

## **"Do I Love the Lord or Not?"**

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"Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Do you love Me?" [John 21:17](#).

THIS is a pointed question which demands a personal answer and should, therefore, stir up full and frequent self-examination. "Do you love Me?" It is a probing question that is likely to excite much grief when pressed home to the sensitive, tender-hearted disciple, even as Peter was grieved because the Lord said unto him the third time, "Do you love Me?" Yet it is a pleasing and profitable question to as many of us as can give a like solemn and satisfactory response to that of Simon Peter, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

I. IT IS VERY NECESSARY THAT ALL DISCIPLES, EVEN THE MOST PRIVILEGED, THE MOST TALENTED AND THE MOST FAMOUS, SHOULD OFTEN BE ASKED THE QUESTION—HEAR IT IN THEIR SOULS AND FEEL ITS THRILLING INTENSITY—"SIMON, SON OF JONAS, DO YOU LOVE ME?"

It must have been momentous, indeed, or the Savior would not have repeated it to Peter three times at one interview. He tarried on earth but 40 days after His Resurrection. The opportunities for conferences, therefore, with His disciples would be few. On what subjects, then, should He speak to them but those which appeared to Him of the weightiest import? Of the times or the seasons that must presently transpire, He refrains to divulge a secret. With the fulfillment of ancient predictions that prompted the curiosity of the Jew, or the solution of metaphysical problems that harassed the minds of Gentile philosophers, He did not meddle. I neither find Him interpreting obscure prophecy, nor expounding mystic Doctrine—but instead, thereof, I find Him inculcating personal piety! The question He propounds is of such vital importance that all other questions may be set aside till this one question is positively settled, "Do you love Me?"

Hence, Beloved, I infer that it is of infinitely more consequence for me to know that I love Christ than it is to know the meaning of the little horn, or the ten toes, or the four great beasts! All Scripture is profitable to those who have Grace to profit by it, but would you both save yourself and those who hear you, you must know Him and love Him to whom Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles all bear witness that there is salvation in none other, and no other name given under Heaven whereby we must be saved! You may whet your appetite for logic, but you cannot, with your heart, believe unto righteousness while you occupy your thoughts, your tongues, or your pens wrangling about Calvinism and Arminianism, sub-

lapsarianism and supra-lapsarianism, or any of the endless controversies of the schoolmen and sectarians! "Do you love Me?" that is the moot point! Can you give an affirmative answer? Will your conscience, your life, your God, attest the verity of your love to Him? Then, though you are no doctor of divinity, though you cannot decipher the niceties of systematic theology, though you are unable to rebut one in a thousand of the subtleties of the adversary, yet you have an unction from the Holy One! Your love approves you, your faith has saved you and He whom your soul loves will keep you for time and for eternity—you are blessed! To my mind, I say, the gravity of the question is palpable from the time at which it was put. During the few days of our risen Lord's sojourn, He would not have given it such distinct prominence had it not been, in Peter's case, the evidence of his repentance, his restoration and the full recognition he received.

But, Brothers and Sisters, what question can more closely appeal to ourselves, to each one of us? Love is one of the most vital of the Christian Graces. If faith is the eye of the soul, without which we cannot see our Lord savingly, surely love is the very heart of the soul and there is no spiritual life if love is absent! I will not say that love is the first Grace, for faith first discovers that Christ loves us, and then we love Him because He first loved us. Love may be second in order, but it is not second in importance. I may say of faith and love, that these are like two roes that are twins—or rather of faith,

and hope, and love, that these are three Divine sisters who mutually support one another—the health of one betokening the vigor of all, or the decline in one the weakness of all. "Do you love Me?" Why, the question means, Are you a Christian? Are you a disciple? Are you saved? For if any man love wife, or child, or house more than Christ, he is not worthy of Him. Christ must have from every one of His disciples, the heart's warmest affection! And where that is not freely accorded, depend upon it, there is no true faith and, consequently, no salvation, no spiritual life. On your answer to that question hangs your present state. Do you love Jesus? If the answer is, "No," then you are still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity! But if the truthful answer of your soul is, "You know all things; You know that I love You," then, weak as you are, you are a saved soul—and with all your mourning and trembling, your doubts and misgivings, the Spirit of God bears witness with your spirit that you are born from above! The sincerity of your love to Christ shows more plainly than anything, the verity of your relation to Him!

