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Do You Love Me?

John 21.15-19

Series: Signs of Life

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I. **The Awkward Question**

- A. Don, do you love your wife? (X3)
- B. It's an awkward question, isn't it?
 - 1. The kind of question one might ask in the pastor's study, or in a couple's living room
 - a. The kind of question that is more appropriate in private
 - 2. But to ask it in the presence of 350 of Don and Eleanore's closest friends – it's awkward
 - 3. The fact that I asked it twice gives the impression that I didn't believe his answer the first time
 - a. And the fact that I asked it a third time – that really makes it even more uncomfortable
- C. One of the things you can always expect Jesus to do is to do the unexpected
 - 1. Jesus is always full of surprises
 - a. And they're not always pleasant surprises
- D. Remember – Jesus had encountered seven disciples after his resurrection on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius (Sea of Galilee)
 - 1. He had appeared to them in Jerusalem twice
 - a. Had directed them to go to Galilee and wait for Him there
 - 2. They had gone to Galilee
 - a. And rather than twiddling their thumbs waiting for Jesus, they went fishing
 - b. They had been out fishing all night, caught nothing
 - 3. Jesus shows up on the shore – they were about 100 yards off
 - a. He calls out, "Do you have any fish?"
 - b. They said, "No!"
 - c. He yells and tells them to throw the net on the other side of the boat
 - d. Silly suggestion to a bunch of fishermen
 - e. But they do it
 - f. And 153 fish jump into the net
 - g. And they realize it's Jesus!
 - 4. They race to the shore
 - a. Peter leading the way, jumping into the water, half swimming, half trudging his way through the shallow water
 - b. The others gathering the fish and bringing the boat

5. And Jesus is preparing breakfast for them
 - a. He's got some fish on the fire already
 - b. They bring some of what they'd caught
 - c. And they have a grand time having a fish fry for breakfast
- E. And then Jesus does the unexpected
 1. Amid the frivolity and fellowship, perhaps in a moment when there is a lull in the conversation
 2. John 21:15–17 (ESV) —
 - a. 15 ... Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”
 - b. He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”
 - c. He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”
 - d. 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
 - e. He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”
 - f. He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”
 - g. 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”
 - h. Peter was grieved 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.”
 - i. Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.
- F. That changes the mood, doesn't it?
 1. Awkward
 - a. A most personal, intimate question
 - b. In front of the other disciples
- G. But Jesus has unfinished business with Peter
 1. And it's worth the awkwardness of the occasion
 2. Jesus needs to heal a wound
 - a. And in order to heal the wound, He needs to open it
- H. Doctors and nurses are acquainted with wounds that need to be opened in order to be healed
 1. Some wounds need to be opened and debrided; cleaned out of extraneous and infectious matter
 2. But the wound won't heal unless it's opened
 3. Both of my children, when they were younger (teenagers), had a kind of wound that needed to be opened, cleaned and packed with antibiotics
 - a. And left open
 - b. It had to heal from the inside out
 4. So Jesus had to open a wound in order for it to be healed
 5. I like what John Piper says: The fastest way to the heart is through a wound.
- I. And you know what the wound is
 1. The wound is the tripartite denial that Peter expressed the night Jesus was arrested

- a. The denial which took place after Peter had sworn that he would never desert Jesus
 - b. The tripartite denial which Jesus predicted would take place before the rooster crowed
 - c. The denial which culminated just at the time Jesus was brought out of the high priest's house, when Jesus looked right at Peter
 - d. The look which dissolved Peter into tears as he ran off into the darkness
- J. That wound is unmistakable to Peter
- 1. Because the interrogation of Jesus was also tripartite
 - 2. "You were with Him, weren't you?" "I don't know the man."
 - a. Do you love me?
 - 3. "You're a Galilean. You were with Jesus." "No, I wasn't."
 - a. Do you love me?
 - 4. "Yes! I've seen you with Him!" "Man, I do not know who you're talking about!"
 - a. Do you love me?
- K. Jesus needs to open the wound to heal it
- 1. Because he needs to restore Peter
 - a. Restore him to usefulness
 - b. Restore him to ministry
 - c. Restore him even to leadership
 - 2. As awkward as it is, that's why it needs to be done in public
 - a. The disciples need to witness it
 - b. And know how such wounds may be healed
 - 3. Because who knows, maybe they will find themselves needing to have wounds healed like that
- L. What does Peter learn from this tripartite inquiry?
- 1. What principle does he derive that would bring healing to transgression?
 - 2. What do all the disciples learn vicariously as they witness this interrogation?
- M. They learn that the overriding principle in all aspects of the Christian life is simply, "Do you love Jesus?"
- 1. There are many virtues in living the Christian life
 - a. Many noble acts
 - b. Many valuable responsibilities to fulfill
 - c. Many habits of the heart that demonstrate fidelity to the Savior
 - 2. But they all pale in comparison to this one question
 - a. Do you love Jesus?

