

JOHN 21:15-23
HOW CAN I EVER SERVE CHRIST AGAIN?
I HAVE DENIED MY FAITH!

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

“Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!’ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’”¹

Few of us realise how sinful we really are. If we actually knew how wicked we are, we would not be shocked when we fail morally, ethically, or even when we deny our faith. However, few of us really know the depth of our own depravity. Therefore, we are shocked, especially when we fall into serious sin. For all our good intentions as followers of Christ, it is disconcerting to discover how very easy it is for us to deny our Master and Saviour.

When we sin—and we do sin, often egregiously—we tend to imagine that we have forfeited any opportunity to have a successful and joyous Christian life. The devil, to say nothing of our own conscience, condemns us, accusing us of our failure and suggesting that we are no longer of any value to the cause of Christ. I want to encourage you who are Christians that when you sin, you have not forfeited your chance for a full Christian life. You must not imagine that you can continue sinning, but you should never think that your sin is so great that you are forever sidelined from serving the Master. The biblically appointed way to respond to sin is repentance and restoration. We learn this from the account of Peter’s failure in the hour of the Master’s greatest need, and through his repentance and restoration by the Risen Saviour.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

A BIG MAN'S BOAST AND FALL — Go back in your minds to one of the great confessions made concerning Jesus. It was great because it required courage and because it was based primarily upon what Jesus said about Himself. You will no doubt remember the setting when Jesus asked, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The disciples responded, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Jesus, perhaps wishing to draw the disciples out, pointedly asked, “But who do you say that I am?” It was at this point that Peter burst forth with his great confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” [MATTHEW 16:13-16].

This confession was the apex of Peter's walk with the Master before the crucifixion. Matters moved rapidly toward a finale after Jesus travelled to Jerusalem. It was during the Last Supper that Jesus issued a new commandment, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34, 35]. The command must have stimulated Peter to think of how much he loved Jesus, because when Jesus spoke of going away, Peter understood that He was speaking of His death. Wouldn't you think that such a lofty command coupled with such a serious statement of sacrifice such as this would humble the disciples? Rather than humbling him, Jesus' words seemed to goad Peter into making a fantastic assertion. We read that Peter boasted, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” [JOHN 13:37].

Jesus responded to Peter's avowal with a sobering prophecy. I cannot imagine that there was a hint of bemusement in Jesus' response to Peter, only sorrow that He needed to make such a negative statement concerning Peter's failure. “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied Me three times” [JOHN 13:38].

Apparently, Peter was sobered by Jesus' prophecy concerning him; he asked no further questions of the Master. Though Thomas [JOHN 14:5] and Philip [JOHN 14:8] questioned the Master after this, Peter was silent. Undoubtedly Peter was much like any of us would have been in that instance. Perhaps he was stunned at the negative aspect of Jesus' words. Likely he was thinking that Jesus was wrong. It is even conceivable that Peter was pouting at the thought that Jesus would have said such things about him, and publicly! He was almost assuredly defensive. “Jesus has no right to think that way about me. He should not have spoken that way in front of all the others about me. I will never deny Him; I'll show Him—and all the others as well.”

I have to think this to be an accurate assessment because the subject *did* come up again. The disciples, together with Jesus, had observed the Pascal Meal. Judas had departed to carry out his nefarious betrayal, after which Jesus had instituted what we know as the Lord's Supper. They had sung a hymn and they were walking to the Mount of Olives when Jesus said, “You will all fall away because of Me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” [MATTHEW 26:31]. At this point, Peter interrupted to say, “Though they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away” [MATTHEW 26:33].

Can't you just see the sweep of his hand as he indicates the remainder of the disciples, "Though they all fall away because of you," and the equally dramatic pointing to himself as he strikes a heroic pose, "I will *never* fall away?" I can only imagine that Peter emphasised the word "never." He was determined to present himself as different; Peter had a high estimate of his commitment to the Christ.

When the Master again warned, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" [MATTHEW 26:34], Peter grew adamant. "Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You" [MATTHEW 26:35], he protested! And this time, the entire band of disciples joined in protesting their allegiance to the Master. Luke informs us that Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail [see LUKE 22:31, 32]. A mature Christian would have heeded the warnings of the Master; yet, Peter continued insistent that his faith was sufficient; and in full confidence he went to his downfall.

