

Jesus and Peter

Key Verse: *“He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”*
—John 21:17

Selected Scripture:
John 21:15-19

denial of the Lord, clearing him of any further rebuke.

In his question of Peter, the Lord simply asked, “Lovest thou me?” The Master did not berate him for his three denials, but now merely wanted to be assured of the depth of Peter’s love and devotion. Perhaps we might have felt it necessary to make Peter apologize first. Let us learn well this lesson of reproving others very gently, by a hint rather than by a direct charge; by an inquiry respecting their present heart condition, rather than

In our Key Verse, the resur-rected Jesus asked Peter for the third time if he loved him. Hearing this question the third time must have sent the memory of Peter back to the scene in Caiaphas’ Judgment Hall, when he denied his Master three times, even with cursing. (Matt. 26:69-75) Three times Peter had denied the Lord, and now three times would the Lord have him reaffirm his devotion to him. By doing so, Peter would receive additional assurances of his full reinstatement in his Master’s love and favor. These three inquiries asked of Peter are the only recorded mention made that hearkened back to his

respecting a former condition, in which they may have erred. Jesus' questions to Peter also served the important purpose of countering his tendency to love and serve his fishing business more than serving the cause of Christ.

When our Lord asked Peter "lovest thou me?" in the first two inquiries, the Greek word "*agapao*" is used, which signifies love in its highest form—selfless, sacrificing, and fully devoted, regardless of circumstance or reward. Now, in his third question, the Greek word "*phileo*" is used, signifying familial love, brotherly affection, and friendship. Peter was grieved at this. He knew that he loved the Master with brotherly love and affection, but realized that he had not yet reached the highest form of love—*agapao*.

One of the most praiseworthy traits in Peter's character was his perseverance. If he made a misstep, he was quick to change course once it was brought to his attention. He felt remorse that there was any cloud between him and the Lord that his repentance had not fully removed. Jesus knew Peter's heart condition was pure. Rather than belabor his former mistake, he let Peter know of the work he wanted him to do. By asking Peter to "feed my lambs" and "my sheep," Jesus is emphasizing that tending his flock, not fishing, was to now be Peter's occupation. (John 21:15-17) The Lord was reminding Peter that he had previously called him to be a "fisher of men." Knowing his heart to be still loyal and zealous, Jesus renewed that commission.—Matt. 4:19

Had Peter continued in the fishing business and neglected the Lord's sheep, his actions would have contradicted his reply. This would have been loving in word, but not in deed and in truth. We also are to learn the lesson of this experience. In harmony Jesus' words, let us leave worldly aims and ambitions behind and be heartily engaged, as Peter became, in ministering to the needs of the spirit-begotten sheep, our fellow brethren in Christ. —I Pet 4:10,11 ■