

## 212. The Gospel of John 21:19-25

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*Lessons in True Love-Part 6*  
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(3-5-23)

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We are going to complete our study in John's gospel this morning—as we finish looking at Chapter 21 and Jesus' restoration of Peter.

But as we have said numerous times—Jesus is restoring Peter by teaching him lessons in true love (the love of God).

These lessons should first and foremost be applied to our relationship with Jesus—but also to every other relationship in our Christian lives—including and especially to our relationship with our spouse in marriage.

**I. True Love is not Words—it's Commitment—v.1-14**

**II. True Love is not Feelings—it's Service—v.15-17**

**III. True Love is not Selfish—it's Sacrificial—v.18-19**

**IV. True Love doesn't Fade—it is Faithful to the End—v.18-19**

**John 21:18–19 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”**

Now before we actually get into these verses—let me summarize and encapsulate what we've already learned in this series on the subject of God's love.

God's love is a commitment He first made to us by Jesus going to the cross and dying for us so that we could be saved (the gospel is actually Jesus' proposal of marriage to the human race).

Our salvation is rooted in a commitment we then make to Him when we receive Jesus as our Savior (and Bridegroom)—a loving commitment that is demonstrated thru our devotion and service to Him.

Notice that Jesus made love the foundation upon which Peter's service was to be built (verses 15-17)—

**“Peter do you love Me?...Feed My lambs.”—v.15**

**“Peter do you love Me?...Tend My sheep.”—v.16**

**“Peter do you love Me?...Feed My sheep.”—v.17**

In other words, “Peter I want your service to be based on your love for Me—because loveless service is meaningless.” (Revelation 2:4)

Jesus is teaching Peter (and all Christians) that the obedience we offer to Him must be done out of a constraining love for Him if He’s going to accept it—because obedience without love is law which equals religion and not a relationship.

Also, (as we have already pointed out)—Peter didn’t use the word ‘agape’ (the Greek word for God’s love which is—deep, fervent, unconditional, and sacrificial) when answering the Lord’s question.

But rather used the word ‘phileo’ which is a lesser love—an affectionate, fondness kind of love. The question is—why didn’t Peter respond with the *higher* word for love (agape)?

I believe he wanted to use the word *agape* but couldn’t because he knew he blew it in denying the Lord, he knew his actions didn’t measure up to the level of agape love—so he was forced to use the lesser word ‘phileo’ to describe his love for Jesus.

And that was really what Jesus was trying to do in Peter’s heart—getting him to admit his love and devotion for Him was not as great as he (Peter) had pledged it was (“*Though these deny You, I will never deny You—I would die before I would ever deny You!*”)

Look, if you and I will humble ourselves to the point of honestly acknowledging that our love for Jesus isn’t what it ought to be, that it isn’t as great as we make it out to be—that’s exactly where the Lord wants us to be—honest with ourselves about where we stand in our relationship with Him!

Pride always goes before a fall (as Peter found out)—but if we will humble ourselves in the sight of God—He will lift us up and use us beyond anything we can hope or even imagine!

But listen—even though our love for Jesus isn’t perfect and even though our lives don’t always measure up (as Peter’s didn’t)—the fact that there is love in our hearts for Jesus, as imperfect and prone to failure as it is—is still a love He will honor and use (as a ‘starting point’).

And in time that love and faithfulness for Him will grow and develop—as it did in Peter where at the end of his life, he was able to say to Jesus, “*Yes Lord I agape You!*”

And how do we know that? Because Peter didn’t bail on Jesus even when he knew it would cost him his life—he hung in there and went to the cross and died for Jesus—which is the ultimate demonstration of God’s love:

**John 15:13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.**

It’s not *imperfect* love that keeps the Lord from using us—it’s the perception that our love for Jesus is *perfect* (that no one loves Him more than we do—like Peter thought)—that’s what hinders the Lord from using us.

In fact, let me say that I don’t believe a Christian ever reaches the level of agape love for the Lord—until He does use us. The reason I believe that is because, as I have witnessed in my own life and in the lives of others I have read about—it seems that *love* and *service* develop together over time.

