

VITAL QUESTIONS

Study 1

To Whom Shall We Go?



John 6

The Bible asks many questions. If you read carefully, you will find that very many of them have great importance. So much can depend upon finding the answer to them. In this series of lessons we are going to consider four questions which relate to the Christian life. It is surprising that often a bold statement fails to touch us, whereas a question makes us think. An answer must be given, and so we search within ourselves for a positive response. The questions we are going to study can be very searching for all who are seeking to follow the Lord Jesus.

The circumstances surrounding this first question are worth noticing In **John chapter 6**. The Lord Jesus has been teaching the people around Him and you will find that the things which He says arise out of the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Because He had provided so many with food they were impressed by His power and so they wanted to make Him king. (**verse 15**) The Lord Jesus would not be influenced by this sudden impulse, so He withdrew. He never allowed men to divert Him from His plans.

In the greater part of this chapter, the Lord Jesus spoke repeatedly about how He could satisfy men's deepest spiritual needs. Read **verses 51-71** carefully. You find in **verse 60** that many who followed Jesus found His sayings offensive and hard to accept. The most difficult thing to them was the way in which the Lord Jesus claimed equality with the Father. They heard Him claim this many times and bitter was the hatred it aroused in the Jews towards Him as **Chapter 10: 31-33** makes clear. To the religious leaders He was guilty of blasphemy and therefore should be stoned. To follow Christ was to cut across the current trends of the Pharisees' opinions and demands.

Let us first ask why many went away from Him. (**verse 66**) Three clear reasons can be given: -

1. The **CLAIMS** of the Lord Jesus were not acceptable.
2. The **COST** of following was becoming too great.
3. His **COMPANY** was not welcome to them - they did not want to be seen with Him.

As people listened to the words of Jesus it was evident that He **CLAIMED** He had been sent by God into the world - as He said, "**He who comes down from Heaven**". (**verse 33**) He was obviously more than just a prophet or great teacher. He could say that the words which He spoke were spirit and life. Therefore He claimed from them faith, loyalty and obedience. To refuse to accept Him and His Word was to miss eternal life. **John chapter 6**, makes this clear. To many, therefore, this was too decisive to be acceptable. The **COST** was too great.

As John unfolds his account of Christ's life he makes it clear that the hostility of the Pharisees was not only directed against Jesus but against those who followed Him as well. (**See John 9: 22**) The peril of associating with a rejected teacher and Saviour could mean being thrown out of the synagogue. So it was that for many the Lord Jesus became the unwanted one - His **COMPANY** was unwelcome.

This gives us the background to the question that was presented to the twelve, "**Do you also want to go away?**" (**6: 67**) There is great sadness in it. Remember that, although Peter gave a positive answer, the time was not far off when the disciples would forsake Him in His hour of suffering and run for their lives. What would your answer have been? Would you have continued to follow?

In **verse 66** we read that many just turned their backs upon Him and went away because they were evidently not true believers. This must have made the Lord Jesus feel sad. It is His desire, that people should love Him and follow Him. Turning to the twelve chosen disciples, He said to them, "**Do you also want to go away?**" (**verse 67**) Peter immediately gives his answer, "**To whom shall we go - You have the words of eternal life.**" (**verse 68**) How warm hearted this answer is. I think it is so wonderful that Peter was ready to speak as he did. His answer contained both a question and a wonderful statement.

We now notice why Peter felt that he could not leave the Lord Jesus. "**To whom shall we go - You have the words of eternal life**" In other words, Peter said that if they left the Lord Jesus, they would give up all that was worthwhile. No one else could give them eternal life! I am sure that Peter could remember that meeting with the Lord when we read that he left all and followed Him, **Luke 5: 11**. Was it worth it? Peter's words say, 'Yes', and he was willing to go on following.

"**To whom shall we go?**" In this brief sentence we begin to analyse our reasons for loyalty to Christ when many would leave Him and go away. What values can be found in Him and no one else? Let us say clearly that all **SPIRITUAL** blessings are found in Him and these are indispensable to true Christian living. He gives **PARDON** - the forgiveness of sins. (**Ephesians 1: 7**) The problem of our own sinfulness is the greatest we have. No one can rid us of it for we are all in the same state. Only the Sinless Saviour, who died at Calvary because of our sin, is able to answer the problem and speak to us the word of pardon and forgiveness. This is the greatest release we can find.