II. Peter's Relationship with Jesus

- A. How many laudable characteristics defined Peter's walk with the Lord
- B. Longevity – Had been a disciple for a long time
 - 1. Matthew 4:17–18 (ESV) —
 - a. 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

- b. 18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.
 2. One of the first acts of Jesus’ ministry was the selection of disciples
 - a. Simon was one of the very first
 - b. No one had been a Christian any longer than Peter
 3. To be a disciple meant leaving everything and following the Rabbi in a peripatetic ministry
 4. **Mark 10:28** (ESV) — 28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”
 - a. Peter had spent Jesus’ entire earthly ministry with his Rabbi
 - b. He had been walking with Jesus longer than nearly anyone
 5. After all that, you’d think that Jesus would be able to take for granted Peter’s love
 6. Don and Eleanore have been married for a long time
 - a. Many of you have been married for a really long time
 - b. And you’d think, just on that basis, you could take for grant that a husband loves his wife
 7. When I first began my ministry I looked up much more to the seasoned saints – to those who had been walking with Jesus for decades
 - a. There were others who were younger, who were more vocal, more enthusiastic, more energetic in their faith
 - b. But I wanted to emulate those who were in it for the long haul
 - c. Who had been through the tough times
 - d. Who had weathered the storms of life
 - e. Who had continued to be with Jesus
 - f. In this church, I’m surrounded by a bunch of people who fit that description
 8. Longevity in relationship with Jesus is an incredibly important and valuable asset
 - a. But this question – **“Do you love Me?”** – transcends the length of time you’ve been a disciple
 - b. Not just a question for the new convert
 9. Jesus: “I don’t care how long you’ve been following me. Length of service does not exempt you from this insistent probing. This is always a relevant question.”
 - a. “Do you love me?”
- C. **Leadership** – Was the chief apostle
 1. There were disciples, and then there were apostles; leaders of the fledgling church
 2. **Matthew 10:2** (ESV) — 2 The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother...
 3. Peter – 156 times

- a. Andrew – 13 times
 - b. Matthew – 5 times
 - c. James – 29 times
 - d. John – 14 times (not counting gospel allusions)
 - e. Philip – 19 times
 - f. Thomas – 11 times
 - g. Peter – 156 times
4. Peter was an apostle, one of the 12 most important members of this new band of followers
 - a. But he was also the leader of the apostles, their spokesman; the point-man
 5. How do you know if you are a leader?
 - a. Well, look behind you
 - b. You know if you are a leader if, when you turn around, there are people behind you
 - c. Peter always had people behind him
 - d. Peter always had people who were willing to follow him
 6. Peter was even a leader when he was going in the wrong direction
 - a. Direction is irrelevant; you're a leader if someone follows
 - b. May be a good leader or bad leader, but you're still a leader
 - c. Peter was the leader of the apostles
 7. If Peter was not just an apostle, but the chief of apostles, you'd think that he'd be the one guy Jesus wouldn't have to ask about his love for Jesus
 - a. Jesus could take for granted the love of the greatest apostle
 8. We are blessed in this church to have a significant number of spiritually qualified leaders
 - a. Men and women
 - b. Who can lead other men and women
 - c. Who can discern the leading of the Lord
 - d. Who can engage, and motivate, move others toward God-ordained goals
 9. Your position as a leader in the church does not exempt you from that probing question – “Do you love Me?”
 - a. Spurgeon: Our names may be in the list of religious leaders and yet they may not be written in the Lamb's Book of Life.
 10. Leader – Jesus asks, “Do you love Me?”
- D. **Experience of Glory**
1. Peter had experienced first-hand the glory of Christ
 2. **Luke 5:1–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.
 - b. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land.

- c. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
 - d. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”
 - e. 5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”
 - f. 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.
 - g. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.
 - h. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.
 - i. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”
3. Peter and the fishermen are cleaning their nets after spending all night fishing and catching nothing
- a. Jesus comes along and says, “Let’s go fishing”
 - b. Peter complains, but relents: “If you say so, we’ll go”
 - c. All the while thinking, “I’ll show Jesus that He really doesn’t know much about fishing; after all, I’m the professional fisherman.”
 - d. Catch more fish than they can handle
 - e. Peter: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”
 - f. He had encountered the glory of Christ
4. **Luke 8:22–25** (ESV) —
- a. 22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.”
 - b. So they set out, 23 and as they sailed he fell asleep.
 - c. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger.
 - d. 24 And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.
 - e. 25 He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”
5. Crossing the Sea of Galilee
- a. Peter had done this hundreds of times; he knew how to command a boat
 - b. Storm came up quickly
 - c. Boat was taking on water
 - d. Disciples are desperately bailing, trying to avoid sinking
 - e. Jesus is asleep!
 - f. Disciples wake Him up
 - g. He rebuked the wind and the waves; they stopped; became calm!
(1) “Where’s your faith?”
 - h. Disciple’s response: “Who is this, who commands even the wind and the water, and they obey?”

