs 11:25 “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

Even though Jesus did not praise Peter on this occasion by the Sea of Galilee, He did something for him that was even better than that—loving forgiveness, which led to restoration of his soul and thus renewal of his purpose in life.

Application: When you’re tempted to say “Go fish!” to Christ and His Church do the following instead:

1. *Ask yourself:* “How much better off will I be without Jesus and His Church? You really can’t have one without the other because Jesus and His Church are one because of His Holy Spirit dwelling in each member. Just like a husband and wife are considered one flesh, Jesus and His bride—the Church—are one. **Ephesians 5:31-32** “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.” Ask yourself: “What better alternative is there to the Lord and His church?”
2. *Read Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes* because just about every question of doubt or despair is covered there and elsewhere in the Bible. The writers of Scripture are inspired of God and they’re real people.
 - A. **1 Corinthians 4:11-13a** “To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly...”
3. *Pray to the Lord*—pour your heart out to Him in your own words. **1 Peter 5:7** uses a fishing metaphor when it says, “Cast all your cares upon Him because He cares for you.”
4. *Obey the Lord’s Word.* It worked for the apostles and it can work for you. **John 14:23**, “If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him and We will come to him.”

CLOSE: Why did Peter deny the Lord? We don't know for sure—we just know that he did and in a big way. Why did Jesus forgive Peter and give him another chance? He loved Him and He loves you, too. The question is—will you love Him by obeying His commands and strengthen others?