Oh, what searching of heart this question demands! Do not flatter yourselves with any false confidence. Many persons have been deceived upon this matter. Alas, they are partial judges who sit in judgment of themselves—for every defect they have an excuse—they find mitigating circumstances to whitewash their basest crimes. No marvel to me, but infinite pity for them that they choose their own delusions and become the dupes of their own infatuation! Their feelings, enhanced by the music of a hymn, or impassioned by the fervor of a sermon, they mistake for an inspiration of faith and love—and when the emotions pass

off, as they quickly do—they grow loud in their professions. At first their own hearts were deceived. At length they practice deception on others. O you church members! I beseech you, do not conclude that you are members of the invisible Church because you are members of the visible Church! Though your names may be inscribed on the roll of the faithful, here, do not be too sure that they are written in the Lamb's Book of Life! Never take your position before God for granted. Do not shrink from a rigid scrutiny as those who never dare ask the question! Do not disparage self-examination like those who dare to think it is the devil who sets them to the task when he would beset them with legal terrors! Believe me, Satan is too fond of lulling you into presumption to aid or abet in awakening you to make sure of your condition! There is a gross infatuation which is the counterfeit of faith in God. Its credulous victims believe a lie and they fondly cling to it like limpets to a rock. But sound Believers are not afraid of vigilant self-examination—they are prepared to endure an even more severe test—they say, "Search me, God, and try me." It is your hollow dissemblers who resent all questionings and take umbrage at any suspicions. The man who knows that he has pure gold to sell is not afraid of the chemicals with which the goldsmith tests it, nor even of the crucible into which he may cast it. Not so the impostor who hawks a baser metal—he entreats you to be satisfied with his warranty, though it is as worthless as his wares! Search yourselves! Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith! Prove yourselves! Know you not that Jesus Christ is in you, except you are reprobates?" By the cries of souls who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck, while they dreamed they were sailing gloriously into harbor—I beseech you make sure work for eternity and take care that your answer to the question, "Do you love Me," is well weighed, truthful and sincere—lest you should crash on the same reefs and be lost. Forever lost!

And, dear Friends, I am sure the more closely we examine ourselves, the more need for self-examination we shall discover. Can you not recollect much in the tone of your thoughts and the temper of your actions that might well lead you to suspect that you do not love Christ? If this is not so with all of you, I know it is so with me. Mournfully must I confess that when I look back upon my past service for my Master, I could wish to blot it out with tears of penitent compunction, so far as my share in it has been concerned! Wherein He has used me, let Him have all the glory, for to Him it belongs. His be the praise! For me there remains shame and confusion of face because of the coldness of my heart, the feebleness of my faith, the presumption with which I have trusted to my own understanding and the resistance I have offered to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Alas for the carnality of our minds, the worldliness of our projects and our forgetfulness of God in times of ease! It is strange to me if we have not all cause to mourn over delinquencies like these. And if it is so with those of us who still can honestly say that we know we love our Lord, what scruples, what perilous scruples might some of you entertain whose conduct, character and the tenor of your lives may well raise a graver question!

You imagine that you love Christ. Have you fed His lambs? Have you fed His sheep? Have you given that proof which our Savior imperatively requires of you? What are you doing for Him now? It is poor love that spends itself in professions and never comes to any practical result! Let this enquiry, then, pass round—

"What have I done for Him who died

To save my precious soul?"