- i. Peter experienced the glory of Christ
- 6. **Matthew 17:1–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
 - b. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.
 - c. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.
 - d. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”
 - e. 5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”
 - f. 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.
 - g. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”
 - h. 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.
- 7. On Mt Tabor probably
 - a. Jesus’ was transfigured before their eyes
 - b. Face like the sun
 - c. Garments white as light
 - d. Conversation with Moses’ and Elijah
 - (1) Two of the greatest OT personalities
 - e. Bright cloud overshadowed them – Shekinah glory
 - f. Father’s audible voice: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him.”
- 8. What an amazing experience!
 - a. One of the great privileges of all earthly saints
 - b. Only three in the history of the church have had that specific experience
- 9. You’d think that with all those experiences of the glory of Christ, the issue of Peter’s love for Jesus would have been settled once and for all
 - a. But it’s possible to be in love with the experience and not love the person
 - b. Jesus: “You’ve had unbelievable experiences with Me, but that does not exempt you from my insistent probing
 - c. **“Do you love Me?”**
- 10. Some have more extraordinary experiences with Christ than others
 - a. Some are given to having remarkable experiences with the HS
 - b. Palpable, immediate sense of His presence and power
 - c. Transformative experiences – life-changing
 - d. Like Paul, who speaks of being taken up to the third heaven, and

witnessing things that are unspeakable

11. Jesus comes to you who have experienced such privileges and says, “I need to know: Do you love Me?”

E. **Doctrinal orthodoxy**

1. Disciple = student
2. Normally, seminary is a three year program
 - a. Peter spent three years in seminary
 - b. The best seminary that has ever existed
3. Three years in the school of Christ
 - a. Not just a class or two
 - b. Eat, drink, sleep theology
4. Not just any school; not just the best seminary
 - a. With the greatest teacher ever
 - b. Wrote the textbook!
5. Peter even passed the mid-term exam
6. **Matthew 16:13–19** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”
 - b. 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”
 - c. 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”
 - d. 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 - e. 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.
 - f. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
 - g. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
7. In the shadows of crass paganism
 - a. Jesus: “Who do men say that I am?”
 - (1) Answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets
 - (2) That answer would yield an F
 - b. “Who do you say that I am?”
 - (1) Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”
 - c. Jesus: “You get an A!”
 - d. You didn’t figure that out by yourself
 - e. Only God could have revealed that to you
 - f. You must have done your homework; read the textbook
8. Peter is under-rated as a NT theologian
9. **1 Peter 1:1–12** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of

- the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
- b. 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:
 - c. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.
 - d. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
 - e. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
 - f. 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,
 - g. 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
 - h. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,
 - i. 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - j. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him.
 - k. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,
 - l. 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
 - m. 10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully,
 - n. 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.
 - o. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven,
 - p. things into which angels long to look.
10. In those twelve verses, Peter ties together...
- a. Election
 - b. Omniscience
 - c. Sanctification
 - d. Atonement
 - e. Regeneration
 - f. Resurrection
 - g. Heaven and eternal life
 - h. Perseverance, preservation of the saints
 - i. Tribulation
 - j. Second coming
 - k. Justification by faith

- l. Scripture – OT prophecy
 - m. Trinity
 - 11. We think of Paul as the theologian of the church par excellence
 - a. But Peter was right behind him
 - 12. Peter had his theology together
 - a. But that didn't exempt him from Jesus' insistent probing
 - b. Jesus: "Theology is important, even crucial. But even that is not the most important thing. Right theology does not exempt you from the question – "
 - c. "Do you love Me?"
 - d. I'm the last person to diminish the importance of theology; but without love of Christ you take your seminary degree with you and put it up in your office in hell
 - e. Satan is a better theologian than you and I will ever be this side of heaven
 - f. **James 2:19** (NASB95) — 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.
 - g. Demons knew who Jesus was before almost anyone
 - 13. Theologian, Do you love Me?
- F. Zeal
 - 1. Peter was zealous without peer
 - 2. **John 18:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)
 - b. Peter was the one who cut off the high priest's servant's ear when Jesus was being arrested
 - c. None of the other disciples had the hutzpa to do that
 - 3. **Luke 22:33** (ESV) — 33 Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."
 - a. Peter was the one who said "I will lay down my life for You"
 - 4. **Mark 10:28** (ESV) — 28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."
 - a. Peter was among those who said, "We've laid it all out there. We've left nothing on the table. We gave it all."
 - 5. You'd think that for someone with such passion, such zeal, that the question of his love for Jesus would taken for granted
 - a. But even zeal and passion does not exempt anyone from Jesus' insistent probing, "Do you love Me?"
 - 6. **1 Corinthians 13:3** (ESV) — 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
- G. None of these things exempt us from Jesus' probing question – "Do you love Me?"
 - 1. Length of time, longevity in ministry
 - 2. Leadership in the church

