

# Bible Studies about Peter

## Study 8: Christ's Forgiveness of Peter

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### Background

In our previous study on Peter, we looked at Peter and the resurrection of Christ. We will be referring back to our earlier studies on Peter here.

We begin now to look at a passage in Scripture to learn about Christ's forgiveness of Peter - and we will return to this passage again in a later study in the series. Later in this series we will look at the ministry of Peter and Peter's vision from God.

### The Message

To set the scene, let us remember Christ's prediction when he said to Peter that *"this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."*<sup>1</sup> And as we know, just as Christ had predicted, Peter did indeed disown him on **three** separate occasions. This poignant account continues later in Matthew where we read how immediately after the rooster crowed *"Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."*<sup>2</sup> It is important for us not to just leave this account at this point, because as we shall find out Peter was later reinstated by Jesus, as we read in John 21:15-19:

*"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.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt 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. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"*<sup>3</sup>

There are some important points to make about this text:

- Peter was asked **three** times by Jesus if he loved Him – equal to the number of times that Peter disowned Him;
- Jesus demands that Peter love him *"more than these"* (v. 15) because He has for him a special commission, which is threefold like the threefold denial and the threefold affirmation of a special love;
- In the first two times that Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, He uses the word *'agápē'* – referring to a love in which the entire personality, including the will, is involved – more simply a love founded in admiration, veneration, esteem. In the third and final time that Jesus asks, He uses the word *'philōō'* – referring to a

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:31-35

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:75

<sup>3</sup> John 21:15-19

spontaneous natural affection or fondness in which emotion plays a more prominent role than will - more simply a special form of friendship with unique intimacy, an inclination prompted by sense and emotion;

- Jesus would have known what was eventually in store for Peter<sup>4</sup>, and He may well have wanted Peter to understand the different types and depths of love. Also, Peter had a significant commission to fulfil as we learned in our previous study;
- Peter made no rash or impulsive replies, no pretensions of a superior love. He, through his earlier denials, had truly learned his lesson and came to Christ with a humble and repentant heart – a heart he asked Christ to look into: “*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.*” His love for Christ, and his willingness to serve Him – his heart for Christ, is something that Jesus must have seen from the moment he first called Peter;
- Christ’s forgiveness is all embracing. He already knew the answers to all of the questions he asked of Peter, and yet he used those questions to make statements of truth that set Peter free to realise who and what he could be in Christ. Peter needed to see for himself and have that revelation of wisdom and truth that only an encounter with the risen Christ can bring. We need to grasp hold of the extent of God’s grace and live it in our lives and be set free to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

## Questions

1. How would we answer if Jesus asked us “Do you (*agápē*) love me?” and “Do you (*philēō*) love me?”
2. With what attitude do we come before Christ? In humility with love and expectation? How should we prepare ourselves as we come before Christ?
3. Have we ever had a similar experience of experiencing grace in such a powerful way?

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<sup>4</sup> Peter would eventually be martyred with tradition indicating that he was crucified upside down