Alas, then, if instead of having, like the beloved Persis, labored much in the Lord ([Rom 16:12](#)), might we not, some of us, suspect ourselves of having so acted as rather to dishonor His name? Are you not tenderly conscious that Christian people full often lend their sanction by a loose conversation and lax habits, to the sins which the world has allowed and applauded? Jerusalem becomes a Comforter to Sodom when those who call themselves people of God conform to the usages of society—and of such society as is corrupt to the core! They say, "Ah, you see, there is no harm in it, for the saints, themselves, indulge in it! They are of the same mind as we are! They make a great pretence, but to no great purpose, for they do as we do." God forgive us if we have opened the mouths of the Lord's enemies after this fashion! Surely such failures and such offenses make it necessary for us to ask whether we love the Lord or not! And though we may hesitate to answer the question, it is well to raise it, lest, closing our eyes in carnal security, we should go on to destruction! Let us put the question to ourselves again, and again, and again, for the question will not mar our faith, nor even mar our comfort, as long as we are able to fall back upon Peter's reply, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." And now, presuming that we are, all of us, convinced that the question is expedient and becoming, let me remark that—

## II. IT IS A QUESTION WHICH, WHEN RAISED, OFTEN CAUSES GRIEF.

Peter was "grieved," but the Lord Jesus Christ never grieved one of His disciples heedlessly. This goes again to prove the need of the question. He was rather for comforting, cheering and blessing them. He inflicted no needless pain. He shielded them from bootless anxiety. Yet Peter was grieved. Now why should you and I be grieved when the enquiry turns upon our sincerity? You know that if we do not canvass the matter, ourselves, our foes will be prompt enough to suspect us, especially if we are in a public position. The clearer your character, the keener the assault. Satan—and he is the accuser of the brethren—said, "Does Job serve God for nothing? Have You not set a hedge about him?" The devil's taunting question has become a proverb with the profane! What worse can they say of the Christian minister than this, "Is he zealous for nothing? Has he not a motive? Is there not selfishness in the background?" Base insinuations will, I suppose, be freely uttered about you whatever may be your position in the world. Of the tradesman who fears the Lord, they will say, "Of course, he makes it pay." As for the merchant who consecrates his wealth for the love of Christ, they ask, "Do not you see that he is seeking notoriety? Is it not

a cheap way of getting up a name?" We are sure to have the question raised. Sometimes it sorely grieves us because of our pride.

We do not like to have our feelings chafed in such a manner. I cannot help thinking there was some sin in Peter's grief. He was grieved as one who felt himself aggrieved—"Is it not too bad to ask me three times! Why should the Lord thus distress me? Surely the blessed Master might have put more confidence in me than to press a question which stings like a reproach." Yet what a poor simpleton he was to think so! How much harm comes from answering in a hurry? When our profession is canvassed, we ought not to be angry. Did we know our own hearts, we would keenly feel the accusations it would be reasonable to lay against us—and the poor defense that conscience could make! When my enemies are finding fault with me, and forging lies to injure me, I sometimes think to myself that though I can exonerate myself from their charges, there are other faults of which they are not cognizant that humble me before God beyond their utmost surmise! Their conspiracies cannot explore the secret of my confessions when I lay the imaginations of my heart before Him against whom only I have sinned. How dare we whisper into the ears of our fellow men the wish, the whim the like, or the hate that haunts one's breast, or anything of the multitude of vanities that float along the rapid current of one's mind! What would they think of us who do not know how rightly to think of themselves? Surely pride is put out of countenance, for the worst opinions our enemies can form of us are probably as good as we dare to entertain of ourselves, taking the evil of our hearts into consideration! The heart is a very sink of evil! If we have not perceived it, we have yet to discover it. The voice Ezekiel heard speaks to us—"Son of man, I show you greater abominations than these." Little charm you can find, because little cheer you can get out of these sermons which wither your vain conceit! But they are not the less profitable. You prefer the small still voice of a kindly promise, or the rich tones of a glorious prophecy—and then you congratulate yourselves upon the happy Sabbath you have spent! I am not quite so sure that your emotions are the truest test of your interests. Is that always the most wholesome food your children get which has most sugar in it? Do they never get surfeited with luxury till they need medicine? Is comfort always the choicest blessing we can crave? Alas,

we form so high an estimate of our estate, that to question whether we love the Lord Jesus Christ or not, lowers our dignity, annoys, vexes and sadly grieves us!