He gives **PEACE** - the sense of security and calm, **Matthew 11: 28; Philippians 4: 6-7**. In a disturbed and dangerous society with its pressure and noise, it is in the Lord Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace', that we can find true quiet and calm. He stills the storms and speaks the Word of peace. Nowhere else can we find this.

He gives **POWER** - ability to conquer sin and wrongdoing, **Romans 6: 14**. Ingrained in our natures and habits is the

fact that that we despise and hate. They have grown up with us. Like chains they bind us. When we know Christ dwelling within us, we find the possibilities of victory. He can speak the word of power.

He gives every **PROVISION** - satisfaction and joy are in Him. (**Philippians 4: 19**) Not in earthly pleasures can true joy be found. These change like the weather and soon pass away. Christ gives joy that abides.

"You have the words of eternal life" - a worthy answer. Make sure you do not go away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Study 2

Who Shall Separate Us From the Love of Christ?

Read

Romans 8: 28-39

The question we look at now is completely different from our first study. The whole idea of that question was linked to the danger of turning away from the Lord Jesus - of letting Him down and refusing to be true to Him. As young Christians, maybe, it is easy to lose our first keenness for Christ and begin to cool off and return to our old ways of life. I hope, as we studied that question together, the challenge of it registered with you.

This question looks at things from a different angle altogether. It is not the idea of my loyalty to the Lord, but of His faithfulness and love to me. I think you must realise, right at the outset, that the whole approach is different. We are now looking at Christ's love and we are seeking to measure its strength and depth.

Love has been described as the strongest force the world knows. When everything else fails, love prevails and continues. Yet in society today, ideas of love are often warped and very far from reality. With prevalent trends of permissiveness people substitute lust for love. Tragedies of unfaithfulness and failure follow. Broken homes and broken hearts are evidence of the wrong values often termed as love. We only have to listen to some of the songs that are sung about love, with the sentimentalities, to find out the slants that the world gives to love. Yet all of us long to love and be loved. And we want most of all to be encircled in a love that never fails. There is only one way we can find this - we must go to the source, **"God is Love."** (**1 John 4: 16**) In Christ alone this pure love is expressed to us and we are asking in this question how powerful is it? We have already established the fact that we can be unfaithful in our love to Christ. Will He be unfaithful to us? As Paul asks the question, he supplies a very ready answer. He says, **"I am persuaded."** He is absolutely sure **"that NOTHING... shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus"**. Is this true?

1. It is true because of the **SINCERITY** of Christ's love. All love is not sincere - is not real. Some people will say they love us and make a lot of promises and protests. They say that they will love at all costs and forever. Words flow from them - until they have to prove their love with deeds. Then the picture changes and they let us down. How best can we know that Christ's love is real? **"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son..."** (**1 John 4: 10**) The fact that the Lord Jesus was willing to give His life for us - even when we did not love Him - gives the proof of absolute sincerity. Having proved His love to this

extent, once we accept it, nothing can separate us from it. **"I have loved you with an everlasting love."** (**Jeremiah 31: 3**) This is God's word and it is definite and real. Love's sincerity was proved by Christ's sacrifice - at the Cross.

2. It is true, also, because of the **STRENGTH** of Christ's love. Often we form friendships in life and the bond of love becomes very strong. Then suddenly we have to separate, and with the distance love begins to dwindle. 'Out of sight, out of mind'. Events prove that the bond of love was not very strong. The love of the Lord Jesus will never be like that. Having proved the sincerity of His love by going all the way to Calvary for us He will also prove just how strong His love is by never letting us go, once we are His. I believe the Lord Jesus can become a real friend to us in life, **"a friend who sticks closer than a brother"**. (**Proverbs 18: 24**) Read these verses in **Romans** again and see how Paul looks at so many things that **COULD** separate - yet he knew that these things never **WOULD** separate from Christ's love.

3. We shall find how true this love is by the **SATISFACTION** it gives to us. When friends and family fail us and let us down, and when we become downcast, discouraged and sad - the Lord Jesus, in His love, will draw nearer to us and we shall find joy and strength in this wonderful love. So often we tire of people we thought we loved - we cease to find joy in their company. Then we cool toward them. The bond of friendship is broken. Let us realise that the more we get to know the love of the Lord Jesus, the more joy and satisfaction we shall find in Him. (**1 John 4: 16-19**) We can rest in His love.

We can give a positive answer to this question, **"Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"**. To be loved in this way is the greatest security that we can have. As long as God is there we are His. Only in Heaven shall we really be able to know what such love really means. **"For 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (**Romans 8: 38 & 39**)

Study 3

Shall We Continue in Sin?

Read

Romans 6: 1-14

To be a Christian is a very wonderful thing! There is nothing in the world that compares with it. True life really begins when the Lord Jesus is received as Saviour and Lord. It is good to remember that the beginning of a Christian life is so simple. We come with our sins to the Lord Jesus - the Saviour. We confess that He bore our sins at the Cross. We repent - turn away from our sins and all that our sinful past meant. We simply accept the promise of the Lord Jesus not to cast us out, but to forgive us our sins. (**John 6: 37**) We believe - we are saved. (**Acts 16: 31**) Could anything be more definite than this? I hope, by the way, that this is your position as you continue these studies.

But is this the end of sin and sinning? I soon found in my Christian life that it was not the end. In fact, I am sure that I learnt more about the meaning of sin after I became a Christian, than before. Perhaps you feel that this is strange. Surely there must be a difference. Of course there is - a

vital difference - as we shall see from our lesson. One thing I think we can learn, right at the outset, is that a Christian comes to look at sin from God's stand-point. This makes all the difference to our sense of values, and makes it possible to learn God's attitude and His answer to sin and its effect on our lives.

Consider the serious **PROBLEM** that our question sets, "*shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" (*verse 1*) Paul was faced with a situation which could have proved disastrous to the whole effect of Christian testimony. His opponents were suggesting that God had been gracious in forgiving the sins of those who believed in Jesus. This was grace indeed. See **Romans 5**. Therefore the more we sinned the more the grace of God would be seen. It would abound. This promoted a policy of careless moral life which allowed sin. Think through its consequences. What if you lived in this way? We can almost feel Paul shudder as he said, "*certainly not!*" - no way can this be. From this point he goes on to deal in a logical way with the very real problem of sin in Christian living. Remember that for you there can be no real peace or happiness until you settle it for yourself.

The first step in finding a definite answer to the problem is 'to recognise the **POSSIBILITY** of sinning, even though we are saved. To think that we are beyond doing wrong - some teach that we can attain to 'sinless perfection' - is to live in a world of dreams. If you read **Romans 7: 19** Paul talks of the wretched conflict that raged within him as he faced the possibilities of temptation and sin. He wants to do good - he fails. He would avoid evil - he falls and does wrong. Have you ever felt like this? Yet we must not give up and live defeated lives! Think of David, the great king of Israel and Judah. He was a true man of God. But there came a time in his life, after a tragic fall into awful sin, when he said, "*I have sinned*". (**2 Samuel 12: 13**) There are others we could name. In fact, there was only one man with whom there was no possibility of sin at all. It was the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember - He **COULD NOT SIN**. He was the Son of God.

It is essential that we face the **POSITION** we, as Christians, must adopt towards sin. Look at **Romans 6** again more closely. **Verse 2** says, "*we who died to sin*". Then in **verse 11**, "*reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin*". I want you to think of this carefully. It seems to make it very clear that a Christian **NEED NOT SIN**. Although we have the tendencies within us to respond to temptation, when we face the urge to sin, we should reckon we died to sin, when we trusted our lives to Christ. This chapter teaches that when a Christian is baptised, and goes down into the waters of baptism, he confesses that the old sinful nature is dead and buried with Christ. (**verses 3-4**) This is something else that we should consider carefully. Have you been baptised? You see, coming up out of the water, is linked with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. You come up to walk in "*newness of life*". (**verse 4**) Therefore, a Christian **SHOULD NOT SIN**. This answers our question clearly. It does something else. It puts great emphasis on baptism as a responsible testimony to others that the believer in Christ is identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. He is **DEAD TO SIN**.

We can be glad that there is a **POSITIVE** answer to the **PROBLEM** of sinning - it is the **POWER** of the risen Saviour. Wrong thoughts, wrong words, wrong actions, need not dominate. "**SIN SHALL NOT HAVE dominion over you**". (**Romans 6: 14**) Note how definite this is. Underline it in your Bible! This teaches us that what we cannot do in

our own strength the Lord Jesus will empower us to do. There is **VICTORY** through Him. "**Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**" (**1 Corinthians 15: 57; Romans 7: 25**) This introduces us to the twofold effect of the Sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. Because we were guilty before God, He paid the **PENALTY** of sin that we might be forgiven. But, because we are weak and cannot in ourselves master sin, He broke its **POWER** and He's set us **FREE**. "**Shall we continue in sin? NO**" says Paul. 'Definitely not.' Lay hold on this wonderful fact that, because Christ has triumphed and is alive, sin **NEED** not, **SHALL** not, **MUST** not triumph. We must win.

Do you say, 'What if I fall and commit sin - is there a remedy?' Yes, thank God, there is. **John**, in his first letter, tells us two things. **1 John 1: 9** teaches that confession of sin brings forgiveness. "**He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**". Someone has said that we need to keep short accounts with God. Unconfessed sin will rob us of **POWER** and **PEACE**. It will also make us more vulnerable to sinning again. The second fact that John teaches us in **1 John 2: 1** is, "*if anyone sins we have an ADVOCATE with the Father; Jesus Christ the righteous*". He represents us before God and pleads our cause with Him. He understands and restores us when we fall.

Study 4 Why are You So Fearful?

Read Mark 4: 35-41; Hebrews 13: 1-6

The Question we now study came from the Lord Jesus and was addressed to the disciples. It would seem that He did not expect them to be afraid. I always think when I look at this incident, that the Lord felt that to know He was there in the boat should have been enough to keep the disciples calm. We must agree that they need not have panicked as they did.

Things were going well as they all set sail together. The Lord Jesus was there - the boat was in good order - the sea was calm. Perhaps a storm was the very last thing they expected. While the disciples manned the ship, Jesus went down into the stern and was soon sound asleep. Again, I often think that had no storm arisen, they would not even have missed Him. But the storm did arise. Often on the Sea of Galilee this sort of thing happened, as it was noted for sudden, violent storms. It must certainly have been a violent one that day. The disciples were terrified, unable to cope with the wind and the waves. Where was the Lord? This was their first thought in danger, and they found Him fast asleep. Wonderful that He could sleep through the storm. He soon proved to them that He was Master of the winds and waves. There was a great calm. It was then that He asked them the question, "**Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?**" (**Mark 4: 40**) Notice it was a question of **FEAR** or **FAITH**.

Let us ask the question now, 'In our lives, **WHICH** really operates - **FEAR** or **FAITH**'? We can think of at least three factors in life which cause us to be afraid:

There is the **UNEXPECTED** - those happenings for which we cannot plan because we do not expect them. Tragedies are seldom announced beforehand. The storm on the lake took the disciples by surprise. Experienced fishermen as they were, they were unprepared for this one. But by the way they spoke to the Lord it was evident that they

expected Him to be prepared. Our vision is so limited and we cannot even see one hour ahead of us. So it is that we fear the future and are so often shattered by events which break in to the ordered course of our lives.

Then there is the **UNCONTROLLED** - happenings and conditions which are beyond us. We are not big enough or sufficient to cope. It is terrible that in our society today there are so many young people who are unable to cope with life. They drown their sorrows in drink or try to increase the kicks by drugs. Many just opt out and commit suicide. The uncontrolled power of trouble very often causes us to be afraid.

Thirdly, there is the **UNEXPLAINABLE** - happenings which come to us. How many sad people whose lives have been suddenly touched by tragedy say, 'WHY'? - 'Why did this happen to me'? There is no real answer. Many adopt a fatalistic attitude yet underneath they are desperately afraid.

ARE YOU FEARFUL - What makes you most afraid? What about FAITH? When you think of the Lord Jesus and His mighty power, you need not be afraid. Although the storm raged and He was asleep, He had not forgotten the disciples. He expected them to trust Him. And today, in all the problems of life, if we know Him as Saviour and belong to Him, He expects us to trust Him at all times.

Let us now answer the factors of FEAR with FAITH.

1. FAITH in Christ means that we need not fear the unexpected in life. If our lives are in His care, He knows the future and nothing that happens to us will take Him by surprise. Even the best of friends we make in life cannot give us assurance as to those things which may happen. They can share companionship in the present, but give little comfort for the future. Their knowledge is limited. How different with the Lord - He can give hope and comfort for the future because all is absolutely known to Him. The Psalmist 'knew something' about this when he said, "**My times are in Your hand**". (*Psalm 31: 15*) Job also said in the experience of sufferings that were his, "**He knows the way that I take**". (*Job 23: 10*) This is wonderful. The Christian trusts in a God who knows everything.

2. FAITH in Christ means that He takes control - we need not FEAR that things will ever get out of control. Notice how quietly He took control of the storm. One word, and the winds and the waves obeyed Him. It is so good to feel His mighty power in our weakness, giving us the sense of security and strength. Let us remember that nothing ever takes God by surprise. *Psalm 121* speaks of Him as the God who neither slumbers nor sleeps. When life becomes strained and pressures threaten to crush us, **FAITH** can say with absolute assurance, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**". (*Philippians 4: 13*) But we must be ready at all times for Him to be in absolute control.

3. But **FAITH** in Christ also means that, even when we cannot understand WHY things happen to us, we can always leave things in His hands. He never makes a mistake. *Romans 8: 28* makes it very clear that God is working only for the good of those who are called according to His purpose - that is, those whose lives are entrusted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Just listen again to those disciples as they sought to waken the Master, "**Do you not care that we are perishing**"? (*Mark 4: 38*) they say. They could not explain His seeming indifference. Why could it be that

He slept? We panic often when we cannot explain the tragedies of life. **FAITH** in Christ brings to us His word of **PEACE**. Thus the storm is stilled and there is a great calm.

Why are you fearful? Look again at the question. I think the Saviour was a bit disappointed that they panicked. Let us make sure that we cancel out our **FEARS** with a definite **FAITH** in the Lord. Someone has said that Faith knows God and therefore God honours faith. There we end the study of these four vital questions.

Questions

Study 1

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

1. Why did the people want to make Jesus king after He had fed the 5,000?
2. To whom did the Lord Jesus say. "**Do you also want to go away**"?
3. Give reasons why many went away from the Lord.
4. What did Peter say that the Lord Jesus had that made him want to still follow Him?
5. Give in detail what you think to be the most important reason for following the Lord Jesus.

Study 2

WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?

1. Comment on this statement, 'Love is the strongest force in the world.'
2. In what way was the love of the Lord Jesus most fully proved to us?
3. 'Out of sight, out of mind'. Give spiritual reasons why this is not true of the relationship between the Lord Jesus and those who belong to Him.
4. (a) What can separate the Christian from the love of God?
(b) What cannot separate the Christian from the love of God?
5. What shall we find as we get to know more of the love of Christ? What Scripture proves this?

Study 3

SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN?

1. What did the Lord Jesus do with our sins when He died on the Cross?
2. Why did Paul say in *Romans 7: 24* that he was a wretched man?
3. Comment on this statement - 'it is still possible for a Christian to sin'.
4. In your own words tell what Paul says about baptism in *Romans 6*.
5. How can a Christian get the victory over sin?

Study 4

WHY ARE YOU SO FEARFUL?

1. Why was the Lord Jesus able to sleep during the storm?
2. The Lord Jesus knows all about the future. What can this mean to us as Christians?
3. Why could the Lord Jesus speak to the winds and waves and they obeyed Him?
4. How do we know that the Lord Jesus expected the disciples to trust Him, even though the storm came?
5. Give, in your own words, the main difference between fear and faith.