Each of the Gospels tells us that Peter did deny the Master three times. Even as Jesus stood trial, Peter, warming himself by a fire in the courtyard of the high priest was denying Him, "I do not know Him ... I am not one of His disciples ... I do not know what you are talking about." Even as he spoke he heard a rooster crow, and "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" [LUKE 22:61].

Undoubtedly, you, as is true for me, have at some point failed miserably. You wanted to do what was right and to honour the Lord. You had every intention of standing bold in the face of opposition, but when the time to confess came, you were silent, or worse yet, you denied the Master. It may have been among your colleagues at work as they ridiculed righteousness or exalted wicked practises, and you were silent. Perhaps it was an opportunity to speak a word of encouragement to someone that was truly in need. You knew that you should speak, perhaps the Spirit of God was even prompting you to speak, but because you were afraid that you would appear judgemental you refrained from speaking. Perhaps there is something even more heinous—a dark blot, a grave sin against God and perhaps even against your fellow man.

Afterwards, you felt terrible; you doubted that God could love you. You wanted to just forget about trying to be a Christian because you knew you couldn't be godly. Peter, disheartened by his utter failure, gathered with the other disciples—he didn't know what else to do. So, he huddled with them, his emotions undoubtedly at the lowest ebb in his entire life. When the women came back with a report of angels and an empty tomb, Peter ran, together with John, to the tomb where he saw the stone rolled back from the entrance and the grave clothes lying on the niche inside the tomb. He witnessed the evidence of the resurrection, he saw the Risen Son of God, he heard Him speak and even received a blessing from this Living Saviour.

However, he no longer felt worthy to be a disciple, much less an Apostle. I know this to be the case because he was silent when the Master appeared to the disciples [see JOHN 20:19-29]; and finally, he decided to go fishing. I don't mean to imply that people who fish are unbelievers; however, Peter resigned from the ministry because he decided that he was no longer suited to "do the job." "I am going fishing," [JOHN 21:3] wasn't a statement about needing rest or needing a diversion—it was Peter's resignation as an Apostle so that he could go back to his former life.

There are some listening today who are ready to resign from being a disciple. “Where can I go to resign my appointment,” you wonder. “I tried, and I failed. I can’t seem to meet the standards that are expected of a Christian. I guess I should just quit trying.” If you think that way, you are in good company. That is precisely where Peter was after denying the Master.

I recall more than one occasion when speaking with people about salvation that I’ve heard, “I’d become a Christian, but I don’t think I can live the life.” I usually respond, “Well, of course you can’t live the life. You will fail, and on occasion you will fail miserably!” You see, at issue is not whether you will be a great Christian, but whether God accepts you.

Don’t you imagine that God knows your weakness and that He knew your weaknesses when He called you? Don’t you imagine that He knew you would fail long before you failed? And yet He called you and entrusted to you the gifts that He gave. Jesus knew Peter, and it is obvious that He knew Peter would fail long before Peter quailed before a little maid! Nevertheless, Jesus specifically called Peter and appointed him to be an Apostle!

Listen to this account of the call the Apostles received. Jesus “called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him” [MATTHEW 10:1-4].

More specifically, listen to the account of Peter’s call to be a disciple. “The next day John was standing there with two of his disciples. Gazing at Jesus as he walked by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ When John’s two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Jesus turned around and saw them following and said to them, ‘What do you want?’ So they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which is translated Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ Jesus answered, ‘Come and you will see.’ So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. Now it was about four o’clock in the afternoon.

“Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, ‘We have found the Messiah!’ (which is translated Christ). Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter)” [JOHN 1:35-42].

Despite knowing who he was, knowing his weakness, knowing that he would deny Him, Jesus chose Peter. In the same way, if you are a child of God you may be confident that the Son of God knows who you are and that He called you. He did not call you to remain as you were, but He called you for His own purpose and to the praise of His glory. If you have failed, it does not mean that your service is over. It does mean that you have opportunity to glorify Him as you renew your service before Him. Listen! A sheep may fall into the mud; but a sheep will never lie down in the mud. Perhaps you failed, but it does not mean that you are of no value to Him who loved you and gave Himself for you. He is well able to restore you when you have repented and returned to His service; and He appointed you to serve Him though He knows you.

REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION — Even at his lowest, Peter was a man with influence. When he announced his intention of quitting, he influenced others to join him in deserting his calling. We know that Thomas, Nathanael, John and James, in addition to two other disciples joined him. Six of the eleven disheartened Apostles joined Peter in deserting the call they had received. Impetuous Peter gave voice to what all were feeling. They had all fled, just as Jesus had predicted when He quoted Zechariah, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” [MARK 14:27]. However, they were neglecting the fact that He had continued by implying that they would be reunited and that He would precede them into Galilee.

Jesus’ method of restoration seems initially to be rather broad. The seven disciples were fishing, and apparently they had not caught their limit. A man appeared on the shore and asked if they had any fish [JOHN 21:5]. The question was innocuous; perhaps they thought that the man was seeking to buy some fish from them. In any case, they responded negatively to the question.

“Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some,” the stranger commanded [JOHN 21:6]. With nothing to lose, they threw the net to the right side; suddenly there were so many fish that they couldn’t haul in the net. When that happened, John, perhaps more spiritually perspicacious at this point spoke to Peter, undoubtedly speaking in awestruck tones: “It is the Lord!” Peter, impetuous as always, grabbed his cloak and dove into the sea and swam the hundred yards or so to the shore.

I imagine that he was silent as he surveyed the man who was on the shore; his impulsivity could only carry him so far. He did observe that the man had a charcoal fire burning with some fish laid on it. I suppose that he was grateful when the boat arrived at shore with the others. Peter hurried back onto the boat, grabbed the net and hauled it onto the shore by himself. Someone took time to count the fish—there were 153 of them. The disciples were all silent now, and the man offered, “Come and have breakfast.” Now, the seven men were convinced that this was the Lord. And it was the third time that He had revealed Himself to the disciples.

It is at this point that the narrative turns to Peter. I suppose that the other six men were still seated around the fire, or perhaps they stood. There was none of the old banter that had once marked them as a tightknit band of men who shared hardships. Now, they were in the presence of the Risen Son of God. What is there that could be said in His presence? Eventually, Jesus broke the silence to address Peter, perhaps first motioning Peter to step away from the others, though likely they were all within range of his voice. Whatever the case, John overheard the conversation and was able to recall it many years later.

“When they had finished breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?’

“‘Yes, Lord,’ he replied, ‘you know that I am your friend.’ ‘Then feed my lambs,’ returned Jesus.

“Then he said for the second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’

“‘Yes, Lord,’ returned Peter. ‘You know that I am your friend.’ ‘Then care for my sheep,’ replied Jesus.

“Then for the third time, Jesus spoke to him and said, ‘Simon, son of John, are you my friend?’ Peter was deeply hurt because Jesus’ third question to him was ‘Are you my friend?’, and he said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I am your friend!’ ‘Then feed my sheep,’ Jesus said to him.

“‘I tell you truly, Peter, that when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you liked, but when you are an old man, you are going to stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and take you where you do not want to go.’ (He said this to show the kind of death—by crucifixion—by which Peter was going to honour God.) Then Jesus said to him, ‘You must follow me.’”²

I should think that Peter’s heart skipped a beat when Jesus first addressed him, using the name by which he was known before he began his walk with Jesus—“Simon, son of John.” You remember that Jesus had previously changed his name to “Cephas,” which is translated as “Peter” [JOHN 1:42]. Jesus was naming him “Rock,” because he would be stalwart in crises. However, his human weakness had been exposed in the time of the ultimate crisis, and he had failed miserably. Jesus’ words were a reminder of his humanity. And though the question was motivated by love, it was calculated to hurt.

How is it that we modern Christians imagine that Jesus will never hold us accountable? We have no difficulty understanding that the physician who examines us when we have injured a joint will likely hurt us as he manipulates the digit or the limb to discover the extent of the injury; but we somehow react in anger at the thought that the Word of God will speak the truth when we have failed. We cannot hope to recover or to be restored if we do not understand the source of our weakness. And thus it was that Peter was being compelled to see that it was his reliance on his own strength that led him into certain failure in the day of trial.