But before He calls us into service, He wants us to acknowledge that our love for Him is imperfect demonstrated by our *disobedience*—and that even though our spirit is willing our flesh is weak.

You see, He doesn't want us to put confidence in our *own* strength but instead to rely completely on His strength to do the work He is calling us to—and then and only then will He use us.

Which means we need to humble ourselves, get on our knees and confess that our love for Him isn't all it should be—because that's where it all begins.

Everything in our walk with Him boils down to how much we love Him—*everything*.

And that's why, as we have said, when Jesus restored Peter in verses 15 thru 17, He didn't ask him: "*Simon, are you sorry for what you did? "Simon, will you promise never to do it again?" "Simon, have you learned your lesson?"*"

No, instead Jesus asked Peter 3 times if he *loved* Him—why? Because the kind of loyalty and obedience the Lord wants from us, He wants based on love not on legalistic duty.

And that's why the Lord needs to break us before He can use us—and He does so by letting our pride cause us to fall (as He did with Peter who thought his ministry for Jesus was over, not realizing that his greatest days of service for the Lord were yet future!).

A life of effective service for God always starts with the breaking of pride and self-confidence in our hearts.

And once He's broken us down—then He'll build us up in the Spirit and use us for His glory.

**James 4:8, 10 (NLT)**

<sup>8</sup> Come close to God, and God will come close to you...<sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

And what do we use as a gauge (like a gas gauge in a car to determine how full the gas tank is)—what do we use as a gauge to determine how full our heart is with love for Jesus?—OBEDIENCE.

As Jesus said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments...*" (John 14:15)—and I believe Jesus would also say, "*The greater your love for Me, the more you will keep My commandments.*"

**The greater our obedience to Him—the deeper our love for Him!**

Jesus went on in verse 17 to challenge even Peter's *affection* for Him ("*Are you fond of Me?*")—why?

Because Peter wasn't being obedient to what the Lord had commanded him to do—he wasn't *waiting* in Jerusalem—he was *fishing* in the Sea of Galilee!

We can't even say we're *fond* of Jesus if we're not willing to obey the *least* of His commands.

*Waiting* isn't a hard command to obey—but then again neither is coming to church to be with the people of God (Hebrews 10:24-25); or reading our Bibles in the morning to start our day (Matthew 4:4).

So, Jesus said to Peter, "*Peter do you love Me—if so then serve Me.*"—and He's saying the same to each of us.

One author cut it straight—

*“Agape love is Christ-centered, and others centered—not self-centered. You are not a true disciple of Jesus Christ if all you do is think about yourself and your problems and your needs. That’s a self-centered love, exactly opposite to the kind of love Jesus demonstrated on Calvary’s Cross when He proved His love for a world of fallen sinners by serving them to the point of death—even the death of the cross.”*

With all that in mind, it brings us to the final point of our outline—

#### **IV. True Love doesn’t Fade—it is Faithful to the End—v.18-19**

**John 21:18–19 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”**

When Jesus said to Peter, **“Follow Me”**—He was calling Peter to a lifelong commitment as one of His (Jesus’) disciples—a life that would end in martyrdom.

John tells us that Jesus was signifying the death that Peter was going to die for Him—that Peter’s arms would be stretched out and that he would die as did his Lord—by *crucifixion*.

Jesus is telling Peter—

*“When you were young (and in control of your life), you did whatever you wanted to do. But now Peter you are not the ‘master’ of your life anymore, you’ve turned control over to Me. And now I will lead you where your flesh doesn’t want to go—to a place that will bring Me the most glory. In other words, Peter, there is a cross in your future.”*

Tradition says, that when Peter was in Rome and was sentenced to death—that when the soldiers went to crucify him, he requested that he be crucified upside down because he said, *“I am not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as my Lord.”*

I can almost hear Peter saying, *“Now, I can say I agape You my Lord!”*

Jesus told Peter up front that he was going to be martyred for his faith—and Peter still committed his life to his Lord—no matter what it was going to cost him.

To be a disciple of Christ you’ve got to first *count* the cost—and then *commit* yourself to Him relinquishing all *control* of your life to Jesus—no matter what.