Not that pride is the only incentive. Shame crouches full often in the same obscure corner where pride nestles. Both alike are disturbed by a gleam of daylight. Peter must have felt, when he heard the question for the third time, "Do you love Me?" as if he could hear the cock crow again. He recollected the scene and circumstance of the dark betrayal hour. Does not the Lord remember my fear and my cowardice, the lies I told, the cursing and swearing I gave way to, and the paltry excuse that edged me on when the taunt of a poor silly maid was too much for an Apostle? Ah, she annoyed me, she irritated me, I was

conquered. I became a traitor, a blasphemer, almost an apostate. The tears, the bitter tears he wept on the morning of the crucifixion when Jesus looked upon him, welled up again from his heart into his eyes as the risen Lord looked into his face and made him conscious of how richly he deserved to be asked the question, "Do you love Me?" Yes, and like bitter memories may cover some of us with shame! Bitter as gall must the recollections be to some of you who have so backslidden as to publicly dishonor Christ. I do not want to say an unkind thing to you, but it is good, sometimes, to keep a wound open. The Bible tells of some sins God has freely forgiven and yet fully recorded. It is no marvel if we cannot forgive ourselves for having in any way brought dishonor and reproach upon the Cross of Christ. The grief is healthy. We sing—

"What anguish does that question stir, 'If you will also go?'"

But what deeper anguish may that other question stir, "Do you love Me?" Our cheeks may well mantle with a crimson blush when we remember what grave cause for suspicion we have given to our Lord!

Not that wounded pride and conscious shame are the only sensations. Perhaps fear distressed him. Peter may have thought to himself, Why does my Lord ask me three times? It may be I am deluded and that I do not love Him." Before his fall he would have said, "Lord, You know that I love You. How can You ask me? Have I not proved it? Did I not step down into the sea at Your beck and call? I will go through fire and water for You." But Simon, son of Jonas, had learned to be more sober and less loud in his protests. He had been tried. He had attempted to stand alone and he had proved his palpable weakness. He looks dubious, he seems hesitant, he feels scrupulous. He is alive to the fact that the Lord knows him better than he knows himself. Hence the diffidence with which he asserts his confidence—"You know all things; You know that I love You." A burned child is afraid of fire and a scalded child shudders at hot water. So a precocious Peter feels the peril of presumption. His timidity troubles him. He hesitates to give his word of honor. Distrust of self distresses him. He dreams his former downfall over and over again. The hypocrisy of his own heart horrifies him! What can he say? He answers the Accuser, or rather he appeals to the Appellant, "You know all things; You know that I love You." His previous guilt causes his present grief. Should like horrors haunt you, Friends, give no place to grievous misgivings! Do not encourage them. Go quickly to the Cross! Behold the crown of thorns! Fly at once, poor guilty Sinner, to the great Atonement which was made by the Lord upon the tree and let that fear be ended once and for all!

Not that it was all pride, or all shame, or all fear—I think there was also love in it. Peter did love his Master and, therefore, he did not like to have a doubt or a dark suspicion cast on his sincerity. Love is a very jealous emotion and keenly sensitive when questioned by those on whom it intensely dotes. "Why," Peter seems to say, "my Lord and Master, what would I not do for You? Though I was so false and so faithless in that hour of trial, yet I