Let me say with a heart of love that so long as you imagine that you are strong, you are susceptible to failure. This is the consistent warning of the Word. Have you never read the warning, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]? Again, the warning Paul issued matches his cautionary statement that those who stand by faith must not become proud, but rather fear [see ROMANS 11:20]. In yet another place, Paul warned, “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” [GALATIANS 6:1]. These warnings are akin to that which Peter penned when he wrote, “Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability” [2 PETER 3:17]. The Apostle of Love warned in his second letter, “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward” [2 JOHN 8]. These repeated warnings are a sobering reminder that our humanity is certain to fail in the day of trial. How humbling to realise the truth of the Proverb:

“If you faint in the day of adversity,
your strength is small.”

[PROVERBS 24:10]

² J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (Touchstone, New York, NY 1972); <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CP04John2.htm>, accessed 26 May 2010

Jesus confronted Peter at the point he had failed. “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” “Do you love Me? Is your love that sacrificial love that you have seen demonstrated in My own sacrifice? Is that the sort of love you have for Me?” Of course, Peter was incapable of making such a claim, just as we will find it impossible to make such a claim. Jesus was asking if Peter’s love approached that one hundred percent sort of love that the Master had demonstrated, and Peter was forced to respond that his was more of a fifty percent sort of love. Events had revealed the quality of his love for Jesus.

Peter has been greatly subdued by his own reaction to the challenge he had faced. He isn’t saying that he doesn’t love Jesus; he is only saying that it doesn’t even begin to approach the level he once thought he had attained. Before being tested and failing, Peter had boasted of his love; he had intimated that Jesus was mistaken in his cautious warning about Peter’s courage. There is no longer even a hint of that bravado; Peter is a chastened man.

Jesus asked a second time if Peter’s love was at that one hundred percent level, and Peter replied as he had the first time that he was at the fifty percent level. Undoubtedly the question hurt, and Peter was forced to confess his inability to approximate such love. His confession was in front of some of the very men who had heard his earlier boast.

The third time the Master asked Peter about the quality of his love, He came down to Peter’s level. It is as though the Master was saying, “Peter, I know you are incapable of coming up to the level of love I have for you; but, do you really love Me with even a fifty percent love?” Peter was grieved. The question was painful precisely because it compelled Peter to see his weakness. He no longer had any confidence in his own ability; if he is to love the Master, he will need the strength that only the Master can provide. Thus, Peter answered out of his sorrow, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I can muster only fifty percent love.”

When the Master responds to Peter’s words, it is as though He is saying, “All right, I can work with that, Peter.” Jesus is able to bring Peter’s limited love to the height that He requires. Make no mistake; we are called to the highest possible love for the Master and for His people. We may, if we labour at it, be able to generate fifty percent love for Him and for His people. However, He will work in our lives and bring us up to that level to which we are called.

Perhaps you are wondering at Jesus’ words. Perhaps you see them as hurtful, even cruel. He did ask Peter three times to defend his love for the Master. Undoubtedly, Peter was conscious of the others who witnessed his humility and it hurt him to be forced in front of these friends to admit his inabilities. Peter had denied the Master three times; now he had been compelled to admit on three separate occasions that he could only muster a fifty-percent love.

Think for just a moment. Had the Master not drawn Peter out publicly, the wound to his psyche would have continued to fester so that throughout the remainder of his days he—to say nothing of others—would have wondered about his call. He would have been marked as somehow inferior, even unworthy of the office to which he was appointed. No doubt he repented, weeping bitter tears [see LUKE 22:62], but now, the Master publicly restored him. Because of Jesus’ public action, Peter and the other disciples would know that his past was past and that the Master Himself commissioned him to further service.

This is the reason the Bible calls for public confession of sin. God is not bullying us; He seeks to openly restore us. God is not being cruel, though public confession is undoubtedly painful. Public confession puts an end to the failure we experienced so that we can again serve the Master just as He called us to do.

Peter did love Jesus; he was honest in attesting to his love. He did not, however, understand the weakness of the flesh and the awful power exerted by those of this dying world who stand in opposition to us. Don't be too harsh on Peter. When you failed and when I failed to stand firm in the face of adversity or opposition, we also discovered that our strength was indeed small. Though we had great intentions, we really had no strength. We had the desire, but we did not have the ability. Surely we discovered the truth of Jesus' words when He urged His disciples to pray. You recall that He said, "The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak" [MARK 14:38]. If the hatred of the world did not compel us to stand, we would fall repeatedly; however, the world does hate us. Those associated with this dying world do not want us even secretly to endeavour to follow the Master.

Moreover, because the Master does restore us when we fail, when we are restored, we will discover the truth of Jesus' promise to those who are His disciples. "I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" [MATTHEW 10:16-20].

OUR RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S RESTORATION — When Jesus compels us to face our weakness, we know that despite the pain we experience, nevertheless He loves us. My dad punished me when I disobeyed, and the punishment seemed severe at the time. However, I never doubted his love for me. I never saw him spank the neighbours, but he certainly spanked me. I heard more often than I can count, "Son, this hurts me more than it hurts you." I doubted the sincerity of that statement, until I had children of my own. Then, I knew the reality of those words. A parent punishes a child, not because he or she enjoys hurting the beloved child, but because the child is loved; the parent is moulding the character of the child through instilling discipline.

Perhaps you will recall a teaching concerning discipline that is written in the Word? "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” [HEBREWS 12:3-11].

The testing through which each of us passes—and in which we often fail—is discipline. It is not punishment, but it is discipline administered by the hand of a Father too wise to make a mistake and too good to needlessly hurt His child. The discipline we each receive must be seen as training necessary if we will achieve maturity and if we will stand firm in the face of adversity as we perform the several tasks that we are assigned.

Questioned by the Master, Peter was no longer willing to boast of his abilities or of his strength. He did, however, speak of Christ’s omniscience. “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” An appeal to Christ’s mercy, Peter’s confession at this point is actually a statement of confidence in the midst of his obvious discomfort at being questioned on such a delicate matter as his love for the Master. Perhaps Peter remembered the words Moses wrote to explain God’s basis for choosing Israel. “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of people, but it is because the LORD loves you” [DEUTERONOMY 7:7, 8a].

We know the assertion is true, because God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” [2 TIMOTHY 1:9]. In the same way, we may be confident that the Master knows everything about us, and yet He chose us. Christ chose you in spite of your weakness. He did not choose you because you were brighter than anyone else or because you are stronger than others. Christ chose you for His own purposes that He might display His glory through you when you stand complete in Him at His return. We are convinced that the Master is soon coming “to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:10], and that includes you, if you have believed in Him.

There is one final matter that I find to be vital for all who are believers. Peter had failed, and the Master restored him. It would have been mercy for the Master to say, “Peter, I forgive you. You may go home now. Do the best you can as a member of the congregation. You are indeed Mine, and I will never reject you. However, I cannot use you any longer. You can no longer be a leader.” But of course, that is not what happened. Jesus commanded the restored Apostle, “Feed My lambs ... Tend My sheep ... Feed My sheep.” Peter had been appointed an Apostle, and he had work to do. Jesus knew all that would happen before He appointed Peter. And Jesus knew all that would happen in your life long before you were ever called.

The sole prerequisite for serving Christ is love for Him. On the authority of God's Word, I caution you that your love is imperfect. However, if you have the desire to serve Him because He has redeemed you, then serve Him. If the requirement for serving Christ were moral perfection, none of us would ever serve. If the condition for serving Christ were an academic degree, or an overwhelming desire to "bring in the Kingdom of God," or the ability to raise vast sums of money, or the skill to build a great cathedral, many would never serve. However, the condition for serving the Master is that you love Him.

To you who are Christians, I remind you that that love will always be practical. It is not an emotion, nor does it get lost in a mystical experience. It is focused outward on the people for whom Christ died. This is the message we find in John's first letter: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" [1 JOHN 3:16-18].

To you who are outside of the love of Christ, God loves you. And the evidence of His love is that Christ died because of your sin so that you need not remain in darkness. You can walk in the light of God's love, you can know the forgiveness of sin. This is the promise of God. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." You have heard me often recite the verse that promises, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

I pray you know the love of God. I pray you receive the life that Christ freely offers. Amen.