3. Extraordinary experiences and privileges
 4. Theological orthodoxy
 5. Zeal and passion
- H. If He asks that question of Peter, why wouldn't He ask that question of any one of us
1. None of us can compare with
 - a. Peter's length and intensity of time as follower of Christ
 - b. Peter's position of leadership
 - c. Peter's experiences with Christ
 - d. Peter's theological insight
 - e. Peter's zeal and passion

III. Peter's Future Ministry

A. Dependence on Love

1. Peter's future ministry depends on his love for Jesus
2. Jesus doesn't simply leave Peter's answer alone; He provides an instruction, an admonition
3. **John 21:15–17** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 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." He said to him, **"Feed my lambs."**
 - b. 16 He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, **"Tend my sheep."**
 - c. 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, 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 everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, **"Feed my sheep."**
4. Peter's future ministry depends on his love for Jesus

B. Expression of Love

1. Would be nice for all of us to sit around and talk about our wonderful love for the Savior
2. But our love for Jesus needs to find expression
 - a. Not just in words, but in deeds
 - b. Jesus: "Do you love Me?"
 - c. Peter: "You know I love you."
 - d. Jesus: "Feed my sheep." ("Get to work.")
3. Jesus says, "If you love me, – get to work"
 - a. If you don't love me, all the work in the world will be worth nothing
 - b. But if you do love me – get to work
 - c. As you are able
 - d. According to the gifts the Spirit of God supplies
 - e. Get to work

4. This is the time of the year when we talk to people about serving
 - a. On boards, on committees
 - b. In ministries
5. Because if you love Jesus – He calls you into ministry
 - a. For Peter – feed the sheep
 - b. All of you – not just the clergy; not just the preachers
 - c. But only if you love Jesus
6. **“Do you love Me?”**
 - a. Then get to work
 - b. Your love needs to find expression

C. **Destiny of Love**

1. **John 21:18–19** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”
 - b. 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)
 - c. And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”
2. Peter’s love for Jesus, and his expression of that love, had a destiny
 - a. He would die for Jesus
 - b. Peter would be crucified
 - c. Tradition – he would be crucified upside down
 - d. Because he did not want to pretend to be too much like Christ
3. Key issue – he would **Glorify God**
 - a. That’s where his love for Jesus would take him
 - b. “This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.”
 - c. That would be his destiny
4. And glorifying God is the destiny all of us will share
 - a. Even if we’re not crucified
 - b. If we love Jesus
 - c. And if our love finds expression

IV. **The Critical Virtue**

- A. Love of Jesus is the critical virtue in the Christian life
 1. With it, everything becomes redemptive
 2. Without it, everything is worthless
- B. Interesting play on words in this episode
 1. Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love Me?”
 - a. **Love = agapao (agape)**
 - b. Peculiar to the NT
 - c. Love of God
 - d. Sacrificial love; self-giving love
 - e. Strongest word for biblical, Christian love in the Bible

2. Peter responds, "You know that I love you."
 - a. But that love is different
 - b. Love = phileo
 - c. Like Philadelphia – city of brotherly love
 - d. Phileo – brotherly love
 - e. Love of affection
 - f. Love in which we experience mutual satisfaction in relationship
 - g. Not as strong a word as agapao
3. Jesus asks a second time, "Do you love Me?"
 - a. Again – agapao
4. Peter, again, "You know that I love you."
 - a. Again – phileo
 - b. "I love you Jesus – but not like that"
5. Then Jesus asks the third time, "Do you love Me?"
 - a. But this time, He says phileo
 - b. "I know, Peter. I know you love Me."
 - c. "You may not love Me in the strongest possible way; in the most God-driven expression."
 - d. "It may not be agapao. It may be phileo. And that's ok."
 - e. But your love will grow
6. When Jesus asks me that question, "Do you love Me?"
 - a. I say, "Not nearly enough."
 - b. But by the grace of God, I pray that my love for Him will grow
- C. Jesus comes to each one of us and says, "Do you love Me?"
 1. Do you?
 2. Do you love Him enough?
 3. Do you love Him at all?
 4. Simply, do you love Him?

Benediction

Ephesians 6:23–24 (ESV) —

23 Peace be to the brothers,
and love with faith,
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ
with love incorruptible.