know that I am true in the very bottom of my heart. My fall has not been a total one, nor a final one. There is in my soul, my Lord, a true, deep and honest love to You—I know there is." He could not bear to have that love questioned. What would the wife say if her husband should ask, "Do you love me?" And if, after she had given a fond assurance of affection, he should repeat the question solemnly, and with an earnest and a penetrating look—especially if she had done much to grieve him and to make him suspect her—I ask, what would she say? Oh, I can understand how her love at last would make her heart feel as if it must burst! With what earnestness she would exclaim, "Oh, my husband, if you could see my heart, you would see your name written there!" It is hard, even in the conjugal relationship, to have a suspicion cast upon your affection! Because of the tenacity of his love, Peter was grieved. Had he not loved Christ so ardently, he would not have felt the grief so acutely. Had he been a hypocrite, he might have fired with anger, but he would not have grieved after this fashion. I tell some of our dear young people who get into trouble and say they are afraid that they are hypocrites, that I never yet knew a hypocrite who said he was afraid he was one, and those who say that they are afraid they do not love Jesus and are

timid and trembling—though I do not commend them for their trembling—yet I have a much better hope of some of them than I have of others who are loud in their declarations and vehement in asserting, "Though all men forsake You, yet will not I." One is comforted to hear the confidence with which some of our young Brothers and Sisters can speak. Their warm expressions of love refresh us. Yet we cannot help feeling that they have got to be tried. Perhaps they will not be less confident in Christ when trial comes. They may be less confident in themselves and it is just possible that, though their voices may be quite as sweet, they will yet not be quite so loud. Years of trial and temptation—and especially any experience of backsliding—will pluck some of the feathers out of us and make us feel humble before the Lord. This grief of Peter, what a complex passion it was!

III. BUT IF IT HAS GRIEVED US TO HEAR THIS QUESTION, IT WILL BE VERY SWEET IF WE CAN TRULY GIVE THE ANSWER, "YOU KNOW ALL THINGS; YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU."

Surely the preacher need not say any more if the hearers would just say what is in their own hearts. Let the question go round. With all your imperfections and infirmities, your wanderings and backslidings, can you nevertheless declare that you do love the Lord? Can you join in that verse—

"You know I love You, dearest Lord, But, oh! I long to soar Far from the sphere of earthly joy, And learn to love You more?"

If you can say that you love Christ from your very heart, how happy you ought to be! That love of yours is only a drop from the fountain of His own everlasting love. It is a proof that He loved you before He made the earth. It is also a pledge that He always will love you when the heavens and the earth shall pass away. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor

life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus' hand is on you, or else your heart would not be on Him—and that hand will never relax its grip! He, Himself, has said it, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Now let your heart say, "What shall I do? What shall I render to Him whom I love?" And the Savior's answer to you will be, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." You know His "commandments," as to the holiness of your life, the nonconformity of your spirit to the world, your private communion with Him. You know His commandment concerning your profession of your faith by Baptism. You know His commandment, "This do you in remembrance of Me," as often as you break bread and take the cup of fellowship. You know His commandment, "Feed My lambs; feed My sheep." Remember this—"If you love Me, keep My commandments."

As for you who do not love my Lord and Master, what can I do but pray for you, that His great love may now overcome your ignorance and aversion—until, having first been loved of Him, you love Him in return? Jesus Christ would have you trust Him! Faith is the first Grace you need. Oh, come and depend upon Him who did hang upon the Cross! When you rest in Him, your soul is saved and, being saved, it shall become your constant joy to love Him who loved you and gave Himself for you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JOHN21.

Verses 1-3. After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed He, Himself There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called the Twin, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee and two other of His disciples. Simon Peter said unto them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We are also going with you. They could not do better. Idleness is the most injurious condition in which a man can be found. A preacher is much better occupied fishing than doing nothing!

3. They went forth, and immediately entered into a ship; and that night they caught nothing. Even Apostles may fish and catch nothing. Do not be discouraged, you who, when you are endeavoring to fish for souls, for many a day catch nothing.

4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Yet He was their old familiar Friend! Was it their unbelief? Let us hope not. Was it that a remarkable change had passed over

the Master—that, after His Resurrection from the dead, there was a glory about Him quite unusual, such as they had never seen before, except when they were with Him on the holy mount? Perhaps so.

5. Then Jesus said unto them, Children, have you any food? Just the kind of language you would expect from Him—to call them children, and to inquire even about their tem-

poral needs. For evermore the Lord had an eye to the temporal condition of the 12, as well as to their spiritual. "Have you any food?"

5, 6. They answered Him, No. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you will find some. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it in for the multitude of fishes. Christ knows where fishes are. He knows where you are, then, my Friend, though you do not, perhaps, know where you are yourself! You have got out of your own latitude, mentally and spiritually. You could not describe yourself, but Christ knows every minnow in the brook, and every fish in the lake, and knows where you are. Christ can bring fish where He wants them to be. He brought them into the net. Christ can bring souls into His net tonight. At His will, their will shall sweetly yield itself up, and they shall come into the net!

7. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his fisher's coat, (for he was naked). He was in his undress.

7, 8. And did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in the little boat, (for they were not far from land, but as it were, two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. It is all very well of Peter to be in such a hurry, but somebody must keep hold of the net. It is not always the most venturesome that is the most practical. We are glad to have some splendidly rash brethren, but we are equally glad that the rest are not quite so rash and are a little more prudent.

9. As soon, then, as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Christ had provided this. We are to catch fish as if we should have nothing to eat if we did not, but yet we are to depend upon Him as if we never caught a fish ourselves. Do everything as if you had to do everything—but trust in God as if you had to do nothing! The blending of these two will make a wise Believer. "They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread."

10. Jesus said unto them, Bring some of the fish which you have just caught. "I do not need it in order to entertain you, for I already have fish here. Still, bring it." Nothing is given in vain. Use it.

11. 12. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. And Jesus said unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples dared ask Him, Who are You? Knowing that it was the Lord. Inwardly conscious that it was Christ's habit to speak as He had spoken. Nobody could have caught His manner, and besides, what secret instinct enabled them to discern their meek and lowly Lord, even through the Glory which surrounded Him?

13, 14. Jesus then came and took the bread, and gave it to them and likewise the fish. This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. Count the visits of Christ. "This is now the third time." We ought to remember

Christ's visits to us so well and so thoroughly that we could tell how many times He has been with us. "This is now the third time."

15-17. So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me more than these? He said unto Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said unto him, Feed My lambs. He said to him, again, the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me? He said unto Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said unto him, feed My sheep. He said unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, 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 all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said unto him, Feed My sheep. Nobody can feed Christ's sheep unless they love Him, and when we love Christ, the most practical way of showing it is by taking care of His lambs—His little ones—and of all those that are His—His sheep. Love will teach us how to do it. Love will sign our commission and ordain us to the work. The Master went on to say—

18. Verily, verily, I say unto you, When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you shall be old, they shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you would not. Peter, you will have to be girded with an iron chain and taken off to prison—and taken off to a cross to die!

19. This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said unto him, Follow Me. That is your life business. Follow Me, even though you end, as I did, on a cross. Follow Me. I am a Shepherd. You must be a shepherd, too, and as the sheep follow you, so do you follow Me.

20, 21. Then Peter, turning about, seeing the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned on His breast at

supper, and said, Lord, who is he that betrays You? Peter seeing him, said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? What about this man?

22. Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? Follow Me. We ought not to be curious about the future of anybody. We must not be inquiring into what is not revealed! And what the Savior said on this occasion was misunderstood—if the words of Jesus, even when He spoke them—were misunderstood so as to become the foundation of a false tradition, you may judge how little value can ever be put upon tradition in the Church!

23. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die, but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? The Word of God is to be trusted—not tradi-tion—for in the handing of a message from mouth to mouth, it generally varies. It sometimes loses its very essential spirit, and sometimes may be made to say the very reverse of what was said. Stick to the Word of God—and leave the traditions alone!

24. 25. This is the disciple which testifies of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. Such a full life—so pregnant with meaning—so active, and all its activity so intensely real and spiritual, that to write a life of Christ is an impossibility! And though there have been many very admirable "lives of Christ" in our time, I recommend you to keep to one which is the best of them all—and that one is written by four Inspired authors—the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the best life of Christ out of sight! All others must be but mere helps to the understanding of these four.