

***Simon Peter:
The Disciple Who Walked On
The Water With Feet Of Clay***



Hosted by the Southaven Church of Christ
Southaven, Mississippi

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Lectureship Director

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Dedication

It is with great gladness that we dedicate this lectureship book to Garland Elkins. For over fifty years, he has faithfully and fervently preached the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). The Southaven congregation has the distinguished honor of being able to list brother Elkins among those who have served as her preacher. Also, as most know, the Power Lectures began during his tenure at Southaven. The two volumes co-edited by him and Thomas B. Warren, **The Providence of God** and **The Minor Prophets**, are classics treasured by preachers and members alike. Although we can never repay the debt that we owe brother Elkins, we hope that this volume expresses the love and appreciation that we have for him and for his work in the kingdom of our Lord.

My first acquaintance with brother Elkins was when I was a student at the Memphis School of Preaching between the years of 1987-89. Although brother Elkins did not join the MSOP faculty until after my departure, we all knew who he was. In fact, virtually everyone in the brotherhood knew who he was. After all, he was the preacher who had three years earlier pelted Phil Donahue with Scripture. At one point during the show, Donahue sarcastically said, "I bet the preacher has a Scripture for that," and brother Elkins did (Matt. 4; 1 Pet. 3:15). Although Donahue was used to getting the best of people on his show, he did not get the best of brother Elkins. Brother Elkins ably defended the church and its disciplinary actions at Collinsville, Oklahoma (Phil. 1:7; Phil. 1:17; 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:8; 1 Cor. 5:13). With meekness and fear, brother Elkins instructed Donahue and others who were opposing themselves and Christ (2 Tim. 2:24-26). The church could not have had a more capable or cool-headed defender on that day. What Satan intended to be a black eye

to the church became an opportunity to teach a national audience the truth. Brother Elkins made the most of the opportunity.

Donahue was not the only one to tangle with brother Elkins and lose. Bob Ross, the Baptist preacher that he debated in 1979, experienced the same. However, brother Elkins did not pelt Ross with a plethora of passages. He pounded him with just one—Mark 16:16. Although Ross desperately wanted brother Elkins to move to another Scripture, and perhaps to another state, brother Elkins refused. He continued to hold Ross' feet to the fire. Ross never answered that one passage of Scripture. Unable to answer brother Elkin's argument, Ross resorted to calling names.

As students in the Memphis School of Preaching, my classmates and I were privileged to see brother Elkin's grasp of Scripture firsthand in the lessons that he presented and in the questions that he answered. During the Open Forums of the lectureship, he tackled the toughest of questions with the greatest of ease. Although brother Elkin's ability to answer questions impressed me as a young preacher, there was something that impressed me more. I was most impressed by the fact that he took the time to speak to young, upstart preachers like me. I can not recall a single occasion when he ever passed me in the halls of the Knight Arnold building or the school without stopping and shaking my hand. I was a preaching student and he was a preaching legend; yet, he treated me as an equal. His kindness and humility made an impression on me then, and they continue to impress me today. Later, when I got out of school and convinced some poor congregation to hire me, I would occasionally see brother Elkins. No matter how long it had been since I had seen him last, brother Elkins would call me by name and ask about my work. I can not begin to tell you how much his encouragement meant to me in my early years of preaching. I am sure that countless other preachers could declare the same concerning him.

While I was in the school, I agreed to preach a sermon for a *Preview for Prospect's Day*. At the time that I agreed to do it, it seemed like a good idea. After all, it was just a five minute lesson. How hard could that be? However, when I looked out into the audience on that day and saw Garland Elkins and Robert R. Taylor, Jr., in the audience, the task became infinitely harder. They had been preaching the gospel longer than I had been alive. They were mentors. As the old expression goes, I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rockers. I was holding my Bible out in front of me to stress that what I was saying was from the Word of God, just as they had taught us to do in school. However, my hand was shaking so much that my Bible was fanning the audience. As you know, it has been feared for years that the city of Memphis, which sits on a major fault line, will suffer a devastating earthquake. I am here to tell you that such an earthquake occurred in 1989 just beneath my feet. Although it was extremely localized, it was very powerful. I have never shaken so much in all my life. I am sure that I scared off any prospects that were there that day. Of course, following my lesson, brother Elkins and brother Taylor were among the first to approach me and to encourage me.

Our paths next crossed in Alabama when he preached a gospel meeting at a local congregation. The night that I attended, he gave us "free Baseball." He went into extra innings that night to cover his subject completely. Near the end of the lesson, he stopped to exhort us to stay with him a little longer. He explained that no one complained when a baseball game went into extra innings, and he hoped that none of us would mind his going a little long in preaching since what he was doing was far more important than baseball. How could you argue with that? During that same week, he took the time to meet with brethren from two congregations who were estranged from one another. Although the two congregations were not instantly reunited, their relationship did get measurably better. No doubt, he has

been a peacemaker and a mediator many other times during his ministry. Following in the footsteps of our Lord, he has gone about doing good (Acts 10:38). It is in this way that those of us who love the truth will remember him (Neh. 13:31).

I think that it is fitting that this humble servant of the cross is today helping to prepare men to preach the gospel. I do not know of anyone better qualified to do so. It is our prayer that more like him will arise to go forth into the fields of service (Matt. 9:37-38). May God bless him with years yet to prepare such men!

Wade L. Webster

Acknowledgments

Overall, I was very pleased with last year's lectureship. We had good crowds and great lessons all week. The speakers exceeded my high expectations and justified my recommending them to the elders. I thank them for making me look like I knew what I was doing. The Southaven members were also great. They pitched in whenever and wherever needed to keep things running smoothly. The success that we enjoyed was because of them and not because of me. I was a rookie, and I made rookie mistakes. Seasoned veterans kept us in the game.

The drawback to success is that more success is expected. The bar has been raised and new heights must be cleared. If the bar is cleared this year, it will be because of the individuals that I mention below. Don't you like how I subtly shifted the pressure from my shoulders to theirs? I am learning.

First, I would like to thank the elders, Larry Everson and Con Lambert, for their faithful oversight and fervent support. I am blessed to be working with them and to be serving under them. They are generous and godly men. There would be no lectureship without them. I am thankful each year when they give the go-ahead for another year, sign-off on the theme, approve the suggested speakers, and set aside the necessary funding. I thank them for allowing me to direct it.

Second, I would like to thank April Meacham for agreeing to proofread this year's lectureship book. I hope that I have not been so hard to work with that she will not do it again next year. Words cannot express the burden that she lifted off my weary back. I am confident that she has added years to my life. The few hours of sleep that I have been able to get each night were because she was up working. She bore the brunt of the storm. I could not have asked for a more conscientious, careful, or committed co-worker. Her speed

and skill amaze me. The volume that you hold in your hand is infinitely better because her hand was in it. My name is on the book, but I want you to know that she did the work.

Third, I would like to thank Betty Marshall and Shelley McGregory for all that they do for the congregation and for me as secretaries. I assure you that they do not get nearly enough credit. They are a delight to work with day in and day out. If they have bad days, and I am sure that they do, it never shows. On top of their daily workload, they routinely take on extra tasks, especially during lectureship season, without murmuring. I can mention something to them and it is done, usually the same day. Without their contribution to the lectureship, it would never get off the ground.

Fourth, I would like to thank those who contributed the manuscripts for this book. I have enjoyed reading them and I am looking forward to hearing them presented. I know the tremendous amount of work that goes into producing a good manuscript. Thank you for agreeing to take on this extra responsibility.

Fifth, I would like to thank Paul Sain and the staff at Sain Publications for printing the book for us. They do a great job and they do it quickly. Although we are slow in getting the book to them, they are quick in getting it back to us. You can't ask for more in a printer.

Sixth, I would like to thank Bobby Liddell, the director of the Memphis School of Preaching, for allowing the students to attend the lectureship in place of their regular classes. I know that this is more trouble for him and that the time has to be made up somewhere. Their presence is a huge boost to our attendance and morale.

Seventh, I would like to thank a number of people who help to preserve the book and the lectureship electronically. I would like to thank Paul and Shirley Tuller for traveling from Texas each year to tape the lectures for us. They do an excellent job. I would like to thank Tony Lawrence for putting the book on CD. As we move further and further into

the electronic age, the CD containing all of the lectureship books becomes increasingly valuable. I would like to thank Rick Jenkins for making the audio CDs and for copying the computer CDs. He puts in hours of work to enable individuals to hear the lessons over and over again. I would also like to thank all of those who work behind the scenes in the sound room. A special thank you goes to Jake Schrimsher for his work last year. At fourteen years of age, Jake stepped up and did a great job in running the equipment during the day sessions for us. I think it made his mom a little nervous, but he made her and us all proud.

Eighth, I would like to thank those who work in the kitchen, at the book table, and in the parking lot. I wish that I could call them by name, but I am afraid that I would leave someone out. Their contributions sometimes go unmentioned but would certainly be missed if they were not done.

What shall I say more? Time fails me to tell of all those who play a part in the Power Lectures. Whoever you are and whatever you do to help the lectureship, let me say thanks. Please continue to do what you are doing, even though I failed to mention it or your name here. God knows your contribution and will reward you for your work. You can be assured that He will one day call your name and commend your service.

Foreword

Simon Peter stands out as one of the greatest characters in the Bible. However, he also stands out as one of the most human. At Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked His disciples whom they thought that He was, Simon Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:15-16; cf. John 6:68-69). Sadly, a little while later, this great confession would turn into a shameful denial. After Jesus’ arrest, when questioned by a little maid, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75). On another occasion, he did what no other man, with the exception of our Lord, ever did. He walked on the water. However, even on this occasion, we see his humanity. As you recall, when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and began to sink (Matt. 14:30). Clearly, Peter walked on the water with feet of clay. I am convinced that it is this mixture of greatness and commonness that makes Simon Peter so appealing to most of us. In this study, we will examine the text that best shows both sides of his life (Matt. 14:22-33). Although all the gospel writers record the storm on Galilee, only Matthew records Peter’s walk on the water.

Peter Gawking

In the fourth watch of the night Matthew records that Jesus came unto His disciples, walking on the water (Matt. 14:25). Jesus had seen their “toiling in rowing” and was coming unto them to help and to comfort them (Mark 6:48). We can be assured that He remains as concerned with our troubles and as ready to help us today (Heb. 4:14-16; Heb. 13:5-6). When the disciples saw Jesus “walking on the sea, they were troubled,” believing that He was a spirit or phantom. The word translated as “troubled” means “to stir or agitate” (Zodhiates “Tarasso” #5105). Their minds were troubled like the stormy

sea. White caps of fear were rolling within their hearts. In fact, they were so troubled that they “cried out for fear” (Matt. 14:26). Grown men were shrieking like school girls in fear. Can you imagine how they must have gazed at or gawked at the form that was approaching them on the water? They must have wondered who or what it was and questioned its purpose. Likely, they surmised that the purpose was not good. After all, generally speaking, you have to wonder about those who are out at 3 a.m. in the morning. Do you not remember your mother telling you that? To better understand the terror that seized the disciples, please consider the following:

- It was the first century and evil spirits were a reality. The disciples had seen firsthand what these spirits could do to people. On the shores of this very lake, they had met a man possessed by a spirit named Legion (Matt. 8:28-34). As you recall, Jesus cast Legion out and allowed him to go into a herd of swine. The swine then ran off a steep place into the sea and drowned.
- It was the fourth watch of the night (Matt. 14:25). The fourth watch would have been between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Things tend to be scarier at 3 a.m. than at 3 p.m.
- The boat was in the midst of the sea (Matt. 14:25). Running away was not an option. Things are much scarier when we are cornered. They were physically exhausted from fighting the waves (Mark 6:48). Things tend to be more overwhelming when we are tired.
- They were in the midst of a storm. Storms tend to set us on edge, especially storms at sea that threaten to capsize small fishing boats. Warren W. Wiersbe noted that there are two kinds of storms—storms of correction and storms of perfection (51). The book of Jonah records a storm of correction (Jonah 1),

while the storm on this occasion was a storm of perfection. This storm would help to perfect their faith (Jas. 1:2-4). Earlier in Matthew's record, we see the disciples in another storm on this lake. On that occasion, their faith failed with Jesus in the boat (Matt. 8:23-27). Now, they were being tested to see how they would do without Jesus in the boat.

Perhaps all of these details help to explain why Peter and the others must have sat motionless examining the form walking on the water. No doubt, they wanted to look away but did not dare to do so.

Peter Walking

Once Peter heard Jesus' words, "Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid" (Matt. 14:27), his mind rested a little easier and he began to imagine great things. He answered, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (Matt. 14:28). "If" in this passage is not meant to convey doubt or uncertainty. It is used in the sense of *since*. Literally, Peter is saying, "Lord, since it is you, bid me come unto thee on the water." Had there been any doubt in Peter's mind about the identity of the form on the water, you can be sure that he would not have spoken out or stepped out. Even I know that you do not want to let an evil spirit know where you are, much less walk in his direction. Just as sheep know the shepherd's voice and are comforted by it (John 10:4), Peter knew the Lord's voice and was comforted by it. The same took place with Mary Magdalene in the garden following the Lord's resurrection (John 20:16). When Peter was convinced that the form on the water was the Lord, He wanted to be with Him. He requested to come to Jesus on the water. It is important to note that Peter's petition to walk on the water was preceded by Jesus' doing so (Matt. 14:25; cf. Job 9:8). Peter got the idea from the Lord. He did not come up with it on his own. Furthermore, please note that Peter did not presumptuously step out of the boat. He asked for permission to do so. As you likely

know, Peter could be presumptuous at times (Matt. 17:4). However, on this occasion, he waited for permission. He said, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water” (Matt. 14:28). The word translated as “bid” in this passage refers to the command of a king. Peter and the others had already been impressed by the authority that Jesus possessed (Matt. 8:26-27). On an earlier occasion, at Jesus’ command, he had launched out *into* the deep (Luke 5:4-5). This time, he was launching out *onto* the deep. On the previous occasion, he had a boat, it was daytime, and the seas were calm. This time, there was no boat, it was night, and the seas were rough. I believe that you will agree that this occasion required more faith.

Not only is it important to note that Peter did not step out of the boat presumptuously, it is important to note the reason why he did step out of the boat. Peter stepped out of the boat to be with Jesus (Matt. 14:28). Peter did not merely want to walk on the water. He did not want to put on a show for the other disciples or to show them up. He wanted to walk to Jesus. Evidently, he felt safer with Jesus on the stormy sea than he did without Jesus in the boat. He was coming unto the Lord for rest (Matt. 11:28-30). With one word, Jesus granted Peter’s request: “Come” (Matt. 14:29). Peter asked and he received (Matt. 7:7). The others asked not and received not (Jas. 4:2). The same opportunities were there for all of the disciples. However, only Peter made the petition. Only Peter walked on the water. Only Peter did the impossible. In hieroglyphics (ancient Egyptian picture writing), the concept of the impossible was pictured by a man walking on the water (Gray 102). What had been considered impossible for thousands of years was made possible by the Lord (Matt. 19:26). Peter did that which no other man, with the exception of our Lord, ever did. He walked on the water. Almost two thousand years later, the feat remains unmatched. What an opportunity is out there for someone! They can be the first since Peter to walk on the water. Their

story can be in all the papers and on the evening news. Are you not waiting on pins and needles for someone to join Peter? I am not either. I recommend that those thinking of trying this feat wear a life-jacket and hold off on calling the press. I think that Peter's place in the record books is safe, don't you? The God who parted the sea and congealed the depths for Moses made the sea a pathway for Peter. In like manner, the God who made an axe head to swim for Elisha made Peter so that he did not have to swim (2 Kings 6:6). Although Peter's faith was not perfect, as will be seen shortly in the context, it is still amazing. It allowed him to imagine the impossible and to do the unthinkable. As far as we know, the thought never entered the minds of the other disciples. Are we as big in our thinking as Peter was in his? Let us never forget that we serve a God who is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

Peter Balking

In baseball, a balk is when the pitcher starts to pitch but then does not. A balk is considered illegal because it puts both the batter and the base-runner at a decided disadvantage. Just like in baseball, individuals can balk spiritually. John records a number of individuals who started to follow Jesus, but then turned back (John 6:66). You may recall that this is what Orpah did with Naomi (Ruth 1:12-15). In the context under consideration in this study (Matt. 14:22-33), Peter balked. He started to go to Jesus on the water, and then he hesitated. The text reads, "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30). Notice the word that begins this passage—"but." This little word contrasts Peter's prior action—walking on the water by faith—with Peter's present action – sinking in the sea by doubt. It is amazing to consider the tremendous faith and troubling doubt that existed in the same heart on this occasion. Like a pendulum, Peter's faith swung from one extreme to the other. Please note that Peter did not sink like

a rock. He did not go straight to the bottom of the sea. The text records that he began to sink. Personally, I think that he sank more like a water-logged cork. As we will see in a moment, he had time to make a short request (Matt. 14:30).

Why he sank is a far easier question to answer than how he sank. Clearly, Peter sank because he shifted his focus from the Savior to the storm (Heb. 12:1). He began to walk by sight, rather than by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). The pendulum in his heart swung from great faith (getting out of the boat) to “little faith” (wanting back into the boat). He had gone from a *get out of the boat faith* to a *get back into the boat faith*. Jesus asked simply, “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31). The word translated as “doubt” means “twice” or “two ways.” It means “to waver, hesitate, be uncertain.” “It is a figurative word taken either from a person standing where two ways meet and not knowing which to choose (inclining sometimes to one, sometimes to the other), or from the quivering motion of a balance when the weights on either side are approximately equal (when first one side, then the other, seems to predominate)” (Zodhiates, “Distazo,” #1365) . It seems to me that Peter was flip-flopping between walking forward to Jesus and getting back into the boat. He was double-minded, and as such, he was unstable (Jas. 1:5-8). If he had been walking in the steps of father Abraham, he would not have staggered (sunk) in unbelief (Rom. 4:12; Rom. 4:20). Sadly, we often skip right over one of the most important details in the story. Peter finished his walk. The text reads, “And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased” (Matt. 14:32). “They” has reference to Jesus and Peter. Peter made it back into the ship. How did Peter get back into the ship? It seems to me that there are only two options—he either walked or Jesus carried him. While it is possible that Jesus carried him, it seems more likely that Jesus simply took his hand and walked with him. Of course, He will do the same with us today.

Peter Talking

When Peter saw the boisterous wind, he was afraid and started to sink (Matt. 14:30). Please note in the context that Peter's faith preceded his walking and his fear preceded his sinking. Truly, faith is the victory (1 John 5:4). Sadly, for a moment in Peter's heart, fear prevailed. He was "afraid" (Matt. 14:30). The word translated as "afraid" means "terrified" and refers to a fear that causes one to run away (Zodhiates, "Phobeo," #5399). It seems clear that Peter wanted to run back to the boat once he saw the wind. However, he did a far smarter thing; he ran to Jesus. When he started to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30). Granted, it was not always a good thing when Peter started talking. Like us, he often put his foot into his mouth (Matt. 16:22; Matt. 17:4; Matt. 26:33; Matt. 26:35). However, on this occasion, it was a good thing. He cried out for Jesus to save him. To his credit, Peter knew where to go for help. He did not trust in himself or turn to the other disciples. He knew that he could not save himself and that the other disciples were in no position to help him. The other disciples had been battling the waves and the wind all night with little success. Peter turned to the One who was not so limited. He turned to the One who had earlier calmed the sea and rebuked the wind (Matt. 8:23-27). He turned to the One who had made the sea and wind. He turned to the only One who could save (Acts 4:12). Please notice that Peter's request was only three words: "Lord, save me." We see the subject (Lord), the action (save), and the object (me). We see the Helper, the help, and the helpless. Peter said all that needed to be said in the shortest and simplest of ways. Someone noted that if Peter had made his request like we sometimes make our prayers, he would have been 29 feet under. Although we make our requests to the Father through the Son today, this inspired account teaches us a great lesson about what to do when we are overwhelmed with worldly cares and concerns. It should be noted that this text (Matt. 14:30) does not support praying

to Jesus, anymore than the text involving Stephen does (Acts 7:59). In both cases, the perishing people could physically see Jesus. It should be noted that Jesus by word and example taught His disciples to pray to the Father (Matt. 6:9-13; John 17:1; John 17:5; John 17:11; John 17:21; John 17:24-25).

Furthermore, the passage under consideration (Matt. 14:30) cannot serve as a justification for the sinner's prayer. First, it should be noted that this was a request for physical deliverance and not for spiritual deliverance. Second, it should be noted that Peter was one of the Lord's disciples. He had evidently been baptized under John's baptism (John 1:35; John 1:40-41). As a disciple, he had a relationship with the Lord that others did not. Third, it should be noted that Jesus had not yet died on the cross. We often make this same point relative to the penitent thief (Luke 23:39-45). We live on the other side of the cross. Fourth, it should be noted that when Peter later told men what to do to be saved, he did not tell them to pray the sinner's prayer or to utter the words that he did while sinking on the sea. He told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Fifth, the Bible clearly defines baptism, and not prayer, as the way that alien sinners call on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Although the text under consideration (Matt. 14:30) could be misused to try to justify many things, it can rightfully be used to teach disciples what to do when the cares of the world weigh them down and cause them to start sinking. Peter would later write, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). No doubt, Peter had seen the truth of this statement demonstrated a number of times in his own life, including the occasion under consideration in this lesson. In like manner, Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made

known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Charles Spurgeon observed, “To walk on the water is not an essential characteristic of faith, but to pray when you begin to sink is” (Butler 72).

Getting back to the text under consideration, we should also note that Jesus “immediately” stretched forth His hand and caught Peter (Matt. 14:31). There was no hesitation to help on the part of Christ. Peter cried and the Lord came. In like manner today, we can “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Furthermore, it should be noted that Peter did not stop talking, as we often do, once the Lord granted his request. He followed up his request for help with praise for what the Lord had done. We read, “And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matt. 14:32-33). Safely back in the boat, Peter evidently joined the other disciples in worshipping and praising Jesus as the Son of God. More than any other, He knew Jesus’ power. He had personally experienced it on that day. Of course, the gospels contain several statements from Peter’s lips that echo the sentiment expressed on this occasion. As you recall, at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asked His disciples whom they said He was, Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). On another occasion, when Jesus asked His disciples if they would follow the crowds in departing from Him, Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:68-69). Peter was fully convinced that Jesus was God’s Son. He would give his back, his freedom, and ultimately, his life, for this conviction (Acts 4-5).

In this study, we have seen the greatness and the commonness of Simon Peter. We have seen the life of one who walked on the water with feet of clay. For sure, our feet are also of clay. We have our share of doubts and fears. However, if we will demonstrate the faith that Peter did, we too can do great things for God. As Jesus did with Peter, He has extended the invitation for us to come (Matt. 11:28-30). Do we have the faith to step out of the boat and to walk to Him?

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CHAPTER 1

Simon Peter's Shadow: An Overview Of Peter's Life

Wade Webster

Luke records a very interesting statement concerning Peter in the book of Acts. He records that people in Jerusalem brought forth their sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches that “at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (Acts 5:15, KJV). Clearly, those with sick friends and family hoped that the shadow of Peter would heal their loved ones. Although the text does not explicitly state that the sick were healed in this fashion, it is implied (Acts 5:16). Furthermore, it seems consistent with other recorded miracles (Acts 19:11-12; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44). We certainly have no reason to believe that anyone left diseased or disappointed. Although approximately two thousand years have passed since Peter's shadow first fell upon the sick in the streets of Jerusalem, the old fisherman's shadow continues to wield a powerful influence over men's lives. Obviously, the power today is not miraculous (1 Cor. 13). Yet, his shadow or example continues to help men to overcome sin and to walk anew with Jesus. I know personally that I am a better man every time that I study his life. I hope that the same will hold true for you. In seeking to get a firm grasp on his life, we will consider the many

different roles that he played in Scripture. There is sure to be something for everyone.

The Prodigal

No study of Peter's life would be complete without a look at the many times that Peter ran ahead of or away from God's will. Although his intentions were almost always good, his actions were sometimes contrary to the will of God. For example, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Simon suggested that three tabernacles be built (Matt. 17:4). He wanted to honor Christ, Moses, and Elijah. To his credit, he listed Christ first. However, he should have started and stopped with Christ. Only one tabernacle was needed. While the words were still in Simon's mouth, along with his foot, a bright cloud overshadowed him to shed a little light on the matter. God did not want Peter or subsequent humanity to be in the dark relative to the position that His Son was to hold. The voice out of the cloud declared simply, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). Peter, and all who came after him, were to honor Jesus by hearing Him (Heb. 1:1-3). A greater lawgiver than Moses and a mightier prophet than Elijah had come.

On another occasion, Peter again played the prodigal. As you likely know, he struggled mightily with Jesus' death. When Jesus began to tell Peter and the others of His impending death, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matt. 16:21-22; cf. Luke 18:15). Although we can see Peter's zeal and love for his Friend in this statement, his words were a clear contradiction of Christ's words and of God's will. Peter was wrong and Jesus withstood him to the face (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). Matthew records that Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). Jesus would submit to the will

of God (Matt. 26:39; Heb. 5:8-9; Phil. 2:5-8) and so must Peter. The words of Jesus must have burned through Peter's heart like a hot knife through butter. However, the struggle in Peter's heart over the death of the Lord was not over. Peter would soon make another mistake. When officers from the Jewish leaders came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword and drew blood. As you recall, he cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). I am convinced that Peter was aiming for more than Malchus' ear. Had Malchus not ducked, he would have lost his head. Of course, Jesus could have put his head back on as easily as his ear. Although Peter's intentions were good in the garden, his actions were contrary to the will of God. Jesus did not need Peter's sword. Had Jesus wanted deliverance, He could have called for more than twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). Heaven would have emptied in Jesus' defense. However, it was God's will for Him to go to the cross.

A final example of Peter playing the prodigal was when he staunchly denied that he would ever turn his back on the Lord. As in the previous example, Peter contradicted Jesus' words. Jesus declared that "all" of them would be offended because of Him that night (Matt. 26:31). In fact, Jesus even quoted the Scripture that had predicted it (Zech. 13:7). Yet, Simon still dared to declare, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). Peter exempted himself from the Lord's statement. In essence, he declared, "All men, Lord, except me." The Lord then made the statement very personal. He declared directly to Peter, "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matt. 26:34; cf. Luke 22:31). Sadly, Peter remained in a defiant state of denial, and declared, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. 26:35). Amazingly, Peter would not only deny Jesus three times, but he would do so with cursing and swearing at the questioning of a young maiden.

When the cock crew, and Jesus looked upon him, it was more than Peter could bear. He “went out” and “wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62).

It is in these weak moments that most of us can relate to Peter the best. After all, who has not put his foot into his mouth at one time or another? Who has not been overconfident? Who has not acted impetuously? The question is not whether we will stray as Simon did, but rather, whether we will be as quick to return and repent as he was.

The Preacher

Before Peter was a preacher, he was a fisherman (Matt. 4:18-20). For Peter, fishing was a profession, not a pastime. He toiled all night searching for schools of fish in the shallow waters of the Sea of Galilee. Sometimes he caught a net full, and sometimes he caught nothing (Luke 5:6; Luke 5:9; John 21:3; John 21:6; John 21:8; John 21:11). Either way, by morning light, his arms were heavy and his back was hurting (Matt. 4:18; John 21:11). Although he probably wanted to crawl into bed and rest, there was still work to be done. Nets had to be cleaned and mended (Matt. 4:21; Luke 5:2). Any fish that were caught had to be carried to market and sold. Come nightfall, the process started over again. When Jesus called Peter, He called him to be a different kind of fisherman. Instead of catching fish, Jesus wanted Peter to catch men (Matt. 4:18-20). He wanted Peter to cast out the gospel net and to bring men safely to shore. Through preaching and teaching God's Word, Peter would spend the remainder of his life looking for and landing lost souls. It would be the most rigorous and rewarding work that Peter had ever done. From the beginning, Peter understood the evangelistic nature of his work. He understood that to catch fish, a fisherman had to go fishing (Matt. 28:18-20; Isa. 2:2-3). Sadly, many preachers today need to be reminded of this simple truth. The Great Commission has become the great omission. Preachers sit in

offices instead of visiting in homes. They schedule seminars instead of seeking souls. Please understand that study, and to some degree scheduling, are essential in preaching. For sure, some do not spend enough time in the book. I have heard them and so have you. However, fishing has become a lost art in the ministry today. I am convinced that many preachers are waiting for fish to jump into the boat, or better yet, out onto the shore. Sadly, I am afraid that even if the fish did jump out onto the shore, many of them would flop back into the water without anyone trying to collect them. Likely, there were times when Peter caught nothing (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). After all, such is the nature of fishing, whether physical or spiritual. However, there were times when he caught a net full. On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the others had a record catch. As you recall, about three thousand souls obeyed the gospel on that day (Acts 2:41).

Although all of the apostles, with the exception of Judas who had already gone to his own place (Acts 1:25), preached on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit only recorded the words of Peter's sermon. Perhaps, this is due to Christ's promise to him (Matt. 16:18-19). At least in this sense, he might be referred to as the keynote speaker on Pentecost. I am convinced that much can be learned about preaching from Peter's preaching on Pentecost and his subsequent preaching:

He preached loudly and logically.

On Pentecost, Luke records that Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice (Acts 2:14). Obviously, Peter did not have the aid of microphones or other sound equipment. He had to speak up to be heard. However, it remains true, that when we preach God's Word, we are to preach it so that men can hear it. There is no place for mousey preaching.

In addition to preaching loudly, Peter preached logically. He was not just shouting at them, he was reasoning with them. Evidently, relative to the matter of speaking with "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) some had sarcastically suggested that the

apostles were drunken. Peter answered the false charge with the following logic: "For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:15). Peter reasoned from the hour of the day that the apostles were not drunken. As a general rule, men are not drunken at 9:00 a.m. (1 Thess. 5:7).

He preached publicly and privately.

Peter preached in the temple and in houses (Acts 5:42). On Pentecost, he spoke to a multitude of men from many nations (Acts 2:5-6; Acts 2:9-11). No doubt, the three thousand that were baptized on that day represented but a small portion of those in the city for the observance of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). On other occasions he preached God's word to a single individual or household (Acts 10:32). Peter knew the value of a single soul (Matt. 16:26). D. L. Moody once noted, "The men who have been permitted to do higher things are the men that began with small things. If you are not willing to deal with one man about his soul, and labor with that one man, you are not fit to go into the pulpit and preach to others. Some of Christ's greatest discourses were given to one or two persons" (Miller 30).

He preached boldly and Biblically.

On Pentecost, Peter declared, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David" (Acts 2:29; cf. Acts 28:31). "Freely" means "freedom or frankness in speaking" (Zodhiates #3954). Peter told the people plainly what they had done and what must be done about it (John 10:24; John 11:14; John 16:25; John 16:29; 2 Cor. 3:12; Acts 2:36-38). Repeatedly, Peter charged the Jews and their leaders with murdering the only begotten Son of God (Acts 2:22-23; Acts 2:36; Acts 3:13-15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:28; Acts 5:30; Acts 10:39) and called upon them to repent (Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19). Even in the midst of severe persecution, he preached "the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31; cf. 4:13; Acts 4:29). He was threatened, imprisoned, and beaten, but

not silenced. He told them that he was hearkening unto God and could not but speak what he had seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20). Furthermore, he told them that he was going to obey God rather than them (Acts 4:29). We need more preachers today with the boldness of Peter. We need men who will stand in the gap and declare the good way of God (Ezek. 22:30; Jer. 6:16).

Not only did Peter preach boldly, he preached Biblically. Repeatedly, Peter referred to that which was written and spoken by the prophets in the Old Testament (Acts 3:21; Acts 3:24). He specifically referred to what was spoken by Joel (Acts 2:16-21), David (Acts 2:25-28; Acts 2:34-35; Acts 4:11), and Moses (Acts 3:22-23). Peter's sermon was filled with Scripture. We need men today who will like him "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2).

He preached humbly and habitually.

Following the healing of the lame man laid daily at the gate called Beautiful, Peter declared, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12). Peter was not a self-promoter. He did not take credit for the lame man's healing. He gave God the glory (Acts 3:13; Acts 3:16). Sadly, many preachers today are ready and willing to take the credit for what is accomplished. Let us never forget that it is God that gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6) and that without Him, we could do nothing (John 9:33; 15:5). Later, when Cornelius fell at Peter's feet to worship him, Peter told him to "stand up," declaring that he also was just a man (Acts 10:25-26). I am afraid that some of my preacher brethren like it when individuals swoon over them or put them on a pedestal. They like it when people follow them from one congregation to another. Peter did not want men to follow him. He wanted them to follow Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21). Take a look at Peter's sermons and see how much he talked about himself. He did not do it. He preached Christ

and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; Acts 2:23; Acts 2:36; Acts 3:13-15; Acts 4:10; Acts 5:28; Acts 5:30; Acts 10:39). Take a look at his sermons in the book of Acts and consider the number of times that he refers to the Lord and the names that he uses for him. He referred to him as: Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22; Acts 10:38), Lord (Acts 2:25; Acts 2:34; Acts 2:36; Acts 10:48), Holy One (Acts 2:27; Acts 3:14), Christ (Acts 2:30; Acts 2:31; Acts 2:36; Acts 3:18), Jesus (Acts 2:32; Acts 2:36; Acts 5:30), Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Acts 3:20; Acts 5:42; Acts 10:36), His Son Jesus (3:13; Acts 3:26), the Just (Acts 3:14), the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15), Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 4:10), the Head of the Corner (Acts 4:11), Prince (Acts 5:31), Savior (Acts 5:31), and the Judge of quick and dead (Acts 10:42). Sadly, some preachers today talk more about themselves in their sermons than they do about Jesus. They are haughty and high-minded (Rom. 11:20; 2 Tim. 3:4).

In addition to preaching humbly, Peter preached habitually. Despite the attempts to get Peter and the other apostles to stop preaching, Luke records that “they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus” on a daily basis “in the temple, and in every house” (Acts 5:42). Perhaps, one of the reasons why the early church had daily additions (Acts 2:47) was that they had men like Peter preaching and teaching on a daily basis. Teaching and preaching today is pretty much limited to two hours on two days a week.

He preached systematically and simply.

When explaining the conversion of Cornelius to those of the circumcision, he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them” (Acts 11:4). Sadly, many sermons today have no skeleton. They are a blob of verses and thoughts. The listener is left to try to sort out the information and to make sense of it. The person in the pew is asked to do in a half-hour what the preacher has not done in a week. Most members are ill-equipped to do so.

To the saints at Corinth, Paul wrote, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Although the context just cited is dealing with spiritual gifts, it contains a general truth that can be applied to many things. For sure preaching, of all things, should be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Many things relative to the pulpit today are wanting and need to be “set in order” (Tit. 1:5). Those attempting to build a fire in the hearts of members must lay “the wood in order” (Gen. 22:9). Think about building a fire on a charcoal grill. Only novices dump the charcoal in the grill and light the pile on fire. You will never get a good fire that way. Those trained in the art of grilling know that the charcoal briquettes have to be stacked in a certain way to get a good fire. The same is true in getting a good fire in preaching. Rambling and disorganized messages from the pulpit generally lead to rambling and disinterested minds in the pew.

In addition to preaching systematically, Peter preached simply. He was preaching to make things “known” unto them (Acts 2:14). He was preaching to inform them and not to impress them; to educate them and not to entertain them. The little word *this* which is used several times in Peter’s sermon on Pentecost captures the simplicity with which Simon spoke. For example, at the outset of the lesson, he declared, “But ***this is that*** which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16, emp. mine, WW). Peter’s declaration left no doubt about the events of Pentecost. They were the fulfillment of prophecy. Later, in the sermon, he spoke of “this Jesus” (Acts 2:32). Peter wanted those who heard him to understand that David was speaking of Jesus and His resurrection (cf. 2:36). Sadly, many preachers today are not simple enough in their preaching. The old rule holds true, “Put it down where the calves can get it, and the cows can get it to.”

T. David Gordon, in his book, **Why Johnny Can’t Preach**, observed the following: “I have come to recognize that many, many individuals today have never been under

a diet of competent preaching. As a consequence, they are satisfied with what they hear because they have nothing better with which to compare it...As starving children in Manila sift through the landfill for food, Christians in many churches today have never experienced genuinely soul-nourishing preaching, and so they just pick away at what is available to them, trying to find a morsel of spiritual sustenance or helpful counsel here or there" (17). He went on to explain that over 25 years of listening to sermons he has routinely asked his wife, "What was that sermon about?" to which she has answered: "I'm not really sure" (18). I imagine other preachers and their wives have had this same conversation. Gordon further revealed that down through the years he has asked individuals what they thought of their preacher. Often, their response began, "Well, he is not a great preacher, but..." They see their preacher as a good man, but not as a good preacher. He is faithful in visitation, but frightful in presentation. I believe that a good study of Peter's preaching will help us to get back to the kind of preaching that was done in the first-century, and that must be done today, if we are going to be successful in saving souls and safe-guarding saints.

The Pastor/Presbyter

When Jesus appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius (Galilee), he asked Peter three times if he loved him. Each time Peter affirmed his love and Jesus gave him a charge relative to His flock. Peter was told to feed Christ's lambs and sheep (John 21:15-17). Lambs and sheep refer to the young and the old of the flock. Peter was given the responsibility of providing a wholesome diet for those of all ages (1 Tim. 6:3). Please note that the flock belonged to Christ. Jesus said, "My lambs...My sheep" (John 21:15-17). Likely, Jesus' words to Peter remind the Bible student of Paul's words to the Ephesian elders. Paul declared, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost

hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). It is the responsibility of elders to “take heed” and to “feed” the flock. As the Head of the church, Christ is the Chief Shepherd. As an elder, Peter and those with whom he served were under-shepherds. In the first epistle that bears his name, Peter wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:1-4). As an elder, Peter fulfilled Christ’s charge for Him to feed the flock. I think that it is worthy of mention that Peter evidently qualified to serve as an elder. I believe that this is a crucial point to make because some argue or act as if no one can meet the qualifications today. Yet, one as seemingly flawed as Peter, did qualify. It is interesting to consider Peter’s life in light of some of the qualifications.

- An elder is to be “blameless” (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6-7), yet there was the time when Paul withstood Peter to the face “because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11).
- An elder is to be “no striker” (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7), yet there was the time Peter drew his sword and removed Malchus’ ear (John 18:10).
- An elder is to be “patient” (1 Tim. 3:4; Tit. 1:8), and yet there were times when Peter was impetuous (Matt. 16:21-22; Matt. 17:4).
- An elder must “have a good report of them which are without” (1 Tim. 3:7), and yet there was the time that Peter publicly lied about knowing Jesus with cursing and swearing (Matt. 26:74).

Please understand that my purpose in pointing these things out is not to suggest that Peter was not qualified nor to argue that anyone and everyone is qualified. My purpose is to make clear that there are some who can and do qualify to serve as elders. Past failures do not have to prohibit present service. If men change and mature like Peter did, then they can serve as elders in the church. Peter is concrete proof of that fact.

The Pupil

Often, in the gospel narratives, Peter is identified as a disciple (Matt. 10:1; Matt. 16:13-16; 26:35-36; Matt. 16:40; Mark 8:33; Mark 16:7; John 18:15-17; John 18:25; John 20:2-4; John 20:8; John 21:1-2). The term *disciple* refers to “a learner” or “pupil” (Zodhiates #3101). For three and a half years, Peter was an apprentice of Christ. He was one of only twelve to be invited to attend MSOP, the Master’s School of Preaching. At the feet of Christ, the Master Teacher, he learned great lessons. Space will not allow us to notice all of the lessons that Peter learned, but we will notice two of them:

Peter learned a lesson about forgiveness.

When Peter heard the Lord’s teaching on how to treat a trespassing brother (Matt. 18:15-17), he asked the Lord a question about forgiveness. He asked, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” (Matt. 18:21). In his commentary on Matthew, John Phillips noted that “the rabbis had decided that three times would be forbearance and forgiveness enough” (371). Peter doubled the number given by the rabbis and added one for good measure. No doubt, Peter thought that he was being extremely generous. However, the Lord said that Simon stopped far short of what love required. Peter was not to forgive “until seven times: but, until seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). Jesus then went on to tell the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant to drive the point home (Matt. 18:23-

35). Luke records a similar occasion when Jesus spoke of a brother trespassing against someone seven times in a day and asking for forgiveness an equal number of times that same day (Luke 17:3-4). On that occasion, the disciples found it necessary to ask Jesus to “increase” their faith (Luke 17:5). The forgiveness that Jesus spoke of on that occasion required a greater faith than they possessed at that moment.

Peter learned a lesson about humility.

The gospels record that the disciples often argued over who was the greatest (Matt. 18:1-4; Matt. 23:11; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; Luke 22:24-26). The mother of James and John even got involved by asking Jesus to pick her boys to sit on His right and His left hand when He came into His kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28). Do you not love her? She wanted the best for her boys. However, her spirit, as well as theirs, was wrong. Jesus did much to try to combat this silly, selfish, sensual, Satanic, and sinful spirit among His disciples. As you may recall, on one occasion He took a child and set the child in their midst, declaring, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2-4). The disciples were in need of conversion or deflating. They were so puffed up with pride that they were not going to be able to fit through the narrow gate of heaven unless they humbled themselves (Matt. 7:13-14; Matt. 19:24).

As great as the lesson with the child was, it paled in comparison to the lesson that He would teach on the eve of His arrest. On that occasion, Jesus Himself became the example. As you recall, after supper, Jesus laid aside His garments, strapped on a towel, poured water into a basin, washed the disciples feet, and then wiped them with the towel (John 13:4-5). Jesus was teaching the disciples the true nature of love. Please note that the context begins and ends with love (John 13:1; John 13:34-35). The chapter opens with the love that

Jesus had for the disciples and it closes with the love that they were to have for one another. Likely, the thirteenth chapter of John reminds the Bible student of another thirteenth chapter. In the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, often called the love chapter of the Bible, Paul noted that true love “envieth not,” “vaunteth not itself,” “is not puffed up,” and “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:4-5). It was these characteristics of love that Jesus was demonstrating to the disciples by washing their dirty feet. He was teaching them that true love always serves. It serves no matter what, no matter when, and no matter whom. It serves even if the job is washing dirty feet or changing a stinky diaper. The task of washing feet was slave’s work. It was assigned to the lowest servant. Yet, Jesus did it. Furthermore, true love serves no matter when. It serves even if it is a person’s last night of freedom, as was the case with Christ. It serves at 3:00 p.m. or at 3:00 a.m. In like manner, true love serves no matter whom. It serves whether it is for a friend or for an enemy. Jesus was washing the feet of the one who would sell him for thirty pieces of silver and the feet of those who would abandon Him when he was arrested (Matt. 26:15; Matt. 26:56). It should be noted that “He knew who should betray him” (John 13:11). Jesus did not wash the feet of Judas in ignorance. Furthermore, he did not wash the feet of the others in ignorance. The end of the chapter reveals that he knew that Peter would deny Him (John 13:36-38). No doubt, you recall that when Jesus came to Peter with the basin and the towel, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet (John 13:6-8). I can see Peter pulling his big ole’ fishermen feet back in embarrassment. It was simply unthinkable that Jesus should wash his feet. Peter knew that the towel ought to be in his hand. Peter’s reaction reminds me of John the Baptist’s reaction when Jesus came to him to be baptized (Matt. 3:13-14). As you recall, “John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” (Matt. 3:14). In like manner, Peter knew that He should be washing Jesus’

feet, instead of Jesus washing his feet. Just as Jesus had to command John to “suffer it to be so” (Matt. 3:15), He had to convince Peter to allow it. When Jesus told Peter that he could have “no part” with Him unless Peter allowed Him to wash his feet (John 13:8), Peter requested that the Lord wash his hands and his head also (John 13:9). Simon went from one extreme to the other, as people often do. Although Peter put his foot in his mouth a couple of times, those reading this account have to be impressed with how much he wanted to belong to the Lord. Our hearts need to be as devoted. I do not think that Peter ever forgot the lesson that he learned from the Lord that night. In fact, I believe that it is the background of what he wrote years later in the first epistle that bears his name (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

The life of Peter was a life of learning. It was a life of growth and maturation (1 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 2 Pet. 3:18). It was a life of becoming a vessel that the Lord could use mightily in His house (Matt. 18:3; Mark 1:17; 2 Tim. 2:20-21). Hopefully, all of us are studying as Peter did to show ourselves approved unto God as workmen (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12).

The Porter

Imagine being a doorkeeper at Buckingham Palace, at one of our nation’s landmarks, or even at a five-star hotel? Would that not be a great assignment? However, in the Psalms, we read of a greater honor. In the eighty-fourth psalm, we read, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa. 84:10). The psalmist expressed the desire, but Peter got the job. He got to be a doorkeeper in the house of God or the church. In the second chapter of Acts, he was given the privilege of opening the doors to the church, using the keys committed to his care by Christ (Matt. 16:19). Those who received the word that he and the other preached

were baptized and added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47). What a joy it must have been to have been a doorkeeper on that day. However, there would be other days when the duty was not as delightful. In the fifth chapter of Acts, Peter had to shut the door on a sinful couple. As you recall, as many of the brethren "as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet" so that distribution could be made to those who had need (Acts 4:34-37). Like these brethren, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession (Acts 5:1). However, they only brought a part of the proceeds and placed them at the apostle's feet (Acts 5:2). Of course, their sin was not in keeping back part of the proceeds. After all, the possession was theirs and the money from the sale of it was within their power (Acts 5:4). The sin was in lying to God about the amount (Acts 5:4; Acts 5:7-9). Just as sin had to be put out of the camp in the Old Testament (Josh. 7), it had to be put out of the church in the New Testament (Acts 5). As you might imagine, "great fear came upon all the church" (Acts 5:11). For a time, "no man" wanted to "join himself" to Peter or the other apostles (Acts 5:13). Can you blame them? They had just seen firsthand that "all things are naked and opened" to the eyes of God and His servants. As Peter shut the door on these liars, we must shut the door on modern day liars (2 John 9-11; Rev. 2:1-2; Eph. 5:11).

In the eighth chapter of Acts, Peter would again have to shut the door. In the eighth chapter, the problem did not involve someone selling something and keeping back part of the price, but rather someone trying to buy something. As you recall, Simon who had formerly been a sorcerer, tried to buy the power to impart spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18). Peter slammed the door quickly on his sticky little fingers, saying unto him, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:20-23). Although Simon’s heart was not right, it was tender. To Simon’s credit, Peter’s rebuke brought him quickly to repentance. He asked Peter pray to the Lord for him that none of the things of which Peter had spoken come upon him (Acts 8:24). Like Peter, we must shut the door on those desiring to make merchandise of that which belongs to God, including their making merchandise of us (2 Pet. 2:3; John 2:16).

The Partner

The wise man Solomon declared, “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:9-12). No doubt, this is why Jesus often sent His disciples out by twos (Mark 6:7; Mark 11:1; Mark 14:13; Luke 10:1; Luke 19:29). Peter was blessed to have two key individuals to lift him up, to warm his heart, and to stand with him.

The first man who partnered with Peter was Andrew his brother. Although Peter eventually overshadowed Andrew, as is evidenced by the fact that Andrew so often is identified by Peter (Matt. 4:18; Matt. 10:2; Mark 1:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:40; 6:8), Andrew was a leader in his own right (John 12:22). Only once, when both of their names are used, does Andrew’s name come before Peter’s (John 1:44). Whether this fact is significant or not, I do not know. However, it is interesting.

In like manner, it is interesting to note the fact that it was Andrew who first found the Lord (John 1:35-40). Upon finding the Lord, Andrew then first found his own brother Peter and brought him to the Lord (John 1:41-42). Peter owed so much to Andrew. Not only did they share a house (Mark 1:29), more importantly, they shared a common hope in a mansion just over the hilltop (John 14:1-3; Tit. 1:2).

The second man who partnered with Peter was John. I do not know if John paired with Peter for the Limited Commission (Mark 6:7), but I do know that he was paired with Peter to make ready the Passover (Luke 22:8). Furthermore, I do know that they were often together with the Lord, along with James, when others were not (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 13:3; Mark 14:33; Luke 8:51; Luke 9:28). Clearly, they shared a close bond with one another and with the Lord. I do know that Peter and John were fishing partners, both physically and spiritually (Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4:18-22). In the early chapters of Acts, we find them working together to carry the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). As you recall, they were together at the healing of the lame man at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11; Acts 4:13; Acts 4:19). Furthermore, they went down to Samaria together to impart spiritual gifts to the new saints there by the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-25).

What a team Peter and John must have made. I sometimes think of them as thunder and lightning. As you recall, Jesus called John, along with his brother James, a son of thunder (Mark 3:17). Both of them possessed a fiery or thunderous temperament. Although Peter was never called lightning, he certainly had a flashy, impetuous, and lightning-like spirit within him. Untrained and unrestrained, Peter and John would have been a deadly combination. However, with their spirits molded and channeled by Christ, they became a dynamic duo. They belong among the great friends of the Bible. They sharpened one another (Prov. 27:17). They

stuck with one another through thick and thin (Prov. 17:17; Prov. 18:24). They went to jail together (Acts 3-4), they defied the Jewish leaders together (Acts 4:19-20), and they suffered the lash together (Acts 5:40). To their credit, none of these things separated them from one another or from the Lord.

May we work together as well as Andrew and John did with Peter (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1; 3 John 8). It is a wonderful thing when brethren dwell together and work together in unity (Psa. 133:1; John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10).

The Prisoner

Before leaving the earth, Jesus reminded His disciples that the servant was not greater than his lord. Those who had persecuted Him would persecute them also (John 15:20). In fact, they would be hated of all men for His name's sake (Luke 21:17). In the early days of the church Peter got to experience what the Lord had predicted firsthand. In fact, for healing a lame man, Peter and John were seized, put into jail, interrogated and threatened (Acts 4:3; Acts 4:17-18; Acts 4:21). Of course, it would get worse from there. The next time that they were arrested, they were imprisoned (Acts 5:18) and beaten (Acts 5:40). It seems clear that they understood that God was in control (Acts 4:23-31) and they committed themselves to His care (1 Pet. 4:19; Luke 23:46; 1 Pet. 2:23; Acts 7:59; 2 Tim. 1:12; Psa. 10:14; Psa. 31:5; Psa. 37:5). No matter who laid hands on them (Acts 12:1-5), they were ultimately in God's hands and He had the power to deliver them (Acts 12:6-19). Two things stand out about the way that Peter and John handled imprisonment and injury:

They took it joyfully

Luke records that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41). Peter and John understood that being persecuted for righteousness' sake put them into

the category of the prophets (Matt. 5:10-12) and into the company of Christ.

They took it patiently.

In the first epistle that bears his name, Peter would write,

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (1 Pet. 2:19-23).

Peter and John followed the lead of the Lord in handling mistreatment.

Like Peter and John, we will face persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Perhaps, if some of the pending legislation passes, we may even face imprisonment for preaching against the gross sins of our times. Whatever happens, we should take the suffering that comes our way joyfully and patiently.

The Pope?

Roman Catholics argue that Peter was the first pope and that all other popes have received their office through apostolic succession from him. Catholicism stands or falls on whether or not Peter was the first pope. Wrestling Christ's statement to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, Catholics use Matt. 16:13-19 to argue that the church was founded upon Peter. They insist that the name *Peter* means rock and that he is

the rock upon which Christ promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). While it is true that the name *Peter* means rock, a careful examination of the passage makes clear that he cannot be the “rock” upon which Christ promised to build His church. After all, the “rock” upon which Christ promised to build His church comes from the Greek word *petra*, which refers to a massive rock. On the other hand, the name *Peter* comes from the Greek word *petros*, which refers to a small stone or pebble. Common sense alone will tell you that a small pebble cannot serve as a foundation for anything. However, a massive rock can. Any church built upon Peter is sure to fall. However, the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church founded upon Christ (Matt. 16:18). Christ is “the rock” upon which the church rests, and not Peter (1 Cor. 10:4). Prophecy so identifies Jesus (Psa. 118:22; Isa. 28:16). Peter knew these Scriptures and later quoted them applying them to Christ. He wrote,

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture,
Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect,
precious: and he that believeth on him shall
not be confounded. Unto you therefore which
believe he is precious: but unto them which
be disobedient, the stone which the builders
disallowed, the same is made the head of the
corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock
of offence, even to them which stumble at
the word, being disobedient: whereunto also
they were appointed (1 Pet. 2:6-8).

Clearly, Peter knew that he was not the rock. He knew that the Lord was the rock. Please note that the Lord’s statement concerning building His church was made after Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). It was upon the rock-solid deity of Jesus and not upon the faulty humanity of Peter that the

church was founded. Paul confirmed this interpretation in his letter to the saints at Corinth, when he wrote, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Catholicism notwithstanding, Paul identified Jesus Christ and not Simon Peter as the one and only foundation. Paul, nor any other inspired writer, knew anything of the supposed primacy of Peter (cf. Acts 8:14; John 13:16). Although Paul considered Peter to be a pillar in the Jerusalem church, he did not give him preeminence over James and John (Gal. 2:7-8). Furthermore, Paul saw himself as "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5; cf. 2 Cor. 12:11). If Peter had primacy, Paul did not know and he certainly did not act as if such was the case. In the book of Galatians, Paul referred to an occasion when he withstood Peter "to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). Please note that it was Paul withstanding Peter and not Peter withstanding Paul. Paul was rebuking Peter because he had withdrawn from the Gentiles out of fear of certain of the circumcision (Gal. 2:12).

Many of the details recorded by inspiration regarding Peter's life stand in direct opposition to the teachings of Catholicism relative to the pope. For example, Peter was a married man. He led about a wife (1 Cor. 9:5; Matt. 8:14; 1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:1). Of course, this stands in direct opposition to centuries of Catholic teaching concerning celibacy (1 Tim. 4:3). Also, please consider that Peter refused worship. When Cornelius fell at his feet "and worshipped him," Peter "took him up, saying, Stand up: I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25-26). As you likely know, popes have routinely accepted worship. These matters and many others clearly show that Peter was not the first pope.

The Polemicist

When Peter was come up from Cornelius' house in Caesarea to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended

with him because he went “in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:2-3). The word *contended* means “to strive with” or “dispute with” (Zodhiates #1252). Those of the circumcision were ready to debate Peter over his dining with Cornelius. Of course, Peter was up to the challenge. Luke records that he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them” (Acts 11:4). Like a seasoned debater, Peter did not leave a stone unturned. He methodically answered their charges against him. He explained that his actions had been in accordance with the Will of God. He told them of the vision that he had in Joppa of a vessel like a sheet filled with all manner of unclean animals (Acts 11:5-6). He further informed them of the command to arise, slay, and eat; and, of his resistance to it on the basis that he had never allowed anything unclean to touch his lips (Acts 11:7-8). Peter was explaining that he had very recently felt like they did. However, he went on to explain the rebuke that he had received from God. He had learned not to call “common” or unclean what God had cleansed. Peter had not been easy to convince as may be evidenced by the fact that it took three times to persuade him (Acts 10:16) and is certainly evidenced by the fact that he voiced his opposition to arise and eating. The fact that the sheet was lowered three times further established that Peter had not misinterpreted the vision. Peter knew that these men would likely be as hard to convince as he was. However, he was hopeful that they would eventually see the truth that had been shown to him. Peter then made the transition from the vision to Cornelius’ house. He explained that men came down from Caesarea and that the Spirit commanded him to go with them, “nothing doubting” (Acts 11:12). Please note that the Spirit “bade” and not “forbade” him from going. With these details, Peter was establishing that he had not acted of his own accord. He had gone to Cornelius’ house because he was commanded by the Spirit to do so. Thus, to

contend with him, as they were doing, was to contend with the Spirit. Furthermore, Peter explained that there were six brethren who had accompanied him and had witnessed the events. As you know, under the Law of Moses, things were to be established at the mouth of two or three witnesses (Deut. 19:15). Peter had twice that many witnesses. He was certainly building an air-tight case.

To further establish that he had acted in accordance with God's will, he explained that Cornelius had seen an angel that had told him to send to Joppa and call for Peter, who would tell him "words" whereby he and all his house could be saved (Acts 11:14). Now, it was time for the final nail in their contentious coffin. The Holy Spirit had been poured out upon Cornelius and his household, as it had upon the apostles at the beginning (Acts 11:15). Peter had nothing with which to compare the outpouring of the Spirit other than that which had taken place on Pentecost. Of course, the Spirit had not been poured out upon Cornelius and his household to guide them into all truth. It seems clear that the Spirit had been poured out upon Cornelius and his household to convince the Jews of the acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter even quoted the promise of Jesus for good measure (Acts 11:16).

Having built an overwhelming case, Peter then asked, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). The conclusion as far as Peter was concerned was clear. He would not withstand God and neither should they. Although they evidently started with great opposition, they were fully convinced by the time that Peter finished stating his case. Luke records, "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

In the first epistle that he penned, Peter encouraged Christians to also give a defense of the hope that was within

them. He wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet. 3:15-16). The Greek word translated as ready means to be “ready for anything” (Zodhiates #2092). As Christian soldiers, they were to be in a state of readiness, prepared for anything that came their way (Eph. 6:10-17). The Greek word translated as answer refers to a “verbal defence” that a person gives “to make good his cause” (Thayer (“Apologia”). Like Peter, Paul, and others, they were to be “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phil. 1:17). Please note further that they were to give their defence with “meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). They were to be meek, not mean. They were to be respectful, not rude. They were to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Paul gave similar instructions to Timothy. He wrote, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

I believe that there is one final point that must be made from the passage under consideration (1 Pet. 3:15-16). Although the defence is to be given verbally, it must be supported by one’s conduct. It must come from a heart where Christ is sanctified and a life where Christ is magnified (cf. Phil. 1:20-21).

In the second epistle that Peter penned, Peter warned the brethren of the coming of false teachers. He wrote, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them,

and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1). Sadly, Peter knew that many would follow the false teachers (2 Pet. 2:2-3). He was writing to stir up the minds of the saints to stand against them (2 Pet. 3:1-2; cf. Jude 3-4). He did not want the brethren to be “ignorant” (2 Pet. 3:8; 2 Pet. 3:17; cf. 2 Cor. 2:11). With great detail he identified the false teachers so that the brethren could mark and avoid them (2 Pet. 2:10-19; cf. Rom. 16:17). He compared the false teachers to brute beasts which are “made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet. 2:12). In fact, he suggested that the brute beasts knew more than these false teachers did. He compared the false teachers to Balaam, who “was rebuked for his iniquity” by a “dumb ass speaking with a man’s voice” (2 Pet. 2:15-16). No doubt, if the beasts of Peter’s day could have spoken, they would have rebuked that were compared to them. Peter knew the danger that these smooth talking, Satanic servants posed to the saints. He wrote, “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Pet. 2:18-19; cf. 3:16-18).

With great skill and simplicity, Peter showed the problem in the proposition of the scoffers and false teachers. The scoffers were mocking the promise that Christ made to come again (2 Pet. 3:4; John 14:1-3). They were asserting that “all things” had continued “as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4). You may recognize this position as uniformitarianism. It is at the heart of modern day evolutionary thought. It is the assertion of atheists and agnostics. Peter said that they missed the boat, or in this case, the ark. They had not missed a minute drop of water; they had missed an earth-covering flood (Gen. 6-8). They were willingly ignorant. They purposefully closed their eyes to the

truth of God (Matt. 13:15). All things had not continued as they were from the beginning. God destroyed the world by water (2 Pet. 3:6). Furthermore, Peter informed them that things would not continue as they presently were forever. He pointed out that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:7). He made clear that the Lord is not “slack” when it comes to His promises (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Tit. 1:2). What He says, He will do. Peter declared, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). Peter did not want the saints to miss the boat as the scoffers did. He wanted them to make preparation for the coming of the Lord and find grace as Noah did (2 Pet. 3:11-15).

The Penman

For three and a half years, Peter was privileged to accompany the Lord almost everywhere He went. In fact, with the exception of James and John, no one saw more of the Lord’s ministry than Peter did. Peter’s knowledge of the Lord was not based on “cunningly devised fables”; he was an eyewitness of His majesty (2 Pet. 1:16). With John, Peter could say that “the life was manifested” and he had “seen” (1 John 1:2) and studied it (1 John 1:1). His ears had heard Him (2 Pet. 1:18) and his hands had handled Him (1 John 1:1). By inspiration, Peter was privileged to write about what he had seen and to help the brethren to become more like the Lord that he loved and served (1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Pet. 3:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). To Peter, the privilege of penning these books was precious. In fact, he used the word *precious* repeatedly in these two letters to describe various aspects of Christ and Christianity (1 Pet. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 Pet. 2:4; 1 Pet. 2:6-7; 2 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:4). Like Paul, Peter knew the privilege that was his in preaching “the unsearchable riches of Christ”

(Eph. 3:8) and in declaring “the true grace of God” (1 Pet. 5:12). Peter knew that he was honored to know and declare things that “the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:12) and that would endure forever (1 Pet. 1:25). He understood the grace that was given unto him in empowering him to pen two pieces of that which would complete the book that provides man with “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter knew that he was blessed to join “the holy men of God” in “old time” who “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). Like these men of God, Peter was privileged to deliver a message from God. Peter delighted in declaring “great and precious promises” unto the brethren (2 Pet. 1:4) and in provoking or stirring them up unto good (2 Pet. 1:12-15; cf. Heb. 10:24). He knew that he must “shortly” put off his tabernacle and join the redeemed of all the ages (2 Pet. 1:14). He was endeavoring by the words of these inspired epistles to equip them after his decease with the things that they needed to fight false teachers and to “grow in the grace and the knowledge” of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God in His grace granted Peter the privilege of saying goodbye by way of the pen (2 Pet. 1:13-15).

Although I have done my best to give an overview of Simon Peter's life, the half has not yet been told (1 Kings 10:7). I have not touched even the hem of his garment (Matt. 14:36). Hopefully, I have over the course of this study brought you close enough to rest in his shadow.

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**THE
PRODIGAL**

CHAPTER 2

Get Thee Behind Me, Satan: When Peter Rebuked The Savior

Wayne Cox

Introduction

In the third act of the second scene of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" there appear these famous lines from one of the speeches: "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones" (as qtd. in Stanley). Though Shakespeare was not inspired of God, his words are nevertheless true! How easy it is to remember the wrongs in the lives of others, and how quickly we forget the good.

To illustrate, consider a few Bible characters. Just the mention of their names usually brings to mind first the wrongs of their lives. Take Jonah, for instance. Most in hearing his name do not consider him the evangelist that led the greatest revival on the earth. Through the message God gave him, and that he in turn delivered to Nineveh, that entire city of over one-half million citizens turned around! But we do not remember that, do we? We instead usually think of a rebellious prophet who ran from God, who did not want to do the will of God, and who was subsequently swallowed by and then ejected from a great whale.

What about Samson? You and I do not remember the fact that he judged Israel for twenty years and there is

nothing of a flaw mentioned there. Because of his faithfully judging Israel, he is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one of the great men of faith. No, we remember him as a lustful, long-haired, passionate, physically strong but morally weak man who caved in and died a clown before the Philistines. Why do we so consider him? Because “the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.”

Just the mention of Rahab typically brings to mind a harlot. Yet, because of her faith which prompted her to hide the spies of God (Heb. 11:31), she became the great-great grandmother of David in the Messianic line.

Think for a moment of the New Testament John Mark. According to Scripture, he was the first missionary drop-out. On the first missionary journey, John Mark went back to Jerusalem when Paul and Barnabas went into Asia Minor. Why? One man was so bold as to say, “The reason he went back home is he missed his mother. He was homesick.” However, Scripture doesn’t indicate the “why” of his desertion, just the fact of it. Whatever the reason, he went back home, and we remember him as a failure. For some reason, we do not recall the words of Paul in his last letter to Timothy: “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11, NKJV). For some reason, we forget that God thought so highly of John Mark that he inspired him to write Mark—one of the biographies of the life of Christ. Why do we remember the bad and seldom the good of certain Biblical characters? As the poet reminds us: “The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.”

What is true of Jonah, Samson, Rahab, John Mark, and others is also true of the big-hearted fisherman named Peter. All too often, we regard him as a brash, impulsive, impetuous person who spoke before he thought and acted without thinking. He is the disciple who walked on water, but sank in doubt (Matt. 14:28-31). He at first wanted no part in Jesus’ washing his feet (John 13:6-9). He was overconfident in

saying he would die for Christ but then deserted and denied his Lord when He needed him the most (Mark 14). He was the apostle intimidated by leading Jews from Jerusalem, and Paul had to correct Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11-14). These are some of the negatives of Peter's life that Scripture does record and that we often call to mind at the first mention of the apostle's name. But why do we harp on the bad and forget the good? Could it be because "the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones"?

Thankfully, the Lord did not write Peter off because of his sins. It was Peter, along with James and John, who had the privilege of witnessing the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17) and the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-37), and of being with the Lord in His hour of trial at Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-38). It was Peter, along with John, whom Jesus trusted to prepare the meal for His last Passover (Luke 22:7-8). It was Peter who recognized that Jesus had the words of eternal life, and that He was the Christ, the Holy One of God (John 6:68; Matt. 16:16). It was Peter, standing up with the eleven, who gave the great gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and who commanded the first Gentile believer to be baptized (Acts 10:48). It was Peter whom God inspired to write two books of the New Testament bearing His name, 1 and 2 Peter. It was Peter, tradition tells us, who when he died, requested to be crucified upside down, feeling unworthy to die in the same manner as the Lord (Gray 2349).

One of the marks of Bible inspiration is that God saw fit to record both the highs and the lows, the good and the bad of the characters contained in Scripture; this is equally true of Peter. Though our lesson focuses on one of the negatives of Peter's life, let us not overlook the many positives of this apostle.

Our responsibility is to discuss the topic "Get Thee Behind Me: When Simon Rebuked the Savior." Our assigned text for study is Matthew 16:22-23, but we'll also consult the immediate verses prior to this section as well as the parallel

accounts (Mark 8:32–33; Luke 9:22) to get the entire picture. We will divide our lesson into three major sections which are as follows: (1) Background of the text; (2) Exposition of the text; and (3) Application of the text.

Background Of The Text

Matthew chapter 16 is a bit past the halfway mark in Matthew's biography of Jesus. Already, He has recorded Jesus' birth by the virgin Mary in Bethlehem, His fleeing at an early age from the wrath of Herod into Egypt and then back to Israel where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus settled in Nazareth. Matthew, as is true of the other biographers of our Lord's life, is relatively silent regarding Jesus' growing up years, inspired rather to concentrate on Jesus' work as an adult instead. His ministry began in earnest after His being baptized by John the Immerser. Matthew recorded the temptation of Jesus by the devil and His thwarting the devil's efforts to ensnare Him. Matthew chapters five through seven contain the revolutionary message of the Sermon on the Mount, which emphasizes genuine righteousness, the true interpretation of God's Law, real spirituality, forgiveness, and good works. Jesus was One to both say and do, and He backed up that Sermon by living it in His own life before His followers, as stressed in the remainder of Matthew's record.

Matthew chronicles many of Jesus' mighty miracles, where Christ performed one supernatural deed after another, producing faith in the hearts of the honest. Our Lord cleansed lepers, healed servants, freed the demon-possessed, calmed storms, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead. The multitudes, seeing these mighty wonders and the compassion of Jesus behind them, were enthralled with this One of Nazareth, and more and more began to follow Him. As a result of the outreach efforts of the Limited Commission and Jesus' teaching, often in parables, His fame continued to spread through the land.

Alas, sinister forces were working behind the scenes; not everyone was thrilled with Jesus. Matthew presents the religious leaders and their continued clashes with God's Son. They have begun to question motives because Christ is bumping up against their religious system, revealing to them the true condition of their heart. This did not set well at all with these hypocrites, and already they have begun plot with others equally jealous as to how to rid themselves of the One who has stolen their crowds away from them.

Our chapter (Matthew 16) opens with yet another confrontation between Christ and His avowed enemies, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. After thwarting their challenge and temptation to produce "a sign from heaven," Jesus taught His men the importance of rejecting the "leaven" or false teaching of this "evil and adulterous generation."

The next section of the narrative describes what took place in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked His disciples the question about what others thought of His identity, followed by Peter's noble confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus then proceeded to bless Peter, to promise to build His church, and to delegate authority not only to Peter, but to all the apostles (Matt. 16:18; Matt. 18:18).

With that brief background before us, let us now proceed to an:

Exposition Of The Text

A Puzzling Command

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ (Matt. 16:20).

At first, we are a bit perplexed as to why Jesus would issue such an order; on the surface, it does not make much sense. We would think that is exactly what He wanted them

to do—to go and tell everyone of His identity. Hendriksen sheds some light on this matter for us:

The people would have interpreted the term “Messiah” = “Christ” in the political sense (cf. John 6:15). This might have fanned the flames of enthusiasm about him, as a potential Deliverer from the Roman yoke, to such an extent that the opposition and envy roused by such widespread attention might have brought his public ministry to an untimely end. This must not happen. When an open announcement must finally be made to the Jewish religious authorities Jesus himself will make it (Matt. 26:63, 64) (652).

Barclay also makes a pertinent point:

Although the disciples had grasped the fact that Jesus was God’s Messiah, they still had not grasped what that great fact meant. To them it meant something totally different from what it meant to Jesus. They were still thinking in terms of a conquering Messiah, a warrior king, who would sweep the Romans from Palestine and lead Israel to power. That is why Jesus commanded them to silence. If they had gone out to the people and preached their own ideas, all they would have succeeded in doing would have been to raise a tragic rebellion; they could have produced only another outbreak of violence doomed to disaster. Before they could preach that Jesus was the Messiah, they had to learn what that meant. In point of fact, Peter’s reaction shows just how far the disciples were from realizing

just what Jesus meant when he claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God (147).

Wiersbe adds:

The Apostles were not to share this truth about Jesus being the Son of God with other people until after His resurrection and ascension. Then the “sign of Jonah” would be completed, the Spirit would be given, and the message could be proclaimed. The nation in general, and certainly the religious leaders in particular, were not yet ready for this message (59).

So for now, the command is to be quiet. In the not too distant future, the command will change to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). These are also our marching orders today!

A Stunning Announcement

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Matt. 16:21).

The preceding verses in Matthew 16 have told of disciples confessing but now we read of confusion on their part. “Jesus began to show.” For the first time, Jesus begins to speak to His men plainly of His upcoming sufferings, trials, and death. Before this, the disciples evidently did not have sufficient faith to appreciate this teaching, but now their faith has some degree of firmness. Granted, very early in His ministry, Jesus had given hints of His future. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19); “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14); “For as Jonah was three days

and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40)—all these were intimations of things to come. These had not been understood by the disciples, so Jesus now spells it out clearly (“openly”—plainly [Mk. 8:32]) for them. Jesus “began to seek to open their eyes to the fact that for him there was no way but the way of the cross” (Barclay 146).

The place of punishment would be the “holy city” of “Jerusalem” —of all cities! “Though he lived most of his time in Galilee, he must die at Jerusalem; there all the sacrifices were offered, there therefore he must die, who is the great sacrifice” (Henry 235).

Our Lord relates that the source of His upcoming sufferings would be at the hands of the “elders and chief priests and scribes.” These three groups of men comprised the Jewish Sanhedrin, “the elders were the respected men of the people, the chief priests were predominantly Sadducees; and the scribes were Pharisees. In effect, Jesus is saying that he must suffer at the hands of the orthodox religious leaders of the country” (Barclay 147). At their hands Jesus would be beaten to the point of being “killed” but then would be gloriously “raised the third day.” The gruesome details of all of this are left out for now, because the Lord’s band of men cannot bear to hear more at this point (John 16:12).

Needless to say, the disciples were stunned by this news—one so much so that he dares to give the Lord:

An Astonishing Rebuke

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ (Matt. 16:22).

What Peter Did

“If in verse 16 we saw Peter at his best, were it not for the event recorded in [Matthew] 26:69-74 we would be ready to

say that we see him here at his worst” (Hendrickson 654). Just what did Peter do? He “took Him aside” (Arndt and Gingrich 717).¹ “Peter did not like what Christ had said and so, in an authoritative way, takes Christ aside for a private chat to instruct Him” (Butler 102).

Peter—the apostle who in one breath has made the good confession—now, in almost the next breath, “began to rebuke” Jesus. *Rebuke* is the same word that refers to Jesus rebuking the wind and the sea (Matt. 8:26) and a demon (Matt. 17:18), and means to “reprove” or “censure” (Arndt and Gingrich 303). “Incredible! The disciple rebuking his Master; but worse, man rebuking God” (Butler 102). One even asserts that Peter acted with “violence” in taking Jesus aside (Barclay 148).²

What Peter Said

“Far be it from You, Lord: this shall not happen to You!” (Matt. 16:22). This phrase is also rendered “God be merciful to thee,” equivalent to “God forbid” (Spence and Excell 139). Butler adds that Peter’s statement:

is a very forceful rejection of the cross...The emphatic nature of Peter’s rejection of the cross for Christ is also found in “shall not be.” The word “not” is a double negative in the Greek, which is an emphatic negative. We can translate it “shall never, no never be” (103).

Why Peter Said It

Simply put, Jesus’ foretelling His eventual death at the hands of the Jewish leaders made no sense whatever to Peter. How could the very One Who has just promised to build His church and bestow the keys of the kingdom die? Was not the Messiah the long-awaited One to restore the throne of David and to return glory to the nation of Israel? Now, Jesus starts talking about death and suffering, and Peter, to say the least, is confused.

Of course, that is the way it has always been—God’s plans are often different from ours. God tells us through His prophet Isaiah that “My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways” (Isa. 55:8). Solomon reminds us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). Further, the Psalmist declares, “O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, Nor does a fool understand this” (Psa. 92:5-6).

Butler avers that Peter’s problem here was pride: “There is no humility in this comment made by Peter. It is filled with much pride. . . . what awful pride to contradict the One he had just previously called the Messiah and Deity and was now, in this comment, calling ‘Lord’” (Butler 102).

Barclay takes a different approach:

Peter had been brought up on the idea of a Messiah of power and glory and conquest. To him the idea of a suffering Messiah, the connection of a cross with the work of the Messiah, was incredible. He “caught hold” of Jesus. Almost certainly the meaning is that he flung a protecting arm round Jesus, as if to hold him back from a suicidal course (Barclay 108).

An Uncompromising Reply

But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men (Matt. 16:23).

What Jesus Did

“He turned.” We assume that Peter had been walking behind Jesus, tried to pull Jesus aside to rebuke Him. Jesus had not as yet turned around to face Peter but now does. It

is also worthy of mention in the previous verse that Peter “began” to rebuke Jesus, but the apostle did not get very far before the Lord mercifully and forcefully stepped in to “cut him short.”

What Jesus Said

“Get behind Me.”

Origen tempers the force of these words by suggesting that Jesus was saying this to Peter: “Peter, your place is behind me, not in front of me. It is your place to follow me in the way I choose, not to try to lead me in the way you would like me to go” (Barclay 149-50). Barclay elaborates:

If the phrase can be interpreted in that way, something at least of its sting is removed, for it does not banish Peter from Christ’s presence; rather it recalls him to his proper place, as a follower walking in the footsteps of Jesus. It is true for all of us that we must ever take the way of Christ and never seek to compel him to take our way (150).

However, Hendriksen dispels the foregoing and sets forth the correct view:

this rendering (“Get behind me”) is rather ambiguous, and has even been interpreted to mean that the Lord was merely telling Peter that he has committed a breach of etiquette when he grabbed hold of Jesus and tried to pull him aside, and that he must now assume his previous position in the lineup and start walking behind Jesus again....What is needed here, accordingly, is a translation like “Be gone, Satan,” or “Get out of my sight, Satan” (655).

Notice that Jesus labels Peter *Satan*. Such strong language! In preceding verses Jesus said “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-

Jonah” (Matt. 16:17); now He calls Peter *Satan*! Being called a devil is never a compliment, nor obviously was it meant to be for Peter. Recall that similar words were used by Jesus to the devil himself when the Lord was tempted shortly after His baptism: “Away with you, Satan!” (Matt. 4:10). *Satan* literally means “adversary” which is what Peter has become on this occasion.

“You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:23). Peter the stone who had just been blessed became Peter the stumbling block who was not a blessing to Jesus (Wiersbe 59).

Why Jesus Said It

Why would Jesus give to Peter, in the words of one, “the sharpest rebuke ever given by Christ to any of His disciples” (Butler 101)? When Jesus was previously tempted by the devil, the record says the devil “departed from Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). The obvious implication is the devil repeatedly tempted the Lord after that initial set of trials, most of which are not recorded in Scripture.

Here, unwittingly to Peter and yet through him, is yet another time of temptation for the Lord. It is the alluring appeal to avoid the shame, pain, and suffering of the cross, to escape death, and in the process, to make void God’s plan for saving man. As Barclay summarizes:

No one wants a cross; no one wants to die in agony; even in the Garden that same temptation came to Jesus, the temptation to take another way. And here is Peter offering it to him now. The sharpness and poignancy of Jesus’ answer are due to the fact that Peter was urging upon him the very things which the tempter was always whispering to him, the very things against which he had to steel himself. Peter was confronting Jesus with

that way of escape from the Cross which to the end beckoned to him.

What made the temptation more acute was the fact that it came from one who loved him. Peter spoke as he did only because he loved Jesus so much that he could not bear to think of him treading that dreadful path and dying that awful death. The hardest temptation of all is the one which comes from protecting love. There are times when fond love seeks to deflect us from the perils of the path of God; but the real love is not the love which holds the knight at home, but the love which sends him out to obey the commandments of the chivalry which is given, not to make life easy, but to make life great. It is quite possible for love to be so protecting that it seeks to protect those it loves from the adventure of the warfare of the soldier of Christ, and from the strenuousness of the pathway of the pilgrim of God. What really wounded Jesus' heart and what really made him speak as he did, was that the tempter spoke to him that day through the fond but mistaken love of Peter's hot heart (148-49).

Application Of The Text

Many are the lessons we can learn from this account; let us limit ours for this study to the following:

There Is A Time To Speak

Peter was one who spoke what was on his heart. He courageously confessed the deity of Christ. He courageously asked to walk on water. He courageously preached the first

gospel sermon, and with equal courage replied to those who wanted to silence his preaching, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

We need Christians today who will speak up and extend the truth to the lost. We need Christians today who will speak up and defend the truth against all error. We need Christians today who will unite their voices together and lovingly take a spoken stand against the wickedness of this world in whatever form. May God grant us the wisdom to know when the time is right “to speak” (Eccl. 3:7).

There Is A Time To Be Silent

It has often been said that “haste makes waste,” and how true that is with our speech. Hasty words are not often weighty words! Peter, if he could undo what was done on this occasion, would have surely bit his tongue for saying what he did. But, have we not all been rash with our speech at times? We rarely feel sorry for the things we did not say, but how we wish we could sever our tongues for what we did say but should not have. May God also give us the wisdom to know when it is time “to keep silence” (Eccl. 3:7).

There Is A Time To Rebuke

Jesus, Who Himself rebuked Peter, gave the directive for His disciples to do likewise: “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). Love does not allow one to wallow in sin without words of warning. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). How difficult—yet how essential—to wound a friend with reproof! The one who wounds does so because he genuinely loves the one he is wounding. He is not rash and does not delight in confrontation but realizes that at times such is necessary. He anguishes over words that must be spoken with the right tone and in the right way. All the while he realizes that a person who claims friendship but restrains reproof really is not a friend: “But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

There Is A Time To Learn From Rebuke

To his credit, Peter did not walk off “in a huff” after the Lord said what He did to him. Surely, the words spoken stung, but the apostle allowed them to penetrate his heart; he would learn from this experience. Immediately? No, there was still much growing to do. He would still stumble and fall. But every time Peter fell, by the grace of God he would pick himself up, dust himself off, and try again. The apostle became a better man because of this strong reprimand from the Lord.

May we, like Peter, be willing to receive rebuke when it comes our way. “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1). “Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool” (Prov. 17:10). The wise man is saying you can beat a fool until he is almost gone. But, as soon as he regains his strength, he goes right back to his foolishness, much like a dog to his vomit. Conversely, reprove a person of understanding with a teachable heart, and that reproof is taken to heart, is not forgotten, and produces growth in wisdom.

“A fool despises his father’s instruction, But he who receives correction is prudent” (Prov. 15:5). To *receive* means to place value on something; here, to listen to reproof or correction and see the value in it. One does not become mad or upset but agrees with such wise counsel—whether from an employer, a parent, a spouse, or a child—even when it hurts.

There Is Never A Time To Rebuke The Lord

Jesus told Peter and the apostles that the cross was a “must” (Matt. 16:21). Peter had the audacity to say the cross must not happen (Matt. 16:22)! No, there is never a time to rebuke the Lord!

And yet, is not that what so many in essence are doing today? When Jesus says baptism is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16), and man comes along and says it is not, has

he not rebuked the Lord? When Jesus says the church is so important that He gave His blood for it (Acts 20:28), and man comes along and says the church is not important but is an irrelevance in the grand scheme of things, has he not rebuked the Lord in the process? When Jesus says worship must be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), and man comes along and says it does not matter how one worships, just so he is sincere, has he not rebuked the Lord? When Jesus says there is salvation in no other name but His (Acts 4:12), and man comes along and says there is nothing in a name, has he not rebuked the Lord?

Like Peter, if I contradict what the Lord says by what I say and how I live, I too have become an offense to the truth, and a stumbling block impeding the spiritual progress others might otherwise be making toward the way of salvation and life eternal.

Conclusion

We end this study as we began, with these words: “The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.” How typical of men in general to remember the bad of others, and not the good! Yes, Peter fell; he sinned on more than one occasion, including this incident of rebuking the Lord. Thankfully, when Peter learned better, he lived better. All in all, he leaves a legacy worthy of our emulation.

We too are sinners, and every bit as much (if not more so) in need of chastising by the Lord as was Peter. We stumble, we offend, we hurt the very One who suffered and died for us. How we should thank God for His mercy, love, pardon and grace for giving us chances for redemption after we fall, as He did with Peter.

Notes

1. The KJV simply says “Peter took him,” whereas other translations (such as NKJV) correctly add “aside.”

2. This to me seems a bit strong and not necessarily warranted by the text.

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CHAPTER 3

Too Many Tabernacles

Greg Dismuke

It is an honor to be invited to speak on the Power Lectures. I appreciate the fine elders who oversee this great work, and for this wonderful congregation of the Lord's church. A special thanks to Brother Wade Webster for inviting me to come and take part in this year's series of lessons on the life of the Apostle Peter.

The transfiguration was one of many truly splendid events in the life of Christ which Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness. The text reads as follows:

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he spake, behold, a bright cloud shadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:1-5, KJV).

Too Many Tabernacles

In the fourth verse of our text Peter having witnessed Jesus changing form made what he thought was a good suggestion. He suggested that three tabernacles be erected, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. The major problem with the suggestion of Peter is that it sought to put Moses and Elijah on equality with Jesus.

The Father spoke to correct the erroneous suggestion made by Peter and revealed that Jesus is His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased and that He is to be heard. They were then left alone and saw only Jesus.

When one examines that text, it is clear there are several pertinent questions answered by the events that transpired during the Lord's transfiguration.

Is There Life After Death?

This is an important question for those who have loved ones near death or have lost loved ones. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to comfort the saints concerning their departed loved ones.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the

Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

When one realizes he or she may be close to death, this becomes an important question to have answered. Job asked this question when facing what he thought was impending death. “If a man die, shall he live again” (Job 14:14)?

Many doctors and scientists are trying to explore the reality of life after death by studying people who have near-death experiences. One should know that near death is not dead. If we should find the answer to the question, we need look no further than to a copy of the Word of God. When we look at the text, it reveals to us two men appearing with Christ when He was transfigured. One of the men was Moses, the great law giver. Moses had died approximately fifteen hundred years earlier and was buried by God in an undisclosed location. “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day” (Deut. 34:5-6). Elijah, who also appeared with Christ and Moses, had been taken up in a whirlwind nine hundred years earlier (2 Kings 2:11). This proves there is life after death. These men had been dead as far as living on earth, but they were alive somewhere.

Consider a few statements made in scripture to prove life after death.

1. Jesus’ statement concerning the rich man and Lazarus after they both departed this life.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a

certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:19-23).

2. God's blessings of Job at the end of his ordeal (Job 1:2-3; Job 42:12-13). He doubled all of Job's livestock but gave him again ten children. It was not necessary to give him twenty children, for the ten he lost were still alive in another place.

3. The statement made by Jesus to the Sadducees who did not believe in a resurrection. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32).

4. The Hebrew writer's statement. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). All men have an appointment with death, but the death appointment is not the most pressing concern. It is the "after this" with which we should concern ourselves if we have not lived life in harmony with God's Will. How one goes down is how one will get up. Jesus said,

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

There should be no doubt to any who believe in the truth of God's revelation that there is life after death.

Is Jesus The Son Of God?

First, God did not leave Himself without witnesses. The reality of the transfiguration was witnessed by Peter, James, and John. Peter and John would later give testimony concerning Christ.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

John wrote that he was a part of them who beheld Christ's glory.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5; John 1:14).

Second, His change of garment came from heaven for according to Mark's account no "fuller" on earth could have whitened the garments of Jesus as they saw them in the mount (Mark 9:3). Also the change of His person as He was transfigured proves who He is. The word transfigured is the Greek word *metamorphoo* from which we get the word *metamorphosis*, "to change, to transform" (Strong). The apostles may have been fortunate to see the glory that was veiled behind the flesh, the change of the inside manifesting itself outwardly.

Those who will follow Christ must go through a transformation. There must be a change of garments as well as a change of person. The illusion of the saints putting on and putting off garments is used by Paul in his letter to the Colossians as well as the church at Ephesus (Col. 3:8, Co. 3:12; Eph. 4:22-24). Paul in his epistle to the Romans uses the same word *transformed* as used by Matthew concerning the transformation of Jesus. This transformation is spoken regarding the Christian changing from the inside and manifesting the change outwardly in doing the will of God. Paul states,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Third, His conversation with Moses and Elijah according to Luke's account revealed the subject of their discussion. They spoke of His death and what He was to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). The word *accomplish* is the Greek word

pleroo; it means “to make replete, to furnish, to satisfy, finish, supply” (Strong). These descriptive terms are just a few of the words that could be used to show what Jesus accomplished for man by dying on the cross.

- He would with His death furnish the world with an everlasting kingdom (Matt. 16:19).
- He would sufficiently satisfy the debt with His sacrifice for sin (Isa. 53:11).
- He would finish the work began by His Father (John 4:34).
- He would supply man with an entrance into the Holy of Holies (Heb. 10:19-20).

This was the scheme of redemption that could only be accomplished by the son of God spoken of by Moses and prophesied by the prophets. All who had before lived by faith were making sacrifices for what would eventually be accomplished by Jesus at Jerusalem. Moses certainly made the right choice.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:23-27).

**Does Christ Have Preeminence Over
The Law And The Prophets?**

The third question answered by this event is in direct response to Peter's mistaken suggestion found in verse four.

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only (Matt. 17:4-8).

God's response to Peter's suggestion showed that God had no intention of allowing anyone to rival the authority of His Son. When Jesus rose from the grave, He announced to His disciples that all authority was given to Him (Matt. 28:18-20). Moses and Elijah were not to be put on equality with Jesus; He alone is to be heard because He has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). It is His words that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

Moses, who represented the law, and Elijah, a representative of the prophets, had both served their purpose in the great scheme of redemption, and both looked forward to Christ. Now Christ alone must be sought for instruction concerning the salvation of men souls (Matt. 11:28-30; John 14:6).

This is a message that has failed to make the proper impact in the lives of people past and present. Whenever one puts anything on par with Jesus, he has erected too many tabernacles.

Tabernacles Of Men

The Corinthians had erected too many tabernacles when they began to glory in men (1 Cor. 1:12), “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” The answer to Paul’s rhetorical questions is an obvious no. Paul was not crucified for the Corinthians, and they were not baptized in his name. The truth Paul declared to the Corinthians is desperately needed today. Many today are no longer consulting the Word of God regarding godly living, morality, ethics, worship, or doctrine. Now it is popular simply to ask the so-called bishops, reverends, and pastors. The false teachers of today have no respect for the Word of God and in larger part they have more authority with those who are blinded to the truth than does Christ.

How will one know when he or she has erected too many tabernacles? A good litmus test is to find out if there is anything that rivals the authority of God’s Word. When one allows something or someone to have as much if not more authority in one’s life than Jesus, he has erected too many tabernacles.

Note the various tabernacles which are erected by men today that in many cases are given more consideration than the Word of God.

The Tabernacles Of Feelings

There are far too many today who have erected the tabernacle of their feelings when facing plain instructions from the Word of the Lord. Statements are made such as “I know that is what the Bible says, but I feel. . . .”

Countless individuals have allowed their feelings on a given Biblical subject to take precedence over the Word of God. Peter’s mistake has become the mistake of many who decide that their feelings can supplant the Word of God. I have a few suggestions for all who have a need to feel something.

1. You should feel privileged that God has given man His revelation that offers us an opportunity to know objective truth so we can get it right and be sure without trusting it to a feeling.

2. You should feel ashamed for feeling you could improve on the Word God has revealed. If God did not trust man enough to ask him his feelings when giving His Word, maybe we should not trust them either.

3. One should feel fortunate that God is not sending fire down from heaven to destroy those who disregard his Word in light of their feelings (Lev. 10:1-3).

4. Things we need to know should not be trusted to a feeling. One must know the truth and not trust it to a feeling. Jesus says, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). One must know that he is saved, not feel that he is saved. God gave His revelation for the purpose of giving men the opportunity to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; Eph. 3:4).

We have also been told by those in our ranks that we are dead because we do not feel it in our worship. We have some modern-day children of Ashdod similar to those of Nehemiah's day (Neh. 13:23-24). The Jews had married wives of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and as a result of this their children spoke half in the language of Ashdod and the other languages of the people. Today our children of Ashdod speak part of the Biblical language they learned from the church, and part of the world's language they learned from the denominations who are more concerned about "feeling it" and having a worship experience through the innovations contrived by men with little to no regard for the Word of God. There are many trying to convince us of this and are hard at work to change us from within. John writes, "God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). If man is to please God in worship, it will not be because he relied on feeling it, but

because he followed the instructions given by God's Word and worshipped Him in sincerity.

The Tabernacle of Thoughts

Man's thinking has often brought him trouble when it was not in compliance with the will of God. Solomon proclaimed, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). The prophet Jeremiah realized this truth when he penned these words, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Jeremiah realized that without God, man has no direction. Man has been created by God and He is the one Who knows the way man should go; therefore man requires direction from God for without it he has none. David wrote, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighted in his way" (Psa. 37:23).

Naaman serves as a great example of one who desired to be healed of his leprous condition but began thinking there was another way other than the one offered by the prophet of God (2 Kings 5).

Here is something about which all men should think. He should think about trusting God for his thinking. The reason for this is simple. God proclaimed long ago through the prophet Isaiah that He does not think like man (Isa. 55:8-9). Paul found that his thoughts were wrong regarding the cause of Christ (Acts 26:9). I believe Solomon summed it up best when he penned these words. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

The Tabernacle of Conscience

Another tabernacle that has been erected by man is the tabernacle of his conscience. Many have thought if they are approved by their conscience that all is well. The conscience apart from the Word of God is not a safe guide. Paul serves

as a great example of one who had approved his fanatical and destructive behavior with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1). Paul's background included persecuting the church which Jesus described as persecuting Him (Acts 9:1-4). Later in Paul's life in an epistle to the young preacher Timothy—Paul's conscience now being trained by the Word of God—he proclaimed he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious and labeled himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13-15). One can see the before and after of Paul's conscience. His conscience was clear because he thought what he was doing was right, though wrong. Later after learning what was right and complying with the will of God, he would truly come to recognize what it meant to have a pure conscience.

Far too many are fond of saying “my conscience is clear” while doing many things contrary to the Word of Christ. Let us remember that even though Paul was saying his conscience was clear, he later stated he thought he should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 26:9). He may have felt his conscience was clear, but he was clearly wrong.

Conclusion

The significance of Peter's mistake should not be taken lightly. His mistaken zeal to erect three tabernacles was quickly corrected by God, settling once and for all that Christ is the One Who should be heard. He is to be heard above Moses and the prophets. They must not be placed on equality with Christ. He also is to be heard above the tabernacles being erected today. Our feelings, thoughts, and consciences must be brought under obedience to Christ if we will be pleasing to God. Our prayer is that men would come to realize this Bible truth and tear down their tabernacles.

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CHAPTER 4

The Rooster That Woke Peter Up

Barry Grider

Peter. No other name is more closely identified with Christianity than Peter, with the lone exception of the Lord Jesus Christ for whom the religion is named. Chosen by the Lord to be one of His apostles, Peter would be drawn into the very inner circle of the God-Man. He was one of the very few in humanity's history to actually see, know, and touch the Christ personally. We would expect him to be unique and he was. Peter was a man of extremes. We see him climbing to the peak of a mountain to see the glory of his Lord's transfiguration and we see him sinking in anguish in the mighty deep only to be lifted to safety by the same Savior. Peter traveled, according to Rex A. Turner, Sr., the high and low roads.

Remember the high road:

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life (John 6:68, KJV).

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16).

Remember the low road:

But when he [Peter] saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt (Matt. 14:30-31).

Peter constantly put his foot in his mouth. However, one day his self-confidence would lead him to self-destruct in the most horrible, agonizing way. Secular history has recorded that when Peter was about to be put to death by crucifixion, he asked to be crucified upside down, not considering himself worthy of dying in the same way as his Lord. Even the trauma of his own crucifixion would not bring the emotional pain and leave the scars of one particular event in his life.

Peter answered and said unto him [Jesus], Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples (Matt. 26:33-35).

Why do we love Peter so much? Sure we know him as the powerful proclaimer at Pentecost, but during our Lord's ministry, we see in him a picture of ourselves. We, like Peter, are disciples who want to follow Christ, but so often we falter.

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the

porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:69-75).

The Setting

Supper has ended. Peter had spoken confidently of his commitment to Jesus. The Lord, however, made it clear that Peter would not stand with Him during His hour of trial. Peter tried to prove himself in the Garden of Gethsemane when aiming for the head of Malchus; he cut off his ear instead. Yet, on that occasion, the Lord rebuked him. Now Jesus has been taken before the high priest. Peter does not flee the scene just yet, but he is feeling low and filled with fear and turmoil. When he is identified as a Galilean and a follower of Jesus, he denies—not once, but three times, just as the Lord predicted. According to Luke, Jesus looked upon him after this third denial. Peter then fled the scene in tears.

Peter's Problem

First, Peter was overconfident. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Peter’s confidence was in himself, not his Lord. Just like he began to sink when he took his eyes off Christ, the farther he got from Jesus, the less confident he became. None of us should ever overestimate our spiritual strength. “If thou faint

in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” (Prov. 24:10). Let us say with the psalmist, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa. 27:1).

Second, Peter was fearful. Fear is gripping and crippling. Jesus often told his disciples, including Peter, “Be not afraid” (Matt. 14:27). At the moment, Peter believed he was cut off from Christ. Fear usually results in estrangement from God (Gen. 3:10). While it is true that the wicked should fear, God’s people are never to be afraid. God said to Abraham, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). How can we overcome fear? Never forget to whom we belong. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Psa. 55:22).

Third, Peter was seeking acceptance. While Peter followed the Lord for three years, when tribulation truly came, he did not stand. His behavior indicates that he simply wanted to be like everybody else. If you do not desire anybody to know you are a Christian, just act like the world around you. As he swore and cursed, that is what Peter was doing. When the world looks upon you as a follower of Christ, they will begin to ask questions of you and perhaps will persist to the point of making accusations against you. Jesus warned of this:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19).

At this moment, Peter must have forgotten those words. He became, for a time, like the seed that fell upon the rock and withered. Peter weakened in time of trial. It is easy to be a Christian when you are sitting in worship on Sunday and when surrounded by fellow Christians. However, when the

world around us is closing in and the pressure builds, often we succumb and become just like the world around us.

The Lord's Look

Following the denial and the crowing of the rooster, Luke records, "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). Place yourselves in the sandals of Peter and imagine the look of the Lord. What kind of look was this?

First, it must have been a look of pain. Remember Jesus was already bathed in spit, his body had been beaten, and his face had been smacked. Surely someone will stand in your defense. However, the one you thought you could depend upon the most, who said he would never deny you, does exactly that. How incredibly sad! Can you imagine what must have gone through Peter's mind as he watched the Lord look upon him as if to say, "Will not even you, Peter, help me?" There has never been a time when someone who confessed Christ did not in some way deny Him later. When this happens, one should remember the Lord's agony. When Christians behave as if they do not know Him, that scene is played over again.

Second, it must have been a look of disappointment. When Jesus said that Peter would deny him three times, that is certainly not what Jesus wanted Peter to do. He wanted Peter to stand. But Jesus knows our every weakness. Remember in the garden:

And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping,
and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou?
couldst not thou watch one hour? Watch
and pray, lest ye enter in to temptation. The
spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak
(Mark 14:37-38).

How many times have we disappointed Jesus by making a vow and not keeping it (Eccl. 5:4)? How often do we

commit ourselves to faithful attendance, living righteously, and soul saving, only to falter along the way and disappoint our Lord?

Third, it was a look of understanding. It was not a look of “I told you so.” It was a look of understanding. It was for this reason that Jesus came.

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men” (Mark 8:31-33).

Jesus mission was to go to Calvary and die for the sins of the world, including the sins of Peter. Later on the apostle would write, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Despite Peter’s denial, Jesus did not give up on Peter. In fact, as soon as he arose from the dead, an angel sent word, “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he [Jesus] goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7). Jesus understands who we are. “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25).

Even though Jesus was in pain and was disappointed, He understood why Peter did what he did because Jesus understands sinful humanity. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth

our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psa. 103:13-14). Yes, our Lord’s look was a look of understanding.

The Rooster That Woke Peter Up

All of us need to be awakened if we are in sin. Paul wrote, “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14). When the rooster crowed Peter was given a wake-up call.

First, the rooster crowing served as a reminder for Peter. He knew what he had done. Sin can seem so friendly, so innocuous. Yet in the end sin is so hurtful and harmful. James wrote:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (Jas. 1:13-15).

Those who do not want to be awakened from sin stay away from the assembly of Christians lest they hear that which inflicts pain in the conscience and creates remorse in the mind over actions committed. The word of God has that power. “For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Thereafter, every time Peter heard a rooster crow, he was reminded of how he had betrayed his Lord. It could have been a reminder of triumph. Instead it would be a reminder of failure.

Second, the rooster crowing led Peter to repentance. “And he went out, and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). While

tears alone do not indicate repentance, they are nevertheless involved in repentance. Revival of the soul comes through tears. Because of sin David said, “I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears” (Psa. 6:6). Jesus stated, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4). When in sin, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (Jas. 4:9). While few blush over their sin today (Jer. 8:12), even fewer weep over their sin. Peter, however, was ashamed of his sin and wept without control. These tears led him back to his Lord. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Salvation’s path is always paved with repentance. Peter learned his lesson and repented of his actions. He made up his mind to change his mind. He would seek his Lord and the Lord would let him try again.

Peter did learn his lesson and became the great preacher of repentance. On Pentecost, to those who crucified Jesus, we read, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). To a brother who had sinned, he stated, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

Listen carefully to the rooster crowing. It serves to each one of us as a reminder of sin in our lives. Will you, like Peter, repent?

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CHAPTER 5

Desired By Satan

Michael Shepherd

Debt Of Appreciation

I for one, truly thank God that this Seventeenth Annual Power Lectures, with the backing of the faithful eldership brethren Larry Everson and Con Lambert, along with the super excellent and exceptional help provided by the administrator, conductor, and director, brother Wade Webster, has become a reality. Gratitude is hereby expressed for this gracious invitation and for this coveted privilege of having a part in this program. It is also with great elation that I express appreciation to each member of the Southaven congregation for their individual contributions to this great cause.

Duty of Assignment

My assigned field of inquiry will be lodged in and around the subject "Desired By Satan." My assigned text for this study is Luke 22:31, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (KJV).

Disposition of Arrangement

As we delaminate and decorticate this dissertation, the diagram for this discussion will decree us in this direction.

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|-------------------------------|---------|
| a. The discourse | Address |
| b. The divine document | Assign |
| c. The descriptive definition | Analyze |

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| d. The disquisition | Allocated |
| e. The didactics | Applied |
| f. Development | Advise |
| g. Denouncement | Actualize, Achieve, Accomplish |

Discourse Address

This subject surely suggests that Satan has this insatiable appetite not only for Peter (Luke 22:31), but also for all mankind. Peter advises and admonishes, “Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

It is Satan’s desire to capture people causing them to miss heaven. Satan’s mission, simply stated, is to destroy the human race. Motivated and induced by strong passionate hatred for God and good, Satan seeks the perdition and destruction of God’s highest achievement, man. Satan will never retire from his poisonous pursuits until he is cast into eternal Gehenna (Rev. 20:10). The desires of Satan are vividly revealed throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Satan being evil, his goal is to bring about everyone’s destruction. He knows that sin cannot enter heaven (Rev. 21:27). Therefore, if he can seduce and tempt all to sin and die in that state, he will keep them out of heaven. Satan uses the ability of man to choose by tempting him, starting in the beginning. Man was given a choice to make-follow Satan’s lies or God’s commandments (Gen. 3:1-6). It was Satan who created the desire for Eve to eat of the fruit. He created a desire for it, and thus we have the first sin of man. When a person desires something strongly enough, he may yield to temptation, or he may choose not to yield to temptation. Satan’s power today is limited to deceit, enticement, and attraction, all of which may be resisted with the help of God and the Sword of the Spirit. Satan can use human interests and weaknesses to entice people into sinful deeds. In view of Satan’s desires to have us, what can we do to thwart, oppose,

block and defeat him, and keep him at bay? Satan cannot force us to do anything. God does provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). God's Word shows us that there are many things we can do to evade his advances. Absolutely no room must be left in our lives in which the devil can operate (Eph. 4:27). Christians must fully equip themselves with the whole armor of God so that we can withstand the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). Because of the weakness of the flesh, we are to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation (Matt. 26:41). Satan must be resisted so he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7). In our battle against Satan, we must know the truth of the gospel and apply it to our lives so that rather than falling victim to the devil, we can be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37).

Avoiding the desires of Satan entails growth, development, and an increase in spirituality and righteousness. It is not enough to eliminate Satan from our lives. We must replace the void with wholesome substitutes (Matt. 12:43-45). Satan is the master of delusion. He has been successful in blinding people's minds (2 Cor. 4:4) and snatching the word of God from their hearts (Luke 8:12). Therefore, it is imperative that we be alert at all times. Self-control and conscious anticipation are critical when dealing with Satan's desires. Satan's destiny is hell. Jesus said that hell is prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Therefore, it is the devil's desire to take everyone with him. As children of God, may we always be aware of Satan's desires and the dangers that face us also. We have the blessed assurance that Christ will never forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

The Divine Document Assigned

The scripture that has been designated for this dissertation is Luke 22:31. Here is where these words are found: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." During Jesus' ministry on planet earth, he reveals Satan's request for Peter. During

the three years of close association with Peter and these men, Jesus was making himself ready to leave them. These were his last hours.

There are no less than nine compositions in this particular chapter. Our focus is on the fourth of the nine where Jesus reached out to Peter and uttered this recorded verse. Luke presents in this verse this event that of course led up to the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cruel cross (Matt. 27:33; John 19:17). This foretelling of Peter's great denial and Jesus encouraging him to stand fast is found in this section. Satan desired to have all of the disciples, not just Peter alone, but all of them. Satan by means of fearful trials and dangers that were impending would drive them from their steadfastness. Satan was making a demand in order to torture or to harm Peter. Satan saw the weakness in Peter's life and was laying claim on him. Not only do we see Satan's evil desire, but we also see his persistence. Satan's desires were strong, but Christ was also active on Peter's behalf. Jesus knew that trials, tribulations, persecutions, and even failures would come. Satan's desire was to sift Peter just like we sift wheat. Satan had already gotten one, Judas. He had nearly gotten another, Peter; and he wishes to have all. Satan wants to put all of the faithful ones through this process, to see if any faith remains after the sifting.

Jesus, because He is all knowing, knew that Peter would show the faith and fortitude to rise up and excel from this situation. Peter thought that his courage was strong enough to meet any tests that might lie ahead, no matter how difficult. Peter thought that he was ready for any crisis that might come—even prison or death. Satan wanted to test Peter, shake his faith, and sift him like wheat. Satan is described by Jesus as planting tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:38-39). The tares planted by Satan are used to strangle and destroy the faith of mankind. To accomplish this damnable work, Satan prowls the earth constantly seeking whom he may pulled down to destruction.

The ability to overcome Satan did not depend on Peter alone, but with the help of God and the strength of Christ, Peter was able to overcome. Interestingly, following Jesus' warning that Satan wanted him, Jesus told Peter, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

First and Second Peter bear witness to that statement of Jesus for Peter wrote: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). Can we overcome? Yes! The victory comes through our faith, and that faith comes by God's Word. Attacks by Satan are attempts to lure us away from the will of God. Therefore, we must learn the will of God and walk in that path and victory will surely follow.

Descriptive Definitions Analyzed

When Jesus told Peter that Satan desired to have him, he was telling Peter that Satan was asking to have you, or obtain you by asking. Satan is demanding to have you. The word *desired* carries the idea of demanding. In this case, Satan was making a demand in order to torture or to harm Peter. Satan's desires were strong, but Jesus Christ was also active on Peter's behalf. Christ's prayer was that Peter's faith would remain intact. Jesus knew that Peter's faith was the only thing that could help Peter overcome the devil in the end. If Peter allowed his faith to fail completely, he would be overcome. The second part of the statement is "that he may sift you as wheat." The word *sift* is used figuratively, conveying the thought to sift by trials and temptations. The thought expressed in the word is inward agitation to try one's faith to the verge of overthrow. The devil wanted, by inward agitation, to try Peter's faith to the verge of overthrowing it. Satan demanded to agitate Peter to see if there was any faith in him. When one would sift wheat, the grain was agitated or shaken in a kind of fan or sieve, that the chaff may

thereby separate itself from the wheat and fall out. The grain remained in the fan and the chaff and dust were thrown off. So will Satan also disquiet and terrify Peter and us through persecutions, dangers, tribulations, and temptations in order to bring our faithfulness towards Jesus to apostasy. Satan desired to try Peter, to place trials and temptations before him to agitate him to see whether any faith remained. Just as the violent and continuous shaking of the sieve causes all the sound, solid wheat to fall through on the pile of wheat below, God will have his wheat winnowed.

Peter did not realize the internal agitation he would face, the severity of the trials he would undergo, and how near he had come to having his faith overthrown. The temptations of Satan will reveal strength as well as weakness in an individual.

Disquisition Allocated

A careful study and analysis of the descriptive words and definitions of this divine document (Luke 22:31) that has just been delineated brings us now to the allocation of this disquisition. We find that the desires that Satan uses to lure man from God consist of a three-point strategic plan: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life (1 John 2:16, ASV). There actually are no other avenues through which Satan may tempt us, but he has mastered the use of these as to lead the vast majority of mankind astray. A man's life can be divided into three realms of activity.

First, there is the social realm. So many people are especially vulnerable in this area of their lives. They want to be accepted socially, so they drink alcohol, smoke, use drugs, go to the clubs, and engage in improper dress and talk. The peer pressure of their surroundings causes them to bow, for they do not want to be different.

Second, there is the business realm. Many people yield to Satan's desires in this area of their life. Though they may

resist Satan in other areas, it becomes difficult to “succeed” in their businesses unless they lie, steal, and cheat. Many business people are dishonest with their customers. There are businessmen who slant the truth and fabricate conditions which do not exist while others simply refuse to tell all the facts. Money becomes more important than God. Whatever the person’s weakness, Satan will surely find it.

Third, there is the religious realm. There are those in the world who rarely yield to temptations in the social or business realms. They are honest and moral people who exhibit kindness toward their fellowman. They oppose immorality. They love justice and fairness. But when it comes to religion, they will not accept God’s standard. Satan will try to persuade, induce, or entice using these avenues.

A temptation is not a sin. One does not commit sin just by being tempted. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:14-15). Temptation is the enticement; it can be the beginning point in the process of sin and death or it can be the ending point in the process of resistance and restraint. Now on the other hand, in order to conform you to the image of Christ, there must be trials in our lives. When you encounter trials, you are going through the best days of your life. Brother James says: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jas. 1:2-3).

We can be excited today for having a bad day. We need to know and understand that the proving, the testing that the trial brings, works, produces, develops, and brings out steadfastness and endurance. If we do not know that, then all of our focus will be on the problem, and we will miss the purpose. The purpose is to develop and mature us in becoming more like Christ. The apostle Peter writes about

this: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Pet. 4:12).

When things get hot in your life, do not be surprised as if this is some unusual thing that is happening to you, because Peter also tells us to rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13). So Rejoice! Rejoice! Jesus goes through every trial with us. We must understand this because if we do not, we will always question why we are going through this. God is developing us just like a developer develops film. God takes us to the darkroom because He wants a good photograph. We must be patient in our trials for they make us mature in our Christian walk with God and have their eternal blessings and rewards. It is very enlightening and comforting in what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:10, when he speaks of the manifold temptations (Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Now, observe the connection for every different color of trial that one experiences, there is that very color of grace to cover it, to enable us to handle it. That, dear reader, is the marvel of God’s care, providence and provision for his people.

Satan’s mission, simply stated, is to destroy the human race in hell. From Genesis 3 forward, he can be resisted. We are assured “resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jas. 4:7-8). What a great promise! What a great assurance! Let us emphatically shout that Satan can be resisted and defeated!

Didactics Applied

Each Christian is under obligation to reproduce the life of Christ in his own life. Paul said it this way: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). Our minds and lives must be in complete harmony with the mind and life of Christ. We need to follow Christ when confronted with temptation. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He was tempted in all points

like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). We are not called to travel on any road or to face any issues not experienced by Jesus. He is our example in overcoming every trial and temptation in our life. When Jesus was facing temptation, He used scripture to defeat Satan. As a human being, He was subject to temptations just as we are. Jesus knew the scriptures and was able to quote them. We must learn the scriptures and be able to quote them. Christianity is directed at daily human behavior. Christianity is practical. That is, it pertains to people and everyday life. God intended Christianity to be the ultimate practical religion for the purpose of generating daily Christian living. That will produce the strength we need to combat Satan. Successful Christian living is taught in the Holy Scriptures in a clear-cut motivational way. Here are some examples for consideration to apply to your life:

1. Remember Christ's victory over Satan (2 Cor. 2:14)
2. Follow Him all the way home (Rev. 14:4).
3. Read and study the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15)
4. Have courage to stand alone (Dan. 1:8).
5. Develop a personal prayer life (Mark 6:46).
6. Never trust in human wisdom (Prov. 3:5).
7. Let trials and persecution strengthen you (Rom. 8:18).
8. Realize that God is not the author of our temptations (Jas. 1:13).
9. Recognize that:
 - The devil will leave/depart (Matt. 4:3-11; Luke 4:13) and even flee when resisted (Jas. 4:7).
 - Our temptations are common to all men; we will never be tempted above that which we are able to bear; and with every temptation there is provided a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).
 - We are being tempted when we are drawn away of our own lusts and enticed (Jas. 1:14)

10. Be willing to wrestle with the devil when he tries to sift God's servants (Eph. 6:12; Luke 22:31).

11. Be vigilant lest we fall into the snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:7).

12. Hear, believe, and understand the word lest Satan take it away and we not be saved (Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).

13. Endure with patience the temptations of Satan as did Job (Jas. 4:11; Rev. 12:10-13; Job 1).

14. Use the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) to bruise Satan under our feet (Rom 16:20).

15. Do not be fearful but faithful unto death when Satan tries us and causes us suffering and tribulation (Rev. 2:10).

16. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3) when Satan contends with us (Jude 9).

17. Put God's armor on and stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11).

18. Realize that, even though the devil holds the world under his evil influence, greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

19. Do not remain novices (1 Tim. 3:6).

20. Desire the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2).

21. Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18)

22. Add the Christian graces to your life so that you will never fail (2 Pet. 1:2-11).

23. Keep the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

There is a better way of life and Christians possess it. By understanding the weapons that we have and the proper use of them, there remains another advantage which we ought to know and that is the reward which God has promised to the faithful. These promises and privileges provide the perfect motivation for overcoming Satan.

Development Advised

There are two things we suggest that would be helpful in developing Christian character that we might stand against the desires and temptations of Satan:

Count It All Joy

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (Jas. 1:2). If we take a closer look at the word *count*, we see that James is telling us not only to think and to esteem, James is also telling us to calculate and add it all up. Satan sends so much our way until it seems as though it is not adding up for our good. The tests and temptations that come our way just do not add up. If you are not counting it all joy, then you are counting or adding up the things you can complain about. Our brother Peter says:

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, through now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:6-8).

Jesus uses the trials in our lives to make replicas of Him; therefore, we go through our trials rejoicing. Satan desires are to get us to focus on the circumstances instead of the spiritual purpose. So many times, we are circumstance driven:

- Why did you do this to me?
- It is not fair.
- I did not do anything wrong.
- How come?
- Why me?
- Why this?
- Why that?

That is the wrong focus. We must focus on the spiritual purpose instead of the circumstances.

Pray For Wisdom

James says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5). God will assist us with wisdom to address the trials and temptations that we might benefit spiritually from those trials and temptations even if we do not know the “why” of the trial. We cannot mix human viewpoints with divine viewpoints to seek a solution. Difficulties should drive us to God. We are placed in scenarios that we cannot fix. Why? So that we can know that God is our only option. When we approach our trials in the right way, James says, “Blessed is that man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him (Jas. 1:12). When we endure, remain firm, and persevere under these trying times, God is stabilizing and developing us on the inside. When His testing is complete, God will pass you and put that crown on you. When preparing meat, a roast in particular, you place it in the oven but at certain intervals, you take it out—stick a fork in it to see if it is tender and done. You have to check to see if the fire has done its job. Now, sometimes you have to put that roast back into the oven even though it looks ready, it smells ready, and it is brown all the way around. When the fork penetrates the internal, it reveals things that the external cannot see. Sometimes God has to keep us in the oven and keep us in boiling water all night long to get our tough self well done, to help us see the spiritual in our trials.

Denouncement - Actualize, Achieve, Accomplish

The desires of Satan can be viewed as both a test and a temptation. From God’s perspective, it’s a trial. From the devil’s perspective, it’s a temptation. We are thankful to God that it has to go through him first. After Jesus makes the

statement to Peter in Luke 22:31, Jesus also said: “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

God allows the devil to tempt us, while at the very same time God is testing us. When we are tempted to take a vacation from God, we have an opportunity to do good. When we are confronted with Satan’s desires, we have a choice because the ability we have to say yes to temptation is equal to the opportunity to say no. The foundation for the solution to being desired by Satan is a God focus.

God allows the devil to solicit us to test us to see if we are going to go against Him. You and I must take the trials and grow, mature, and develop to have a deeper and more abiding, obedient faith. God wants man to follow him by choice. Why would God allow the devil to tempt us to go against Him? Because God wants us to follow him by choice and without opposition; there is nothing to choose. Trials, temptations, and the desires of Satan are allowed by God to test us to see if our “amens” on Sunday are any good on Monday. When our flesh is being confronted with the desire to go against the will of God, this is not sin. Temptation becomes a sin based upon our response to it.

How Do I Overcome Temptation, Trials And The Desires Of Satan?

The foundation and solution is having a God focus. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, that they not be led into temptation, but be delivered from evil (Matt. 6:13). When we yield to the things that are evil, we are not allowing Jesus to lead us. When we pray, we are focusing on God and not evil. When we focus on God, he will lead us in the path of righteousness (Psa. 23:3). We often sing the song:

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you, some other to

win. Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue, Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through. Ask the savior to help you, comfort, strengthen, and keep you; He is willing to aid you, he will carry you through.

The issue here is to ask the Savior to help you, to comfort you, to strengthen you. After we fight manfully, after we subdue our passion, God is willing! Are we willing?

When we pray, we are praying for God to lead us and to deliver us. The foundation and the solution for Christian achievement is a God focus. The desires of Satan cannot be our primary focus because we would be focusing on the very thing that we cannot fix.

Brother James encourages us to look at no less than three things in James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” The first thing that James says that I want you to focus on is the goodness of God. Day after day, the Lord blesses us in so many ways that we should not let one thing come between all of that goodness. In the midst of our temptations, James says, focus on the goodness of God.

Lessons From The Garden

The methodology used by Satan to tempt Eve is the same avenues he still uses to tempt mankind today. God placed trees in the Garden of Eden, and the issue was “Who are you going to choose?” The devil made one tree look as if it was the only tree. Eve allowed Satan to build her entire world around the one tree that she could not have. The goodness of God provided her with a whole bunch of trees that she could have. The devil persuaded Eve to forget about all of the goodness that God had provided; she even forgot about all of the other trees in the garden that she had and started focusing on the one tree that she could not have. Satan convinced Eve to forget about all of God’s goodness.

First, Satan began by asking a simple question: “Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1). Also, the question was posed in such a way as to draw out the feelings of the woman and her perception of God’s rules.

Second, the question does not give God the full respect He deserves. The phrase “Jehovah God” occurs 11 times in chapter 2, but by omitting the personal name of the Lord, Satan accomplishes his primary goal: minimizing the power of the Lawgiver. And of course, by eating of the forbidden fruit, Eve will also achieve godhood, being as powerful as God.

Third, Satan capitalized upon Eve’s weakness. “Neither shall ye touch it” (Gen. 3:3). Satan also presents an overt contradiction to God’s edict, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). Satan is equating himself with the one who made the law, showing himself to be just as superior to the lawgiver. Here he asserts: “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4).

Fourth, Satan glorifies the value of sin. Here, Satan explains to Eve that by eating, she will “be as God” (Gen. 3:5). Now, Satan appeals to the three areas of human weakness.

The Lust Of The Flesh

The Genesis account states that Eve saw the forbidden fruit as “good for food” (Gen. 3:6). In the wilderness, Satan used the same avenue to tempt the Lord who had fasted forty days and forty nights. “If thou be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matt. 4:3).

The Lust Of The Eyes

Eve saw that the fruit “was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). Likewise, Satan tempted Christ through the lust of the eyes. “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them” (Matt. 4:8).

The Pride of Life

Satan completed his temptation of Eve with this ploy. Eve thought that the tree was to be desired to make one wise (Gen. 3:6). She determined that she could improve herself

even to the point of being a god by eating. Eve allowed this pride to induce her to act. She wanted a greater position. Jesus was tempted to abuse and boast of his power by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (Matt. 4:5-6).

The apostle John notes that sin takes shape in these three distinct categories as he writes about this in First John 2:15-16.

The point that James is making (in James 1:17) is that God is so good to us in so many ways that we will overlook by allowing one thing to come between Him and us. God says just look at my goodness. Whenever the devil's desires of "having you" comes into effect, just look at the goodness of God. Start thanking God for all of the good things that He has given you, and let God's character take over your life.

We also need to focus on the faithfulness of God. James says that these good and perfect gifts are from above, and come down from the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17). If the good things are coming down, then the good things must be up. Paul writes in the Colossian letter, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

When we face temptation, we are to look up and see the consistency of God. For those who successfully endure the hardships of this life, God has promised a beautiful and glorious crown (James 1:12).

Next, focus on God's plan. James says, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (Jas. 1:18). We are the firstfruits of God's plan. Firstfruits are a thing of value. When God looks at us, there is nothing higher than us. We must focus on the Master when we are tempted, and He will lead us safely through. While vigilance is necessary in pre-empting temptation, it must be combined with prayer. Jesus in the model prayer included in that petition, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We are to pray that God,

in His gracious providence, will help us to avoid temptation and help us escape the wiles of the devil. Peter says that the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:9).

Conclusion

What blessed assurance we have in knowing that when Satan desired to have Peter, Jesus prayed for him that his faith not fail (Luke 22:32). Jesus' desire was that Peter would show the resistance of a steadfast faith. Peter later writes, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). This faith will succeed and triumph over Satan. Our faith is in Christ Jesus who prayed for Peter's faith. He is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Indeed, faith is the victory. Faith enables us to endure the temptations and trials of this life. When these things confronts us, let us resist bravely with God's Word which produces faith in the Master.

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CHAPTER 6

Put Up Thy Sword

Paul Meacham, Jr.

Thanks

I cannot allow myself to begin this manuscript without first thanking brother Webster for his kind invitation to contribute to this noble effort. I also extend my deepest thanks to the elders and the wonderful brethren of the Southaven Church of Christ for this opportunity to work with them again. I am a Gospel preacher today, in part, because of the challenging opportunities, unwavering support, invaluable encouragement, faithful examples, and unconditional love you have shown my family and me through the years. I have no words to adequately express how grateful I am to you.

Introduction

Maybe it is due to the combined efforts of John Wayne and John Ford, but in America, we love the cavalry. Those who put themselves in harm's way are our heroes. They swoop in just when things have turned from bad to worse. We have trouble imagining a scene where a representative of the encircled wagon train comes out from his hiding place and explains to the newly arrived young officer that he and his men are not needed, that this is their battle, and they must fight it alone. Yet, the passage under our consideration, John 18:10-11, tells us of a friend and follower who put himself at risk to protect his Lord only to be told that his efforts were misguided, and his assistance was unwelcomed.

The apostle John, an eyewitness and inspired historian of the events (Matt. 26:37; John 18:1, KJV), recorded that when Judas led an armed mob into the garden to arrest Him, Jesus went out to meet them (John 18:4). Jesus clearly identified Himself as the One they were seeking and took steps to ensure that His disciples were not involved in the arrest thus shielding them from danger (John 18:5-9). Jesus' disciples did not know what they should do but expressed their willingness to fight by asking Jesus if they should defend Him with the sword (Luke 22:49). It was Peter, however, who stepped forward, drew his sword, and struck out at the high priest's servant, a man named Malchus (John 18:10). Peter's intentions are not explicitly stated, but we know that his blow landed in such a way as to cut off Malchus' right ear (John 18:10). From that we might conclude that Peter was an extraordinary swordsman and was able to nip off a man's ear without further damaging him at will. Or we must conclude that Peter, a fisherman, not a soldier by trade, was striking at Malchus' head and came away with only an ear. Whatever Peter's intentions, Jesus intervened and miraculously restored Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51).

It was there on a cold night in the garden that we can see by torchlight the scene unfold: Jesus standing between the mob and His disciples; the mob armed and acting under the authority of the High Priest; Peter standing at the head of the disciples with his bloody sword drawn; everyone ready to kill; when Jesus turned to say "unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath" (John 18:11). I have no doubts as to why Judas did what he did. He was a thief (John 12:6). I have no doubts as to why Peter did what he did. However misguided, he was ready to die for Jesus (Matt. 26:35). I am, however, compelled to ask, "But why, Lord?" Why did Jesus not want Peter's assistance? Why was stepping forward to defend our Lord the wrong thing to do? I believe the Bible answers these questions.

**Put Up Thy Sword: Because You Are Putting
At Risk Those I Am Protecting**

Matthew's account tells us that Jesus said to Peter, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). There is an inherent risk in taking up arms and waging a physical battle. History has shown us that those who engage in physical combat die at an alarming rate compared to those engaged in more peaceful pursuits. In drawing his sword, Peter put himself and the other disciples in grave jeopardy.

Jesus had already taken steps to clearly identify Himself and to tell the mob that His disciples should be allowed to go. Peter's actions created risk and raised tensions at the exact moment when Jesus was seeking to provide safety and calm anxieties. Jesus had just finished praying to His Father that during His time on earth He had protected His disciples (John 17:12). Yes, Peter was trying to help Jesus, but he was actually working against his Lord's purposes.

Peter would later learn that his actions created risks that extended beyond the garden. John tells us that later that night as Peter warmed himself by a fire with the servants and officers of the High Priest he was recognized as being a disciple of Jesus. Who was it that recognized him? It happened to be a relative of Malchus who also worked as a servant to the High Priest. Being put on the spot and being afraid, Peter denied that he even knew our Lord. There is no doubt that Peter, the man who cut off Malchus' ear, was at greater risk than would have been Peter, just one of the disciples of Jesus. Peter never should have drawn his sword, but, having drawn it, he needed to put it away.

**Put Up Thy Sword: Because Even Fervent
Zeal Can Be Misguided**

There is no doubt that Peter was zealous in his attempt to protect Jesus. He drew his sword and struck the first blow

even though it was an armed multitude that had come out against Jesus (Matt. 26:47; John 18:3). However, zeal is not the only test of propriety. Paul wrote concerning the Jews. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:1-3). For zeal to be a blessing it must be shaped and controlled by knowledge. There are those who blow up buildings killing thousands in the name of religious zeal. There are those who perpetuate hatred and racism in the name of religious zeal. There are those who remain intentionally ignorant of God’s Word and justify their choice by boasting of how fervently they believe what they believe. Zeal is important (Tit. 2:14), but separated from a controlling knowledge of God’s Will it is dangerous.

In Peter’s case, all he needed to do was wait for Jesus to tell him what to do. When the disciples realized that the mob had come to arrest Jesus, “they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?” (Luke 22:49). That was a good question. It was asked of the right person. If Peter had waited for the answer, he would have known God’s will on the matter. Instead, Peter allowed his zeal to drive his actions without the controlling influence of God’s word. A favorite song of mine tells the story of an inept flight crew trying to find the city of Philadelphia in the dark. One line of the song has the captain informing the passengers that “We’re not sure where we’re heading. The good news is we’re making excellent time” (Chordiac Arrest). Such unguided, uncontrolled zeal may bring a chuckle when it appears in a barbershop quartet’s routine, but it is no laughing matter when it is found in God’s people.

Faithful children of God have long been ridiculed for giving to and requiring of others a “thus saith the Lord.”

How else can we know that our zeal to please our Creator is actually pleasing to Him? How else can we know that our steps are being taken under the guiding hand (Psa. 119:105; Jer. 10:23)? Let us be satisfied to live the sentiments of Ira Brister's beautiful hymn. "Not a step will I take without Jesus, is the vow that my heart hath made; Though I often am tempted to leave Him, yet unto Him my heart is stayed."

**Put Up Thy Sword: Because I Do Not
Need That Kind Of Defense**

Peter made a mistake. He saw before him a man with two arms, two legs, two eyes, two ears, and one nose and forgot that Jesus was more than just a man. In the stress of the moment, he did not consider that Jesus was divine and did not need to be defended. There were times Jesus allowed His disciples to help care for Him. There was a company of women who followed after Jesus and the apostles tending to their needs (Matt. 27:55). Jesus was alone at Jacob's Well because He had sent the disciples away to purchase food for them to eat (John 4:8). However, Jesus never put His disciples at risk to care for or protect Him. It would not have fit with His stated purpose in coming to the world: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

When Peter struck Malchus, Jesus corrected him. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels" (Matt. 26:53)? Satan had tempted Jesus to make His deity known by casting Himself off a pinnacle of the temple. "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:6). Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore, the angels of Heaven are at His beck and call. If Jesus had needed a defense, He had a host of beings with power beyond our understanding available to Him (2 Kings 19:35).

Additionally, a careful reading of the account shows that Jesus did not behave as One who needed to be rescued. When the mob came to get Him, He went out to meet them (John 18:4). He asked them who they sought and positively identified Himself as their prey (John 18:5; John 18:8). Upon identifying Himself to them, “they went backward, and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). What caused them to fall to the ground? Were they simply surprised by His candor? Were they afraid because of the miracles they had heard about? Were they struck down by “the glorious effulgence of the majesty of Christ which overpowered them” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown) as some have supposed? I do not know what caused the mob to fall to the earth, but I do know that Jesus was not behaving like someone who wanted, needed, or expected to be rescued.

Today, it is right for Christians to defend the Gospel and its message of hope (1 Pet. 3:15). It is right for us to defend ourselves in the spiritual battle we wage with Satan (Eph. 6:10-19). It is right for us to defend ourselves when we have been accused falsely of wrongdoing (Acts 22:1ff). However, Jesus has never needed us to defend Him, rather “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield” (Psa. 33:20).

**Put Up Thy Sword: Because My
Kingdom Is Not Of This World**

Peter’s actions were diametrically opposed to his King’s desire and indicative of a citizen in an earthly, not spiritual, kingdom. The next day Jesus defended Himself against the charge that He and His followers were a threat to the Roman government. “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). If Jesus had intended to establish an earthly kingdom, then Peter’s actions would have been perfectly right. Earthly kingdoms are advanced

and defended at the edge of a sword, but not Jesus' kingdom. The battle cry of the Islamic faith has been "Islam, tribute, or the sword" (Newman 432). Jesus' kingdom, the church (Matt. 16:18-19), is advanced by the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), not by the sword of man.

Jesus was fully aware of the dangers of this world and acknowledged a person's need to defend himself from those dangers. As He prepared His disciples for the changes they would experience because of His return to Heaven, He advised them, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35-36). Jesus would no longer be among them to protect them. They would have to look to their own protection. But the physical sword has never been a suitable instrument to advance the cause of the Lord's kingdom. One cannot be driven to Jesus at the point of a sword. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:44-45). Therefore, Peter was being groomed to wield a weapon that was "... quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb 4:12). Peter's weapon was to be the Word of God.

Put Up Thy Sword: Because It Is Time For Me To Go

The events that played out in the garden on the night in question were put in motion before the world was created (Rev. 13:8). When the time was right, Jesus was sent into this world (Gal. 4:4). Now the time was right for Jesus to turn

Himself over to them and submit Himself to their cruelty. In Luke's record of the events, Jesus questioned the mob and acknowledged that their time had come. "Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:52-53).

They had wanted to kill Jesus before. When Jesus taught publicly regarding the Jewish leaders' hypocrisy, "they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Matt. 21:45-46). They wanted Him dead but feared the people. On occasion, they even took steps to kill Him and Jesus, because it was not the right time for Him to die, had to remove Himself from their grasp. When Jesus claimed deity by pointing out that He predated Abraham, "then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (John 8:59). Again, when Jesus taught in the temple grounds that He was divine and that those who rejected Him as the Messiah would be rejected by Jehovah, they "took up stones again to stone him....Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand" (John 10:31; John 10:39).

In the garden, however, there was no escape. It was not because they had Jesus cornered. It was not because He was overpowered. It was not because He was outnumbered. There was no escape because it was time for Him to go. His Father's plan called for this to be the time when He should go and, as at all other times, Jesus did what pleased His Father (John 8:29). For Peter to stand in the way, no matter what his motives, put him in the way of God's plan. He needed to put up his sword and move aside.

Jesus had tried to prepare the disciples for the moment of His sacrifice. According to McGarvey, Jesus had spent

about nine months teaching them “that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt. 16:21) (414). It was Peter who had opposed the idea at that time, and Jesus had to rebuke him saying “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt 16:23).

Jesus had taught them in great detail why it was necessary that He die.

The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour (John 12:23-27).

One of the most difficult concepts in Scripture for me to grasp is the fact that “it pleased the LORD to bruise him” (Isa 53:10). That Jehovah saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied (Isa. 53:11). What pleasure could a Father gain from seeing the suffering of His Son? What could be satisfying about seeing His Son pour “out his soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12). The only ways I can answer these questions is that Jesus died making “intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Like a father whose laments are laced with pride and satisfaction over the grave of a son who selflessly gave himself up to save the lives of others, our Heavenly Father

could once again say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

Put Up Thy Sword: Because You Cannot Accomplish By Killing What I Can Accomplish By Dying

Peter thought Jesus was engaged in a struggle, and He was. The problem, for Peter, was that he did not understand the true nature of the struggle in which Jesus was engaged. Peter’s understanding of Jesus’ battle was limited to what he could see. He saw an armed mob, he knew Jesus was hated by the Jewish leadership, he knew Jesus would be falsely accused, and he stepped in to defend Jesus. What Peter could not then appreciate was the true identity of the enemy. Later, when Peter better understood the greater war being waged, he wrote, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Jesus had been locked in a battle with Satan from the very beginning. In the wake of man’s first sins, Jehovah decreed that he would “put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed” (Gen. 3:15). The Bible gives us glimpses of the on-going war between Satan and God. Satan’s persecution of Job was more than a personal attack on Job. It was an assault on Jehovah and His authority (Job 1:9-13). The conflict between Satan and Jesus was played out in clear terms as Satan tempted Jesus to abandon His Father’s plan and prove His deity through a Satan-conceived shortcut (Matt. 4:1-11). Even after being rebuffed, Satan continued to tempt Jesus in his hopes of depriving the world of a savior (Luke 4:13).

That night in the garden was the beginning of the final events that would lead to the blows so long ago prophesied. “It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”

(Gen. 3:15). This battle had to take place. Jesus would not deliver His crushing blow to Satan's head until Satan had first bruised His heel. The blow Jesus was to receive was slight relative to that which He was going to deliver, but it did not seem slight. Peter was not prepared for what he saw happening to Jesus. It was not that Jesus had not done what he needed to do to prepare him. It was just that it was beyond Peter's and the other apostles' ability to comprehend fully what was going to happen to their Master.

There are times that we, like Peter, fail to recognize the greater battle. We get sidetracked by the small battles that touch us daily and fail to see the bigger picture. When that happens, we need to put up our swords and focus our attention of the bigger issues. Why do we tell the truth when many would argue that lying to ease another's immediate pain would be kinder? We tell the truth because it is right to do so and wrong to lie (Col. 3:9; Rev. 21:8). Why do we stand for the truth uncompromisingly even when pressured by family or friends to give in "just this once"? We stand firm on God's Word because it is right to do so and will sustain us in the end (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Pet. 3:17; Col. 1:23). Peter, no doubt, had to take a firm stand on many things in his service to God. On that night in the garden, he took a stand in the wrong place. He was standing between Jesus and His purpose. There was only one right course for him to take. He needed to put up his sword and get behind Jesus. What a great example for us!

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CHAPTER 7

Operation Restoration: Go Tell Peter And The Disciples

Paul Sain

Introduction

What does the Lord see in us? What potential lies within that we may have difficulty even imagining? Are we guilty of giving up before we hardly begin? Do we have a “defeated” attitude that prevents us from being faithful and fruitful servants for the Master?

I confess I have difficulty at times spiritually striving to be like Paul. He is my hero—an awesome example in so many godly characteristics. I most often find myself more reflected in the actions and life of Simon Peter, especially during the times he spoke impetuously, before thinking, and then failed to do what he had so boldly declared. Truly, I rejoice I have the example of Simon Peter.

In this lesson we will examine: (1) Peter, The Outspoken One; (2) Peter, The Denier; and (3) Peter, The Powerful Proclaimer.

The prophets had spoken in amazing detail of the coming Messiah. John the baptizer had prepared the way for the Master. The Lord was born of the virgin Mary and had grown to adulthood. The Master Teacher instructed, illustrated, and demonstrated the way that leads to heaven,

inviting all to come to Him for salvation. Jesus Christ's earthly ministry spanned about three years. His ultimate crucifixion on the cruel cross, shedding His precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19) purchased the church (Acts 20:28). He was buried in a borrowed tomb (Matt. 27:60). The Son of God was raised from the dead, just as He had declared!

Go with me now to the gospel records, especially as recorded by Mark (16:1-13) and Luke (24:13-34).

Peter, The Outspoken One

A familiar incident, as recorded in Matthew's account of the life of Christ on earth, was when the Lord came to the disciples, walking on water. It was Peter who impetuously spoke, saying, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord bid him come to Him. Peter stepped out of the ship and walked on the water. Sadly, when he saw the boisterous wind, taking his eyes off the Lord, he began to sink (Matt. 14:28-30). Once again, Peter proved to be the first to speak of his faithfulness, but tragically he did not prove faithful.

Peter, The Denier

"Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" were some of the quick-spoken words of this disciple of our Lord (Matt. 26:35). Yet, as students of the Word are familiar, Peter denied the Lord three times. Peter had followed afar off (Matt. 26:58), was questioned without in the palace (Matt. 26:69) and out in the porch (Matt. 26:72) and ultimately when asked if he was a disciple, Peter began to swear and curse and denied even knowing the Lord (Matt. 26:74). The cock crowed, just as the Lord had said. Can you imagine how Peter felt at that moment?

Peter, Worth Recovery And Restoration

Very early, on the first day of the week, after our Lord and Savior was crucified, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother

of James, and Salome brought sweet spices to the sepulchre to anoint His body. They even talked among themselves concerning who would be able to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. But when they arrived at the tomb, they saw that the stone was already rolled away. They went inside the tomb and saw a young man sitting on the right side. Luke's account states there were two men in shining garments (Luke 24:4). This naturally scared the women.

The angels told the women not to be afraid, saying that Jesus of Nazareth "is risen; he is not here" (Mark 16:6). The men then told the women to "go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:7).

These faithful women were amazed, trembling and left quickly not saying anything to anyone because of their fear.

Go with me back to Mark 16:7 and the relatively insignificant phrase "tell his disciples and Peter." Questions abound in our minds. Why was Peter singled out? What was the purpose in specifically mentioning Peter?

Before we pursue these questions further, let us go to Luke 24. The Scriptures give us Luke's account of an event in Emmaus. While two disciples talked of the events of the Lord's death, the Son of God appeared before them. They did not recognize Him and He asked why they were so sad. They told the Lord of the events that had transpired, including the women going to the empty tomb and not finding a body. Later they ate meat and bread together and their eyes were opened—they knew He was the crucified Lord. At that point He vanished from their sight. The Scriptures record for us:

And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon (Luke 24:33-34).

Again the question arises: Why was Peter singled out? What was the purpose in specifically mentioning Peter?

Pause for a moment and reflect briefly on the eternal purpose of God as referenced in Ephesians 3:9-11. Centuries and centuries of time had been involved thus far in the redemptive scheme. The Old Law lead up to and prepared the way for the New Law. When the fulness of time came, God sent His Son to earth (Gal. 4:4) to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). After the church was established, there was a vicious persecutor named Saul (of Tarsus) who breathed out threatening and slaughter against the church (Acts 9:1) making havoc of the church (Acts 8:3). But as Saul journeyed to Damascus—to secure any who followed “this way” (Acts 9:2)—a light from heaven blinded him. Ananias was told by an angel to go to Saul but because of his extreme reputation, Ananias hesitated. He was told,

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul made his own defense known, as allowed by the chief captain, of his conversion and what God had planned for him.

The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard (Acts 22:14-15).

Paul appeared before King Agrippa and recounted what had occurred to him. Paul said the Lord told him to,

rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision (Acts 26:16-19).

Now, draw these two isolated incidents together. The Lord had a plan for Saul. The persecutor turned proclaimer was a valuable instrument in the spread of the saving gospel. I suggest the Lord looked far beyond the quick-speaking, verbal-denying, foolish-thinking, swearing and cursing Simon Peter and saw a servant, a faithful and powerful proclaimer who would convince thousands on Pentecost to follow the Lord and Savior of their soul.

Peter, The Proclaimer

On the day of Pentecost, “Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words” (Acts 2:14). Peter’s words continued,

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by

the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:22-23).

Peter brought the powerful sermon on Pentecost to a persuasive conclusion in the following words:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (v. 36).

The one who had denied the Lord three times, the one who had a faltering faith and began to sink into the water is NOW the one who so effectively is proclaiming the powerful and saving good news of Jesus Christ. Peter, along with the eleven, was a valuable instrument for the Lord on Pentecost. As a result, about 3,000 precious souls turned from their sinfulness and became a Christian on the first day the gospel was proclaimed, when the Lord's church was established.

Valuable Lessons We Learn From These Passages

We know that **one** soul is precious to the Lord (Matt. 16:26). Worth more than the whole world is the phrase found in inspired Scripture. Consider that our Lord died for each person and that one person is important to Him.

The recovery of **one** soul is just as vital, urgent, and important as teaching and baptizing an individual. Congregations and individuals put great effort in reaching, teaching, and baptizing the lost—as it should be. Likewise, we should continue our efforts to maintain the faithfulness of each soul. Recovering wandering saints is most important too.

Urgency is needed to reach countless thousands and thousands who have wandered away from the Savior. Time is short. Life on earth is brief for everyone. Thousands are plunging into eternity with each passing minute. The tragic

reality is that the majority are lost in their sins, unprepared to meet God.

Look upon each person as the Lord sees him. Since all are sinners (Rom. 3:23), and all are invited to come to the Saviour for salvation (Matt. 11:28-30), let us not see only the filth of sin in which a person is involved. Let us not be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) but see a soul that can be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

God's plan to redeem man became a reality. From the prophets who spoke of the kingdom of God centuries before it became a reality to the spokesmen on Pentecost—many were valuable instruments toward the salvation of man. Simon Peter was a valuable servant of the Lord.

The One Lesson We Must Obtain From This Occurrence

Our Lord wants **all** to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). God gave His Son (John 3:16) and the Son of God gave His life (Acts 20:28). The Holy Spirit has been very instrumental in our learning the truth regarding the way to heaven. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do not want us to merely start this spiritual journey; they want us to receive the crown (Rev. 2:10). They have made adequate provisions for us to live forever in paradise—but only if we continue to the end (Matt. 10:22), remain faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10), press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling (Phil. 3:12ff) and do not grow weary (Gal. 6:9). They do not want any to turn back to the beggarly elements of the world (Gal. 4:9), to turn from them because of love for the world (2 Tim. 4:10), nor to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).

Friend, the gospel is in our hands. We must take the “good news” to the lost. But the obvious and dominant point of this lesson is: We must exhort and restore the erring if possible, whenever possible!

The church is comprised of those who make mistakes, fall short, and neglect their duties to their Savior. Let us

briefly notice: (1) Who are the erring? (2) In God's sight, what is their condition? (3) What is our duty toward them? and (4) In what way can we restore them?

Who are the erring? The faithful are walking in the light (1 John 1:7); obediently following the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9). One is erring when he is NOT so walking and living. They become erring (unfaithful) in God's sight when they are overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1), having left their first love (Rev. 2:4), and are walking disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6).

What is the condition of the erring? According to Simon Peter (2 Peter 2:20-22), an individual who is erring is in a worse state than before they ever learned the truth. There remaineth no more sacrifice for their sins (Heb. 10:26). They are a spiritual shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

What duty does the faithful Christian have toward the erring? Faithful followers are duty-bound, obligated, and bear a responsibility to endeavor (at all costs) to restore them (Gal. 6:1). They should go and tell them their fault, warning them, praying for them (Matt. 18:15-17). Paul admonishes us to admonish them (1 Thess. 5:14) and thereby save a soul from death (James 5:19-20).

In what way can we restore the erring? In what attitude should we approach the erring? Should we ever reflect an attitude of "holier than thou" as was demonstrated by the praying Pharisee (Luke 18:10-11)? We must seek to restore in meekness (Gal. 6:1), with love one to another (John 15:12), as a brother (2 Thess. 3:15), kind and tenderhearted (Eph. 4:31-32), considering thyself lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2).

The faithful are commanded to take action toward the erring. If (after all avenues have been pursued) nothing brings the brother's restoration, Paul wrote by the inspiration of God:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thess. 3:6).

Why would we ever seek to do this? To save the soul! To help them reach heaven! To snatch them out of the fire (Jude 23; Jas. 1:19-20).

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**THE
PREACHER**

CHAPTER 8

Keynote Speaker On Pentecost

Garland Elkins

Although Simon Peter is not explicitly said to be the keynote speaker on Pentecost of Acts chapter 2, it is true that Peter fits the description of a “keynote speaker.”

A Brief Discussion Of Peter’s Background

Simon Peter was the son of Jonah (Matt. 16:17, KJV); his father was also designated as John (John 21:15-17). He was a brother of Andrew, with whom, along with James and John, he was engaged in the business of fishing. He was of Bethsaida (John 1:44). Peter was a married man, for we learn that he had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14-15); it is implied that his wife accompanied him when he went out to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:5). Peter and Andrew were first disciples of John the Baptist, and it was from John that they received testimony regarding Jesus (John 1:36). Peter was brought to Jesus by Andrew (John 1:40-42).

Peter loved the Lord but in a time of temptation and weakness he denied his Lord, even though earlier he had affirmed that he would go with him both to prison and to death (Luke 22:31-34). When the Lord looked upon him with sorrowful eyes, he remembered what he had said and “he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). Later the Lord appeared to Peter and led him three times to express his love for the Lord (John 21:15-17).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter was privileged to preach the gospel for the first time in the name of the risen Lord (Acts 2:1-40). Later at Caesarea, he was allowed to “open the door of faith” to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48).

Some Things Predicted Before Pentecost Of Acts 2

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the Law of Moses would be superseded by a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). The Law was nailed to the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14), and the Law of Christ had its beginning on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-40).

The Lord promised to build His church, and it was established on the day of Pentecost (Matt. 16:13-20; Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:47).

Some Great Things Of Pentecost

The city of Jerusalem was a city with a great history. It was the respected capital of the Jews. The prophets had predicted that the church would be established in the city of Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-4). It was here that the apostles were to wait for power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). It was in Jerusalem the apostles were to begin their witnessing for the Lord (Acts 1:8). It was here that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations (Luke 24:47). Jerusalem was a great city.

Pentecost Was A Great Day

It was the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of the Passover week. It was the second in chronology of three annual festivals which every Israelite was expected to attend. The day of Pentecost always came fifty days from the Passover. We read, “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering, seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord” (Lev. 23:15-16).

The psalmist prophesied of a day that would be called the Lord's Day. He said, **"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"** (Psa. 118:22-24; emp. mine, GE). Peter quoted Psalm 118:22 and applied it to Christ. Peter said "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:10). Then he said: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

We note the following from Acts 20:7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). There is every good reason to conclude that the previous verse implies that Paul and his company tarried in Troas until the next Lord's Day so that they could partake of the Lord's Supper with the church there. The verse reads: "And we sailed away from Phillipi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days" (Acts 20:6). Also from other Scriptures we learn that the whole church was required to assemble in one place; "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place" (1 Cor. 14:23). Also we learn that the brethren were not to forsake the assembling of themselves together: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). On the night of His betrayal our Lord instituted His (the Lord's) Supper. After observing the Passover Supper from the elements present,

he instituted His own Supper and placed it in His Kingdom (the church) which was soon to be established: “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19-20). He then makes clear that His supper was to be participated in, in His kingdom, therefore by Christians. He said, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (Luke 22:29-30).

A Great Audience

Present were people from all of the civilized nations of the world. “Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5, ASV). A detailed account is recorded for us: “Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, in Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:9-11, ASV).

People were present from every nation under heaven. People were there from Europe, Asia, and Africa. There were Galileans, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia, Judaea, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.

Peter Was A Great Preacher

Peter loved the Lord and His truth; yet he was impulsive, and thus he arose to great heights, and sadly at times sank to low depths. In Matthew 14:28, we read that Peter said to Christ, “Lord...bid me come unto thee on the water.” I have always been fascinated by this story. I have read it many times, but it always grips my attention. Here is a little ship

in the midst of a storm at sea. A dozen men are manning the oars, battling the tempest through the long hours of the night with the storm-whipped sea, fighting with death and yet getting nowhere. It had been long hours since they left the shore.

Doubtlessly they had become tired and discouraged, and though we do not have a record of what they said, but it would be reasonable to conclude that they may have either thought or said, "I wish the Lord were here; if He were here He would know what to do." And to add to their terror, when they saw the Lord they thought that he was a ghost (Matt. 14:26). However, Jesus reassured them: "But straightway Jesus spake unto them saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. 14:27). Peter said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:27-31, ASV).

Even in his failure Peter has a message for us. In his defeat he is his own straightforward, sincere, and human self. When Peter realized that he was sinking, he did not try to conceal the matter. He did not say, "I'll fight it out in my own strength." He threw himself on the infinite strength of Christ. He cried out for help, and said with great earnestness, "Lord, save me." There is little doubt that when he denied his Lord that was the saddest day of his life (Luke 22:54-63).

The story of Peter's life is of great interest to us because he was so human. Let us briefly trace his steps:

He Went Downward

1. He was overconfident. He compared himself to others and insisted that he would do better than they would (Luke 22:33; Matt. 26:33).

2. He had misguided zeal, and later he gave way to cowardice (John 18:10).
3. He followed the Lord from afar (Luke 22:54).
4. He was among evil associates (Luke 22:55; John 18:15-18).

His Fall

1. He fell **gradually**. He passed off the first statement with ignorance. He met the second with a denial. He met the third with an oath (Mark 14: 66-71).
 2. He fell **completely**. He was guilty of falsehood, swearing, and disloyalty.
 3. Some contributing causes to his fall.
 - He was a recognized leader. He made himself conspicuous (John 18:20-21).
 - He was alone. His brethren had fled. John was near Jesus, but he had a measure of influence (John 18:15).
 - His means of defense had been taken from him (Matt. 26:52).
- The good news is that Peter arose.** Many disciples fall, but not all repent as Peter repented.

1. **It began with the Lord.** “The Lord...looked” (Luke 22:61). It was a look that needed no words.
2. **He was a lonely man.** He “went out” from his evil associates to be alone with his sin and God.
3. **It was a sensitive thing.** He “wept bitterly.”
4. **His repentance was an immediate thing.** He accepted the responsibility of his sin.
5. **His repentance was genuine.** He did not blame others or the circumstances.

Not only did the Lord honor Peter by allowing him to preach the first gospel sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), he also allowed him to preach the first gospel sermon to the

Gentiles: “And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7, ASV). On the day of Pentecost the Lord having forgiven Peter (John 21:15-17) allowed him to preach the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:1-47).

Peter was an inspired preacher as were all the apostles. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would be an infallible guide for them. He said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit was a perfect guide “But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

A Great Sermon

Peter first refuted the charge that the apostles were drunk (Acts 2:15). The subject of Peter’s sermon was Jesus Christ. “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know” (Acts 2:22, ASV). He then presented four proofs that Christ is both “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). When those people heard Peter’s sermon it affected them in a good way. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

In the sermon the Lord’s resurrection was declared by David (Acts 2:25-31; Psa. 16:8-11); the twelve were witnesses (Acts 2:32). Jesus was exalted to God’s throne (Acts 2:33-35; Heb. 1:3; Psa. 110:1-4). Therefore, Jesus was proclaimed

as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36; 1 Tim. 6:15), and as already mentioned they were pricked in their heart, and wanted to know what to do to have their sins remitted (Acts 2:37).

A Great Question

The question, “What shall we do?” was asked after they heard Peter’s great sermon. They had been convinced that they had crucified the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 2:37). This was the first time that this question was asked in the Christian Age.

A Great Answer

The great answer is easy to be understood. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

Great Results

The response was great: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). We preach the same truth today that Peter preached on that great day of Pentecost. The seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11). It is our plea to all that everyone obey that same truth; and as obedience to the gospel then saved people, the same obedience to truth will do the same today!

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CHAPTER 9

The Lost Art Of Fishing: Answering The Call To Be A Fisher Of Men

Mark Reynolds

Near the end of my first year working with the church at Towne Acres in Muncie, Indiana, I received a call from Norman Light, one of our deacons, while in the office one particularly beautiful spring morning. He asked if I would be interested in going fishing with him, his son Josh, and another man who was a good friend of his. He made it clear that this would be no ordinary fishing trip in that we would have to drive sixteen hours, clear customs at the Canadian border, and paddle from lake to lake, carrying our gear with us over the land portages that connected the lakes. He promised that it would be worth it because the fishing would be like nothing I had ever experienced. This was not saying much because up to this point in my life if a fish could not be caught with a worm and bobber or by attaching a little bell to the end of the pole and sitting back and waiting for a catfish to take the bait, then I was not interested. The final sell was when he told me it would only cost me about \$250 for the whole week. This sealed the deal and supplied with “all” this knowledge, three months later I traveled to the Quetico Wilderness in Ontario, Canada, with my companions.

I wish I could go back and see myself the way I was when we arrived at the outfitters in Atikokan, Ontario. We immediately sat around a large table with Jim, one of the owners of Canoe Canada, and started pouring over maps. How ignorant I was! I remember thinking, “Why do we need maps?” and, “if we need one, why don’t I get one?” Jim marked our maps, showing us several campsites, as well as the best fishing spots along our route. That was it; that was the extent of my preparation. The next morning we drove for about an hour and made it to our entry point into the Park. My education began. We had to walk nine hundred yards with six packs weighing about seventy pounds each, two canoes, eight fishing rods, three tackle boxes, and five paddles just to make it to the water so we could **begin** our trip! After eighteen miles of paddling, and three more portages that made that first one look like a walk in the park, we were at our first campsite! With no map, I had no idea where we were (everything looked the same), and I had no idea where we were going, but I had ample opportunity to think during these several hours of paddling. Many thoughts came to mind: (1) We only brought things to eat *with* fish. In other words, if we did not catch fish the meals would be mighty lean. Did we bring enough “side dishes” to survive? (2) There were several things that could end our fun--things like wolves, moose, and bears, and we had no gun! (3) The fishing better be the best I have ever experienced after all the work we had to do to get there! I vividly remember thinking, “What in the world have I gotten myself into?”

I had no idea how that call that Norman made inviting me on this fishing trip would change my life in such a positive way. By the end of this first trip, I was “in love” with the Quetico Park. The following year, the same group made another trip to Quetico. On that trip I had the privilege of baptizing one of our traveling companions, Jeff Payne, into Christ right there in the Park. Jeff is still faithful and is now

not only my brother in Christ, but a dear friend. My wife and I now make annual trips into the Quetico by ourselves, except when we take our girls with us, and she too has “fallen in love” with the solitude of the wilderness. We spend months planning out each trip. We both crave that week out of our hectic lives alone together with no phones, no noise, no interruptions, and no real stress.

Looking back, I surely learned a lot from that first trip. (1) There was no way I could have known how much that call would change my life. (2) Fishing takes on a whole new meaning when one has to do it to survive. (3) A good map is priceless. On subsequent trips with my wife we have gotten “turned around” (I’ll never admit to being lost) a few times in the two million acres that make up the park, and without a good map we might still be there. (4) Sometimes different tactics and presentations need to be employed to catch different types of fish. We catch smallmouth bass, lake trout, walleye and northern pike on every trip. (5) The bond among fishermen is strong. Norman and I have made other trips together to Quetico and six to Tanzania to do campaign work, and he is one of my best friends in the entire world, and it all started with that first fishing trip. What does this have to do with Peter? Everything!

Peter Receives The Call

Peter had met Jesus prior to receiving a personal invitation to work with Jesus (John 1:35-42, KJV). On this occasion Andrew, Peter’s brother and a disciple of John, had heard John’s proclamation that Jesus was the Lamb of God Who would save the people from their sins. Upon hearing this Andrew ran to get Simon Peter telling him “We have found the Messiah!” (John 1:41). It was there in Bethabara beyond Jordan where Peter first saw His Savior face-to-face, and “when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation,

A stone” (John 1:42). This would not be the last time that the eyes of the Messiah and Peter would meet with meaning.

Nearly a year after this initial meeting, Jesus was teaching by the lake of Gennesaret, and the people pressed upon Him so much that He entered into one of the ships which belonged to Simon Peter asking him to thrust out a little from the land so He could teach the people from the ship allowing the maximum amount of listeners to hear. After Jesus finished teaching, He told Peter to launch out into the deep and let down his nets. Peter replied to his Master that they had been fishing all night with no “luck,” but at the command of Jesus he would try again. Allow the inspired Luke to describe what takes place next:

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. **For he was astonished**, and all that were with him, at the draught of fishes which they had taken (Luke 5:6-9, emp. added, MER).

Jesus had Peter’s attention, and it was at this point where Jesus made the call that would change Peter’s life forever: “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Peter, and the others who were called, took little time to make their decision: “They **immediately** left their nets and followed Him” (Mark 1:18, NKJV). Luke adds to our understanding of the profoundness of the moment when he tells us that “When they had brought their ships to land, **they forsook all**, and followed him” (Luke 5:11).

No doubt Peter understood what he was leaving behind: the work, the nets, the boat, and the largest catch of fish he, or anyone else, had ever taken; but there was no way he could have known the full impact of answering the call to become a fisher of men would have on his life.

During his time as a fisherman for fish, Peter must have seen some beautiful places and scenes; the sunrise on the Sea of Galilee, the calm that exists on a lake just before sunset, the sound of a storm rolling in on the sea, and the exuberance of activity just before the storm hits, and the stillness after it leaves. These things pale in comparison, however, to the scenes and storms he would see as a fisher of men. Think of it! Answering the call of Jesus took him to scenes where people were raised from the dead! Imagine how thankful he was that he heeded Jesus' call to be a fisher of men as he watched the life come back into the little body of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:35-43). He would have the opportunity to visit with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17). He was able to see miracle after miracle and experience sunrises and sunsets with the One Who made the sun!

On the other hand, not all that happened to Peter after he answered the call of Jesus was pleasant; there were also plenty of storms that came his way because of his being a fisher of men. Some literal storms would scare him so much that he just knew he was going to die—until the One who made the sea awake from His sleep and told the storm to “be still” (Mark 4:39). Other storms would hurt Peter in a much deeper way. He would hear people mocking his preaching and would receive beatings for what he taught (Acts 5:40). No one except a fellow fisher of men knows the pain of pouring one's heart into a sermon, lesson, or Bible study just to have the hearer reject the truth. Peter was further devastated when he let the Savior down while he was working as a fisher of men. No words can adequately paint a picture tragic enough to capture the anguish that Peter felt when his eyes met the

Lord's after his third denial of the Christ (Luke 22:61). Finally, how could Peter have known that answering the call of Christ would eventually lead to his own death (John 21:18-19)?

In light of all the storms that would come into a fisher of men's life, why would Peter heed the call? Because he was a fisherman, and he knew that oftentimes the best fishing comes just after the storm. He also knew, because of his experience, that when the fishing is good it makes all the effort, harm, and pain worth it all. He knew that the effects of the storms were quickly lessened when he began catching fish, and he knew that the effects of the storms of life are eased when one helps others get to heaven. Had Peter quit fishing for men he would have saved himself some heartache, but he would have missed out on an abundant "catch" on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2); he would have missed the lame man by the temple (Acts 3); he would have missed five thousand more that would obey what he taught (Acts 4); he would have missed the privilege of teaching the first Gentile convert (Acts 10-11), and the list could go on. Peter could not have known how much heeding the call of Jesus to become a fisher of men would change his life, and the eternal destiny of himself and thousands of others. Then again, can any fisher of men truly know his impact on this side of eternity?

Fishing To Survive

"And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Jesus used this term, "fishers of men," to persuade Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him and help in His earthly work, and to carry on after He left the earth. He employed this figure because they were all fishermen. To some men He would never say that. He did not say it to all His early disciples. There were others who were farm workers and to them He said, "They [the fields] are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). Later in the Revelation John would record the words,

“Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest is ripe” (Rev. 14:15). Jesus changed his illustration depending on the men to whom He wanted to appeal (Morgan 34). Peter may not have known the feeling of praying and hoping for just the right amount of rain and sun to produce a good crop to feed his wife and children, and he may not have known the feeling of hopelessness when a man’s crop is ruined by locusts or hail. He did know, however, that unless a fisherman fishes, he has no hope of a reward. Peter would use the same mentality of necessity when he fished for men. He did not consider fishing for men optional, just as he did not consider fishing to provide for his family optional. He understood that if he was going to obey his Lord he *must* fish. Peter was present on the day when Jesus gave the limited commission to His twelve apostles: “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 10:5-7).

Peter obeyed and went fishing for men among the Jews. Peter was also present when Jesus gave His final command to His disciples before leaving the earth:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20).

Peter obeyed, and went fishing for men of every race! Peter knew that in order to catch, one must first fish. He felt the urgency, and knew that if he desired to please his Lord, he **had** to fish. In fact on one occasion those with human

authority commanded him to stop fishing for men, or there would be severe consequences. What was Peter's reply?

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

Later, when they would not stop fishing, the high priest asked them:

Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men** (Acts 5:28-29 emp. added MER).

God told him to fish, and men told him to stop. Peter knew that in order to please God he had to keep fishing!

Christians must still fish for men today in order to please God. The Great Commission was not given **only** to the apostles, but rather applies to all who have obeyed the gospel of Christ. Mathias came after the original twelve, yet he still felt compelled to obey. The apostle Paul came after the original twelve, yet he still felt compelled to heed the Great Commission. In fact, "it is a historical fact that the Gospel according to Matthew was written to the church at least three decades after the start of the church. God does all things economically, so why tell the church about the need to preach to everyone; if such a command were abrogated after the eleven apostles heard it" (Mosher 263). Dear Christian, you *must* fish! Your eternal survival depends upon it.

Every Fisherman Needs A Good Map

Every fisherman knows that after a while on a large lake, sea, or ocean it all looks the same. The Holy Spirit never tells us about the times Peter got “turned around” while fishing for fish (although any fisherman believes he did). The Holy Spirit **does**, however, tell us about the times Peter got “turned around” while fishing for men. He got “turned around” on the Mount of Transfiguration when he wanted to erect three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus (Matt. 17). He got “turned around” when he argued with the Master when discussing Jesus’ purpose on the earth (Matt. 16:22-23). He got “turned around” in the Garden of Gethsemane when he tried to interfere with the providence of God concerning the arrest of Jesus (Matt. 26:51-54). He got “turned around” when he tragically denied his Lord three times even cursing and swearing to prove his disloyalty (Matt. 26:69-75). Yes, Peter certainly got lost many times while fishing for the souls of men, but he knew the value of going back to the map when things are not right.

There is a consistent pattern that occurred each time Peter lost his way while fishing for men. Notice in each of the above examples there is a constant in each case. When Peter lost his way on the Mount of Transfiguration, it was the words of God that helped him find his way:

While he [Peter] yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Matt. 17:5).

When Peter lost his way and argued with Jesus concerning His purpose on the earth, it was the words of Deity that helped him recognize the way: “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men”

(Matt. 16:23). When Peter was ready to take on all of the officers that came to arrest Jesus, what stopped him from going after the other ear of Malchus? “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52). What helped Peter recognize where he was when he denied the Lord thrice? “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus” (Matt. 26:75a). Each time Peter got lost, he went back to the only map a soul-winner has, the Holy Word of God! Not only did he consult the map, he listened to it and relied upon it!

Dear soul-winner, you may get turned around on your quest for catching men—all fishermen do—but one must always have his map ready to get back on course. “Back to the Bible” must never be just a catchphrase; it must rule our lives in everything we do! The Bible is the perfect, inerrant compass for our lives.

Different Tactics For Different Fish

The Sea of Galilee was a natural resource for the area because of the fishing industry, and this is where Peter fished the most. Strabo, Josephus, and Pliny, as well as each of the gospel accounts all mention the plentiful supply of fish in the lake (Metzer and Coogan). In one ancient Rabbinic writing the author speaks of the variety of fish available to catch in the area of Galilee when he describes three hundred different kinds of fish at a dinner given for a great Rabbi (Edersheim 328). Although this description is believed to be an exaggeration, it does give an idea about the abundant variety, and because of this variety consumers were able to be selective when it came to the type of fish they wanted. Jewish Rabbis suggested different types of fish for different occasions, which put pressure on the fisherman to catch all different kinds of fish (327). In order for Peter to survive in the fishing industry he had to be able to adapt to the demands of the consumer and had to be adept in all three of the fishing

methods of his time: using baited hooks, casting nets, or using drag nets, depending on the conditions and what they were hoping to accomplish (Metzger and Coogan 289).

Peter would use the net dragging method when he was just trying to catch any type of fish that might be in the area. He not only used this method when fishing for fish but employed it when he fished for men as well. On that Pentecost day when the church was born, Peter dragged his nets through Jerusalem. He stood up and preached to whomever was listening, male, female, bond, free; he just preached to everyone in hearing distance.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken unto my words (Acts 2:14).

This was a rather broad audience so he addressed them all and dragged the gospel net and caught what he could, and what a successful day it was! Preaching during a Sunday morning worship assembly is much like what Peter did; a gospel preacher will preach to whomever shows up that day.

Further, Peter would cast the gospel net going after specific type of men. The chapter following the birth of the church records Peter and John going to a specific area to fish: “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1). He was going after his Jewish brethren when he went fishing at the temple that day. Campaign work, whether foreign or local, employs this method of fishing. When a man decides he want to go to Tanzania, East Africa, to fish for men, he is mainly going after a certain type of “fish.” Every once in a while a different type of fish, other than the kind a man was specifically going after, shows up in the net, but he definitely has a definite purpose in fishing in that location.

Still further, Peter would be able to use the method of using a baited hook. When using a baited hook a man's quantity is greatly limited, but there is great value in this type of fishing. Fishing with one line and one hook shows that a person has the hope of catching one fish at a time. While quantity is limited, there is often great quality in the fish that are caught. A modern man can cast a line in the tightest of places where a net could never reach, and under those docks, or in that weed bed lays a monster fish that is just waiting to give him the fight of his life. While dragging a net and bringing up a variety of fish may be wonderful, and casting a net in a specific area is fantastic, nothing can replace the thrill of catching that one fish that a person works diligently to land.

Peter often went after one man at a time. In fact, he would do whatever it took to catch that one man who was searching for the truth. The obvious example is Cornelius, one lone Gentile who was devout, but lost without the knowledge of the truth. Peter would load up and make the thirty-mile trek to where Cornelius lived just to teach him the gospel (McGarvey 275). The long travel was not the only hardship from this trip. Peter also had to explain to his Jewish brethren, who had yet to comprehend the scope of the Great Commission, why he was working to convert a Gentile to Christ (Acts 10-11). Time and time again in the Bible there are examples of men who fished for one soul at a time. Consider just a few examples: The Ethiopian (Acts 8), Lydia (Acts 16), The Jailer (Acts 16), Agrippa (Acts 26), Zacchaeus (Luke 19), and the list could go on and on. Someone once said that public preaching is like taking a bucket of water and throwing the water over a bunch of empty bottles. Water will definitely make it into some of those bottles. One-on-one teaching, however, is like taking those bottles to the faucet and filling them one at a time. Think back to the people who have been converted in your local congregation over the past

ten years. There are probably some who just started attending, and then one day walked down the aisle and obeyed the gospel. Then there are others who were taught in personal Bible studies what it means to obey the gospel and to live a faithful Christian life. Which of these two groups usually stays faithful longer and is more involved in the work of the church? Nothing can replace fishing for men one at a time and every Christian can and must do it to survive.

One last note concerning the variety of methods Peter used to fish for men needs to be made. While Peter taught in different situations and styles, the message that he taught never changed. The gospel was **always** the center of his teaching, because he understood the drawing power was Christ (John 12:32). This is a far cry from those who try to draw people in through other means such as entertainment, comedy, drama, etc. If people are drawn by these methods, they will be “let down” when they find out the real reason they are there, i.e. to hear the gospel, although little gospel teaching ever gets accomplished in these situations.

The Bond Among Fishermen

If one spends much time among fishermen, one will notice something rather quickly; there is a special bond among them. Fishermen spend so much time together, often leaving before sunrise, fishing all day and then returning after dark only still having to clean their catch. Sure, there are times when they will get on each other’s nerves, but those moments are usually short-lived, and even in this the bond is forming, because they always seem to work it out. Most days are spent in hard labor when fishing for a living, and it seems as if there are always jobs to be done, and yet even here the bond is growing stronger, because if the work is going to get done it will take all of them pulling their fair shares of the load. There are, however, those special moments when the fishermen can sit down together at the end of a long day and

talk about the events that filled that day. This is where the bond is cemented.

Any fisherman would love to have been able to sit with Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they described their days on the sea; how the weather was, how many fish were caught, and where they planned to fish the next day. Even greater than that, however, had to be their conversations after they became fishers of men. Imagine the talks that must have occurred about the things they were able to witness both together and separately. Imagine Peter telling his brother Andrew about the events of the day at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17), or what it was like being able to walk on water until he started to sink (Matt. 14:28), or what it was like to see Jesus in His pitiable condition in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26). This type of bonding is seen over and over again in Scripture. Notice just a few:

After healing the man who had been lame from his mother's womb (Acts 3), Peter and John faced a tremendous test after teaching the people who saw the miracle. The priests, captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them and held them in prison after which they grilled them about the things they were teaching. No doubt, this had to be an intimidating situation, but what did they do when brought before the high priest and others? They preached Christ to them as well. The leaders could not deny that the man had been healed, or that Peter and John had been with Jesus, so they threatened them, and commanded them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Peter and John said they would not and could not stop preaching in His name. Then notice what they did:

And being let go, they went to their own company, **and reported** all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. **And when they heard that, they lifted up their**

voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is...And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word...**And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:** neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts 4:23-24; Acts 4:29; Acts 4:32 emp. mine, MER).

Peter and John talked about the men they “caught” that day, and the bond among all the fishers of men was cemented! They lifted up their voice and praised God. They were all with one heart and one soul!

This same type of bonding among fishermen is seen all through the New Testament. It is seen when Peter informs the Jews and talks about the first Gentile won for Christ. How did Peter’s fellow fishers of men react?

But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying...When they heard these things, they held their peace, **and glorified God**, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:4, 18 emp. mine, MER).

This same type of bonding among fishers of men occurred after Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey: “And when they had come, and had gathered the church together, **they rehearsed all that God had done with them**, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

This bonding among fishers of men still occurs today. Congregations who support mission work are thrilled when the men they support come to their home congregation and give mission updates. Those congregations who believe in fishing for men so much that they send their own men and women into foreign or local fields of labor allow at least two things to happen: (1) They allow the men and women who make these trips to fish for men to have their lives changed by doing this type of work (This writer strongly believes that it is impossible for a person to make a mission trip to foreign lands to work in campaigns without having his life changed forever); and (2) They allow the local church to be changed by these people coming back and rehearsing all the things that God accomplished through them on their trip. Nothing causes a congregation to grow both numerically and spiritually than those within that congregation fulfilling their purpose as the church, namely, fishing for souls of men.

Conclusion

When Peter forsook his fishing nets to become a fisher of men, his life would never be the same. The places it took him, both good and bad, were tremendous. Once he started, he knew he could never stop until his life on this earth was finished. He was true to the map that the Holy Spirit laid out for him, and he, much like Paul, would have done anything within the guidelines given him to win souls for Christ. And the bond he formed with his fellow fishermen were soul-strengthening, not only here on earth, but even in eternity.

Dear fellow Christian the purpose of the church today is to teach the gospel. The day one obeys the gospel of Christ he must lay down his nets and follow Christ in fishing for men (Luke 19:10; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 8:1-4). It is meant to be a life-changing action, and our survival depends upon this, not only in building up the local congregation. Our very own souls depend upon our working to teach the lost.

Does anyone truly believe that he can go to heaven without doing the work he was called by Christ to do? The first part of the title of this manuscript should break the heart of every Christian: “**The Lost Art of Fishing: Answering the Call to be Fishers of Men.**” It is **not** a lost art because we do not have guidance; we have the same map Peter used. It is **not** lost because we do not have plenty of tools to use to suit our personal preferences today. There are any numbers of outstanding tools at our disposal. It is lost simply because of a lack of desire. Let the church get back to fishing, and our bond will be cemented as we labor together, and just like Peter’s, this bond will last into eternity!

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**THE
PASTOR/PRESBYTER**

CHAPTER 10

“Feed The Flock”

Jerry Martin

In the New Testament we find three basic words used to describe those who are to be appointed spiritual leaders in the church: “elders,” “bishops,” and “shepherds” (Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4, KJV). The Holy Spirit outlines the work of these men of God. The term *elders* indicates the advantages of the wisdom acquired with age. *Bishops* indicates the responsibility that spiritual leaders have to plan, oversee, and direct the work of the local congregation (Acts 20:28). When the word *shepherd* is used it highlights the leaders’ responsibility to watch out for the souls under their oversight by feeding, protecting, and compassionately caring for each individual (sheep) that makes up the local flock (Heb. 13:17). It is the shepherd emphasis we want to develop as we look specifically at Peter serving as an elder in the Lord’s church. Shepherding carries with it a warm and compassionate tone.

It is intriguing to read Peter’s inspired instructions to elders in 1 Peter 5:1-5:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief

Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Peter matured from an impulsive, sword-wielding militant, who followed Christ from a distance, to an intimate imitator of his shepherding mentor, Christ, who faithfully fed Christ’s sheep. But how did the maturation of Peter take place?

Peter Was Taught By The Chief Shepherd Himself

In the broader context of John chapter 10, Jesus allegorically presents Himself as the shepherd, the door, and the pasture. As the shepherd, He knows His sheep and they recognize His voice. In presenting himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus illustrates the work elders ought to do among God’s sheep. The shepherd goes before the sheep (John 10:3-4). He goes in behalf of the sheep (John 10:11-12). The shepherd goes with the sheep (John 10:14-15). This mutual recognition is demonstrated by the sheep submissively following His guidance and thereby receiving His blessings (John 10:1-5). As the door, He shuts out danger and opens to abundant blessings. As the pasture, He is the endless source of nourishment and refreshment.

In the narrowed context of John 10:7-10, there are some very specific and inescapable spiritual truths as they relate to Christ describing Himself as the door to the sheepfold. The religious guides of the first century, like many religious leaders today, had perverted the Scriptures to serve their own selfish purposes. These “false shepherds” took advantage of those individuals who were sincerely seeking spiritual protection and blessings. It is in that context that Jesus presents Himself as the “door of the sheep.” He wanted to remove the confusion

as to where spiritual safety and abundant blessings could be found. It was Jesus who would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). It was He who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). It was He who was the Lamb of God that would make atonement for sin (John 1:29). By applying the symbol of the door to Himself, Jesus could emphasize that only through Him could one enter spiritual safety (John 14:6). The Lord makes it clear that any religious leader who promises anyone salvation on terms different than the specific instruction He had taught was a “thief” and a “robber.” Christ is the door for the sheep and the under shepherds. There is no other way to access spiritual blessings: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

It will be our purpose in this study to first give a brief analysis of John 10:7-10 and then share some ways to make application of the truths of spiritual counsel gleaned from this inspiring passage of Scripture. Our Lord came to this earth in response to man’s needs (Matt. 20:28). As Christians, if we are truly Christ like, we must be busy responding to the needs of hurting humanity (Gal. 6:10; Tit. 2:11-14).

Jesus masterfully explained shepherding to his disciples. Peter would have been present as the Lord taught the truths recorded in John 10:7-10. “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7). It is only in Christ that a man can have lawful entrance into His ministry of divine care and protection. “All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers” (John 10:8) is a reference to those self-appointed religious leaders who claimed to speak for God. Their motivation was not to provide for the spiritual needs of the people but to take advantage of trusting souls for selfish gain. “But the sheep did not hear them” (John 10:8)—those who are humble in spirit and wise in heart hear only the Lord’s voice and follow only His instructions (Matt. 5:3; Matt. 7:21-29; John 5:24). “I

am the door; by me if any man enter in” (John 10:9). Christ is the only means or medium by which to access the love God has extended to the world (John 3:16; Eph. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:7). If any enter in, “he shall be saved” (John 10:9). Peter himself would later reaffirm that only in Christ does one have his sins blotted out and his soul secured (1 Pet. 1:18-25). Food is provided for those in the sheepfold—“and shall go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). Like sheep gently guided and vigilantly watched after by their shepherd as they are led to green pastures and fresh water, so followers of Christ are led “beside the still waters” of salvation and feast on the bread of life (Psalm 23; John 4:14; John 6:35). “The thief cometh not” (John 10:10). Without Christ as the door of protection, His followers would be left at the mercy of those who showed no mercy but who would unhesitatingly sacrifice them to gratify their own selfish desires. “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). In Him is life (John 1:4). He is the water of life (John 4:14). He is the bread of life (John 6:35). The words that He has spoken are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). It is not surprising that the life He offers is full, rich, unfailing, and everlasting.

One of the greatest descriptions of the Lord’s ministry is that which is stated in the last part of John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Jesus came to address the needs of those who are in His fold and under His care. In the context of John 10:7-10 the Lord describes how He provides for the needs of His sheep. As the door to the sheepfold, He is the only means of entrance and the assurance of protection. As the door to the sheepfold, He is the means of accessing provisions. As the door to the sheepfold, He continually makes available the pastures of refreshing. For those of us who are privileged to serve as ministers under Him, with Him, and for Him, there are some principles of truth that can be gleaned from the

text that can be invaluable in this soul-caring ministry. Peter would have been taught these principles by the Lord Himself. He would have learned the following:

First, properly responding to the needs of the sheep requires that the shepherd be in a position to provide protection for those in need. Obviously in the text under consideration, the Lord is the only one in the position to provide spiritual protection and He describes His position of protection by declaring Himself to be the “door of the sheep” (John 10:7). In ancient times the shepherd would gather the sheep into a c-shaped walled enclosure called a “sheepfold.” There was no gate or door erected so the shepherd himself would be the door of protection. At night, when the sheep were encamped inside they would face their greatest danger. Because of the ever present danger the shepherd would lie down at the entrance to the sheepfold and in essence be the door of protection. The sheep’s life was dependent on the protection provided by the shepherd. The descriptive way in which Christ placed Himself as the only opening to the spiritual sheepfold underscores how precious the lives of His sheep are to Him. In the physical world, there can never be a foolproof guarantee of protection from harm. Yet, as the sheep of His fold, Christians have the security of their spiritual life guaranteed by Christ: “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9). Because of the knowledge of such a guarantee, the Christian is the only one who is equipped to safely counsel and respond to the needs of those struggling with issues in life. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). One not living by the Lord’s instruction cannot lead others to a place of spiritual safety.

Secondly, properly responding to needs of sheep requires the shepherd to have a clear perception of what the needs are. In the early part of John 10: 8–10, the Lord acknowledges

the existence of thieves and robbers whose sole intent would be to cause harm and hurt. A good shepherd would be fully aware of the dangers that lurk under the cover of darkness. The good shepherd would also know that sheep cannot live in an enclosed fortress all the time. They would know sheep also need food and refreshment. In a spiritual context it is essential to teach someone how to get into Christ where spiritual protection is assured and where all spiritual blessings reside. They must be taught that the way into Christ is through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 10:17; Luke 13:3; Rom.10:10; Rom. 6:3-4). It is also essential for a spiritual mentor to have a clear recognition of the needed growth and development of a Christian (Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Thirdly, properly responding to the needs of the sheep requires the shepherd to be able to provide access to the resources necessary to address those needs. The shepherd not only served as a door of protection for the sheep while they rested in a secure enclosure at night, but he also provided safe passage to the provisions necessary to sustain life. The Lord promised safe travel for the sheep to pastures of refreshing. Since Jesus is the shepherd that guides, the door of protection, and the pasture of refreshment, wise spiritual counsel will remind the counselee that safe passage is available only by walking in the light (1 John 1:7). The spiritually empathetic Christian will compassionately extend available resources to people in need (Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 3:16-18).

Peter Was Sought To Be A Shepherd

It is truly fascinating to fast-forward from John 10's description of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, caring for His sheep, to John 21 and read Jesus repeatedly requesting Peter to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). After the Lord's resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus ate with His disciples by the seaside. He used that occasion to prepare Peter for the most

important job of his life, feeding the Good Shepherd's sheep. Between John 10 and John 21 the following exchange had taken place between Peter and the Lord.

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples (Matt. 26:31-35).

Jesus provides an opportunity for Peter to reassess and refocus his commitment. He asked Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15-17). Peter, in the Matthew passage above, had confidently claimed that though all the other disciples might fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7 and flee like sheep when the Shepherd, Christ, was smitten he, Peter, would not. His impetuous declaration did not sustain him when Christ was arrested. By morning the next day, Peter had denied any association with, or knowledge of, Jesus. Now, the resurrected Lord is asking Peter if he still thinks his love and commitment is greater than the other disciples. If Peter loves the Lord as the Good Shepherd, he will love His sheep. Jesus is going to be ascending back to the Father and wants to assure that His sheep are fed and cared for. The Lord's intense questioning was designed to impress upon the often self-confident apostle that he needed to be more caution and less boastful of his own strength (Woods

441-45). Peter seemed to have learned not to dispute with the Lord nor to assess his strength as being greater than the other disciples. His answer, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee,” (John 20:15) is simply an affirmation of his love for the Lord and not a declaration of his love being greater than his brethren’s love for Him.

Peter Wrought A Good Work As A Shepherd

When the Lord said “feed my lambs” and “feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17), He was calling on Peter to recognize his obligation as a teacher and shepherd to care for the flock the Lord had purchased with His Blood. First Peter 5:1-4 records evidence that Peter came to recognize the seriousness of the responsibilities he had as an under-shepherd:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Elders, spiritual shepherds, have the solemn responsibility to feed the flock of God. If the flock is going to be fed, a shepherd goes before the sheep to assure that food is available (1 Peter 5:1). Peter had learned from his experience—being taught by Christ (John 10:3-4) and following Christ (John 21:15-19)—that a true shepherd knows not only what food the sheep needs to eat, but also where to find such necessary nourishment. He can lead the sheep safely to their food source because he has gone ahead to identify where it is

located. He, the shepherd, will always have traveled the path in which he desires the sheep to walk. Peter, “a witness of the suffering Christ, a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed,” could exhort his fellow elders and the saints under their care because of what he had already experienced in his relationship with Christ.

Shepherds, elders, not only go ahead of the sheep, they go in behalf of the flock, providing for their protection and training. Peter reminded the elders they were responsible for “taking the oversight” of the flock. Their oversight means they must be willing to sacrifice themselves on behalf of God’s sheep by giving their time, energy, and effort to protect them from anyone or anything that would try to harm them.

Just as the shepherds of physical sheep have to assure the sheep’s safety in the sheep fold, spiritual shepherds are responsible for assuring that the church is a safe haven for the souls under their care. Leadership is always of the highest consideration in the church. As an apostle who had learned from the Master teacher, as an elder who had learned from the Chief Shepherd, Peter is uniquely qualified to address leadership concerns. His exhortations are timeless and leaders in every generation would do well to use his instructions as a textbook on shepherding.

Peter teaches us how to shepherd in the most difficult of circumstances. When he writes his epistle of First Peter, he addresses it to “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). The letter is addressed to Christians under intense persecution. And, like sheep who are scattered, these Christians are in desperate need of the type of shepherding that will bring calmness and confidence, as they are re-gathered into an environment of love and safety. Peter makes a powerful and effective appeal in 1 Peter 5:1-5, not just as an inspired apostle, but as a fellow elder. His fellow-shepherd approach adds weight to his words, because they know that he is someone who knows

firsthand the challenges elders face every day (Orbison and Petrillo 22).

Conclusion

If one wants to know how to “feed the flock” of the Lord, Peter is the most appropriate one to address the subject. He was taught by the Chief Shepherd Himself (John 10:1-18). Peter was specifically instructed by the Chief Shepherd to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). Elders (shepherds) need to know the sheep belong to Christ and Peter is the best one to remind them of that fact. Elders need to remember there is a shepherd over them and Peter is the best one to teach them that truth. Elders need to remember it is about feeding the sheep and Peter is the perfect one to teach them that spiritual principle. Spiritual leadership is always a chief concern in the churches. Peter is uniquely qualified to address leadership issues, both as an apostle of Christ, and also as an elder himself. His exhortation is timeless, and leaders in the church that belongs to Christ today would do well to study diligently Peter’s instructions the elders. Peter was convinced his work was about feeding the sheep. Also, he was passionate about convincing his fellow elders (shepherds) that it is about feeding the flock (Turner 37).

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CHAPTER 11

Qualified To Serve In Spite Of Past Failures

Billy Bland

Introduction

Everyone has a past. Not only does everyone have a past, but all accountable people have a mixed past, some good deeds but also some bad deeds, some successes and sadly some failures. All faithful children of God wish they never had sinned. But the reality is that all have sinned and do sin. Christ came into this world and died for each of us, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23, KJV). Even children of God sin at times. The Holy Spirit had John to write, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10). He continued, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). These passages are not written to endorse or to excuse sinful living. They are written to explain reality; all of us do sin. If we say we have not sinned, we are making God a liar. If, on the other hand, we will confess our sins, God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9).

When a congregation is about to appoint elders (either initially or add additional men to an existing eldership), the names of men are usually placed before the congregation, giving the congregation an opportunity to list any scriptural objection as to why one or more of the men are not qualified to serve as an elder. Some who may know of failures in the man's past life, or even the man himself knowing he has failed the Lord several times in the past, may think that the person who has been asked to serve as an elder is not qualified, due to his past failures. In this section, attention will be given to Peter's serving as an apostle and also as an elder, even though he sinned on occasions. Also the lessons learned from Peter (and others) should be encouraging to all who serve God yet struggle with sin.

What does a Christian do once he has sinned? Does his failure indicate that Christ no longer has any use for him? Should he adopt the attitude that he has tried, but he simply cannot live the Christian life? When one is genuinely attempting to live the life Christ has set before him but realizes he has come short of that life, he can experience great frustration. Jesus Himself never sinned—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). While it is true that Jesus never sinned, such cannot be stated relative to any of His disciples. Jesus showed us the Father (John 14:9), but the disciples show us us! I suppose none of the disciples does this any more than does Peter. All of us can empathize with Peter because we can see so much of us in him! Peter was a man who wanted to serve his Master successfully, yet he often times fell short of his goal. How many times have we, in attempting to serve our Savior, been overtaken in a fault, or found that we have disappointed God as well as ourselves by allowing sin into our lives? One of the encouraging factors of the Bible is that it shows us the shortcomings and sins of great men of God. Even David, a man after God's own heart, sinned but upon his repentance came back to serve

God successfully. Such also could be said of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others. With these thoughts in mind, let us look at few things regarding Peter and how Jesus encouraged him, even though he often times fell short.

Peter's Selection As An Apostle

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone (John 1:35-42).

Peter had been a disciple of John the Baptist and was introduced by Andrew, his brother, to the Christ. Jesus could see something promising in Peter that perhaps Peter did not fully appreciate at that time. Jesus stated to Peter—“Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42). The word *Cephas* is Aramaic whereas the word *stone* is Greek. Jesus could see that

Peter would become a “rock” for Him. There will be many times in Peter’s life, however, that he might doubt that he was worthy of that appellation. It is most encouraging to know what Jesus can make of us, if we will continue with Him.

Peter would have the distinct privilege of traveling alongside of Jesus as one of His apostles, beholding His miracles and hearing His wonderful words of life. He would become exceedingly close to the Son of God. Imagine spending some three years alongside the Messiah, watching His moves and hearing His powerful message. Think also of the honor of being commissioned by Jesus to carry God’s Gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Peter (along with the others) would preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He (and they) would heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. 10: 6-8). It was to Peter that Jesus said,

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against
it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the
kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou
shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven:
and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth
shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. Upon the solid foundation that Jesus is the Son of God, Christ would build His church. It should be noted that Christ did not promise to build His church upon Peter (*petros*), but upon the rock (*petra*) that Christ is the Son of God. Peter also would have the privilege of having the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He would use these keys on Pentecost to open the door to the church (Acts 2:37-47). The statement “whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be

loosed in heaven” was stated to all the apostles as recorded in Matthew 18:18.

All of this shows the great privilege that Peter possessed in traveling with the Christ. However, this did not make Peter a perfect or sinless individual. He, like us, would have his shortcomings (sins).

Peter Serving As An Elder

The Word of God informs us there are to be “elders in every church.” This was an important aspect of the work of the apostle Paul. After churches had been established, it was important for them to be scripturally organized. Luke writes:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14:21-23).

While we do not have an inspired account of **when** Peter began to serve as an elder, we do, however, have an inspired account that he **did** serve as an elder. Peter wrote:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Peter, when addressing the elders and giving them Divine directives regarding their mission, stated that he himself was "an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" (1 Pet. 5:1). Since the Word of God records that Peter served (with Divine approval), as an elder, it is implied by God that Peter met the qualifications as stipulated by the Holy Spirit to serve as an elder (cf. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1).

Peter's Qualifications

Among the qualifications of an elder are: (1) An elder must be blameless (1 Tim. 3:2), (2) he must not be a striker (1 Tim. 3:3), and (3) he must be of good report from without (1 Tim. 3:7). Had Peter ever been guilty of any of these? Could someone argue that Peter was not blameless because when Jesus was arrested and on trial, Peter denied the Lord and cursed (Matt. 26:74)? Later Peter sinned again and was said to be "blamed" because he showed hypocrisy by not eating with the Gentiles when the Jews were present (Gal.2:11). Also, when the soldiers came out to arrest Jesus, it was Peter who took a sword and cut off the ear of Malchus! Jesus had to tell him "put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). How could Peter be of good report from without in view of these matters? But there are other occasions of Peter's failures or shortcomings.

"O Thou of Little Faith"

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before

him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God (Matt. 14:22-33).

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sends His disciples unto the other side of the sea. They are in a ship in the fourth watch of the night and the wind is “boisterous.” In the midst of this, the disciples see Jesus walking on the sea. They think that He is a spirit and cried out for fear. Jesus calms them and says that it is He. Peter, being impetuous, answers, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the

water.” Jesus invites Peter to come. Peter came down out of the ship and walked on the water. However, when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he became afraid and began to sink. He cried out to the Lord to save him. Bruce comments, “It is one thing to see a storm from the deck of a stout ship, another to see it in the midst of the waves” (as qtd. in Robertson). Regardless of this, Jesus says to Peter, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

How would many in the church today respond if Jesus said to them “O thou of little faith?” They might “reason” that at least they tried! “No one else said they would walk on the water. I am not going to follow this Jesus, if he is going to insult my faith.” Peter, however, did not respond with such. When they got into the ship, the winds ceased and the ones in the ship worshipped “saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”
“Get Thee Behind Me Satan”

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matt. 16:21-23).

Jesus had just asked Peter whom did he think that the Christ is. Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Jesus now sets forth in plain language that He must go to Jerusalem; suffer many things of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes; then be killed and raised again the third day. Peter did not want this

to happen to Jesus. Perhaps also Peter still misunderstood the nature of Christ's kingdom. Peter loved Jesus and did not want Him to suffer such a fate. Jesus, being true to His mission, said unto Peter; "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23).

Peter was acting as an adversary (Satan) to the mission of Christ. The total dedication of Christ is truly amazing. Jesus was intent on doing the Father's will, even though it meant Him suffering and ultimately dying on the cross. Peter, unwittingly, was attempting to persuade Christ not to do what God wanted Him to accomplish. Jesus followed up this statement by informing Peter that all must be willing to bear their crosses. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:24-26).

There is a rebuke from Jesus unto Peter. Peter, again, had failed. Jesus earlier had told Him that he (Peter) did not have a faith that was strong enough to keep him walking on water. Now he is rebuked because he stands as Satan (an adversary) to the mission of Christ. Peter's interest (or thinking), as indicated in his statement, was not with the things of God, but with men.

To Peter's good credit, he evidently learns from the Savior's rebuke and continues to follow Jesus. Many members of the church quit serving the Lord because of lesser things. Peter however was a "rock" in the making. Let us remember that as many as the Lord loves, he rebukes and chastens (Rev. 3:19).

"And The Lord Turned, And Looked Upon Peter"

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew the frailties of His disciples. He foreknew that His disciples would be offended

at Him. Peter, being overconfident, stated that he would never be offended at Jesus.

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples (Matt. 26:31-35).

It should be noted that all the disciples stated that they would never be offended at Christ; however, Peter seems to be the lead spokesman in the matter. Did Peter mean what he said? Indeed, he did! When they came to arrest Jesus, Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword—“Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus” (John 18:10). Jesus informs Peter to put away his sword—“Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it” (John 18:11).

Jesus had told Peter that before the cock crew, Peter would deny Him thrice. The Bible reveals Peter’s denial.

Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice (Luke 22:54-61).

Peter, again, has failed. He is very disappointed in himself at this point. He had confidently affirmed that he would never be offended at Jesus, but now he has denied Him three times! The text says that when Peter denied Jesus the third time, immediately, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. The Lord, this time, did not say a word, he simply looked at Peter. The word translated looked is from the Greek word *emlepo*, and means “to look on, i.e., (relatively) to observe fixedly, or (absolutely) to discern clearly” (Strong). Vine comments, “This verb implies a close, penetrating ‘look.’” What a look from the Lord this must have been to Peter!

Peter’s Success

Even though Peter had failed on several occasions, this did not mean he was not qualified to continue to serve as an apostle and later as an elder. To Peter’s good credit, any time he sinned or failed, he repented and was restored to useful service. Although Peter had sinned, when he was

restored to his Savior, his sins would never be remembered by God against him again. Jesus had foretold of Peter's sin and restoration—"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Peter's failures did not mean his ultimate downfall. Jesus said, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Jesus knows that all of us fail Him from time to time. However, our failure does not have to be our spiritual ruin. We, like Peter, can come back to Christ in a penitent, obedient faith.

The Lord would accomplish many great works through Peter. After Peter's conversion, he was instrumental in selecting an apostle that would replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26). On the day of Pentecost, he boldly preached the resurrected Christ and about three thousand souls were saved (Acts 2:14-47). He healed a lame man at the temple gate called "Beautiful" (Acts 3:1-9). After healing the lame man, he admonished the Jews to "repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). When the Jewish rulers told Peter and John not to preach Christ anymore in the city of Jerusalem, the Bible states, "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Remember, this is the same Peter that earlier denied the Lord, who now stands like a "rock." Peter was instrumental in dealing with the first recorded sin in the church (Acts 5). Peter continued to stand against the Jewish rulers who further threatened him and the others for preaching Christ—"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Peter, along with John, would travel to Samaria to lay their hands on the new converts in order to convey

miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 8:14-15). While there he will confront Simon, the sorcerer who was converted to Christ but then fell back into the desires of his old trade. Peter will tell him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). It will be Peter whom the Lord will use to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter became an elder in the church (1 Pet. 5:3). He even wrote two epistles in God's Holy Book, the Bible. It is more than obvious that, in the eyes of Jehovah, Peter was qualified to serve as an elder, an apostle, and a writer of two Books in the New Testament, and to accomplish many other good works. In the book of Acts alone, the name *Peter* is mentioned 57 times. Remember this is after he had denied the Lord but had been converted. It did not take the Lord long to forgive Peter of his sin of denying Him. Once Peter repented, he was forgiven. When you sin, and repent of your sin, do you not want to be forgiven? Do you not want to be useful once again in the Lord's work? Then, will you not treat all other "sinners" the same way (cf. Matt. 7:12)? Just think of all the good that the Lord accomplished through Peter! Think of all the people who were saved and edified because of Peter. A truly encouraging statement recorded in the Word of God is found when the women went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. There they did not find the body of Jesus, but an angel instead. The angel gave these women instructions. The Bible states, "And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:6-7). Did you notice that the angel singled out Peter's name? Where did the angel learn of Peter and why did he call Peter by name? What an encouragement it must have been to broken-hearted Peter to learn that an angel had

appeared to the women and had specifically said to them to tell “his disciples and Peter.” Peter was reassured that he was qualified and useful for the Lord’s service.

Peter’s Savior

Peter was qualified to serve the Lord in many areas, not because he was sinlessly perfect, but because he had a wonderful Savior who willingly forgave him of any and all transgressions and failures, and gave him a fresh start. The Psalmist declared, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared” (Psa. 130:3-4). It is most encouraging to know we can please God. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his evil ways and live (cf. Ezek. 33:11).

We should be so grateful for Jesus—“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). None of us, on our own merit, are good enough (qualified), even to be a Christian. Jesus’ blood was shed so we can have “remission” of our sins – “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Conclusion

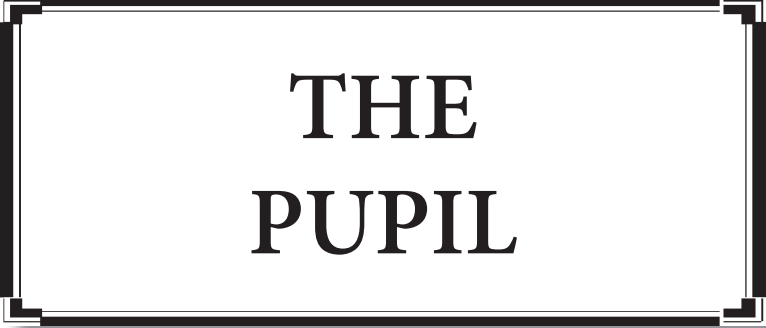
As one looks at the life of Peter, he sees Peter’s selection as an apostle, his serving as an elder, his shortcomings, his success, but most importantly his Savior. When considering men to serve as elders, one should never ignore any of the qualifications set forth by God. However, neither should one ignore men who are qualified, even though they have failed (sinned), but have repented. As noted above, Peter went forward in the work of the Lord and accomplished great things by forgiveness and help of God.

How many more “Peters” are out there in the shadows today? Perhaps there are those who due to “failure” in their lives have given up. “Quitters do not win and winners do

not quit.” There may be good, humble men and women who should be serving God in various areas but have needed the encouragement drawn from the life of Peter. May God help us to serve Him in whatever area He should desire. “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).

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**THE
PUPIL**

CHAPTER 12

Peter Learns To Worry About Himself

Gary Hampton

Mark reports that the women who went to Jesus' tomb at the dawning of the first day of the week encountered a young man dressed in a white robe sitting in the otherwise empty tomb. Their alarmed response was followed immediately by reassuring words from him. "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (Mark 16:1-7, NKJV). Why did he specifically tell them to tell Peter? Is it possible he above the other disciples felt like a failure?

One's response to failure will in large measure determine his future development. Trying to blame someone else most often results in stagnation or a negative growth. In contrast, accepting responsibility for one's failures and learning from mistakes can help one grow exponentially. It is little wonder then that the Lord seized the hours following a fruitless night of fishing for Peter and six other disciples to restore Peter as a fisher of men and encourage him to become a faithful shepherd among the sheep of the Chief Shepherd.

Peter's Actions On The Night Of The Lord's Betrayal

Among Christ's chosen ones, it is likely no one felt like a greater failure than Peter. On the night of His betrayal,

Jesus had said all would be made to stumble because of Him. Though we cannot see any of his gestures, we can imagine Peter might have spread wide his arms to indicate the other apostles when he said, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” The Lord then told Peter, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter immediately indicated he would not deny him even if he had to die with the Lord and the others joined him in their expressions of loyalty (Matt. 26:31-35).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord had invited Peter, James, and John to go deeper with him and watch while he prayed. Returning to them after a period of prayer, the Master found them asleep and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.” Despite the warning, Peter, James and John could not keep their eyes open as the Lord went back twice more to labor in agonizing prayer (Matt. 26:40-46).

Perhaps in an effort to prove he was still resolute in his support of the Son of God, Peter cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Instead of praising his actions, the Lord told him to put his sword away because those who took the sword would die with the sword. One wonders if he then followed at a distance with bowed head feeling sorry for himself. Whatever the case, he entered the courtyard of the high priest and proceeded to deny the Lord three times, just as had been prophesied. “So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:47-75).

A Breakfast By The Sea

John reports that Peter and the others had seen Jesus twice, once with Thomas absent and another time with him present. Still, Peter announced he was going fishing and six of the others went with him. Woods thinks it probable that

“they needed meat and also money they would receive from the catch” (436). After a long fruitless night, they heard their as yet unrecognized Lord calling to them from the shore to learn whether they had any meat. When they responded in the negative, Jesus told them to let down their nets on the right side of the boat and they caught one hundred fifty-three great fish.

It was John who first realized it was the Lord and Peter who first swam ashore to be with him. Of course, the others had to struggle to bring the miraculous catch ashore. “Peter’s action, quite in keeping with his nature, is less admirable than that of the others; he seems to have forgotten, in his zeal to be with Jesus, that the fish had been caught by the Lord’s directions and that he sustained responsibility in preserving the catch” (Woods 438).

After they had eaten breakfast together, Jesus asked, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” (John 21:15). Seemingly, the Lord was asking if he loved him more than all the other apostles. Though his flesh had proven to be much weaker than his spirit, Peter had indicated his loyalty was above all the others on the night of the Lord’s betrayal. As Pendleton noted,

Peter had boasted of a love toward Jesus superior to that of any of the other disciples (Matt. xxvi. 33; Mark xiv. 29; John xiii. 37), and by refusing to have Jesus wash his feet, by being the first to draw a sword in his Master’s defense, and by even now conspicuously deserting the others to swim to meet Jesus, he had endeavored to prove his boast. Jesus therefore asks him if it is indeed true that his love is greater than that of his fellow-disciples—“Do you love me more than these love me?” (McGarvey and Pendleton 757).

“Whatever potential for future service he had therefore depended not only on forgiveness from Jesus, but also on reinstatement amongst the disciples” (Carson 676).

The contrast between Peter’s answer on the betrayal night, when he effectively said the Lord had missed the mark on predictions of his stumbling, and his humble answer after breakfast by the sea is stark (John 21:15). Following breakfast he humbly acknowledged the Lord’s omniscience. Also, “He does not try to answer in terms of the relative strength of his love as compared with that of other disciples. He appeals rather to the Lord’s knowledge. Despite my bitter failure, he says in effect, I love you—you know that I love you” (Carson 677).

I am aware that John seemingly used forms of *agape* and *phileo* interchangeably in his gospel record. However, the usage here seems carefully crafted to note distinctions which may only have been apparent to eyewitnesses. McGarvey’s thoughts on the passage are of great interest to our study.

The Greek here has subtle shades of meaning which the English does not express. In the first two questions addressed to Peter our Lord uses the strong verb *agapan*, and Peter replies by the weaker verb *philein*. . . . Peter, as we have seen, had professed the most unparalleled devotion for the Master, but when the Lord now asks him if he has that devotion, he humbly describes his love as of a far weaker order—a mere instinctive affection or strong attachment, but nothing approaching adoration. In his third question, Jesus drops the *agapan* and takes Peter’s own word—*philein*: as if he said, “Peter, are you even sure that you have a high regard for me?” It grieved Peter to have the Lord thus

apparently doubt that he had even a tender regard for him, and he appealed to Christ himself as a searcher of hearts to bear witness that, poor and meager as his love was, it was at least as intense as he had represented it to be. In response to each of Peter's professions of love Jesus lays a command on him, as if he had said, "If you love me as you say, prove it thus" (758).

That command indicated Peter's love for the Lord would be shown by caring for the Master's sheep. That he took this assignment very seriously can be seen in 1 Peter 5:1-4 where he wrote to the elders among the "pilgrims of the Dispersion." He simply described himself as "a fellow elder" and stressed their role in shepherding God's flock among them. He instructed that they all should serve as "overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." It seems especially important to note that Peter acknowledged Christ as the Chief Shepherd. The flock was his and he and his fellow elders were only entrusted with watching for their feeding and safety.

The Price Of Following

Considering Peter's seemingly fearful denial of the Savior on the night of his trial, Jesus' next words are remarkable. "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish" (John 21:18). McGarvey noted that the apostle's plunge into the sea to swim ashore was a specific instance where Peter chose his

own path. In his later years, he would be led by others to his death. Carson says the words “stretch out your hands” were used in John’s day to refer to crucifixion (McGarvey and Pendleton 679). “Thus our Lord, by delicate but unmistakable suggestion, shows Peter that the freedom which he now enjoyed would be taken from him, and that he would lift his hands to permit others to bind him that they might lead him to martyrdom to which his flesh (though not his spirit) would go unwillingly” (759).

John, who likely wrote after Simon Peter’s death, confirms that understanding of the Lord’s words in John 21:19. “This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” Clearly, Peter was going to be put to death for following Christ. Interestingly, he would also follow Christ in the way he died and, like him, would thereby glorify God. “Whenever any Christian follows Christ to suffering and death, it is a means of bringing praise to God (1 Pet. 4:14-16)” (Carson 680).

It Is None Of Your Business

Immediately following their conversation, Peter observed “the disciple whom Jesus loved” following. He asked what would happen to John. “In the Greek it is elliptical, that is, not all the words are expressed. Literally it reads, ‘And this one what?’ Probably the meaning is, ‘What is to become of him? Will he suffer a similar fate as mine?’ After all, they were close to one another, and had been a part of the inner group of Jesus’ disciples” (Pack 173).

Use of the phrase “the disciple whom Jesus loved” is reminiscent of the last supper before Christ’s crucifixion. After Jesus prophesied his betrayal by one of the disciples, Peter “motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke” (John 13:18-23). Carson sees within that action a certain intimacy between Peter and John. “That intimacy makes

Peter's question more comprehensible, if not more justifiable. His own prognosis is not very good: for Peter the cost of discipleship will be high. What about *him*?" Basically, the Lord answered that it was none of Peter's business what would be expected of John. "Peter has been informed what will befall him: let him therefore obey, regardless of the specific forms of obedience others must pursue (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2-7). *You must follow me* (the pronoun *You* [sing.] is emphatic). John may be asked to remain until Jesus returns: *what is that to you?*" (Carson 681).

Getting Rid of Guilt

The Peter we see in John 21 is nothing like the Peter seen in the rest of the record of Christ's walk on earth. In fact, John does not record a single word he spoke on the morning of the breakfast by the sea until after Jesus pointedly asked him a question. Judging by the Lord's questions, he was burdened by guilt. Notice the Lord took immediate steps to remedy that situation so he could move Peter's attention off himself and onto others.

It is not unusual to find Christians today who are similarly being held back from doing the Lord's work because of some sin in their lives. When approached about taking on a teaching assignment or some other leadership role, they may say, "No, you do not want me to do that job. I would not be someone others could follow." Further questioning often reveals they feel guilty over some unresolved sin in their lives. Rather than dealing with the sin and pressing on, they have chosen to allow their guilt to become their focus.

For the sake of their souls and the furthering of the Lord's work, we should follow the Lord's lead and insist the sin be confronted. That Peter understood this principle is clearly seen in the way he immediately challenged the sinful action of Simon the Sorcerer, saying,

Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity (Acts 8:20-23).

Similarly, when Paul learned the Corinthian church was tolerating the sinful actions of the man living with his father's wife, he insisted they deliver him to Satan so that his soul might be saved (1 Cor. 5:1-5). In both cases, the action seems to have had the desired effect. Simon asked Peter and John to pray for him and the man was moved to a sorrowful penitence which in turn motivated Paul to call for the church to lovingly accept him back into full fellowship (Acts 8:24; 2 Cor. 2:5-8).

What About Him?

Some have turned their guilt over to the Lord by confessing their sins. Yet, they may effectively ask the Lord what he is going to require of some other disciple. Anyone who has ever tried to get teachers for Bible classes has likely heard, "I have served my time. It is someone else's turn now." The ones making the statements expect those striving to recruit them to accept this as a valid reason for their refusing to take on the responsibility. However, the Christian retirement plan is found in heaven. It was at the end of his life, when Paul was facing death, that he could say,

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have

finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

In his letter to the church at Smyrna, The Lord said, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Though they would be confronted with severe trials, he did not tell them it was acceptable to sit down and let others carry on the work. Instead, they were to remain faithful in service even to the point of dying for their faith.

Showing Love For Christ By Feeding His Sheep

Others have handled their guilt and are willing to serve for the rest of their lives, but they are unwilling to take on the role of a shepherd watching out for the Lord’s sheep. This results in many congregations trying to carry on without any properly appointed group of elders. Such churches are being led by the least experienced in their midst through the means of business meetings and committees. Those with the most shallow knowledge of God’s Word have just as much voice as those with the strongest Bible knowledge. This is especially dangerous because the church is and has been in a war since its very beginning (2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Tim. 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3-4). We must overcome this deficiency by enlisting men to be elders. After all, Jesus told Peter the way to show his love for him was through feeding his sheep.

On the homeward portion of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting.” These men and the churches they were to oversee were also “commended. . . to the Lord

in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23). Similarly, Paul left Titus in Crete to “set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city” as he had commanded him (Tit. 1:5). The men appointed as shepherds were to be “able to teach,” at least in part because of the false teachers who would try to lead God’s people astray. They were thus to hold “fast the faithful word” as they had been taught so they might “be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9).

Like Peter, these shepherds were intended to feed the Lord’s sheep and protect them from false teachers (1 Pet. 5:1-4). There was no doubt then, nor can there be any doubt now, that some will try to lead God’s sheep astray (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5). Thus, churches need God ordained pastors whose goal is to be able to give a good report regarding the safety of the souls under their care in the Day of Judgment (Heb. 13:17). In order to achieve good results, elders then needed, and those today need, to lead by living a life that sets the proper example of being pointed toward a heavenly home (Heb. 13:7; Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16).

Conclusion

Peter was a living demonstration of the dangers associated with becoming focused on oneself. Jesus’ questions in the breakfast by the sea seem designed to help Peter overcome the burden of guilt he carried because of the denial. Those of us similarly held back by our focus on unresolved sin should turn to the Savior for forgiveness. Like Peter, we also need to be determined to follow the Lord until the end of our days no matter the cost. Our primary focus needs to be on showing our love for the Master by encouraging and expressing care for his sheep.

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CHAPTER 13

When Jesus Washed Peter's Feet: A Lesson In Humility

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

The disciples of Jesus had seen some truly amazing things during their time with Him, but they had never seen anything quite like this. They had seen Jesus miraculously multiply loaves and fishes, walk on water, heal the sick, and raise the dead, but they had never seen anything as astonishing as what they observed in the upper room. They had heard Jesus preach many sermons and teach many truths, but they had never heard a sermon that would surpass the sermon they saw in the upper room!

The sermon the disciples saw in the upper room was so memorable because it was not merely a lesson of hearing—it was a visual lesson. The visual they saw was not a “PowerPoint” lesson, but what they saw made a powerful point! What made this lesson so very effective and memorable? To answer this question we will investigate (1) the Classroom; (2) the Teacher; (3) the Students, with special emphasis upon Peter; (4) The Lesson Plan; and (5) The Application.

The “Classroom”

The Master Teacher taught many people in many places. He taught from a mountain (Matt. 5-7, KJV); He stood in

the plain and preached to the multitudes (Luke 6:17); the multitudes pressed against Him by the seaside so much that He went out into the sea and spoke from a boat, while the whole multitude stood on the shore (Matt. 13:2).

Of the many places where Jesus taught His disciples, we turn our attention to the time when Jesus turned “a large upper room” (Mark 14:15) into a classroom. We are not left to wonder what Jesus taught in this “classroom,” for John provides four chapters (John 13-16) of material, revealing the lessons that Jesus taught His disciples, by both His lips and His life, and how He capped it all off with His High Priestly prayer (John 17).

In this chapter, our focus is upon the events recorded in John 13. It had been a very eventful week in the life of our Lord. Matthew's record (chapters 21-25) reveals the timeline leading up to the events that transpired in the upper room. Jesus had entered into Jerusalem on Sunday, cleansed the temple on Monday, and spent Tuesday embroiled in controversy with the religious leaders who sought His demise. The events in the upper room occurred on Thursday. Nothing is recorded of Wednesday's events, which has led some to conjecture that it was a day of rest (Wiersbe).

Throughout the Book of John, we find the repeated emphasis by the author that “the hour” had not yet come for Jesus to be glorified by His death, resurrection and ascension (John 2:4; John 7:30; John 8:20; John 12:23). However, a pivotal turn takes place when in John 13:1 we are informed that Jesus knew that His hour **was now come**. He reiterated this in His High Priestly prayer (John 17:1). Knowing that His death was impending, Jesus spent some valuable private time with His disciples. It has been observed that John 1-12 addresses the rejection of Jesus by the nation (cf. John 1:11), whereas John 13-17 temporarily zooms in on those who, for the most part, did receive Him (see John 1:12). As one observes the words and deeds of Jesus in John 13, it is very

important to remember that Jesus knew that His crucifixion would occur on the very next day.

The Teacher

To fully appreciate the lesson taught in John 13 we must pause to consider the Teacher. The academic world today often refers to certain teachers as “distinguished” professors. If anyone ever deserved the title of a distinguished teacher, it is the Lord Jesus, for He distinguished Himself as “a teacher come from God” (John 3:2a). This was evident, not only because of the miracles that He did (3:2b), but also because of His personal credentials.

The most impressive aspect of His teaching credentials is wrapped up in His identity. According to John 13:3, Jesus knew “that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God” (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 3:35). Jesus knew that He was the Son of God and as such, He taught as one having authority (Matt. 7:28-29).

Regrettably, some teach with authority, but not lovingly. Jesus was such a great teacher because He taught both authoritatively and lovingly! There is no doubt that He was a Teacher Who loved His disciples/students. When He taught the rich young ruler, “Jesus **beholding him loved him**” (Mark 10:21). Furthermore, the opening verse of John 13 informs us that Jesus “knew that His hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, **having loved his own** which were in the world, **he loved them unto the end**” (John 13:1). The first phrase “having loved his own” is an aorist Greek participle which could be translated “he had always loved” (Newman and Nida 427). Moreover, the Greek word for “loved” is *agapesen*, “the love of choice and selection” (Vincent 2:224).

Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary appropriately observes, “Christ loved them (v. 1), knowing the worst about them (v. 2) and the best about Himself (v. 3)” (Radmacher,

Barclay, and House). The fact that Jesus could love so very much those who had often been a source of consternation to Him is remarkable. The Pulpit Commentary observes:

Marvellous indeed is it that the affection of Jesus should outlast the many trials to which it was put by his disciples, to which it has been put by all of us. There was very much in his followers which was fitted to check, to kill, the love of Jesus. "His own" were: 1. Slow to understand his teaching. 2. Slow to appreciate his nature and his mission. 3. Unworthy in their character of his fellowship and his Name. 4. Inconstant, as was shown by their afterwards forsaking him in the depth of his distress and humiliation. Amazing was the love which endured when so tried! Amazing is the love which we, and all Christ's people, have experienced from him, notwithstanding our unfaithfulness and coldness!

The Greek phrase *eis telos* indicates a love without limits. Jesus gave everything and keeps on giving (Richards 690). The loving concern of Jesus for His disciples, at a time when He was facing a painful death, is all the more remarkable.

If there is any time when a man's attention is presumed to be necessarily and properly directed to himself, that time is the time when danger is present and when death approaches. But when our Saviour's hour was come, when the shadow of the cross fell athwart his path, he seems to have been signally unselfish in all his actions, and disinterested in his very thoughts. Humiliation, suffering, and death were immediately before him; but it

is beautiful, instructive, encouraging to see how warmly his heart beat for his friends, and how anxious he was to use the closing days of his ministry for their spiritual profit (Spence-Jones).

“The word *love* is used only twelve times in John 1–12, but beginning with John 13, and continuing through the end of the book, John 21, it is used forty-four times” (Wiersbe)! The Pulpit Commentary offers this thought-provoking summary of the love of Christ for His followers, in spite of our shortcomings.

Could we bear from one another
What he daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother
Loves us, though we treat him thus!
Though for good we render ill,
He accounts us brethren still.
(Spence-Jones)

The Students

The Book of John identifies many specific individuals who were privileged to hear the teaching of Jesus: Simon, Philip, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, etc. There were also many occasions when the Master Teacher addressed a multitude of students at the same time: The Samaritans, the Jewish authorities, over 5000 at the feeding of the thousands, the scribes and Pharisees, etc.

The identity of the students in the upper room

In John 13, the class was confined to the twelve apostles of Jesus (cf. Mark 14:14-17). Certainly, the events of John 13 impacted all of the twelve, but two of the twelve are given particular attention.

1. Judas. John 13:2 zooms in first on Judas Iscariot. It is not uncommon for John to put Judas in the spotlight. He

mentions him eight times, which is the most of any of the Gospel accounts. Although we shy away from naming our boys by the name of Judas, it was a very common name in the first century. The word Iscariot is from an Aramaic term meaning, "son of Kerioth." He was the only one of the twelve who was from Judea (Wiersbe).

He was also the only one of the twelve whose heart was occupied by the devil. John writes, "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (John 13:2). We should not take this to mean that the devil was just now beginning to influence Judas. In the previous chapter we learn that Judas "was a thief" (John 12:1-6). Also, approximately one year earlier, Jesus had said unto His disciples, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70).

For some reason, perhaps a desire to be true to the false doctrine of once saved always saved, a host of commentators argue that, because Jesus called him a devil, Judas must of necessity have been evil from the moment Christ chose him to be an apostle. However, this is not a necessary conclusion. The Scriptures teach that a righteous man may become unrighteous (Ezek. 18:24). God created Adam and Eve in a righteous state but they became unrighteous when they succumbed to Satan's fleshly enticements (Gen. 1:26-3:22). God knew that they would sin but in no way caused them to do so.

Likewise, it is very possible that Judas was righteous when Jesus called him—to say otherwise is to affirm that Jesus deliberately set a wicked man into a position of apostolic leadership. This is difficult to imagine. On the other hand, it is very conceivable that Judas was righteous when he was called, but that this righteous man later became unrighteous when he was seduced by a lust for money. Moreover, as noted

above with Adam and Eve, God could have foreknown that Judas would abandon the paths of righteousness to betray Jesus without God in any way causing him to do so.

Neither should we conclude that John 13:2 implies that Satan influenced Judas against his will. “The devil planted the seed, but the soil of his heart was ready. The devil has no power except where there is preparation for him. The covetous disposition of Judas had prepared the way” (Johnson). As we shall see later in this chapter, Judas needed a lesson on humility because he was so self-absorbed that he was willing to put his own financial interests above the life of the Son of God.

2. Peter. Just about every classroom is populated with that student who blurts out whatever comes to mind without considering the propriety/accuracy of his words. Peter was definitely such a student. “Peter often spoke impulsively out of his ignorance and had to be corrected by Jesus. Peter opposed Jesus going to the cross (Matt. 16:21–23), and he tried to manage our Lord’s affairs at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8). He expressed the faith of the disciples (John 6:66–71) without realizing that one of the number was a traitor” (Wiersbe).

Peter had a propensity for saying something foolish in one breath, and in the next breath saying something profoundly brilliant. It takes quite a bit of hubris for the uneducated student to take it upon himself to correct the educated teacher, especially when the Teacher is the very Son of God, but Peter is regularly depicted in such a role. He also needed a large dose of humility, and he would come to know this by the events that transpired in John 13.

The Lesson Plan

The best teachers know the needs of their students, and Jesus knew the needs of His disciples, inside and out. We have seen that both Judas and Peter needed a sermon on

humility, but what about the other ten disciples? **What was the lesson most needed by the twelve who were gathered in the upper room?** Christ was about to leave them, and He knew that they needed some very specific instructions. He knew that, like Judas and Peter, the rest of the twelve also needed instruction on the subject of humility.

In fact, the subject of the sermon they saw in the upper room was not a new one to them. On more than one occasion they had listened to Jesus discourse with them about the need for humility. There was the time in Capernaum when Jesus asked them, "What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).

Then again, there was the time when the ten learned that James and John had petitioned the Lord to grant them chief positions in the kingdom. "And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John" (Mark 10:41). The rift among the disciples grew so deep that Jesus had to call the group together to teach them a vital lesson. He told the disciples,

Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: **but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:** And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45, emp. mine BJC).

The above passages reveal that Jesus had taught His disciples repeatedly about the need for humility. Unfortunately, they were not yet applying His message to their lives. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that Luke 22:24 also mentions a dispute among the disciples. The context of this passage in Luke indicates that this dispute occurred in the upper room. After describing how the disciples made ready the Passover, and how Jesus observed the Supper with them, Luke records that Jesus predicted that one of them would betray Him (Luke 22:21-23). The verse which follows records that “there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24). B. W. Johnson conjectures that this contention “probably arose while they were taking seats for the paschal meal, each seeking the chief place.” The Pulpit Commentary suggests a different reason for the dispute in Luke 22:24:

The Lord’s words in these verses are peculiar to St. Luke. The strife among the disciples which suggested the Lord’s corrective sayings was evidently no mere dispute as to precedence in their places at the supper, but some question as to their respective positions in the coming kingdom of which their Master had said so much in the course of his later instructions (Spence-Jones).

Whatever the precise reason was for the dispute, the Master Teacher had one clear objective for His students—to teach them to serve one another in loving humility. But how would He convey this message to His students? What “lesson plan” could He use to indelibly etch this truth upon the hearts of His disciples?

And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s

son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (John 13:2-5).

The American Standard Version records that it was “during supper” that these events occurred. Vincent argues that the “most approved reading” employs the use of the present participle, thus conveying the idea of “*while a supper was in progress*” (2:224). Matthew Henry notes that “It would have turned many a squeamish stomach to wash dirty feet at supper-time; but Christ did it.”

A number of commentators believe that Jesus interrupted the argument of the disciples about who should be the greatest by silently beginning to wash their feet. Others, like Wiersbe, believe that the dispute occurred **after** Jesus had already washed their feet. If we were to take Luke's account as strictly chronological, then this would appear to be so. However, there is no absolute claim of chronology in Luke's order of events. It is not unknown for the Gospel writers to write of the same events in a slightly different order. Be that as it may, the key is not so much the timing of when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples but the wonder that He did it at all.

In New Testament times it was slaves who washed the feet of those who came to a meal at the home of a wealthy person. The roads and streets even in Jerusalem were unpaved and dusty. As most people wore sandals, feet became dusty after they had walked even a little distance. If a visitor was especially

prominent, a host might wash that visitor's feet himself. But foot washing was a lowly service normally performed by servants or slaves (Richards, Pegoda, and Gross 153).

Wiersbe adds that "Jewish servants did not wash their masters' feet, though Gentile slaves might do it...As a special mark of affection, a host or hostess might wash a guest's feet, but it was not standard operating procedure in most homes."

When they arrived "in the evening" at the upper room (Mark 14:17), the feet of Jesus and His disciples were certainly dusty and dirty from the activities of the day. No servant was assigned to wash their feet, and not one of the disciples made a move, not even to wash the feet of Jesus. The "sinful woman" in Luke 7 had washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them dry with her hair, kissed His feet, and anointed them with ointment (Luke 7:37-38). Yet the disciples did not initiate washing the feet of Jesus, in even a traditional sense. In the chapter just preceding John 13, Mary took very costly ointment and "anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 12:3). Yet, the thought of washing the feet of Jesus apparently did not even cross the mind of the twelve, much less the thought of washing one another's feet.

While Jesus deserved to have His feet washed, the disciples would have thought it demeaning to wash the feet of one of their peers. Moreover, it would have been considered an admission of inferiority. "The action itself was mean and servile, and that which servants of the lowest rank were employed in...1 Sa. 25:41...2 Ki. 3:11" (Henry).

But someone needed to do something, and so Jesus arose from supper "and laid aside his garments" (John 13:4). Newman and Nida observe that "The verb *took off* (Greek *tithemi*) is not the normal word used for taking off one's clothes, but it is used in 10.11, 15, 17, and 18 for the laying down of one's life. By "laying down" his garments, Jesus

foreshadows the “laying down” of his life. It may be noted in this context that the same words rendered *put... back on* in verse 12 is translated *receive... back and take... back* (of Jesus' life) in 10.17, 18” (430).

Jesus then “took a towel” (a linen cloth) and “girded himself” (tied it all around Himself) (John 13:4). “After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded” (John 13:5). Newman and Nida explain the process:

The word translated *washbasin* does not appear elsewhere in Greek literature; its meaning is uncertain, but most translations have “basin.” It can be argued that the word means “pitcher,” since in the ancient Near East peoples' feet were not generally washed in a basin of standing water but by pouring water over the feet from a pitcher. The picture would be as follows: The disciples were on couches, reclining on their left sides, and using their right arms to reach into the dishes that were on the table, or tables, placed in front of the couches. Jesus poured water into “the pitcher” (the Greek has the definite article “the,” suggesting that it was a particular vessel used specifically for that purpose) and then went around behind the couches, where the disciples' feet were stretched out behind them. There he poured water from the pitcher over their feet and dried them with the towel wrapped around his waist (430).

Matthew Henry asks,

But why would Christ do this? If the disciples' feet needed washing, they could wash them

themselves; a wise man will not do a thing that looks odd and unusual, but for very good causes and considerations. We are sure that it was not in a humour or a frolic that this was done; no, the transaction was very solemn, and carried on with a great deal of seriousness.

Henry then proceeds to give four reasons as to why Christ washed the feet of His disciples.

1. That he might testify his love to his disciples, v. 1, 2.
2. That he might give an instance of his own voluntary humility and condescension, v. 3-5.
3. That he might signify to them spiritual washing, which is referred to in his discourse with Peter, v. 6-11.
4. That he might set them an example, v. 12-17.

This was the lesson plan of the Master Teacher! “Instead of basking in the glow of power and authority, to use the Pauline image, Jesus emptied (*kenoun*) or humbled himself and adopted the form (*morphē*), here the posture or role, of a servant” (cf. Phil 2:7) (Borchert 76).

As indicated in connection with the story of the Baptizer (John 1:27), touching feet was regarded as menial slave work and as such was primarily an assignment given to Gentile slaves and women. Students were responsible to rabbis or teachers to perform menial tasks of labor, but touching feet was clearly not expected. But what is startling in this story is the vivid portrayal of the Messiah adopting a shameful/lowly posture in relation to his disciples. I know of no other example in the literature of the ancient world before the coming of Jesus where such a foot washing by a leader occurs (Borchert 76).

B. W. Johnson does an excellent job of summarizing the attitude of the disciples, and the emotional impact of what Jesus did for them:

Then, while they were filled with their ambitious, envious feelings, and had engaged in strife right at the Lord's table, after waiting long enough to have it shown that no one would condescend to the menial, but needful duty, the Lord, full of conscious divinity, arose, girded on the towel, and began the office. A rebuke to their ambitious strife, far more powerful than words could have spoken...It said, "Let him that would be greatest become the servant of all."

A student questions the Teacher's method

As Jesus washed the feet of each one of His disciples, He came to Simon Peter (John 13:6). Not surprisingly, Peter broke the apparent silence in the room with a question for the Teacher. He asked, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" In comments on John 13:6, the commentary by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown points out:

Our language cannot bring out the intensely vivid contrast between the "*Thou*" and the "*my*," which, by bringing them together, the original expresses, for it is not good English to say, "Lord, *Thou my* feet dost wash?" But *every word* of this question is emphatic. Thus far, and in the question itself, there was nothing but the most profound and beautiful astonishment at a condescension to him quite incomprehensible. Accordingly, though there can be no doubt that already Peter's heart rebelled against it as a thing not to be

tolerated, Jesus ministers no rebuke as yet, but only bids him wait a little, and he should understand it all.

The Teacher responds to the student

Jesus beckoned Peter to watch and learn patiently rather than jumping to hasty conclusions. He said, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7). Although this author does not often quote John Calvin in an approving way, his comments on this verse are worth considering:

What I do. We are taught by these words, that we ought simply to obey Christ, even though we should not perceive the reason why he wishes this or that thing to be done. That man, therefore, is too haughty, who refuses to obey the command of God, because he does not know the reason of it. But this admonition has a still more extensive meaning, and that is, that we should not take it ill to be ignorant of those things which God wishes to be hidden from us for a time; for this kind of ignorance is more learned than any other kind of knowledge, when we permit God to be wise above us.

The student arrogantly refuses to obey the Teacher’s request

Peter responded, “Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13:8). In the original language, Peter’s comment is presented with the force of a strong double negative. Kenneth Wuest translated Peter’s statement, “You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never.” It is “a very strong expression. Lit., *thou shalt by no means wash my feet as long as the world stands*” (Vincent 2:224). Robertson notes that in addition to the passage containing a strong double negative, “the

word (my) is “made emphatic by position.” Again, Calvin’s comments are pertinent:

Hitherto Peter’s modesty was excusable, though it was not free from blame; but now he errs more grievously, when he has been corrected, and yet does not yield. And, indeed, it is a common fault, that ignorance is closely followed by obstinacy. It is a plausible excuse, no doubt, that the refusal springs from reverence for Christ; but since he does not absolutely obey the injunction, the very desire of showing his respect for Christ loses all its gracefulness. The true wisdom of faith, therefore, is to approve and embrace with reverence whatever proceeds from God, as done with propriety and in good order; nor is there any other way, indeed, in which his name can be sanctified by us;...In short, until a man renounce the liberty of judging as to the works of God, whatever exertions he may make to honor God, still pride will always lurk under the garb of humility.

It is interesting to note that Peter had properly addressed Jesus as “Lord” (John 13:6) but now contradicts his speech by refusing to follow His wishes. Moreover, this is not the last time Peter would act in such fashion. When Peter saw a vision with a great sheet knit at the four corners, wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air, a voice from heaven ordered him to “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat” (Acts 10:12-13). Peter immediately responded, “Not so, Lord” (Acts 10:14). He was promptly admonished not to call common that which God hath cleansed (Acts 10:15). His stubborn resistance necessitated this happening three times before the vessel

was taken up again into heaven (Acts 10:16). Peter needed to learn that because Jesus is truly our Lord, we cannot say “Not so” unto Him.

The Teacher teaches the student a lesson about humble submission

Jesus minced no words in responding to Peter’s insubordination. He said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13:8). The Pulpit Commentary offers the following explanation of the Lord’s response to Peter:

If you refuse this manifestation of humble love from me, if you put your own pride between yourself and me, if you disdain this act of self-surrender, claiming to understand me and our mutual relations better than I, you have no part with me. This is a symbol of my love to you, and of what is to be your love to one another (ver. 15); if you refuse to accept it from me, you will then have no part with me in the manifestation of the spirit of self-sacrificing love which I have come to inaugurate.

Moreover, the question is properly asked, “If Peter then could not submit to let his Master go down so low as to wash his feet, *how should he suffer himself to be served by Him at all?...*It is not humility to refuse what the Lord deigns to do for us, or to deny what He has done, but it is self-willed presumption” (Jamieson, Fausett and Brown).

The student stumbles again in trying to make amends with the Teacher

A study of Peter’s life reveals that there was often a mixture of good and bad in so much of what he said with his mouth. When Peter heard that he would have no part with Christ if he refused to let Him wash his feet, he exclaimed, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9).

At first glance, Peter's comment appears endearing. It is as if he was saying, "If washing my feet is necessary for me to have fellowship with you, then just wash me all over, because I want so much to have a part with you." Examined more closely, Peter's attempt to verbalize his intense desire to have a partnership with Jesus was somewhat rash and inaccurate. The Pulpit Commentary assesses Peter's statement in this way: "**Simon Peter** makes another impetuous and characteristic outburst, and another of his almost glorious mistakes. Once more he will go before and give advice to his Master" (Spence-Jones). Robertson describes the statement as evidence of "Peter's characteristic impulsiveness that does not really understand the Master's act." Robertson also quotes the comment of Dods concerning Peter's words: "A moment ago he told his Master He was doing too much: now he tells Him He is doing too little."

The Teacher corrects the student yet again.

Although Peter meant well in his utterance of verse 9, the fact that Jesus corrects him in verse 10 demonstrates that the Lord did not wholly endorse Peter's comment. Jesus said, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10). The point is that one who has already bathed does not have to take an entire bath again just to clean his dusty feet. He just needs to wash his feet. A careful examination of these verses indicate that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual cleansing more than the mere physical cleansing of one's feet in this section.

Jesus said his disciples were already "bathed" (Greek *louo*, to bathe completely) and only needed to have their feet washed (Greek *nipto*, to splash; 13:10). The picture is of getting one's feet dirty while returning from a public bath, thus needing to wash them again at home. Likewise, a sinner who repents is

forever clean (see Heb. 10:1–12), though on occasion he or she may become defiled by sin and require a “*nipto*” cleansing (see 1 John 1:9) (Willmington 617).

Peter was a great man, but he was often so busy talking that he failed to discern the meaning of the words of Christ. It has been said that if you spend all of your time talking then you are only saying what you already know. But if you stop and listen then you learn something new. Indeed, it is true that the person who “knows everything” has a lot to learn.

The Application

The very best teachers know how to drive home the application of the intended lesson. Jesus first drove home the application by **asking a thought-provoking question**. “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, **Know ye what I have done to you?**” Perhaps the Lord paused for effect after this question so that the disciples could contemplate its meaning.

Jesus then drove home the application by **making an argument from the greater to the lesser**. He affirmed that He was indeed Lord and Master (John 13:13). Why was His identity so relevant to the intended lesson? Jesus explained,

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, Verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:14-17).

It was not uncommon to see disciples serving their teachers. The relationships of Joshua with Moses and Elisha

with Elijah are two of the better-known examples of such. Never do we read of Moses washing the feet of Joshua nor Elijah the feet of Elisha. Yet we find Jesus the Master, the One Who deserved to be served girding Himself with a towel and washing the feet of His lesser disciples.

He has thus consecrated the most menial duties and offices of life for us, that we should not in our pride decline to discharge them. His example does not bind us to do his very act—for the custom was Oriental in its origin and meaning—but to carry the spirit of his act into all our relations with brethren (Spence-Jones).

“Christ is not suggesting that a ritual of foot washing be established but that His humble example of love in self-sacrificing service and forgiveness be followed. The person who practices these things will be blessed” (Radmacher, Allen, and House). Humble service is not a matter of option—it is a matter of ought! The verb translated ought literally “means *to owe*. It occurs several times in John’s Epistles (1 John 2:6; 3:16; 4:11; 3 John 8). Jesus here puts the obligation to ministry as a *debt* under which His disciples are laid by His ministry to them” (Vincent 2:224).

Jesus reminds us that “A servant is not greater than his master” (John 13:16–17). I love the following words: “In the future if a disciple of Jesus was ever tempted to see himself as better than others because of his authority, he need only remember how Jesus had stooped to take a servant’s role at that Last Supper. He could hardly consider himself better than Jesus, and so he must be as willing as Christ to humble himself to serve others (Richards, Pegoda, and Gross 153).

Wiersbe wisely notes that “Jesus was their Master, so He had every right to command their service. Instead, He served them! He gave them an example of true Christian

ministry. The world asks, 'How many people work for you?' but the Lord asks, 'For how many people do you work?'" The mentality of the world is "Happy are those that rise and rule. Washing one another's feet will never get estates and preferments; but Christ saith, notwithstanding this, Happy are those that stoop and obey" (Henry).

Jesus drove home the application by **emphasizing that knowing must be followed by doing**. He said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). Henry emphasized this point as well when he wrote, "Though it is a great advantage to know our duty, yet we shall come short of happiness if we do not do our duty." Moreover, we must keep on doing. Robertson explains that "**If ye do**" is a "present active subjunctive, assumed as possible, 'if ye keep on doing.' Both conditions with the one conclusion coming in between, 'happy are ye.' Just knowing does not bring happiness nor just occasional doing."

Jesus drove home the application by **exhibiting humility toward those who were disloyal to Him**. We err if we believe that the washing of the disciples' feet is the only evidence of humility by our Lord in this chapter. Jesus was fully aware that Judas was going to betray Him (John 13:10-11, 18-27), and yet He washed His feet just as He did the feet of the others (John 13:12). Consider the following excellent quotations regarding this:

It is the character of a *widow indeed* that she had washed the saints' feet (1 Tim. 5:10), and there is some comfort in this; but the blessed Jesus here washed the feet of a sinner, the worst of sinners, the worst to him, who was at this time contriving to betray him... There were those among our Lord's enemies who wronged him, not knowing what they did. They had no real perception of his goodness

and the Divine beauty of his character. Since they knew nothing against Jesus, they were grievously to blame for the part they took against him. Still they did not sin against clear, full daylight. But Judas was in constant association with his Lord, and knew how perfectly Jesus merited the warmest attachment and devotion. Yet he betrayed him whom he should have honoured and defended; and on this account his guilt was greater (Henry).

Through all the years of His public ministry Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. Yet even as they ate that Last Supper together, the other disciples had no idea. Jesus had always treated Judas in the same way He treated the others. No change of tone in His voice, no sidelong glance, had led the rest of the Twelve to suppose that Judas was different from the rest. (Richards, Pegoda, and Gross 153).

Jesus also knew that Peter was going to deny Him three times (John 13:36-38), but nevertheless He washed his feet and treated him with lovingkindness. In truth, Jesus knew that all of the disciples would forsake Him and flee, at least for a season (Zech. 13:7; Mark 14:27; Mark 14:50). Yet, He referred to them tenderly in the upper room as His "little children" (John 13:33). "This is the first and only time, in the Gospels that the tender word, **little children**, is used by the Lord. The adoption of the gentle love-word is appropriate as a link to the new commandment, and reveals the love of departure, the tender love that wells up in his heart, as he contemplates the orphan-like and bereft condition of his disciples" (Spence-Jones). Likewise, Jesus exhorted them to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34-35).

There is a new standard. We are no longer to love others “as you love yourself,” but “as I [Jesus] have loved you.” Christ’s own committed, self-sacrificial and limitless love is the yardstick by which we are to measure our love for our Christian brothers and sisters (Richards 690).

Finally, Jesus drove home the application by **revealing that exaltation follows humility**. Jesus wanted His followers to know that humility does have its reward. The humiliation of the cross would be followed by the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The humble man does not seek earthly glory but will receive the glories of heaven.

The word “glorify” occurs five times in these verses...John uses the Greek word translated “glorify” (*doxazo*) in a special way. The root typically means to exalt. But here it refers to Jesus’ death. The thought is that Jesus will lift God up by obeying Him completely, even going to the cross, and that in His resurrection Jesus will be lifted up by God. It’s important to note that when Jesus speaks of His coming death He typically speaks also of His resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; 9:31; Luke 9:22). Cross and resurrection are so intimately linked that they constitute a single redemptive act. Thus it is Jesus’ humiliation that leads to His exaltation (Phil. 2:5–11) (Richards, Pegoda, and Gross, 153).

Conclusion

How well did Peter listen and watch the lesson that Jesus put before him in the upper room? It is apparent that Peter was listening/watching very well. He exhibited great humility

when he told Cornelius not to bow before him. Peter said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26). Perhaps one of the greatest evidences that Peter learned his lesson is what he wrote in 1 Peter 5:5-6: "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Vincent does an excellent job of painting the picture of the meaning of Peter's words:

Be clothed with humility. The last word is a very peculiar one, occurring only here. It is a *knot* or *roll* of cloth, made in tying or tucking up any part of the dress. The kindred word from which the verb is directly formed, means a *slave's apron*, under which the loose garments were girt up. Hence the figure carries an exhortation to put on humility as a *working virtue* employed in *ministry*. This is apparent from the evident reminiscence of that scene in which Peter figured so prominently — the washing of the disciples' feet by the Lord, when he *girded himself* with a towel as a servant, and gave them the lesson of ministry both by word and act. Bengel paraphrases, "Put on and wrap yourselves about with humility, so that the covering of humility cannot possibly be stripped from you." (1:667).

Peter was not the only one who needed to learn from the Master Teacher in the upper room.

We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility.

The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge, but not in grace (see 2 Peter 3:18). ‘Humility is the only soil in which the graces root,’ wrote Andrew Murray. ‘The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure’ (Wiersbe).

Satan will do everything within his power to tempt us to live in arrogance. “Pride, indeed, will counsel thus: ‘Let others serve you; it is beneath your dignity to minister to them.’ Humility will offer very different advice: ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ’” (Spence-Jones).

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CHAPTER 14

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class

Clark Sims

Introduction

It is a considerable honor and joy to be a part of the Power Lectureship program at the Southaven church of Christ. While it is my first time to be a part of this program, the reputation of it for good has long come to my attention. I have great respect for the eldership who oversees this program and for the one who directs it. Ironically, my assigned topic deals with a concept that is at the very foundation of this and other great lectureship programs within the church. We live our lives as students and we are always in need of being taught.

One of the primary reasons a study of the life of Peter is so valuable is because he, perhaps more than any other, gives us a solid picture of ourselves. No matter what place we might be in our walk as a disciple of Christ, we can look to Peter and see that mirrored reflection. Honestly, that is true in favorable traits and those traits not so favorable. In this lecture, we will be addressing the subject “When Peter Went to Sleep in Class.”

Peter and the other disciples had sat in the “classroom” with Jesus as their teacher for three years. Jesus embraced that role. In fact, it seems much of His emphasis during that earthly ministry was in the teaching and training of His followers. The passage in Matthew 5:2 leading in to the grand “Sermon on the Mount” says, “Then He opened His mouth

and taught them” (NKJV). The rich young ruler ran up to Jesus with the words, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17). One of His disciples in Luke 11:1, after hearing Him pray, said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Peter himself understood his role at the feet of a “Good Teacher.” He said in John 6:68, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” In the early days, when Jesus gave instructions concerning a fishing expedition, Peter replied in Luke 5:5, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” Sadly, even at the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, Judas Iscariot mocked Him by saying, “Greetings, Rabbi” (Matt. 26:49). Rabbi is a word that means “teacher.” Being a teacher was simply a part of the identity of Jesus. Peter was so fortunate to be numbered in the group as one of His pupils.

While I know Peter going to sleep in our text verses does not reflect favorably on him, I do not want to be too hard on him. I am not sure we would be any different in the same situations. Jesus led His disciples in a very busy lifestyle. Both of the contexts we will discuss today represent very intense moments in time. Along with that, they had experienced draining activity immediately preceding these moments. Peter, along with his fellow disciples, was tired. They were weary and they had earned that sleep. However, Jesus was tired, too. He did not waste a minute in His yesterdays and His tomorrow represented a time like no other this world has known. Jesus needed Peter. He needed him to be alert and strong. He needed him to focus on the current events that would go with Peter and the others throughout their lives. Likely, Peter fought it. Have you been there? Likely he struggled in that moment that we all know between being awake and going to sleep. Ultimately, he lost the battle. His eyes grew heavy and he went to sleep. When his teacher really needed him to be awake, he went to sleep.

A Time You Would Not Want To Miss

Fresh in the memory of Peter, James, and John as they made their way up the mountain to pray was the powerful confession of Peter to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16) and Jesus’ declaration shortly thereafter “upon this rock I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18). A very real conflict was taking place within the minds of the disciples as they longed for a physical kingdom while Jesus continued to emphasize a spiritual one. The events that would take place on that mountain could shape the minds of the disciples toward a spiritual understanding--that is, if they could stay awake.

Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease (departure) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:28-35).

**When Peter Went to Sleep In Class,
His Teacher Was *Glorified***

The carpenter's son who went on the mountain to pray began showing the form of deity. This is God's Son! His face was altered and His robe became white and glistening. It was a spiritual presence where He was joined in conversation by men of yesterday, Moses and Elijah. Peter, you do not want to miss this. Your Teacher is truly very special. When he fully woke up, he saw Jesus in His glory. He saw the men with Him. He recognized who they were. He had an idea. On the surface, it appeared to be a good idea. However, his idea revealed he still did not grasp who His Teacher really was. The voice of God, coming from a cloud, is about to make clear just who this Teacher really is.

**When Peter Went To Sleep In Class,
His Teacher Was *Magnified And Identified***

"This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35). The words were very similar to the words of the Father as He sent His Son off to begin His earthly ministry. But this time there was one addition. This time the Father added, "Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35b). Peter needed to hear those words. Peter had been raised on the words of Moses, the lawgiver. The Father makes clear that His Son brings new words, a new law with His complete approval. The One who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger in a barn because there was no room in the inn is being magnified and identified by the Creator of the universe. You do not need to sleep through these kinds of moments.

Wake Up Peter; the Lord Needs You!

All of our study to this point brings us to this garden. It is in this garden that the pupil faces his most significant test to date. His Teacher needs him. We see a side of the Teacher in the garden we have not seen before. The pupil has heard

his teacher speak of His upcoming death many times, but this time is different. Frankly, this time the Teacher is so different. You can see it on His face and hear it in His voice. They have just left an upper room where the pupil had promised the teacher he would never leave His side. He affirmed he would go to prison or even die before he would leave the Lord alone. Words like these were meant when they were stated, but somehow they appear to be fading as a weary pupil joins his teacher and two other pupils deep in the garden. We learn some things about the Teacher as He takes that special group of pupils further into the garden. As we consider the Teacher and His pupils who went to sleep, it is important for us to remember with everything said, with everything done in that garden, our souls were hanging in the balance. What happened there affects us today, in 2009, and directly affects us as we face eternity. Surely weak men will stay awake for a time like this. You would think they would.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing,

but the flesh is weak.” Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand” (Matt. 26:36-46).

When Peter Went To Sleep In Class

We See His Teacher Was Human

John starts out with words reminding us that the Teacher was with God in the beginning. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). But, before you get to the bottom of the page, you are also told this: The Teacher became “flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). We saw it when He was weary sitting at a well in Samaria. We saw it when He was weeping at the tomb of a very close friend. We saw it when He faced temptation in every way like we do. We saw it when he was hungry. We saw it when He was thirsty. We saw it when He spent time with friends. But, when He got to that garden, we saw His humanity on a level much different than we had seen before from Him. Like a man sitting in a hospital waiting room needing friends to “just sit with him,” the Teacher pleads with these three pupils to simply “watch with Me” (Matt. 26:38). The humanity of the Teacher is really facing a struggle. There is a very real battle going on between what He wants and what we all need. We are not fair to the Teacher when we make the moments in this garden easy for Him. At

this low point, He called on a group of weak, weary men for support.

We See His Teacher Was Hurting

The view was different this time for the pupil. He had witnessed the compassion of the Teacher many times toward people who were hurting. He saw Him take care of thousands who were hungry and one business man who had climbed a tree. This time, though, it is the Teacher who is hurting. He told the pupils, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me” (Matt. 26:38). He told His Father, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matt. 26:29). He had always known this moment was coming. Before Eve took one bite of the forbidden fruit, He knew this moment was coming. Before the words “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” were ever penned in Isaiah 53, He knew this moment was coming (Isa. 53:5-6). However, that did not make the moment’s reality any easier to embrace. After he poured out His heart to His Father, He went back to the pupils and found them asleep. You can hear the hurt in His voice. “Could you not watch with Me one hour” (Matt. 26:40)?

We See His Teacher Was Hoping

Is it possible? Is there any other way? Does it have to be like this? The side of Him that had been with the Father throughout creation knew the answer, but the side that cried and thirsted and got hungry was desperate. Remember with every question asked the destiny of your soul is swaying back and forth. Do not miss the reality. He did not want to do this. His language indicated He was ready for “any other way.” The family is concerned about their relative in the intensive care unit in the hospital. The diagnosis is not good. The condition of the patient gets worse with each passing hour. The doctor walks into the room. You hold out hope. You want it so badly. But you know. You know things do not always work out like

you hoped they would. With an answer that went against His very real desires, the Teacher looked to His pupils for support. But they were asleep.

We See His Teacher Was Humbled

“Nevertheless”--It is perhaps the single most important word in this passage (Matt. 26:39). It is the word that indicated the Teacher’s heart. It is the word that shows submission. It is the word that reveals His priority. The Teacher knew the line that could not be crossed. He was very comfortable emptying His heart before the Father. In John 6:38, the Teacher had stated, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” Humility. It is not My will but yours that must be done. The Teacher was flat on His face. The Teacher was begging the Father for a way out. Yet, before He got off the ground He is telling the Father what He is going to do. Respect at its highest level is when you submit to an authority, even when their will is different than yours. The lesson the Teacher here teaches His pupils is so needed in this world. It is difficult for us to let go of “what we want.” Judges 21:25 speaks of a time when, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The Teacher speaks in Matthew 15:9 of those who worship in vain, “teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.” We all need to “wake up” and see the value of submission to the will of the Father. I honestly cannot think of any issue that cannot be traced to a respect for the authority of God, His Word and His will. How does one so sorrowful, so distressed, and so hopeful for another way find this strength of conviction?

We See His Teacher Was Helpful

This one amazes me. We have already documented what the Teacher was enduring. We have seen His heart. We have heard His words. We have watched His actions. You are really not prepared for what happens next. He makes His way to the sleeping pupils. After acknowledging His hurt that they could not watch with Him, He turns His attention to their

well-being. “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:38). I do not want you to give in to temptation. While it is amazing, it is not surprising. From the age of twelve when He revealed He must “be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49) to the cross when He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34), the Teacher looked to help His pupils. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. His yesterdays and His tomorrows said this is what He would do. And He did it. With sleep still in the pupil’s eyes, he said, “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:38). Be on guard. They had no idea what they were facing, but He did. For the pupils who slept, the Teacher prayed in John 17, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...Sanctify them by Your truth” (John 17:15; John 17:17a).

We See His Teacher Was Hated

The words basically function as an alarm clock. The words indicate to the pupils that it is time to leave this garden. The words serve to “wake up” the sleeping pupils and let them know action is at hand. “Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand” (Matt. 26:46). Betrayer! The people approaching the entrance to the garden where the betrayer knew He would be hated Him. They were not going to be satisfied until the Teacher was destroyed. One of His own lead the mob. Even the pupils who had slept in the garden would “turn on Him.” Our primary pupil whom we have discussed denied he even knew Him. The Teacher faced hatred from the very pupils He came to teach, serve, and save. He had said, “He that is not with me is against Me” (Matt. 12:30). He knew every one must choose his side and most would not choose Him. He knew the pupils who followed Him looked to Him as the “chief cornerstone” while those who rejected Him look to Him as “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (1 Pet. 2:7-8). It is worth noting that the decision to do “the

will of the Father” meant He was making a sacrifice even for those who hated Him. We all need to realize the sacrifice He willingly made for us.

Conclusion

In the garden, the Teacher clearly indicated to His pupils, “I need you now.” He was distressed and sorrowful, battling the will of the Father with His own wants. Unfortunately, they were not there for Him. They went to sleep and left the Teacher discouraged and on His own. In Acts 1, these same pupils were standing by as the Teacher ascended into the clouds to sit at the right hand of the Father. His words to them then were the same as they were in the garden: “I need you now.” Thankfully, these pupils took His words to heart, woke up, and did what He commissioned them to do. The reality is, He looks to us all today, in 2009, with the same request, “I need you now.” How will we respond? Will we act on His need or will we be found asleep?

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CHAPTER 15

Seventy Times Seven: A Lesson In Forgiveness

Kevin Ruiz

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” (Matt.18:21, NKJV). Not only did Jesus answer this question of His disciple, but He also showed that forgiveness among men is a matter of the heart that must mirror the very nature of God toward man. Following His answer to Peter’s question, Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant, painting a picture of the beauty and enormity of the forgiveness God has extended to man. He also exposed the dark and hardened heart of man that is seen in man’s refusal to forgive others.

This subject is one of importance to all, since all need that blessed forgiveness which God has shown us how to find. Furthermore, the Lord warned of the consequences of withholding forgiveness, urging instead the extending of the same, lest we fall into condemnation.

Needing Forgiveness

Made in the image of God but clothed with flesh, we are subject to the desires of the flesh and struggle with temptation throughout life. Often we yield to temptation, and in violation of the revealed will of God, gratify our desires. Paul explained,

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Eph. 2:1-3).

The sinful choices we make necessitate our need for forgiveness. The saints in Ephesus had been “made alive” when their debt of sin was forgiven through the blood of Christ. Jesus described this kind of debt in the parable of the unforgiving servant and revealed the magnitude of the servant’s indebtedness—ten thousand talents or thirty million denarii (Matt. 18:24). Given that one denarius was equal to one day’s wages for both the common laborer and the soldier, the servant’s debt was equal to more than eighty-two thousand years of labor! (Peterson).

His debt was one the servant could not possibly repay, and his future was dark. Sin is a problem we are powerless to remedy, and its wages are eternal torment (Rom. 6:23). Furthermore, it is a burden that has come upon all of humanity (Rom. 3:9) and thus makes all the more apparent the universal need for forgiveness.

The apostle Peter was one who no doubt came to understand this need following his later denial of the Savior. Cursing and swearing, he said, “I do not know the man” (Matt. 26:74). In the darkness of night during the spring of the year, even as those words were leaving his lips, Peter heard a rooster crowing. At that moment, Jesus turned, looking into His disciple’s troubled eyes. Peter’s earlier conversation

with Jesus came suddenly into the disciple's mind and with it the words of the Savior, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times" (Mark 14:72). The feelings of grief, guilt, and failure must have been overwhelming. In the weeping fisherman, we see one who understood the great need for forgiveness. As David expressed,

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin" (Psa. 51:1-2).

Though all have sinned, not all are willing to see their sins. Some deny their transgressions and are resistant to even the gentlest admonishment. Their hearts, being lifted up, are hardened against the truth regarding their iniquities. John proclaimed,

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

Seeing our need for forgiveness is the first step toward finding forgiveness.

Finding Forgiveness

The servant who owed his master ten thousand talents found forgiveness, in part, by **confessing** his great debt when he promised to pay all. He did not deny the debt, nor did he accuse his master of being unfair, unjust, or impatient. Indeed, the very disciple to whom Jesus spoke this parable

had made such confession: “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” (Luke 5:8).

It is written, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). And again, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The confession of sin is an essential act of humility whereby we acknowledge to God and any person against whom we sin that we bear guilt in the matter under consideration.

It is further noted that no amount of confession would have proven profitable had the servant’s master not been “moved with compassion.” When the master had listened to his servant’s pleading, we are told, “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt” (Matt. 18:27). The master had no obligation to forgive this enormous sum, but he freely forgave from the goodness of his heart. What a comfort this point in the parable would later prove to be for Peter after he denied his Savior three times and tearfully contemplated the enormity of his sin! The goodness of God toward mankind is incomparable, “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psa. 86:5). Paul declared that the goodness of God should stir up our hearts to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

As servants of Jesus our King, we will at times miss the mark and fail in our faithfulness. Simon the sorcerer suffered such a setback shortly following his baptism (Acts 8:9-25). In the account of his sin, we learn of another requirement with which we must comply in order to find forgiveness—repentance. When Simon offered Peter money in exchange for a full measure of the Holy Spirit, Peter rebuked him, saying, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22).

The same held true for the church in Corinth. When Paul chastised the brethren saying, “Your glorying is not good” (1 Cor. 5:6), he was showing them their sin in tolerating the immorality in their midst. How did they find forgiveness? The Corinthians were cleared of their guilt through the repentance that resulted when their hearts were pricked and grieved by Paul’s divinely-guided rebuke. Their repentance was made manifest when they turned from their pride and practiced the punishment that Paul commanded. Then, as Paul declared, “In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Cor. 7:11).

For those not yet citizens of the kingdom, finding forgiveness requires compliance with every command found in Scripture relating to the salvation of sinners through Christ: believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of sin (Luke 13:3), confess Jesus as God’s Son (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16).

It should also be noted that we may be forgiven of sin but still have to suffer the earthly consequences of our actions. Moses’ sin of striking the rock instead of speaking to it was forgiven (cf. Mark 9:4), but the man of God was forbidden from entering the Promised Land (Num. 20:12). Likewise, David found forgiveness from the sins of adultery and murder but, nonetheless, suffered the bitter consequences of his deeds (2 Sam. 12:10-14).

It is further seen in the parable of the unforgiving servant that our finding divine forgiveness depends on our choice to withhold or extend forgiveness to others (cf. Matt. 6:12-15).

Withholding Forgiveness

Jesus exposed a common human weakness when He explained that the servant who had been forgiven his great debt refused to forgive his peer a comparably insignificant sum.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt (Matt. 18:28-30).

The servant learned nothing from his master's compassion or from the magnitude of the forgiveness he had received—his heart was cold. It was in this spirit that he aggressively seized a fellow servant and demanded payment of the one hundred denarii. While this debt was not small change (one hundred days' wages), it paled in comparison to the massive debt the king had earlier forgiven.

The prophet Jonah serves as a fitting example of withholding forgiveness. Upon seeing God's pardon of the evil, violent citizens of Nineveh, Jonah angrily confessed to the Lord that the thought of these Assyrians being divinely forgiven was the spark that ignited his passions, even to the point of prompting him to rebel against his Maker's direct command (Jonah 1:2-3). That spark grew into a flame when God forgave the Ninevites, for Jonah cried out in prayer, "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" (Jonah 4:3). Jonah and his Hebrew kinsmen were themselves recipients of God's forgiveness, as Jonah well knew (Jonah 4:2) and as the Biblical record repeatedly confirms. The prophet, nonetheless, desired punishment, not pardon, for the enemy of Israel.

Jonah's unforgiving heart serves as a reminder of the human struggle to forgive. While it may be easier to forgive what we perceive to be minor offenses against us, would our hearts be different from Jonah's if our mothers, wives,

daughters, or sisters were brutally raped, or our fathers, husbands, sons, or brothers were savagely murdered? The greater the offense, the greater the temptation to withhold forgiveness. Yet, we must learn from this parable which our Lord planted in the heart of Peter (Matt. 18:21-35). While our “fellow servants” may accumulate “debt” in their sins against us, our own sins, over the course of our lives, multiply into a vast mountain of iniquity. In truth, though we are guilty of sinning against various individuals, all sin is ultimately perpetrated against God. It was in this sense that David, following Nathan’s condemnation of the king’s adultery and murder, declared, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge” (Psa. 51:4).

To withhold forgiveness is to incur the wrath of God, “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matt. 18:34-35).

Extending Forgiveness

Our aim as children of God should be to cultivate hearts that are a copy of our heavenly Father’s. The compassionate forgiveness of God toward us His servants ought to make an impression upon our hearts and produce tenderness toward those who seek our forgiveness. That forgiveness must be “from the heart,” not pretended but genuine, sincere, and heartfelt. Paul reminded the saints in Ephesus, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

Peter’s question of “how often” to forgive may have stemmed from Jesus’ teaching that if a brother “sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:4). Was

there a limit, Peter inquired, to the number of times he was obligated to forgive the transgressing brother?

Had Jesus intended to convey that forgiveness need only be granted a limited number of times, He could have answered, “Four hundred ninety times.” Instead, the Lord used numbers that convey the idea of completeness—seventy and seven (Cole). The creation week of Genesis was complete after six days of labor followed by one day of rest (Ex. 31:17). Judah’s punishment for her harlotry against God was complete after seventy years in Babylonian exile (Jer. 29:10). By replying, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22), Jesus was indicating that, whenever a brother comes seeking our forgiveness in his struggle against sin, we must **always** stand ready to forgive. The heart of man is only complete in forgiveness when his forgiveness is like God’s.

An additional point that the Lord taught regarding forgiveness is the responsibility of the one sinned against to rebuke the guilty brother, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him” (Luke 17:3). Jesus here commands rebuke because He loves us (cf. Rev. 3:19) and desires that we turn from sin and be saved. Thus, a spirit of love should undergird every word of rebuke that passes from our lips. Consider Paul’s words following his rebuke of the church in Corinth, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (2 Cor. 2:4).

After commanding rebuke, Jesus said, “and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3, emp. added). In this statement, we find a condition that must be met before forgiveness can be extended—repentance. This principle is seen in the teaching of Christ regarding personal offense (Matt. 18:15-17). Is a sinning brother to be forgiven even though he refuses to repent? The Lord said, “But if he refuses even to hear the

church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17).

In Corinth, a brother was living in fornication. What was the church commanded to do? Paul wrote, “Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). The subsequent withdrawal of fellowship carried out by the saints in Corinth produced grief in the sinning soul who then humbled himself in repentance. It was only **after** the brother repented that he could be forgiven (2 Cor. 2:6-8). The same principle of forgiveness coming after repentance would apply to those outside of the body of Christ, though it must be noted that the church does not withdraw from such. Paul stated, “For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

Our Lord taught “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). God’s fire, not His forgiveness, awaits those who refuse to repent of their sins. As the Holy Spirit through Solomon said, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). And while God’s justice demands that He punish the ungodly, it is not His desire to destroy anyone, for He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Though impenitent souls cannot be forgiven until they repent, our hearts should desire their salvation while we, through prayer and persuasion, seek to turn them from sin. We should always possess the same eagerness to forgive as we do to be forgiven. Were it not for the forgiveness God made possible, life would be full of despair and hopelessness. Let us therefore glorify God by imitating His forgiving nature, for “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13 -14).

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CHAPTER 16

Peter Learns A Lesson About Tax Exemption

Robert Jeffries

Introduction

In the late 1700s one of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, Benjamin Franklin, said, “The only things certain in life are death and taxes.” However, long before this statement was made, the New Testament spoke to us about death and taxes. The subject of physical death was spelled out so clearly by the Hebrews writer when he penned the words, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27, KJV). However, for the study that is at hand, death is not going to be our focus. Our objective is to deal with the subject of taxes.

Background

The text for our study is found in Matthew 17:24-27:

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers, Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding,

lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

In just two chapters (Matthew 16 & 17) consisting of fifty-five verses, Jesus and His disciples have been very busy. They sail into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asks the question, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matt. 16:13). After hearing several of the answers given—John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matt. 16:14)—Jesus would corner His disciples and ask them, “Whom say ye that I am?” The answer given to this question will lay the groundwork for the rest of our study today. Peter makes the Great Confession by answering, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

After six days had passed, Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain and was transfigured before them. They then went out to the multitude where Jesus cast a demon out of a boy and then rebukes his disciples because of their lack of faith.

Finally, they come to Capernaum. This would be the last visit which Jesus and His disciples would make to Capernaum before the crucifixion. Matthew is the only Gospel account writer to include this portion of Jesus’ ministry. It is here that Peter was met with a question, “Doth not your master pay tribute?” From this question we are going to notice three things: (1) We Learn Something About Jesus; (2) We Learn Something About Peter; and (3) We Learn Something About Brethren.

We Learn Something About Jesus

First, the **tribute** that the tax collectors were asking about is the temple tax. The taxes that were being collected

were not a civil tax, but a religious tax. This tax began in the wilderness when God instructed Moses to collect a half-shekel from every male twenty years and older. The origin of this tax can be found in Exodus 30:11-16.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are number, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the Lord. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the Lord. The rich shall not give more, and poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls.

The tribute was first used for the Tabernacle, and later it was used for upkeep on the temple and for providing the funding for the day-to-day operations of the temple. Upkeep and day-to-day operations included purchase of animals for the daily sacrifice, wood, flour, salt, incense, etc. During Nehemiah's day the amount was reduced to one-third of a

shekel. "Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God" (Neh. 10:32).

Second, these collectors wanted to know if Peter's **master** paid tribute. On the surface this question may appear to be an innocent question, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" However, knowing the background of so many of these religious individuals, we see was not an innocent question. Knowing the character of these religious leaders and their great dislike and disrespect of Jesus, one can only conclude that the asking of the question was a backhanded way of telling Peter that Jesus was expected to pay. Under the taxation process, rabbis were exempt, which meant that they were accusing Jesus, in a roundabout way, of not being a "master" or teacher.

On numerous occasions, Jesus was referred to as a master or rabbi. Seven times in the New Testament Jesus is labeled as "Rabbi." The word *rabbi* is defined as "a respectful term applied by the Jews to their spiritual instructors." In fact, on two instances he is referenced as master and Rabbi in the same verse. Let us notice just a couple of these passages:

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:2).

And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren (Matt. 23:7-8).

In the New Testament the word master is used over seventy times. At least fifty-five times, master is used in reference to Jesus. Let us notice several of these passages:

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, **Master**, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest (Matt. 8:19).

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your **Master** with publicans and sinners? (Matt. 9:11).

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good **Master**, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? (Matt. 19:16).

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? (Matt. 22:36).

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your **Master**, even Christ; and all ye are brethren (Matt. 23:8).

Neither be ye called masters: for one is your **Master**, even Christ (Matt. 23:10).

Jewish Rabbis were exempt from paying the tax. When Peter was questioned with the phrase “your master,” this was actually an insult to Peter saying that Jesus was just an ordinary Jew.

However, not all gave Him such a respectful title. Some of the Jews thought that Jesus was from Satan. “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house **Beelzebub**, how much more shall they call them of his household?” (Matt. 10:25). “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by **Beelzebub** the prince of the devils” (Matt. 12:24). Others thought He was just a prophet:

And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a **prophet** (Matt. 14:5).

And the multitude said, This is Jesus the **prophet** of Nazareth of Galilee (Matt. 21:11).

But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a **prophet** (Matt. 21:46).

Why go to the trouble of examining the words *master*, *rabbi*, and *prophet*? The reason is because of the **answer** Jesus gave. “And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, **What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?** Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free” (Matt. 17:25-27).

First, we notice the omniscience of Jesus. There is no reason to suggest that Jesus was present when Peter was questioned about his Master paying tribute money. All the while, not being present, Jesus knew exactly what Peter was asked.

Second, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter by addressing Peter by his family name and then rebuking him through the process of questioning. “What thinkest thou, **Simon?** of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free” (Matt. 17:25). He appeals to the way of the kings of the earth, which is to take tribute of strangers, of the subjects of their kingdom, or foreigners that deal with them, but not of their own children. There is such a community of goods between parents and children, and a joint-interest in what they have, that it would be absurd for the parents to levy taxes upon the

children, or demand any thing from them; it is like one hand taxing the other. The argument is this: If the sons of kings are free from the payment of tribute, I, the Son of God, am free from God's tribute. When we introduced this study, we started by going back to Peter's Great Confession. You can almost hear Jesus saying, "Peter what are you thinking? You just said that I was the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16).

A third piece of information we learn about Jesus is His miraculous power. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the **sea**, and cast an **hook**, and take up the **fish** that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his **mouth**, thou shalt find a piece of **money**: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matt. 17:27). Notice how much control over the natural world Jesus exercises here: He controlled where the hook went, where the fish went, when the fish went there, and what the fish had in its mouth. Through this miracle Jesus would also show us his care for us. He provided not only for Himself, but for Peter also. May we remember the words of Peter and the Hebrews writer about our Lord: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you (1 Pet. 5:7); and "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Truly this is amazing!

We Learn Something About Peter

This episode in the life of Peter begins to shine light on his rash personality. You may have heard the sayings, "Think before you speak," or "Think before you act." He answered yes to the question about Jesus paying the tribute before thinking. Just shortly before he made that Great Confession that Jesus was the Son of God and here he so soon forgets or does not think first. This would not be the first time that Peter would display this personality of his. The next time would be when he cut off the right ear of the servant Malchus. "Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the

high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 18:10). Another occasion would be when Peter denied Jesus three times, especially after Peter proclaimed that he would not. "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matt. 26:34). The three denials are recorded just a few verses later in Matthew 26:70-71, 74. Then finally, we see later on in the life of Peter where he chooses not to eat with the Gentile Christians when the Jewish Christians are around (Gal. 2:11ff).

Another piece of information that we notice is that during Peter's younger life, he lacked many of the characteristics from his "Christian Graces." Notice the things that Peter lacked from his "Christian graces" of 2 Peter 1: virtue (defined as "spiritual courage," which Peter lacked at times), knowledge (he often gets confused by Jesus' teaching; after all he just made the Great Confession), temperance (self-control; exhibited a lack of it here, when he emphatically answered "Yes"), patience (again, he acted without thinking and was easily discouraged), and charity (why else would Jesus have to ask him three times, "Lovest thou me?").

This writer is fully convinced that Peter gets it right and faithfully serves Jesus the Christ. After all, church historians have claimed that Peter requested to be crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to be crucified like his Lord and Master. This is something else that is truly amazing!

We Learn Something About Brethren

In Matthew 17:27 we notice the application of this event. Jesus gives the reason why He still pays tribute even when He does not have to. "Notwithstanding, lest **we should offend them**, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matt. 17:27). Jesus says,

“So we do not offend them.” Even though Christ could have maintained his right of exemption from payment with strong, clear reasons and arguments, he chose to forego it. He did not want any to be offended by him and look upon him as a transgressor of the law—one that had no regard to the temple and slighted the worship and service of it—and so be prejudiced against him and his doctrines. Jesus’ action, by the way, may teach us to be careful to give no offence to Jew or Gentile or the Lord’s church though it may be to our own disadvantage when the honor and interest of the church lies at stake. Jesus is illustrating what Paul teaches about in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 (Paul was willing to abstain from eating meats rather than to cause a brother to stumble). Though I may know something is okay, I should honor my weaker brethren and abstain. May we always remember to set the proper example, and not cause our brethren to stumble.

Conclusion

From the text of Matthew 17:24-27, we not only learn that Peter learns a lesson in tax exemption; we also learn valuable lessons about Jesus, Peter, and our brethren. As we close may we always remember that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God and that He has the supreme authority. Jesus continually proved throughout His ministry this very truth by the way he lived, taught, and lead others. Matthew 17:24-27 is just another way that Jesus illustrates this very message. May we take heed the message found in John 20:30-31: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

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CHAPTER 17

The Inner Circle: Private Lessons

Michael McDaniel

It is my joy to speak on the Power lectures once again and to be associated with the great Southaven church, their sound eldership, and their two outstanding preachers: Wade Webster and Robert Jefferies. May God continue to bless you as you labor together for Him.

The choice of Peter for a biographical study is an excellent one. Peter was one of the twelve chosen apostles.

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house (Mark 3:13-19, KJV).

Peter is always mentioned first in the list of the apostles. We see that Jesus gave surnames to Peter, James, and John. These surnames were nicknames or descriptive labels which Jesus attached to His closest disciples. Simon was named Peter which is the Greek word for rock or stone. In Aramaic, he was called Cephas. Jesus called James and John “boanerges,” which translated means “sons of thunder.” The descriptive character of this particular name takes on added meaning in Luke 9:54, “And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” Early on, it appears these men were fiery in temperament and quick to punish (Olbricht 9).

Peter, James, and John are sometimes called the inner three or inner circle. Rex Turner Sr. wrote,

The companions of Jesus were the three apostles who composed the inner circle and who were to furnish the main leadership in the early days of the church: his two cousins, James and John the sons of Zebedee, and their former fishing partner, Simon Peter. Of these, James became some fourteen years later the special target of Herod Agrippa I, and was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:1-2); Peter left his testimony of what he saw in his second epistle; and John was privileged to see the glory of Christ again on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-18) (341).

J. W. McGarvey wrote the following comment on Mark 5:37: “These three were honored above their fellows by special privileges on several occasions, because their natures better fitted them to understand the work of Christ” (**The Fourfold Gospel** 355).

The inner circle would be eyewitnesses of three special events in the life of Christ: the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, the transfiguration, and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. It seems that they were nearest to the Savior in sympathy and understanding and that they were better prepared in heart and life for these scenes. Our Lord had an appointment with death. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). This passage shows that (1) Christ **accepted** human flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). He accepted flesh and blood so that He could do what we could never do. (2) Christ **accosted** the Devil. He destroyed him that had the power of death by using the Devil's greatest weapon against him! Death first came into the world as the result of sin which the Devil introduced through temptation. Satan is called a "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Christ came to defeat the Devil's purposes regarding mankind. Satan's power of death could be broken only from inside the tomb itself. Jesus had to die and go into the sepulcher to conquer the Devil and death. He had to take the keys of death away from him. This He did by his resurrection from the grave to die no more. He conquered death and its power, thereby defeating the greatest weapon that the Devil had. John expresses it this way in First John 3:8, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (3) Christ **accomplished** the deliverance of man from the fear of death. He provided the remedy for sin and removed the most dreadful part of the fear of death which is the fear of punishment afterward (1 Cor. 15:55-56). Then he conquered death by his resurrection, showing us not to fear the grave (John 11:25). It was important that the apostles understand

these facts regarding the mission of Christ to earth. To help prepare them for a better understanding of these things, Jesus would reveal unto the Inner Circle three important lessons about death. They would see His supernatural power over death, a shining panorama clarifying death, and a submissive prayer about death.

The Inner Circle Saw Christ's Supernatural Power Over Death

In Mark 5:35-43, we have the account of the raising of Jarius' daughter. First, you have the report (Willmington 503). A ruler of the synagogue named Jarius came to Jesus and wanted Him to heal his daughter. As they proceeded to the house, a woman reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment that she might be healed. Following this interruption, someone arrived from the ruler's house and said, "Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?" (Mark 5:35). The person or persons who sent this message not to trouble Jesus showed mercy and concern for the overburdened life of Jesus, but a lack of faith in His divine power. In their minds, there was no further hope—nothing could be done.

Second, we have the reassurance. "As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus immediately challenged the faith of Jarius with these words. Could he believe that Jesus was Lord over both life and death?

Third, we have the restriction. "And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James" (Mark 5:37). This is the first time in the Biblical record that the presence of the apostles at a special event is restricted to these three men. Burton Coffman thought that the abilities of these three had earned for them a closer relationship with the Lord. Also, each would have an important role in the

future spread of Christianity. James would set the heroic example of being the first of the apostles to suffer martyrdom. Peter would preach the first gospel sermon. John would be the last witness and live the longest (109).

Fourth, we have the ridicule. “And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn” (Mark 5:38-40a). Matthew 9:33 says that Jesus saw minstrels or professional mourners there. When Jesus said, “She is not dead, but sleepeth,” they laughed him to scorn. They did not understand Jesus’ use of the word *sleep*.

Fifth, we have the resurrection. “But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying” (Mark 5:40). Jesus threw these scorners out of the house. They were not fit to witness what He was about to do. Only Peter, James, John, and the mother and father would be allowed to serve as witnesses of what was about to occur. “And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment” (Mark 5:41-42). We can only imagine the anxiety of those parents as they watched every movement of the Lord. Suddenly their grief was turned to gladness as she got up and walked. Jesus not only restored life to her body but immediately gave to that body strength and vitality.

Sixth, we have the restraint. “And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat” (Mark 5:43). Telling them to keep quiet would save the family from much annoying notoriety. R.C. Foster also pointed out,

If we knew how many Zealots were in the crowd seeking constantly to turn Jesus' campaign to their own militaristic aims, we could better understand why Jesus put a curb on such exciting news which would inevitably become known, but would have to filter out. Jesus continually had to keep the excitement of His miracles from overpowering the desire of the people to hear His spiritual message.

This significant narrative illustrates our Lord's power over death. The inner three heard Jesus use the metaphor of sleep for death. This gentle figure for death is often found in the Old Testament. In bemoaning his birth after Satan had afflicted him, Job cried, "For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest" (Job 3:13). Daniel prophesied, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). The Old Testament also refers to patriarchs and others as those who "slept with their fathers." Jacob told Joseph, "But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said" (Gen. 47:30). David was told, "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. 7:12). Job would come forth from his "sleep" when the Lord "wouldest call, and I would answer thee" (Job 14:12; Job 14:15).

We need to understand the significance of the metaphor of sleep being used to describe death because many do not. (1) Those who sleep in Jesus are not extinct; they continue to live. The dead do not cease to exist but are only

in rest, as in sleep. It is not soul sleeping for it is the body at rest in the grave while the spirit has returned to God. Interestingly, the word *cemetery* means “a place to sleep.” (2) One is not unconscious in death. In Revelation 6:9-11, souls (the immortal nature of man) are spoken of as crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” These souls were alive and conscious in another world. The rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham still existed and were conscious in the Hadean realm of Luke 16:19-31 as was one, probably Paul, who was caught up into the third heaven of Paradise (2 Cor. 12:2). The dead are “at home with the Lord,” though they are “absent from the body” (2 Cor. 5:8). Though asleep to the things on earth (Ecc. 9:5-6), the spirit is very much awake and conscious of its own realm of existence. (3) The sleep of death is temporary. As one awakens from sleep, likewise the body will be awakened by the resurrection. It will be changed into a glorified and immortal body capable of spending eternity with God above. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). Paul said in First Corinthians 15:20-22, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Christ will awaken the faithful out of sleep just as he awoke Lazarus (John 11:11) and the daughter of Jarius (Mark 5:39-42) and just as He Himself would awaken on the third day following His death. Seeing Christ’s supernatural power over death should have helped the apostles later when they were faced with the death of Jesus.

**The Inner Circle Saw A Shining
Panorama Clarifying Death**

To be understood fully, the transfiguration must be viewed in connection with the announcement by Jesus concerning His death shortly before it happened. Matthew 16:21 states, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” This statement immediately follows Peter’s good confession of the Deity of Jesus. This prediction was surely a grievous blow to them. Peter at once interrupted Jesus and rebuked him saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matt. 16:22). Despite the fact that the prophets had foretold how the Messiah would be stricken, smitten, or cut off, Peter, along with most of the Jews, regarded the thought of the Messiah’s being subjected to suffering and death as a cowardly and shameful thing (Turner 329). How difficult it is to accept or understand anything that is contrary to one’s preconceived opinions!

When Peter made his rash rebuke, Jesus must have recalled Satan’s temptation (Matt. 4:8-10). Satan had tried to turn Jesus away from the cross, and now Peter was being used by the Devil for the same purpose. “But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:23). Jesus would not be detoured from the cross by His greatest enemy or by one of His closest friends. What the Inner Circle was about to see next would comfort them as they considered what awaited the Master in heaven. They would behold a passing glimpse of His great glory.

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart” (Matt. 17:1). The setting is likely Mount Hermon, which is

in the region of Caesarea Philippi where Christ was, some fourteen miles away. This mountain is the highest mountain in Palestine. Luke reveals that Jesus went up to the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28). From the topic of conversation soon to follow and from the subject of His prayers in Gethsemane, this writer wonders if His death was the subject of His prayers on this occasion. Did Jesus desire comfort and solace at this time? If such is the case, then the transfiguration of Jesus may be viewed as the Father's first source of comfort to Him.

“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). The word translated *transfigured* gives us our English word, *metamorphosis*. A metamorphosis is a change on the outside that comes from the inside. When a caterpillar builds a cocoon and later emerges as a butterfly, it is due to the process of metamorphosis. Our Lord's glory radiated from within, and it changed His countenance on the outside. “And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:29). Jesus appeared in His glorified state, not veiled by human flesh. God allowed, for just a moment, the essential beauty and glory of Christ's divinity and deity to shine forth (Wiersbe 60). When Moses was in the presence of God on Mount Sinai, his face also began to shine to the extent that he had to wear a veil before the people could look at him (Exod. 34:29-35). However, the brightness of our Lord's appearance was not something that occurred because of His association with Deity. On the contrary, it was His own Deity shining through His humanity (Turner 341). A. B. Bruce remarked that this might have been “a foretaste of the glory with which He should be rewarded after His passion, for His voluntary humiliation and obedience unto death.” What a spectacular panorama this must have been! John said, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Perhaps the transfiguration occurred to reveal the mystery of His nature visibly. It revealed the glory of His pre-earthly existence and the glory that He sought to regain upon His ascension. We recall His prayer in John 17:5, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Before this could occur, His death on the cross would have to be endured. The faith of the disciples would soon be severely tested. They needed to be prepared as much as possible for what was to come. The transfiguration that the Inner Circle was privileged to witness would hopefully aid them in their comprehension of events soon to transpire.

A second comfort to Jesus on this occasion would have been the assurance that His impending death was understood and appreciated by the spirits of just men made perfect. “And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him” (Matt 17:3). Moses was the great representative of the law. Elijah was the great representative of the prophets. Christ would be the end of the law and the fulfillment of prophecy (Rom. 10:4). What was the topic of their conversation? Luke 9:31 adds, “Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” The Greek word translated “decease” is *exodos* and literally means “departure.” The Latin form of this word, *exodus*, is used for the leaving of the Israelites from Egypt. Ralph Earle wrote, “The primary reference is probably to Jesus’ death, which soon occurred at Jerusalem. But we should include His resurrection and ascension as His ‘departure’ to heaven” (63). “Moses had led Israel out of bondage to Egypt, and Elijah had delivered them from bondage to false gods; but Jesus would die to set sinful world free from bondage to sin and death” (Wiersbe 208).

The death of Christ is the most important subject under Heaven. The salvation of all people depended on the death of Christ on the cross (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). Had there been

no death in Jerusalem, there would have been no abolishing of the law (Eph. 2:15), no establishing of the church (Acts 20:28), no remission (Matt. 26:28), no redemption (Eph. 1:7), no reconciliation (Eph. 2:13), no justification (Rom. 5:9), no sanctification (Heb. 13:12), and no cleansing of sin (1 John 1:7).

The conversation on the mount would be a source of comfort to Jesus, but it would also be a source of clarification to the Inner Circle and to us. From the record of this occasion we learn a number of important ideas. (1) There is life after death. Moses and Elijah were very much alive. If there is an afterlife for them, can we not deduce that there is one for us? (2) Men do not cease to exist. We have an immortal spirit that is not identified with our flesh and bones. (3) There is consciousness after death, and the dead do not lose their identity. How did Peter, James, and John recognize Moses and Elijah? Somehow, their identity was revealed to the three, whether it was something about their clothing and appearance, or it was revealed through miraculous knowledge, or else they overheard part of the conversation and realized who they were. Regardless, it is evident that when we die, we do not lose our identity in the afterworld. Moses had been dead about 1500 years, and Elijah some 900 years, yet the disciples knew who both men were. Both had maintained their individuality and personality after death and both were recognizable. (4) The death of Christ that was soon to come was in harmony with the law and the prophets. While the disciples were dismayed at the prospect, for it dashed any dream of an earthly kingdom, it was obvious that Moses and Elijah were not shocked by it. Shortly after this occurred, Jesus would tell them “how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought” (Mark 9:12).

“Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three

tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (Matt. 17:4). Luke 9:33 adds the comment that Peter said this, “not knowing what he said.” Perhaps Peter just wanted this scene to continue for Jesus to be glorified apart from any suffering to come. Sometimes Peter spoke first and did his thinking afterward. Why did Peter say this? Though he trembled at the presence of Moses and Elijah, he also realized the blessedness of it. He did not want it to be over. Thus Peter suggested some type of abode or a place of worship to these three. This writer is not exactly sure what he meant, and he does not think Peter did either! However, we do know that by his statement, he had placed Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah--that all three alike were worthy of a tabernacle.

A third source of comfort to Jesus on this occasion was the approving voice of His heavenly Father. “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). Luke adds that they feared as they entered into the cloud. The brightness of this cloud and the fear it produced suggests that this was a cloud of glory, a symbol of God’s presence. Such a cloud appeared over Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24:16-17), over the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod. 40:38), and also over Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). Ezekiel 10:18 describes the cloud of glory’s departure unto Heaven.

This is the second time we have this statement declared by a voice from Heaven (Matt. 3:17). Here God adds three words: “Hear Ye Him.” This command gives significance to the entire scene. It makes known to the disciples their duty to hear Christ more than any other--even Moses and Elijah. There was a time when they were to hear Moses, the lawgiver of Israel; then Elijah came and revealed God’s will as one of the greatest of the prophets. Today, we are to hear God’s Son. We are to honor Him above all others as God’s authority (Deut. 18:15; Heb. 1:1-2) and to strengthen our

faith in Him. We must do what He commands and be what He requires that we might obtain the promises made unto us. God also states His pleasure in Christ. He is also well pleased in those who follow the example of Christ. The disciples were not despaired at the revelation of Christ's death so that they ceased to follow the Lord. Everything was going according to the plan of God. The voice of God's approval would have been both comforting to Christ and reassuring to the inner three.

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead (Matt. 17:6-9).

Their fearful reaction would be natural under these circumstances (cf. Dan. 8:17; Dan. 8:27; Rev. 1:17). Nevertheless, Christ sought to alleviate their fear with the words, "Be not afraid."

Why were they instructed not to tell at this time? A number of reasons could be suggested. (1) They probably did not understand fully what they had seen. (2) It might create envy among the other apostles. (3) Others might not believe it, and their unbelief might harden their heart. (4) It was not yet time to fully reveal that the Old Law was being done away and superseded by the new. (5) It might have prematurely provoked the Jews. It was not yet time for Jesus to die. Jesus did not teach the apostles many things they needed to know but left much for the Holy Spirit to teach (John 16:12-13). There are those today who are novices in the faith who are unable to comprehend or grasp fully some spiritual truths. There is a growth process involved (Heb 5:12-14). Now that

Christ is risen from the dead, let us tell the story of the vision of His glory!

And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10-13).

They had just seen Elijah on the mount, but if Jesus were the Messiah, they must have wondered why He preceded Elijah's appearance. The Scribes had correctly taught that the Messiah would not come till Elijah came (Mark 6:15). However, Malachi 4:5 referred to John who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17; Matt. 11:13-14). Just as John was rejected, Jesus would also suffer (Isa. 53:3).

It is only Mark who relates the fact that a discussion developed among the Inner Circle as to what Jesus meant when He referred to His rising from the dead (Mark 9:9-10). Mark says they kept this question to themselves. They had personally witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter by the Lord. Was Jesus referring to a resurrection earlier than the one at the last great day? They chose not to bring up this subject.

Nevertheless, the transfiguration served to strengthen the faith of the Inner Circle after Jesus had openly revealed His death. While the other nine did not observe the scene, the change in demeanor and confidence in Peter, James, and John afterward would have been a blessing to them. This scene must have made a tremendous impact upon these three men. Rex A Turner,

Sr. wrote, “The experience was intended to inform and enlighten the three that they could console the others when Jesus had been put to death. Even with this experience, though, Peter was slow to learn the lesson intended” (329). Nevertheless, we see its significance on Peter later as he spoke of it to others:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2 Peter 1:16-18).

In His epistles, Peter sought to establish a solid foundation of his reader’s faith and conduct. Peter had been not only a personal companion of Jesus, but also an eyewitness of the transfiguration. He could have appealed to the miracles of Christ and the resurrection of Christ as proof of His Deity, but instead, he chose to emphasize the transfiguration. He reminded them that it was a real event, that he was personally present, and that he witnessed it with his own eyes and ears. Jesus will come again in the majesty and power manifested on the Mount of Transfiguration, and this time, it will be to judge the world.

The Inner Circle Saw A Submissive Prayer About Death

The final mention of the Inner Circle being alone with Jesus is found in Matthew 26:37 as Jesus prepared for His death in the garden of Gethsemane. Eight disciples had been

left at the gate while Peter, James, and John were selected to go farther into the garden in the shadows of its ancient olive trees. It would be a difficult night for the Savior and the Inner Circle. “And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me” (Matt. 26:37-38). Jesus moved away about a stone’s cast (Luke 22:41) where He fell on His face and poured out His breaking heart to the Father. “And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). The cup which Jesus spoke of was the cup of suffering which He foreknew would be His to drink upon the cross to execute God’s eternal plan for the redemption of humanity. Into that cup were poured loneliness, ingratitude, betrayal, humiliation, suffering, and death. Jesus prayed that the cup might be removed if it were possible. In John 12:27 Jesus had said, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” He said this about a week before the ordeal of Gethsemane (John 12:1). Jesus was already under great emotional strain at the time. Already the thought had occurred to Him to pray for deliverance. However, He knew not how that could be reconciled with God’s eternal purpose.

Jesus expressed His heart’s desire to God to remove the cup of suffering. Yet, it was not possible. There was no other way. He then said, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” There were two wills: His and the Father’s. Which would He follow? Oh, how the Devil must have tempted Him on this occasion to turn from the awful task before Him. The conflict was real. Yet, He prayed, not my will, but thine be done. Jesus submitted His will to the will of Father. Gethsemane means “olive press,” and here the heart of Jesus was pressed beyond measure. Yet, His prayer was a prayer of submission.

“And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:40-41). The Lord was disappointed to find them asleep instead of watching and waiting, and He rebuked them.

Jesus went back and prayed again. “He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matt. 26:42). In the second prayer, the words are slightly different. Jesus knew what the Father’s will was. He had surrendered His will to the Father’s will. So in the second prayer He said, “O Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” See His faithfulness? He would be faithful to do God’s will. He would submit perfectly and totally to the will of God. God’s intentions were clear. “Night, with ebon pinion, Brooded o’er the vale; All around was silent, Save the night-wind’s wail; When Christ, the Man of Sorrows, In tears and sweat and blood, Prostrate in the garden, Raised His voice to God” (Jameson).

When He returned, Matthew 26:43 says, “And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.” At some point, while watching our Lord’s submissive prayer, they fell asleep again. Luke 22:45 says the Lord found them “sleeping for sorrow.” Their sleep was not the sleep of indifference. Rather, it was caused by their sorrow at the words Jesus had spoken unto them, and perhaps, the words they heard Him praying. They were willing in spirit, but they were weak according to the flesh. They were physically and emotionally spent. Nevertheless, those circumstances were not sufficient to excuse them from being more actively involved. Had they fully comprehended how much the Lord needed their sympathy and comfort as He came repeatedly seeking it, they probably would have kept awake. “And he said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter

into temptation” (Luke 22:46). “Smitten for offenses, Which were not His own, He, for our transgressions, Had to weep alone; No friend with words to comfort, Nor hand to help was there, When the Meek and Lowly humbly bowed in prayer” (Jameson).

Can we not see the loneliness of our Lord? Our Lord knew what loneliness was. He desired the sympathy of His friends, but they were sleeping. There are several applications that come to mind. (1) How often are we miserable comforters to friends in their time of need? (2) Do you not think that our Lord is often disappointed with us because we fail to do that which He desires from us? (3) Is the life which you are currently living a disappointment to God? (4) Is the Lord disappointed in your weakness to serve Him as He desires? “When my love to Christ grows weak, when for deeper faith I seek, then in thought I go to thee, Garden of Gethsemane. Then to life I turn again, Learning all the worth of pain. Learning all the might that lies, in a full self-sacrifice” (Wreford). Watch and pray for we know not when our Lord shall come (Mark 13:32-37).

Jesus returned to pray for a third time, saying the same words. The writer of Hebrews spoke of this very occasion when he wrote in Hebrews 5:7, “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” Why did Christ so pray? He did not want to be separated from His Heavenly Father, and He did not want to endure the ridicule and the shameful death of the cross. He despised the shame of it according to Hebrews 12:2. He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. We can see His feelings in this place called Gethsemane and know that He was made like us, that He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Because His prayer was the prayer of submission, Jesus can be a merciful and faithful High Priest for us today (Heb. 2:17-18; Heb. 4:16).

Upon returning from His final prayer, Jesus apparently found the three apostles asleep the third time. “Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me” (Matt. 26:45-46). You may wonder why these instructions seem contradictory. At first Jesus told them to continue to rest. The Lord understands human weakness. However, at that precise moment, Jesus could see the soldiers approaching in the distance and knowing what was about to occur, He told them to arise (McGarvey, **The New Testament Commentary** 231).

When Jesus returned the third time to His sleeping friends, the time for comfort was now over. Luke 22:43 states, “And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.” The strength He had desired to receive from His earthly friends came instead from an emissary of His heavenly Father. Did God have to send an angel from heaven because the Inner Circle let the Lord down when He needed them the most? He desired human sympathy from those most capable of giving it to Him, and they failed. They missed out on their greatest opportunity to help their Lord.

While the Lord did not receive the earthly support and sympathy He needed in His hour of suffering, we can be sure that in our time of need, we have a Faithful Father and a Sympathizing Savior who are never asleep on the job. Psalm 121:1-4 states, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” Even while we sleep, God watches over us because He does not go to sleep. In his comments on Psalm 121:4, Albert Barnes wrote:

Man sleeps; a sentinel may slumber on his post, by inattention, by long-continued wakefulness, or by weariness; a pilot may slumber at the helm; even a mother may fall asleep by the side of the sick child; but God is never exhausted, is never weary, is never inattentive. He never closes his eyes on the condition of his people, on the needs of the world.

While the inner three were too weary to watch, God is never weary, and His watchful eye is upon His people just as it was upon His only begotten Son that night.

Each of the three experiences we have studied taught the three apostles, Peter, James, and John, a lesson about death. (1) They saw His supernatural power over death. (2) They saw a shining panorama clarifying death. (3) They saw His submissive prayer about death. The lessons learned from these private experiences would aid them greatly following our Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension.

This writer is reminded of Paul's admonition in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him [as revealed by His glory at the transfiguration], and the power of his resurrection [as reflected by His raising of Jarius' daughter], and the fellowship of his sufferings [as represented by His experience in Gethsemane], being made conformable unto his death." If you and I would be resurrected unto eternal life and glorified with Christ, then we must be willing to submit our will to our Heavenly Father's despite the suffering, the shame, and the sacrifice that is involved.

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**THE
PORTER**

CHAPTER 18

Liar, Liar: When Peter Shut The Door On A Sinful Couple

Cliff Goodwin

With great blessing, there comes also the potential for great temptation. Satan delights in “using” our own blessings against us. The more appropriate term would be “misusing” or even “abusing” God’s blessings. Man must avoid the tendency to fixate on the **gift** and not on the **Giver**. One’s **attitude toward** and **use of** God’s blessings must ever be that which draws one closer to God and not that which actually pulls one away from God.

Acts 4 closes with the inspired record of a great blessing in the church of Christ at Jerusalem. Those who possessed property willingly sold what was needed to provide for the necessities of less fortunate brethren (Acts 4:34-35, KJV). After stating this fact generally, the inspired historian Luke cited the specific example of Barnabas and his selfless gift (Acts 4:36-37). Truly, the love of God dwelled in Barnabas and others like him, for the apostle John would later write, “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

No doubt, it was a great blessing on all the church in Jerusalem for such a compassionate and generous spirit

to abound. However, everyone's attitude toward such a circumstance was not what it should have been. Perhaps some felt threatened by such acts of selflessness and spirituality. These would not have been at a point in their spiritual lives (nor perhaps in their material lives) to make such sacrifices themselves and to do so **willingly**. So, what would their reaction be to the generosity manifested in others? Would they resent the liberal benefactors out of hearts filled with envy? Or would a spirit of rivalry compel them to "compete" with ill-motivated sacrifices of their own? It was, indeed, a blessing that so many had learned the grace of selfless giving (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-7), but it would be necessary for all to react properly to such blessed circumstances. To react improperly, or with improper attitudes, would give Satan an advantage over God's people. He will always try to "use" God's blessings against us. "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

The Charity Of The Church

What a beautiful portrait of the Jerusalem church is painted in the conclusion of Acts 4. Their benevolence reminds one of Paul's inspired words, "That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:25-26). New Testament Christianity has always involved members' caring for one another. In fact, the church's example and influence before the world is greatly damaged when it is observed that the church fails to care for her own. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

The members of the Jerusalem church were willing to do what was necessary to meet the needs of those brethren who lacked. This does not mean—nor does the record suggest—that every member sold his material possessions and contributed the proceeds into a communal fund (Wiersbe 420). Robertson points out that the use of the imperfect tense in Acts 4:34 conveys the idea, “Selling they brought from time to time, as there was occasion by reason of need.” Had all the disciples sold their material possessions and donated the proceeds, then there would have been no bringing “from time to time.” Instead, it seems obvious that sacrificial gifts were made **occasionally**, as needs arose, and that all such gifts were strictly voluntary. This latter fact becomes clearly evident as one notes Peter’s words to Ananias, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4).

The charity, or love, of the church in ancient Jerusalem reminds one of at least two Biblical doctrines. First, there is the concept of selfless service. Christians are urged, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 2:3-5). Christ is held up as the supreme example of one who cared not for His own interests first, but for the interests of others—namely, a world of lost and dying sinners (Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:6-8). John, the apostle of love, concluded, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,” (1 John 4:10-11; cf. 1 John 3:16). Second, there is the idea that with greater blessing, there comes also greater responsibility. It is obvious that the makeup of the Jerusalem church included a significant number of poorer people (cf. Jas. 2:5); after all, the poor had not been overlooked by Christ

and His disciples as they had been by the “religious elite” of that time (cf. Matt. 11:4-5). However, not **every** member of the early church was poor. Obviously some were quite affluent, possessing the means whereby needs could be met, hardships could be alleviated, and great good could be done. God fully intends that wealthy disciples be “rich” in good works.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded; nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

The Culpability Of The Couple

It is important to note that, in many English versions, Acts 5 begins with the word “but.” One does not often think of “but” being used to start a sentence, much less a chapter. Here, however, it is used to show the connection between the events beginning chapter five and those concluding chapter four. “But” is a word of contrast, and Acts 5 opens by contrasting the attitude and actions of Ananias and Sapphira with those of Barnabas.

As Barnabas had sold some land (Acts 4:37), Ananias and Sapphira likewise sold a tract of property (Acts 5:3). Their sin was not in selling the piece of property; it was theirs either to sell or to keep. Neither did they sin in retaining for themselves a portion of the proceeds from the sale. Once again, Peter’s inspired words make this fact abundantly clear. Their culpability is seen in the fact that they **lied** about the price of the land, **pretending** to contribute the entire amount to the church.

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts 5:3-4).

Lying originates with the devil and will ultimately bring one to the same end as the devil. Regarding the origin of lies, Jesus said, “[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44b). Regarding the destiny of liars, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and **all liars** [emp. mine, CG], shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). As children of the living God, Christians should desire in every way to imitate their Heavenly Father. This is a chief reason why lying is so unbecoming of a child of God: he who lies is imitating Satan, the father of lies! It was by means of a lie that Satan was successful in introducing sin into this world (Gen. 3:1-6). By way of contrast, Christians are instructed, “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). In choosing to lie, Ananias and Sapphira went counter to the very spirit of Christianity. They aligned themselves with Satan—not with the Lord.

Even further, theirs was a special type of dishonesty. By misrepresenting the price for which they had sold the land, Ananias and Sapphira made a pretense and thus became hypocrites. “Hypocrisy is *deliberate* deception, trying to

make people think we are more spiritual than we really are” (Wiersbe 421). Reading the account in its context, one cannot help but think that Ananias and Sapphira were well aware of the sacrificial gift that Barnabas had made. Equally plausible is the idea that Barnabas had been greatly commended for his generosity, and that the couple had taken note of such praise as well. It seems that Ananias and Sapphira may have wanted “Barnabas praise” without making “Barnabas sacrifice” (Clark 503-04). If not, then why lie about the proceeds from the sale? In lying they became hypocrites, playing the part of being more sacrificial, and thus, more spiritual than they really were. Virtue and achievement in others should rightfully encourage us, and even motivate us, to do better in our own lives. However, there are no shortcuts to true spiritual growth. Pretending to be what one is not only reveals the spiritual immaturity of the pretender—or better stated—of the hypocrite.

The Carnality Of Their Motive

At the mentioning of the names “Ananias and Sapphira” many begin thinking of a covetous couple—as notorious for their greed as for their deception. However, upon closer examination and contemplation of the inspired text, this writer believes the love of money might have been a “secondary” weakness for the pitiable couple. Had the love of money been preeminent in their hearts and in their lives, then why sell the property at all? Or, having sold it, why contribute *any* of the proceeds from the sale? The sacrificial donations being given to the church at this time were purely voluntary. It seems, therefore, that a couple consumed with greed would have kept to themselves not only the proceeds from a sale, but the very news of the sale itself. Yet something prompted Ananias and Sapphira to sell their own possession and to bring a portion of the price to the apostles. What was their motive for doing this?

One must exercise extreme caution in attempting to judge the motives of another person. Motives are matters of the heart, and only God can fully know a person's heart (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). Motives, unless clearly stated, are often misinterpreted and inaccurately diagnosed. For these reasons, therefore, one must ever remember the words of Jesus, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Regarding Ananias and Sapphira, inspiration does not explicitly reveal the motive behind their actions. One could hardly say, however, that their heart was "in the right place." Why taint a potentially good deed with exaggeration and dishonesty? Whatever prompted their deceptive actions, it must have been carnal in its nature, not spiritual. It would be helpful to consider two possibilities.

The couple might have been motivated by envy—only God knows. Were they envious of praise that had been heaped upon Barnabas or others like him? Did they feel that they were better suited to receive such accolades, only to prove the very opposite by their actions? Envy is an insidious monster, indeed. A person who seeks the glorification of self is especially vulnerable to this sinful vice. The apostle Paul wrote, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Gal. 5:26). In giving the way they gave, did Ananias and Sapphira seek to glorify God or to glorify themselves?

In addressing those who might claim a high degree of spiritual wisdom, James urged his readers, "Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth" (Jas. 3:13-14). In other words, one might pretend to possess great spiritual wisdom, all the while harboring envy and strife in his heart. What is the result? Such a one is lying against the truth. And is this

not reminiscent of Ananias and Sapphira? They pretended to be something they were not and, in essence, lied against the truth. Hence, we learn from James that envy might well have been behind their actions.

Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira were motivated by their love of praise—only God knows. Jesus warned against doing religious acts for the glory, or praise, of men.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1-4).

Perhaps it is the height of insincerity for a supposed disciple to perform a religious act in hopes of actually bringing glory to himself, and not to the God he pretends to serve. In fact, one engrossed in the glorification of self has really missed the point of Christianity (cf. Eph. 3:21; 1 Pet. 4:11). God has done for us that which we could never do for ourselves—and this with the intent that we place our faith and hope in Him, not ourselves (1 Pet. 1:18-21). When one's faith is stunted or misplaced, he will seek the glorification of **something** or **someone** else rather than God. Obviously, Ananias and Sapphira's faith toward God was not entirely what it should have been. It seems that "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43).

The Captivity Of Their Hearts

Anytime sin is found among God's people, one can rest assured that Satan is involved. In fact, it is likely the diabolical attacks from within the church that are most perilous and threatening. Many commentators note that Satan's assaults against the church in Acts 4 were from without—in the form of persecution from outside forces (Acts 4:1-22). As tempting as persecution and coercion may be, Satan's plot in Acts 5 posed an even greater problem for the church. He would use two of her own members in an attempt to undermine the integrity of the church and the authority of the apostles. In chapter four, Satan attacked the church through **persecution**; in chapter five he would make an assault through **pretension** (Roper 179).

How tragic for Ananias and Sapphira that they would be the ones used by Satan for this latest assault. Peter's inspired words are very telling, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). Barnes provided these helpful comments regarding Satan's filling of Ananias' heart, "A man's 'heart' or 'mind' is 'full' of a thing when he is 'intent on it'; when he is strongly 'impelled to it'; or when he is fully occupied with it. The expression here means that he was 'strongly impelled' or 'excited' by Satan to this crime." Satan had so affected Judas Iscariot's heart as to impel him in betraying the Son of God (John 13:2); now he influences Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, to lie to the Holy Spirit.

One simply must not "toy" with the devil or with devilish attitudes and actions. The more the devil is "flirted with" spiritually, the more of a "toehold" he attains in a person's life. It is a fearful thing, indeed, to imagine one's coming under the control of Satan. This is almost always done unconsciously, through carelessness or neglect, but it happens all too often just the same. Paul described the work of a soul-winner as helping the lost to recover themselves out of the snare of the

devil, “And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26).

The devil is the chief adversary of mankind (1 Pet. 5:8). He desires nothing more than to drag down human souls to eternal perdition. In this diabolical pursuit, the devil is very methodical in his assaults. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles [methods] of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11). Sadly, the devil is often more serious and deliberate regarding his work than Christians are regarding theirs. The only way God’s children will overcome the enemy is by relying totally and faithfully on the Lord. One must not be ignorant of Satan’s designs, or purposes (2 Cor. 2:11, ESV), but he must refuse to be a part of them, resisting his temptations at every turn (Jas. 4:7). This Ananias and Sapphira did not do. They allowed themselves to be used of the devil and to be taken captive at his own will.

A word here regarding attitudes might be profitable. Attitudes are really dispositions of the heart, and out of man’s heart come all the issues of life (Prov. 4:23; cf. 23:7). One might think that secret attitudes hidden in the heart are harmless, but the Scriptures indicate otherwise. Paul commanded that God’s children give no place, or opportunity, to the devil (Eph. 4:27). Attitudes harbored and cherished in the heart often constitute that “little crack” needed by the devil to “get his foot in the door.” Consider the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Had they harbored a secret love of praise? A love of money? A love of both? One can be sure that Satan will learn the “chinks” in one’s armor and do his best to exploit those weaknesses. A Christian must not harbor sinful attitudes; sooner or later, he will give place to the devil.

The Calamity Of The Couple

The narrative concerning Ananias and Sapphira must rank among the most tragic accounts recorded in the book

of Acts. A couple who, no doubt, must have held much promise and potential for the service of the Lord, came to such a shocking and heartbreaking end. As one considers the calamity of Ananias and Sapphira, he must direct his attention to the **enormity** of their sin; the **authority** of an apostle; and the **severity** of their punishment.

The Enormity Of Their Sin

Yes, Ananias and Sapphira were found to be hypocrites. And yes, they were found to be liars. But the enormity of their sin is seen in the fact that they perpetrated a lie before Deity (Acts 5:3-4)! McGarvey has sagely noted, and others with him, that lying to the Holy Spirit was not likely the **aim**, or **objective**, of their actions. However, it was the **practical result** of their actions—it was actually what they had done, whether they intended it or not (86-87). Surely, they had not set out to lie to the all-knowing God, but that was the exact nature of their actions.

The Authority Of An Apostle

According to Acts 5:2, the partial proceeds were laid at the apostles' (plural) feet—marking the public nature of this voluntary surrendering of the funds. The apostles were “handpicked” by the Lord to be His inspired agents and representatives (2 Cor. 5:20), not to mention being eyewitnesses of His resurrection (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:21-23) and the authoritative leaders over His church (Matt. 19:28). They were vested with the very authority of Christ Himself while upon the earth, and they still exercise that authority in the church today through their written, inspired testimony, the New Testament (cf. John 17:20-21; Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20). By their actions, Ananias and Sapphira exhibited a blatant disregard for the authority of Christ's apostles, and by extension, a disregard for the authority of Christ Himself. Had their fraud been successful, apostolic authority would have been undermined and the church left without effective leadership (Roper 190).

The Severity Of Their Punishment

The foregoing observation helps one to understand better the severe punishment leveled against the hypocritical couple. The authority of the apostles could not be impugned without disastrous consequences on the church. The penalty suffered by Ananias and Sapphira curtailed such consequences, however. What could have been a successful advance into the church's ranks by Satan himself turned out rather to the glory and fear of God. Note the following statements from Luke's inspired record.

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things (Acts 5:5).

Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things (Acts 5:10-11).

As stated earlier, both the integrity of the church and the authority of the apostles had been protected by the punishment exacted on Ananias and Sapphira.

Many commentators have been extremely critical of the apostle Peter regarding the punishment of this deceitful couple. One would do well, however, to notice that there is no hint whatsoever of a "death curse" in Peter's words to Ananias. To what extent the apostle foreknew the consequences of the lie, inspiration does not reveal. To be sure, Peter must have known the sad demise awaiting Sapphira, when, three hours later, she attempted the same lie. McGarvey shrewdly observed that no one understood the deaths of

the couple as acts of Peter, else when news of the deaths had spread, charges of murder might have been raised against the apostle (86).

It seems most plausible, therefore, to understand the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira as an act of Divine judgment. Peter was used by God as an inspired spokesman. He pointed out the **identity** of the act (i.e., pretentiously keeping back part of the price); the **nature** of the act (i.e., it was a lie); and the **origin** of the act (i.e., Satan was ultimately behind it). The apostle of Christ went on to declare the **absurdity** of the act (i.e., the land and its price were both in Ananias's power) and the **futility** of the act (i.e., he had lied to God). Later with Sapphira, Peter noted the **conspiracy** of the act (i.e., they had agreed together) and the **result** of the act (i.e., they had tempted the Spirit of the Lord). All of these inspired statements proceeded from the mouth of the apostle Peter, and they have been recorded in God's written Word as a matter of record.

Practical Lessons

1. Husbands and wives need to deter, not encourage, each other regarding sin (Clark 503). Spouses can lead each other to heaven or plunge each other to hell (cf. 1 Kings 21:25).

2. Beautiful deeds can be made ugly by evil motives and evil means. It is tragically ironic that Ananias' name meant "the Lord has been gracious," and Sapphira's name in Aramaic meant "beautiful." Ananias learned that the Lord is also holy, and Sapphira is remembered for an ugly deed that marred her name (Wiersbe 421).

3. There can be a wrong kind of unity (Roper 189). Just because people are working together does not mean that God is necessarily pleased. Yes, God demands unity among His people, but His people must be unified in doing **the will of the Lord**.

4. Lust conceives sin, and sin ultimately brings forth death (Wiersbe 422). Apparently their lust for recognition prompted Ananias and Sapphira to sin in lying to the Holy Spirit. The end result, of course, was tragic and untimely death (cf. Jas. 1:13-15).

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CHAPTER 19

Simon Says: “Repent And Pray”

Jason Roberts

Introduction

The invitation to have a part in the 17th annual Power Lectureship is greatly appreciated by this author. The valuable material contained within all of the previous year’s lectureship books has been a tremendous resource tool for me as a preacher. I look forward to reading every chapter of this year’s book, featuring one of the Bible’s most intriguing characters, Simon Peter.

Exegesis Of Acts 8:9-24

The seventh chapter of Acts closes by recording the stoning of God’s faithful preacher, Stephen. The opening verse of chapter eight reveals that “Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen’s] death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1, KJV). Some devout men served as Stephen’s pallbearers—carrying him to his burial place “and made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2). Meanwhile, Saul of Tarsus is on a militant mission of making “havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). The persecuted church continued its mission of spreading the word of God every where they went

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(Acts 8:4), and “Phillip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). In addition to Phillip’s preaching being heard, his miracles are being noticed by the people of Samaria, unclean spirits are being expelled from many individuals, and many that were lame were healed (Acts 8:6-7). Consequently, “there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8).

Main Character #1 - Simon The Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-11)

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries (Acts 8:9-11).

Verse nine begins with an interesting contrasting conjunction. Wayne Jackson notes: “One implication of this is that there is a marked contrast between the sort of ‘signs’ Philip was performing, and the ‘magic’ of a local impostor” (92). A rhinestone may sparkle, but when compared to a diamond, its flaws are exposed. In the same way, Philip’s true evangelism revealed the glaring defects in Simon’s deceptive ministry. True evangelism always exposes a false faith. Philip proclaimed Christ and verified the authenticity of message by performing miracles (Mark 16:17-20); Simon proclaimed himself. Luke was careful to record the details, highlighting Simon’s own affirmation, “saying that he himself was somebody great” (Acts 8:9, ESV). Herein lies the very clear distinction between the genuine and the counterfeit—the counterfeit always exalts a person rather than Christ (Gal. 1:11).

At this point we are introduced to Simon the magician, who for a “long time” (Acts 8:11) had deceived the people

of Samaria into believing that he had the ability to practice sorcery. The word *sorcery* is the Greek word *mageuo* from which we get our modern word *magic*. This charlatan was using his *sleight of hand* tricks to advance the claim that he was “some great one” (Acts 8:9b.). Apparently he was quite an illusionist. This is evident for at least two reasons: (1) **The reaction his audience had when he performed his magical arts** (Acts 8:10-11), and (2) **The length of time he was able to keep his audience convinced that he was the real thing** (Acts 8:11). Jackson observed, “Multitudes, from all strata of society, were spell-bound by his illusions. They attributed his powers to God, but he knew the truth about the matter” (92). Simon was a manipulator and a deceiver. And his astounding acts were certainly not of God.

Main Character # 2 - Philip The Evangelist (Acts 8:12-13)

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done (Acts 8:12-13).

These two verses are pregnant with rich material. First, Philip’s message began with a discussion of things that concerned (pertained) to the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12). Luke does not reveal the specific content of what Philip said relative to the church. More than likely he spoke of things that pertained to the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom (Isa. 2:1-2; Dan. 2:44; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38-47). Furthermore, Philip may have discussed the terms of entrance into the Lord’s kingdom. This seems apparent from the immediate reaction the Samaritan’s had in response to Philip’s message. Luke records “they were baptized” (Acts 2:12b).

Second, Philip's message continued with a discussion of the name of Jesus Christ. This could mean that Philip discussed the specific name of Christ, and what this name entails. Or, it could mean that Philip preached to them the authority that resided in Christ. Perhaps his message contained a combination of both truths. We are not sure. Philip may have alerted his audience to the truth expressed by Peter that Luke recorded earlier in the book of Acts. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12; cf. John 14:6). Perhaps Philip reminded his hearers of what Paul stressed to the church at Philippi:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phi. 2:9-11).

If Philip stressed to his hearers the importance of the authority that resided within Christ, he may have instructed them what the Lord Himself affirmed, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth (Mat. 28:18, ASV). It is this author's studied conviction that if we get our religious friends and neighbors to grasp fully the significance of Bible authority, specifically the authority inherent in Christ and His Word (Col. 3:17; John 12:48; Mark 8:38), then the waters in our baptisteries would be stirring more frequently than they presently are.

Third, Philip's message underscores the truth regarding the simplicity of salvation. The text reveals that when the Samaritans heard Philip's message, they were baptized (Acts 8:12). Now if we eliminate the content of Philip's message, here

is how the passage would read, “But when they believed...they were baptized.” How simple! Philip’s message is consistent with the Lord’s words, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Someone has rightly observed, “The gospel is simply glorious and gloriously simple.” Tragic indeed that legions have yet to understand its simplicity.

Fourth, the authenticity of Simon’s conversion is supported by clear evidence from Luke. The text reads: “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized” (Acts 8:12-13). Virtually every commentator and denominational preacher claims that Simon’s faith was not genuine, i.e., he was never initially saved. Jackson wrote, “The assertion that Simon merely wanted the ‘new power,’ but had ‘no personal need of Jesus as Savior of his sins’ (Robertson III.105), is a desperate Calvinistic attempt to avoid the conclusion that a child of God can so sin as to be in danger of hell” (93). But will this assertion hold up to what the inspired Luke said about the matter? Observe again Luke’s description of Simon’s conversion. “Then Simon himself **believed also**: and when he was baptized” (Acts 8:13, emp. added). Luke, the historian, makes no distinction between the faith of the Samaritans and the faith of Simon. The key word he employed is *also*. Whatever degree of belief Simon reached was identical to that of the Samaritans. If Simon’s conversion was not genuine, then the same argument could be made that the Samaritans’ conversion was lacking in authenticity. Lenski observed, “On the basis of what is related later it is usually assumed that Simon’s faith was only a sham, but Luke uses the same verb and the same tense with reference to him as he does with reference to the people” (322).

Now consider a later case, where Luke employs similar language—joining two groups of obedient believers.

When Paul and Silas were dispatched by some brethren from Thessalonica to Berea, Luke contrasts the attitude of the Bereans with those in Thessalonica in this way: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them **believed; also** of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:11-12, emp. added). Notice that Luke makes no distinction whatsoever between both groups of Berean believers that readily received the Word of God proclaimed to them. Again, we say that Simon’s conversion was genuine; the former charlatan was now saved from his past sins. Sadly, in just a few moments following his baptism into Christ, Simon’s heart would be ensnared once again in the bonds of iniquity.

Fifth, Luke’s recording of Simon’s continual gazing upon the miracles Philip performed may suggest how powerful and deceptive temptation can become in one’s life. After Simon’s baptism, “he continued with Philip, and **wondered, beholding** the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13, emp. added). (It is interesting that the Greek word for *wondered* is the identical word for *bewitched* used earlier to describe Simon’s trickery of the people). The word *beholding, theoreo*, means “to look closely at. To gaze, to look with interest and for a purpose, usually indicating the careful observation of details” (Zodhiates 733). Now **what** Simon was carefully observing was not wrong. The miracles Philip performed were God-ordained and approved. But the deception lay within what Simon could do if he possessed that same ability as did the apostles. His motive (heart) was not right. Perhaps he thought to himself, “If I could disguise my ability to perform sorcery and still have a huge following, imagine what kind of following I could have if I actually could perform some miracles.”

I read a story some years ago of an attorney who invited one of his friends to tour the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The attorney took him to particular section of the bank where lines of people do nothing but count thousands of dollars each day. The man asked his lawyer friend, "How can they stand it back there handling all of that money?" The attorney responded, "Everything is fine if they remember their job is only to count pieces of paper. If they begin to concentrate on what those pieces of paper represent, then we have problems." Simon's problem was he started concentrating on what these miracles could represent for him, instead of focusing on why Philip was performing them in the first place. Mark it down: **Temptation is an inside job** (Jas. 1:14)!

Main Characters 3 & 4 - Peter & John (Acts 8:14-17)

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-17).

How the apostles heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, we are not told. What we do know is that when this good news reached them, they sent Peter and John to Samaria for the purpose of equipping the new church with further instruction. When Peter and John arrived, they prayed for the church and laid hands on them in order that they might receive this miraculous measure of

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the Holy Spirit. Since the word of God had not been written down in its completed form (as it is today), it was necessary for the infant church to accompany their gospel message with a demonstration of miracles (1 Thess. 1:5; cf. Mark 16:17-20). This would not only validate the authenticity of their message but also the genuineness of the ones who proclaimed it.

Main Character # 5 Simon’s Sin (Acts 8:18-23)

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:18-23).

Simon’s request betrayed his heart, clearly revealing his preoccupation with the material rather than the spiritual. Interested in his profit-making potential, he hoped he could purchase this same power of transferring this miraculous gift to others that Peter and John possessed. Peter declared to him, “Thy money perish with thee” (Acts 8:20). Jackson observes:

The construction of this sentence has puzzled many. . . .The Greek text literally reads: May [optative mood - conveying a wish] your

silver perish with you. How could the apostle *wish* such a destiny upon this new convert? Clearly, Peter, by divine authority, uttered a word of judgment. The sense is: “If you will not repent, may you justly receive the destruction due you” (emp. in original) (95).

Peter informed Simon that he had “neither part nor lot in this matter.” Those who are wedded to Calvinistic thinking suggest that this statement means Simon was not a Christian. Is this what Luke was intending to convey? Notice that the phrase “neither part nor lot in this matter” falls on the heels of Luke’s comment, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:20, emp. added). The phrase, “neither part nor lot in this matter” (Acts 8:21) points us to the “gift of God” in verse 20. Luke is simply saying that Simon had no part in the ministry of administering spiritual gifts to others. Jackson noted: “For one reason, his heart (motive) was not in a state consistent with such a grave responsibility. If he would ‘buy’ a spiritual office, he likely would ‘sell’ such as well” (96). Simon’s sin was a matter of the heart. Peter declared to him, “for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:21-22, emp. added). Sin originates in one’s heart, i.e., the mind. Jesus said:

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:20-23).

Solomon added, “Keep [guard] your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

Previously, Simon had “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered” (Rom. 6:17) to him. His heart had been purified by faithful obedience to the gospel (Acts 15:9). Sadly, in a matter of moments this same heart that had been cleansed by the blood of Christ had now once again been ensnared by sin.

Peter instructed him to “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness” (Acts 8:22). The words *this* and *thy* are specific in nature. Simon needed to be reminded of the specific thing that was in need of his repentance and also that the responsibility of taking care of this transgression was his and no one else’s. We need to remind ourselves and others that the materialistic person (as was Simon) is classified in scripture as being **wicked**.

In addition to Peter’s command for Simon to repent of his wickedness, he was urged to “pray” to God (Acts 8:22). Since prayer is a spiritual blessing afforded to only those who are in Christ (Eph. 1:3), this is further evidence that Simon was a child of God. “The pre-regenerate sinner is never authorized to pray for the forgiveness of sins” (Jackson 96). Peter continues, “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). The language Peter employs here graphically depicted not only the severity of Simon’s sin but also the enslaving effects of it (John 8:34).

It is noteworthy to observe that Simon’s humility is evidenced by the fact that he immediately requested the help of the apostles [the pronoun *ye* is in the plural] in prayer (Acts 8:24; cf., Jas. 5:16). He recognized Peter and John’s power earlier by observing their manifestation of the miraculous; now he is privileged to witness their power via prayer.

Lessons To Be Learned

Nothing is in the Bible by accident. That being the case, we can know every recorded event that God deemed necessary to include within the Sacred Book is there for a reason. The event of Simon's sin—and Peter's confronting him of it—contains many practical lessons for us. We now want to highlight some of these for the readers' consideration.

First, all sins are buried in the waters of baptism, but some of them may resurface later in our lives. Simon may have had many sins that needed forgiven, but one of his sins is mentioned, and perhaps another can be inferred from the narrative. Peter describes Simon in this way: "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, **giving out that himself was some great one**" (Acts 8:9, emp. added). The sin of pride is clearly seen here. At this point, humility was no part of Simon's life. For him, life was viewed strictly through his prideful eyes (the sin of materialism may be the second sin that characterizes Simon). Solomon reminds us of the deceptive nature and damaging effects of pride in this way: "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Those whose life's ambition is to "make it to the top" have nowhere to go but down when they get there. It is "a proud look" that incurs the hatred of God (Prov. 6:17). Though Simon was not hated by God, his transgression most certainly was.

Simon's sin of having a prideful heart was forgiven the moment he was baptized. However, it did not take very long after his baptism to see this same sin rear its ugly head in Simon's life. The text reads: "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and **wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done**. . . . And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, **Give me also this power**, that on whomsoever

Simon Says, “Repent and Pray”

I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:13; Acts 8:18-19, emp. added). Peter adds, “For thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). What was no longer right about his heart? Pride had once again invaded it and taken up residence therein! Someone has well said that the door into heaven is very low; and it really is (Matt. 18:1-3).

Sins, once forgiven by the blood of Christ when one is baptized, can still resurface in life of a Christian. Currently this writer is working with a man who was formerly a homosexual, alcoholic, and addicted to pain pills. In March of this year, I was privileged to baptize him into Christ after several months of studying with him. He recently informed me that he has no interest in reverting to homosexuality, nor does he have an interest in drinking alcohol, but he told me that he has started to take illegal pain pills again. My friend has done what Simon the sorcerer did—reverting back to his former life-style—at least one aspect of it. I encouraged him to repent and pray about the matter, just as Peter instructed Simon to do.

Second, confronting one with sin in his life is never easy; but it is always necessary. When Peter learned of Simon’s sinful actions, Luke records:

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:20-23).

It takes courage to confront sin. Peter could have followed “the path of least resistance,” remaining silent, and allowing Simon to remain shackled in his sins. But Peter was

a courageous man of God (at least on this occasion). Had Peter remained silent, Simon would have remained in his sins and would have been on the verge of perishing in hell forever. Confronting sin is not for cowards; it takes courage to lovingly and directly address sin that is in a person's life. Nathan the prophet's confrontation of David's sin may have been difficult for him to carry out, but it was the most loving thing he could have done for David's soul (2 Sam. 12:1-9).

Tolerating sin may be popular in the eyes of the world, but it is unpopular with God and with those who are truly God's people. The church at Corinth was tolerating immorality in their midst, and Paul rebukes them for their shameful neglect in dealing with the rebellious fornicator (1 Cor. 5:1-13). The reasons why toleration of sin exists today among many congregations of God's people are numerous. We will offer the reader one to consider. David declared, "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104). The child of God is to hate everything that is false; but before he can be in a proper position to do so, he must have a sufficient understanding of what is true versus what is false. David says the way one is able to make this distinction is by or "through" the Lord's "precepts." It seems clear that one reason why some tolerate that which is sinful is because they do not have a proper understanding of the Word of God and what it demands relative to those who engaged in sinful practices.

Confronting those who are caught in the web of sin must be done with a proper attitude. Paul addressed this principle on two separate occasions. To the church at Galatia, he wrote, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one **in the spirit of meekness**; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1, emp. added). Furthermore, he instructed Timothy with this admonition:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be **gentle** unto all men, apt to teach, **patient**, In **meekness** instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26, emp. added).

The main purpose for which such loving confrontation is exercised upon those who are in sin is to prevent them from losing their soul for an eternity in hell. The last two verses of the book of James clearly underscores this truth, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way **shall save a soul from death**, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20, emp. added).

May it never be said that the restoration of a wayward member is not serious business! The entire congregation must be soul-conscious when he comes to the reclamation of delinquent children of God. A failure to do is a declaration of one’s own guilt (Jas. 4:17).

Third, the procedure by which a wayward member returns to God is clear and available upon one’s request. After Peter informs Simon that his “heart is not right in the sight of God,” (Acts 8:21b), he add this command, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee....Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me” (Acts 8:22; Acts 8:24). Repentance and prayer are two God-approved means by which a wayward sinner can be restored back in fellowship with God. This has been commonly referred to as “God’s Second Law of Pardon.” Simon had to repent, i.e., change his mind, based upon Godly sorrow which ultimately would

lead to a reformation of his life (Matt. 21:28-31; 2 Cor. 7:10), before he could reach the blessing of forgiveness. In addition to repentance, Simon could invoke the blessing of God via prayer, asking Him to forgive him of his transgression. The gracious God of heaven would abundantly pardon Simon's offence, and the same is true for any other child of God who sins. Isaiah expressed it like this in these encouraging words, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

Conclusion

The narrative of Simon the sorcerer should remind us that sin is serious, confrontation is commanded, repentance is required, prayer is powerful, and God is gracious. May all of us be careful to avoid Simon's mistakes; to imitate Peter's courage; and to be ever so grateful for God's limitless love and marvelous forgiveness that is freely available upon request for those who are "overtaken in a fault" (Gal. 6:1).

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**THE
PRISONER**

CHAPTER 20

When Peter's Preaching Landed Him In Jail

Chad Ramsey

The proclamation of the gospel message is not an optional matter. We must preach the gospel because of the charge of our Savior: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, NKJV). We must preach the gospel because "it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). And we must preach the gospel because "it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Our proclamation of the gospel message must not be bridled by the likes or dislikes of men. There will most certainly be times when men are not interested in hearing the truth. Like those who lived in the days of the prophet Isaiah, some will implicitly request: "Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). And like those about whom Paul warned Timothy, some individuals "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Nevertheless, those who would please God must preach the Word. We must preach the Word of God when men want to hear, and we must preach the Word of God when men do not want to hear. We must preach

the Word of God when there is no threat of persecution, and we must preach the Word of God in the face of persecution. Regardless of what men might say or do, the gospel message—the only message that offers hope to a dying world—must be preached.

The subject of this lectureship, the apostle Peter, knew as well as any other that the preaching of the gospel is both a great privilege and a responsibility. Consequently, Peter proclaimed the risen Savior even as the enemies of Christianity stood ready to seize him and punish him for his actions. And though the Jewish leaders made every effort to stop the mouths of Peter and the other apostles, his response reveals how deeply he felt the need to tell others about Jesus: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20). Peter's example stands to remind us of the importance of faithfully proclaiming God's Word come what may. Let us now turn our attention to the events that precipitated this wonderful statement of faith.

The Text: Acts 4:1-31

Following the church's establishment on the day of Pentecost, New Testament Christians enjoyed a period of relative peace and tranquility. Describing this, J.W. McGarvey wrote: “The work of the apostles had gone on without interruption, and they probably began to imagine that the old enemies of their Lord were so completely paralyzed by the triumphs of the truth that they had lost all of their former zeal and courage. But just at this moment of hope and joy the calm was followed by a storm” (66). Peter and John's proclamation of the gospel drew the attention of the priests and the Sadducees. Recording what transpired, Luke wrote: “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being

greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening” (Acts 4:1-3).

Why were the Jewish leaders so disturbed by Peter’s message? At least two reasons can be offered. First, the Jews were upset “that [Peter and John] taught the people.” No doubt, “the Sadducean ranks saw [this] as a threat to the status quo. . . . Peter and John were rallying support and acting unofficially in a way as to disrupt established authority--an authority vested in Sadducean hands” (Longenecker 301-2). Second, the Jews were upset because of **what** was being taught--that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This also was an affront to the Sadducees who “say there is no resurrection” (Acts 23:8). Thus, the Jewish leaders arrested Peter and John **because** they presumed to preach and because of **what** they preached. It could certainly be said that Peter’s preaching landed him in jail.

Peter’s Defense

On the following day, the Sanhedrin assembled to hear the case against Peter and John. Having placed the apostles “in the center” (NASB), they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7). Interestingly, the charge leveled against Peter and John was not that of preaching the gospel--although that is why they were arrested. Instead, they were “treated as if they were criminals--the chief offense being the healing of a lame man!” (Jackson 45). Explaining the shift in charge, David L. Roper described how the Sadducees “could not charge Peter and John with teaching false doctrine, for **the Pharisees** believed in the bodily resurrection--and a few powerful Pharisees were members of the Sanhedrin” (149, emphasis in original). Thus, the question addressed to the apostles was more appropriately designed to elicit an answer that might be worthy of punishment, the court not having a reason to punish Peter and John heretofore.

When Peter answered, however, he did so in a way that rendered further prosecution unlikely and that left the Sanhedrin in amazement. Luke wrote:

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8-12).

This answer is noteworthy, not only because of the response that it elicited from the Jews--"they marveled" (Acts 4:13)--but also because of the example that it continues to provide for those who would preach Jesus. Peter's answer came from the proper source--the Holy Spirit. He answered in the proper way--with respect. He also gave the proper credit to Jesus as the force behind the miraculous healing of the lame man. He made the proper application to his audience by identifying them as the ones who crucified Jesus. And he concluded with the proper emphasis: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Reaction of the Sanhedrin and the Response of Peter

Having listened to Peter's defense, the members of the Sanhedrin were clearly taken aback. Not only did they

not expect such a reasonable response from “uneducated and untrained men,” but they also could not deny “that a notable miracle has been done through them” (Acts 4:16). Thus, without the authority to hold Peter and John on *real* charges, they concluded that they could do nothing more than threaten the apostles. Luke wrote: “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).

Such a warning might have been welcomed by one who merely wished to escape the persecution and criticism of the Jewish hierarchy. But just as Polycarp, who a century later refused to renounce Jesus so that he might escape death, responded to his persecutor, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and My Savior?” (“The Martyrdom of Polycarp”), so Peter and John answered, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). To put it simply, the apostles told the highest court of the Jews that they could not stop them from preaching and teaching about Jesus. The message of Jesus is real. The evidence is overwhelming. The truth cannot be silenced. As Wayne Jackson put it: “Peter and John declared that they could only speak what they had seen and heard. Get the point: Christianity is grounded in *real evidence*--not mystical illusions” (48, emphasis in original).

The Report and Prayer

After their release, Peter and John went to their own companions and reported on all that had occurred. Inasmuch as Christians are to “Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), the support, encouragement, and fellowship received from the presence of likeminded individuals no doubt helped the persecuted apostles to muster the courage to continue. Those present then commenced to pray, and in the beautiful prayer recorded in Acts 4:24-30, they acknowledged God’s greatness

and His foretelling of the mistreatment of Christ, and they petitioned God for the strength needed to proclaim God's message in an unadulterated manner. Just as Paul petitioned the Colossians to pray for his ability to "make [the gospel] manifest, as I ought to speak" (Col. 4:4), so Peter, John, and the others gathered petitioned God to "grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word" (Acts 4:29). Richard Longenecker observed:

These early Christians were not praying for relief from oppression or judgment on their oppressors but for enablement "to speak your word with great boldness" amid oppression and for God to act in mighty power "through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (v. 30). Their concern was for God's word to go forth and for Christ's name to be glorified, leaving to God himself their own circumstances (309).

The passage begins with Peter and John teaching and preaching about the resurrected Jesus. It ends with their plea to God for the strength needed to continue to proclaim the gospel. Between the beginning and end, we notice the power of the gospel message. It is capable of causing men and women to change their lives for the better (as in Acts 4:4), and it is capable of sustaining those who proclaim it even as they face persecution.

The Application

Having considered the text in which Peter's preaching landed him in jail, it remains for us to think about the lessons that can be learned. Among those lessons, we learn that there has always been and will always be opposition to the preaching of the gospel. Some will be offended by the preaching of the gospel; others will view the gospel message

as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). And we can rest assured that the truth of Paul's words to Timothy: "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12), remain true even today. Nevertheless, the gospel message must still be preached. Thus, we must "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We also learn that Christianity is, by its very nature, exclusive. It is not one religion among many. It is **the** religion. That is why Peter proclaimed: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And that is why Jesus told Thomas: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The reason the gospel message must be proclaimed in spite of what men might say or do is because of its exclusive nature. Without the gospel, men are lost. Therefore, it is a message that we cannot keep to ourselves.

Another lesson we learn from this passage is regarding the difference that Jesus makes in one's life. What a difference Jesus had made in the lives of Peter and John! It was obvious to the Sanhedrin that these "uneducated and untrained men... had been with Jesus." Men who had formerly been fishermen were now fishers of men! Where did they get the ability to boldly defend themselves before the most educated men of their day? Their strength came from the Lord. And the same thing, of course, ought to be true of Christians today. Noting this, Roper commented:

When Satan gives us a hard time, it soon becomes evident whether or not we have "been with Jesus." If all our thoughts are self-centered, we have not imbibed the spirit of Him who "emptied Himself," then "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death" (Phil. 2:7, 8). If fear fills our minds,

we have never learned what He meant when He said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (Jn. 14:1, 2) (174-75).

We learn that the gospel must be proclaimed. The necessity of proclaiming the gospel stems from its truth. Peter later wrote: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). Christianity, then, is based upon fact and not fiction. It is a fact that God exists. It is a fact that Jesus came to earth, died, and was resurrected. It is a fact that God has a plan for man's salvation. And it is a fact that God's plan—the gospel—must be preached to humanity. This is true even if men take steps to prosecute those who preach "the whole counsel of God." Like Peter and John, we must respond: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

Finally, we learn that it is not always easy to preach God's message in the appropriate manner. This lesson is bolstered by the prayer uttered after Peter and John's release. After recognizing God for His greatness and knowledge, the apostles prayed: "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word" (Acts 4:29). As has previously been observed, this prayer did not seek freedom from the obligation to preach. Neither did it request God to remove the persecutions that result when the gospel is proclaimed. Instead, the prayer requested that God grant them the ability to speak with boldness. In their case, boldness came through the ability to perform various miracles and signs (see Acts 4:30). In our case, it comes when we proclaim God's message and not the message of man.

Because Peter faithfully proclaimed the gospel message, he was arrested and warned to speak no more in the name of Christ. Nevertheless, he continued to preach and teach about the resurrected Savior. Let us learn from his example, and let us likewise strive to remain faithful and true to our God.

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CHAPTER 21

In The Hands Of Herod/ In The Hands Of God

Ronnie Scherffius

The “Mighty” Hand of Herod

The hand of Herod was mighty among men. As king of Judea, a title given to only one other, he had power and authority coveted by many. A number of men from antiquity bore the name of Herod, thus from the outset of our study it will be beneficial to identify which of the Herodian family we will consider.

In the New Testament, no less than three men are identified by the name of Herod. Perhaps the most notable is **Herod the Great**. It was this Herod who ruled Judea at the time of Jesus’ birth: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem” (Matt. 1:1, KJV). Herod the Great was the son of Antipater and grandson of Antipas. Antipas, who died in 78 BC, had been appointed governor of Idumaea by Alexander Janneus a descendant of Judas Maccabaeus who reigned during the era of Jewish history known as the Hasmonean Period (Cerr 1378). Antipater, who succeeded his father as governor, was a cunning and resourceful man filled with great ambition. Ever conscious of his family’s weaknesses and constantly mindful of the unconquerable strength of the Romans, Antipater shrewdly selected his companions. Following the defeat of Pompey by Julius Caesar at Pharsalus (48 BC), he allied himself with

Caesar and was rewarded with the procuratorship of Judea (47 BC) (Cerr 1379). Herod was the second of four sons born to Antipater, and it was by his hand that the family came to great prominence. Appointed tetrarch of Judaea by Antony in 41 BC, he soon obtained the crown over Judaea being appointed king by Antony and Augustus (37 BC).

Herod the Great, son of Antipas, was a supporter of Rome and lover of all things Roman. His emulation of the habits and views of Roman life continually offended his Jewish subjects (Cerr 1379). His introduction of Roman sports and especially their heathen temples caused great antagonism between Herod and the Jewish population. In addition to this, Herod greatly feared losing his crown to the Jewish bloodline of the Maccabees. So great was his desire to hinder the return of Maccabean power to Judaea that prior to his death he sought to kill any of the Hasmonean bloodline that might take his throne. In so doing, Herod decreed the murders of his mother-in-law Alexandra, his wife Miriamne and their two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus (Josephus **Antiquities**, 16.11.7). Nevertheless, through the seed of Aristobulus would come one to equal the might of Herod the Great.

Another Herod familiar to Bible students is **Herod Antipas** or Herod Antipater; he was the son of Herod the Great and noted as “Herod the tetrarch” (Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:1; 9:7). Along with his brothers Phillip and Archelaus, he was appointed ruler over a portion of his father’s kingdom; Herod’s rule was over Galilee and Perea. Herod Antipas is most familiar for his adulterous marriage to Herodias, his brother Phillip’s wife, and for his decree to have John the baptist beheaded (Matt. 14:1-11). It was also this Herod to whom Jesus referred saying, “Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). Herod

Antipas was also the ruler to whom Jesus was sent by Pilate and of whom Luke wrote, “He [Herod] was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him [Jesus] of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him” (Luke 23:8).

The third Herod mentioned in the New Testament is the Herod of our text: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church” (Acts 12:1). This is **Herod Agrippa** or Agrippa I. Born Marcus Julius Agrippa (10 BC), he reigned as King of Judaea, and in his time was known as “Agrippa the Great” (Josephus **Antiquities**, 18.5.1). Herod Agrippa was the son of Aristobulus, the son Herod the Great had murdered just prior to his own death, and thus grandson of Herod the Great. He was also the nephew of Herod Antipas and brother to Herodian, the adulteress wife of Antipas (Smith 128). Like his fathers before him, Herod Agrippa was cunning, shrewd, and exceeding wise when it came to choosing his friends. His selection of friends and the great lengths to which he went to strengthen those relationships helped to propel him to great heights among men (Brann). Like many of his peers Herod Agrippa used his mighty hand to promote his self interests and he allowed nothing to stand in his way. Because of this, the might of Herod’s hand became the means to Herod’s end.

As we enter into our study of the apostle Peter’s imprisonment at the hands of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-24), we will note some of the characteristics of the “mighty hand of Herod” and compare them to the true power and might of God Almighty. After this, we will note some practical lessons we can draw from the text for our own lives.

The Persecuting Hand of Herod (1-2)

Our introduction to Herod Agrippa demonstrates the persecuting character of Herod’s mighty hand. Luke records: “Now about that time Herod the king stretched

forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:1-2). As king, Herod had the authority to save or to kill. Sadly, Herod abused his power to satisfy himself and his supporters. While Herod, as one of Hasmonaean descent, did not obstruct the worship of the pagans, it is reported by some that he strictly kept the Law of Moses. One legend states that once he burst into tears on reading in a public service Deuteronomy 17:15 which states, “Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother.” The Jews exclaimed, “Be not distressed, thou art our brother” (“Herod” sec. 5). While it is highly unlikely that Herod kept the law “strictly,” it is not beyond reason to accept that he did to some degree observe the law. Herod’s son, Agrippa II, before whom Paul stood, was asked by the apostle, “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest” (Acts 26:27). This clearly indicates a deep familiarity with the old law by the king, likely instilled in him by his father.

For the greater part of the first century, Christianity was considered by many to be nothing more than a faction of Judaism. