



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Restoration of Peter

John 21:15-19

December 3, 2006

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I. **The Fall of Peter**

- Before one can fully understand the restoration of Peter in John 21:15-19, he must first understand the nature of Peter's fall in John 18:15-18, 25-27 [and Luke 22:31-34].
- We read, in John 13:36-38, that after the Last Supper, Jesus predicts Peter's denial.
 - This is interesting, as the setting of the prophecy was at a time of great intimacy between Jesus and His disciples.
 - Jesus had just shared the Passover meal with His disciples. He washed their feet; and then, He predicted Peter's fall. It is as though Peter would go from the heights joy and intimacy with his Lord to the depths of despair in only a few hours.
 - How true this is for us today. As a former coach of mine used to say, 'All time highs are often followed by all time lows.'

- Yet, it is quite clear that, in a very real sense, **God ordained Peter's fall.**
 - Most certainly He did this do demonstrate Peter's weakness and dependence on God and God alone. However, this would only become clear after his restoration.
- The fall and the restoration were both ordained by God in order to show the powerful reconciling effects of the Work of Christ.
- In John 18:15-18, 25-27, the Evangelist records the fall of Peter, as he betrays Christ three times. Recall, this occurs as Jesus is being taken into the home of Annas for the beginning of His trials.
- Peter not only denies Christ **three times**; he does so as Christ is being led away to His trial and crucifixion *on Peter's behalf* (and on behalf of all of us who follow Him). Further, those to whom Peter denies Christ are not exactly 'intimidating types.' He first denies Christ to a young servant girl; secondly, to a group of slaves and officials who were warming themselves around a charcoal fire in the courtyard of the high priest; and, thirdly, to a slave of the high priest who was also a relative of Malchus (the one whose ear Peter cut off).
- Although it is easy to criticize and pass judgment on Peter, all Christians must realize that we have all sinned against God. Every one of us has 'fallen' in this respect; although, some sins are more public and 'frowned' upon.
- Furthermore, when we sin against someone else, we are still offending God, as all sin is ultimately an affront to, primarily, our holy God. Therefore, let us not think that Peter's sin [or ours] was unique.

II. The Restoration of Peter

- Before we can understand restoration, we must see it as a result of reconciliation – that, in Christ, we are reconciled to God. (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 1:19-22)

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Romans 5:10-11

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be

reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. **AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;** Eph. 2:14-17

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- Colossians 1:19-22

- Therefore, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our restoration when we sin [and Peter's as well] is based upon the finished work of Christ that brings about our reconciliation to God.
 - This is why the timing of Peter's restoration is so crucial: it had to happen **after Christ's death and resurrection.**
- Yet, the world will never understand this truth!
 - **Apart from Christ, there is NO true reconciliation or restoration.**
 - Before one can be restored, there must first be reconciliation; yet, as stated previously, in a non-Christian world this never happens. When someone sins against another person, the effects of that sin are permanent. **The relationship is never the same again; there is always that tension that did not exist before the offense.**
 - Also, it seems that every week, a prominent figure in this country falls from grace in some scandal. We either never hear of them again, or when we do, they are forever tainted, never to be seen in the same light as they were before they fell.
- Therefore, as all sin [even against our neighbor] is ultimately a sin against God, we will never be able to reconcile relationships and restore one another until we have first been reconciled to God!
- Now, as we examine Peter's restoration, it is essential that we understand that this passage is not simply for us when we sin against God and others; but also when we have been sinned against. We are called to restore others as Christ restored Peter [and restores us today]!

a. The Question

- John begins this section by stating, ‘So when they had finished breakfast...’
 - The seven disciples who when fishing have just finished breakfast with Jesus along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee).
- Then, Jesus asks Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’
 - First, we should note that this restoration of Peter is rather ‘public’, in the presence of his fellow disciples. This was important to also restore Peter, not only in the eyes of the LORD, but in the eyes of His fellow brothers. Leon Morris states, ‘There can be no doubt but that Peter was under a cloud with his fellows disciples after the denial.’
 - Secondly, Jesus’ question reflects the **primacy of love** for Christ.
 - In other words, **all that we do** is a direct function of **our love for Christ**.
 - It is no coincidence that Christ Himself says, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments.’ (John 14:15)
 - Furthermore, this reflects the ‘greatest commandment’: to Love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
 - Third, this first question of Jesus is phrased as a comparison of sorts, ‘Do you love me more than these?’
 - There are basically three ways that one can interpret this specific questions:
 - **‘Do you love me more than these things [i.e., the fishing equipment/gear]?’**
 - At first, this may sound strange, but one must remember that the fishing equipment represented Peter’s way of life as a fisherman. Without the gear, he could not fish and, therefore, could not make a living.
 - **‘Do you love me more than you love these disciples?’**
 - Not many commentators have taken Jesus’ words to mean this, as it does not fit with any of the themes of this book. However, this is still grammatically possible.

- Finally, it could mean, ‘**Do you love me more than these disciples do?**’
 - It seems that most believe that this is what Jesus is getting at, given that Peter has [before his fall] clearly expressed his superior devotion to his Lord (Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29; John 13:37; 15:12-13).
 - It is certainly possible that what Jesus is doing is saying, ‘Now that you have fallen, do you still maintain this exceeding love for me?’
- Yet, regardless of what, specifically Jesus’ question means, it is clear that the Lord is addressing the significance of love for Him. In other words, What is the supreme affection of Peter’s heart? Is it Christ and Christ **alone**?

**This is most certainly the question before all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ:
Where does our supreme affection lie?**

- Jesus asks twice more, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’
 - Once again, Jesus is emphasizing the significance of love for Him.
 - What is clear throughout the Gospel accounts is that Peter did not anticipate a crucified Christ. Further, Peter’s professed devotion to Christ occurred before the Lord’s crucifixion. However, Jesus was crucified. Therefore, the questions by Christ also serve to ask the question, ‘**Do you love me the way I actually am, or the way you want me to be?**’

b. The Answer

- Peter immediately answers Jesus’ question of ‘Peter do you love Me more than these’ with ‘**Yes Lord; You know that I love You.**’
- Notice, Peter does not answer Jesus’ question *exactly*. In other words, Peter does not address the point of comparison that Jesus does; rather, **Peter appeals to Christ’s knowledge.**
- It is as though Peter is saying, ‘Lord, you know my heart, and you know that I love you.’
- Such a response by Peter powerfully demonstrates that Peter knows a great deal about Jesus’ true identity.

- Note: Some preachers and commentators focus on the two different words for love in this passage; attempting to demonstrate that there is a degree of significance to be found in this; however, the two words *phileo* and *agapao* are often used interchangeably in this Gospel. Therefore, it is unlikely that such significance exists.

c. The Repetition

- John states that, after the third time Jesus questions Peter, ‘Do you love Me?’ ‘Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ However, it is certainly quite significant that Jesus questions Peter three times.
 - First of all, the repetition of Christ, no doubt providentially, leads to a profound confession by Peter: ‘Lord, **You know all things...**’
 - The first time Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, Jesus challenges primacy of Peter’s love for Christ [‘Do you love me *more than these?*’].
 - In this final response by Peter, the disciple confesses the superiority of Christ, in His knowledge of **all things**.
 - In other words, Peter is not simply saying, ‘Lord, you know that *I* love You.’; but, rather, ‘Lord, You know **all** things...You are all-knowing!’
 - Secondly, and most significantly, the three-fold repetition of Christ’s question corresponds to Peter’s three-fold denial of Christ.
 - In other words, although this may sound trivial, Jesus’ three-fold commissioning of Peter, ‘Tend My lambs...Shepherd My sheep...Tend My lambs,’ represents **complete restoration** of the disciple.
 - Unlike the world, **when God restores one of His children, He does so FULLY and COMPLETELY!** When God restores us, He does exactly what is needed.
 - Further, Christ does not simply restore Peter to a place of neutrality [as if nothing had ever happened], **He restores Him with a purpose.**
 - Once again, this kind of restoration is only possible through Christ’s work of reconciliation in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

d. The Command

- Following each of Peter’s responses, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love You,’ Christ commissions Peter to ‘Tend My sheep...Shepherd My flock...Tend My sheep.’

- ❑ What is clear is that LOVE for Christ is the condition each time Jesus commands Peter to ‘Tend My sheep.’ In other words, it is as though Jesus is saying, ‘If you love Me, *then* Tend My sheep.’
- ❑ Notice, that, with the command of Christ to Peter, than he ‘Tend My Sheep’ Jesus is not simply restoring Peter, but demonstrating a profound trust in him, for **the sheep are not Peter’s, but Christ’s!**
 - Shepherding is the most common image given for leadership and care in the church.
 - The image of a Shepherd caring for the people of God finds its roots in the Old Testament, where God is the Shepherd of His people (Psalm 23; 77:20; Ezekiel 34).
 - In the New Testament, it is clearly Jesus Christ who is the standard for shepherding, as He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:1, 26; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:24).
- ❑ As C.K. Barrett writes, ‘[Peter’s ministry] is described in verbs, not nouns: Tend, feed, not Be a pastor, hold the office of pastor. And the sheep are Christ’s sheep, not Peter’s. Not, Tend your flock, but Tend My sheep’ (Barrett, *Essays*, pp. 165-166).
 - In this passage, Christ is not establishing Peter as the primary shepherd of the Church; rather, Christ is commissioning Peter as *a* shepherd of the Church. When one compares Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 4:1-4, it becomes clear that the command to Peter is not exclusive to him; but, it is the command of God to all who are shepherds of Christ’s sheep.
 - D.A. Carson correctly writes, ‘Thus there is nothing intrinsic to the language of John 21:15-17 that suggests a distinctive authority for Peter. All Christian leadership entails a certain tension between authority and meek, exemplary service, patterned finally on Jesus Himself. In the context of the Fourth Gospel, these verses deal with Peter’s reinstatement to service, not with his elevation to primacy.’
- ❑ Yet, it must be acknowledged that the **primary means that God has given shepherds to feed and tend with is His Word.** For Christ, the Living Word, was the **exegesis**, the **explanation**, if you will, of the Father. Jesus was, primarily, a teacher.
 - The function of teaching is certainly clear in 1 Timothy 3, which explains the qualifications of elders and deacons.

The care, tending, feeding and protecting of the flock of God can only come through the faithful exposition of God’s Word, which necessarily includes a demonstration of its applicability to the lives of God’s people.

e. The Prophecy

- ❑ Immediately following Jesus’ three-fold restoration of Peter, Jesus says, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you

wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.’

- Interestingly, Jesus refers to Peter’s past.
 - As a youth, Peter had the strength to go wherever he wanted.
 - This may also refer to his ‘selfish’ will that he had before his encounter with Christ – he went where **he** wanted to go – not where he was led by Christ.
 - Such a reference to one’s past is not uncommon in Scripture. Paul certainly uses this technique; however, it does not end with a focus on the past, but on the present and future – ‘you were once like this...but now, in Christ, you are like this...’
 - Then, Jesus tells Peter, ‘when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.’
 - In the ancient world, the phrase, ‘stretch out your hands’ often referred to death by crucifixion.
 - Andreas Kostenberger writes, ‘The stretching occurred when a condemned man was tied to the horizontal crossbar, the *patibulum*, and compelled to carry his cross to the place of execution.
- In other words, Jesus is likely indicating the *type* of death Jesus will suffer.
 - This very real possibility is quite profound, in that, now that Peter has been restored and commissioned to the calling of a shepherd, Jesus is also, in the same ‘tone’ prophesying that Peter will suffer the same type of death Christ has already endured.
 - There seems to be no doubt that this is a privilege afforded to Peter by the Lord.
 - John also informs the reader that this type of death that Peter was called to suffer would ‘glorify God.’
 - For the believer, this is certainly the ultimate privilege; that not only in our lives, but even in our deaths, we bring glory to our God!
 - NOTE: Clement of Rome (AD 96) wrote that Peter was martyred; however, he does not say how (*1 Clement* 5:4). In AD 212, Tertullian stated that Peter was crucified.

- No doubt the glory given to God through Peter's death is because the death itself was the result of Peter's obedience to the Lord's commission.
 - Another truth worth noting is that Jesus' words fulfill his previous statement, in John 13:36: '[Peter] where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.'
- Jesus ends the restoration of Peter simply with the words, 'Follow Me.'
- This is certainly the call that Jesus has on all of our lives. We are to follow Him in obedience, just as Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father throughout His lifetime.
 - Yet, like Peter, we are not promised an easy life.
 - Amazingly, Peter lived the rest of his life – some three decades – in the shadow of the cross, with this prediction hanging over him, yet he did so joyfully!
 - We, too, are called to consider the cost of true discipleship, pick up our cross daily, and follow Christ.
 - Far from being promised a comfortable life, we are promised persecution; yet, we have a hope and joy that the world can never take away!
 - As Peter, himself wrote, in 1 Peter 4:14-16:

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

- ❖ From this point on, Peter no longer lives the life of a disciple who fell from grace; but, as a commissioned Apostle called to glorify God in his life and his death.