Are you willing to let the Lord Jesus have total control over your life—to do with your life whatever He wants to do, even if you don’t understand it at the time and even when your flesh doesn’t want to go somewhere or do something—yet because He’s your Lord (Master) you submit and obey His will—no matter what the cost?

That’s the mindset of a true Spirit-filled disciple manifesting a heart of true love.

A true disciple of Christ is a person who is following Jesus—so that wherever Jesus is, so is that disciple:

*“Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am...” (John 12:26-NLT)*

As a servant of God and a disciple of Christ—where He leads you must follow.

But understand, that He would never lead you into a bar or to smoke dope or lead you into looking at pornography or into adultery or fornication or to marry an unbeliever or to steal or lie or cheat—or anything else that violates His will as expressed in His Word!

No, in fact, the first place He will lead you is to the cross which is where you learn to die—die to self and live in absolute obedience and surrender to the will of God—a lesson even Jesus Himself had to learn:

**Hebrews 5:8–9 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

Jesus is saying to all of us who are His disciples—*“Follow Me to the cross—as the Father sent Me so I’m now sending you.”* (John 20:21)

The cross is more than an instrument of death—it’s a principle of life!

As Jesus said, *“Unless you take up your cross and deny yourself daily, you cannot be one of My disciples...”* (Luke 9:23-26)

**John 21:19 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, **“Follow Me.”**

Our Lord’s words, **“Follow Me!”** must have brought new joy to Peter’s heart—literally, Jesus said, *“Keep on following Me.”*

In other words, *“Peter, your ministry for Me isn’t over. You’ve fallen, now get up and keep following Me.”*

Immediately, Peter began to follow Jesus, just as he had done before his devastating fall—before his threefold denial of the Lord.

However, for a moment Peter took his eyes off of Jesus—why? Why did Peter turn away from his Lord and start to look back? Because he heard somebody *walking* behind him—the Apostle John who was also following Jesus:

**John 21:20–22 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” <sup>21</sup> Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what *about* this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? **You follow Me.**”

Why do we let another Christian’s walk cause us to take our eyes off of Jesus and stumble us?

Peter did a foolish thing and asked Jesus, **“What about this man?”**

In other words, *“Lord, you just told me how I’m going to suffer for Your sake—but what about John? If I have to suffer, he should have to suffer too-right?!”*

The Lord rebuked Peter and reminded him that, *“Peter, your job is to follow Me—not to worry about anyone else’s walk.”*

God has a unique plan for each of His disciple’s lives—a plan that the rest of us have no right to question or meddle in.

As Peter discovered when he stepped out of the boat to walk on the Sea of Galilee—whenever you get your eyes off of Jesus—you will begin to ‘sink’ in your walk!

The Christian life, like walking on water, is humanly impossible—it can only be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit—through faith (Galatians 2:20).

Peter could walk on the water because he had faith in Jesus’ word, *“Come.”* (Matthew 14:29)—

*“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”* (Rom. 10:17)—but when he took his eyes off of Jesus—he began to sink. As long as we keep our eyes upon Jesus, keep trusting in His word, and relying on His power (the power of the Holy Spirit within us)—we can do the impossible for God!

But the minute we get our eyes on ourselves or our circumstances or someone else’s walk with the Lord and take our eyes off of Jesus—we’ll begin to sink. That’s why Jesus scolded Peter when he got his eyes off of Him (Jesus) and on to John—

*“Peter didn’t you learn your lesson on the Sea of Galilee? Taking your eyes off of Me is the quickest way to sink in your walk and fail.”*

*“Looking unto Jesus”* should be the aim and practice of every believer (Hebrews 12:1–2)!

This does not mean, however, that we ignore others—because we do have the responsibility of caring for one another (Philippians 2:4).

God has a plan for our life (Ephesians 2:10), even as He has plans for the rest of His children’s lives—how He works in *their* lives is *His* business—*our* business is to follow Him as He leads us!

However, to the final point of our outline—Jesus is telling Peter that true love isn’t temporary, it doesn’t fade—it is faithful to the end.

As we pointed out last time, human love is limited and can diminish over time—but God’s love (agape) never diminishes, and it never quits on those He loves—as was demonstrated in that Jesus’ love didn’t quit on us when facing the cross—

**John 13:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

**“He loved them to the end”** means either *“to the last”* or *“utterly and completely.”*

John is telling us that Jesus loved us all the way to the cross—all the way to the completion of our *redemption* (to release a person from slavery by paying a price).

He didn’t just love us with words, and He didn’t just start the work of redemption only to stop short.

Jesus died to *finish* the work necessary to redeem His Bride and secure a place for her in heaven with Him for all eternity—He loved us to the end—to the end of His mission—which meant to the end of His life!

Husbands, God’s Word says that you represent Jesus in your marriage, and you need to “*die to self*” to finish the work you began when you promised her you would stay faithful to her and remain by her side in sickness and in health, in good times and bad, until death separates her from you—and wives the same goes for you.

That’s the work you need to continue till the end of your lives here on earth—the work of building a strong and God-honoring marriage—because true love doesn’t fade, it’s faithful to the end!

*“But pastor, it’s hard living with my spouse—it would simply be easier if I gave up on this marriage and divorced her (or him).”*

Well, all I can say is—thank God our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, didn’t feel that way and take the ‘*easy way out*’ by refusing to go to the cross and dying for His Bride.

Thank God He didn’t ‘*stop short*’—but loved us all the way to the end—by finishing the work of redeeming us on Calvary’s Cross where, before He bowed His head and dismissed His spirit—He said, “*It is finished.*” (John 19:30)

**John 21:21–23 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what *about* this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.” <sup>23</sup> **Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?”**

It’s amazing how people put words in Jesus’ mouth or in the mouth of God in general when they read His Word.

Don’t read into the Bible what you *want* it to say or what you think it *should* say—take from it exactly what God is *actually* saying.

This is how false teaching gets its start and cults are born—but also how many come to think that God can’t be trusted because He doesn’t keep His word.

When in reality it was a ‘promise’ they or some TV preacher put into the mouth of God and not something He actually said (the health and wealth gospel).

Let me say that, in a way, John did live until Jesus returned—he was transported into the future and from heaven saw the Tribulation Period, the Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom, and the beginning of the Eternal State—and wrote it all down for us in the Book of Revelation!

**John 21:24–25 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> **This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.** <sup>25</sup> **And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.**

It’s interesting that there are a lot of aspects of Jesus’ life (a lot of things He did and said) that weren’t recorded in the Bible, but then—how much truth does a person need to come to saving faith?

God gave us 66 books in the Bible consisting of 31,102 verses for a grand total of 783,137 words in the KJV of the Bible.

If a person reads every word in the Bible and still refuses to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior—it wouldn't matter if God gave them a thousand books, containing a million chapters totaling a billion words—they will never come to saving faith—because they really don't want to believe.

But if a person's heart is open all they really need is one verse to believe and be saved—

**John 3:16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

The theme of the whole Bible is *redemption* (Jesus shedding His blood for us that we might be saved)—which means the theme of the entire Bible is—the love of God!

Which begs the question, “How many times does God have to tell you He loves you before you believe Him?”

“How many times does Jesus have to die for you—before you surrender your life to Him as your loving Savior?”

Maybe you're hesitating because you don't want people to think you're nuts—one of those crazy ‘Bible-thumping Jesus freaks!’

One of the greatest hymns ever written on the subject of God's love was written by Frederick M. Lehman in 1917—it's called “*The Love of God.*”

*“The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell,  
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell,  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:  
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.  
When years of time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,  
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,  
God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong:  
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—the saints' and angels' song.”*

The final stanza was added to it later by a man the authorities had deemed crazy and sentenced to an insane asylum.

After he died, they found it scratched on the wall of his cell:

*“Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade—  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.”*

I believe that ‘crazy’ man was a Christian.

Would to God all Christians were that ‘crazy’—crazy in love with God!



The man who wrote that sounds pretty sane to me!

Who knows if he lived in a communist country where all Christians were considered 'crazy' and put in insane asylums.

All I do know is that—the sanest thing you can ever do is to receive God's loving gift of eternal life thru His Son Jesus Christ!

That is why John wrote his gospel—

**John 20:30–31 (NKJV)**

**<sup>30</sup> And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).