

"LOVEST THOU ME?"

In His last recorded exchange with the Apostle Peter, Jesus asked:

John 21:17a *He saith unto him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" [KJV]*

Jesus did not ask Peter: "How much do you love Me?" Nor: "Do you have enough love for Me?"

So it is in my own case: it is not a matter of respect or reverence for God. It is simply: Do I love the Lord Jesus? Either I love the Lord or I do not: there is no middle ground, no partial love.

And if I love Him, my aim and purpose in life is to do His commandments:

John 14:15 *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." [NRSV]*

In fact, the test of whether I love Him or not is my obedience to His commands:

John 14:21 *"Those who have my commands and obey them are the ones who love me, and my Father will love those who love me. I will love them and will reveal myself to them." [EXB]*

And there is a guarantee, which ensues from my obedience:

John 15:10 *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love." [NIV]*

Such is the great assurance of remaining well anchored in the love of the Almighty Creator, as Jesus Himself is.

At another time, Jesus had explained to the crowds that being with Him and in His love is a matter of priorities:

Luke 14:26 *"If any one doth come unto me, and doth not hate his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and yet even his own life, he is not able to be my disciple;" [YLT]*

Am I to take offense at this teaching of the Lord? And perhaps then join those disciples, who were offended when the Lord instructed them to "eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood." (**John 6:48–59**), so that:

John 6:66 *From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. [NKJV]*

No, I do not take offense, if I remember that:

John 4:24 *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." [NRSV]*

Therefore, I understand that the words of the Lord are to be understood and taken literally, certainly not lightly; rather spiritually — as always — but not carnally, as He taught us:

John 6:63b *"the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." [KJV]*

Thus, Jesus is not leading me to physical violence nor to physical suicide; rather to the recognition of the Apostle Paul that:

Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [ESV]*

For:

Romans 6:6 *We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. [NRSV]*

What the Lord does require — if I want to be His — is the spiritual death of my self and of my self-righteousness; He requires me to forgo the right to myself, the right to have my way and satisfy my lusts, that is: I want "it" now! (whatever or whomever "it" may be).

2 Timothy 2:11 *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; [ESV]*

He invites me to make Him the top priority of my life, second to none: neither relatives nor myself.

Luke 9:23 *Then He said to them all, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." [HCSB]*

So that my goal and satisfaction is in participating actively in making the will of God done on earth:

Matthew 6:10b *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." [NRSV]*

As I give up the love of self and let the love of the Lord fill my heart I shall be able — as a new creature in the spirit — to express His love to others.

And the divine love of the Lord is not like human love, for first of all it is the love that induced Him to offer His life that my sins may be atoned before the righteous judgment of the Almighty Creator.

John 10:17–18a *"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ^{18a}No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again."* [NRSV]

No one forced Christ to lay down His life; He did of His own will, which He had joined and made one with the will of the Father.

Once Christ is the One Whom I love, love — His love, that is — will manifest itself toward all others "father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters," and even my enemies:

Matthew 5:44–45 *"But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."* [NLT]

Hence, the fundamental question of my life is how do I answer the Lord's question: "Do you love Me?"

Do I answer as the Apostle Peter did?

John 21:17b *"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."* [NRSV]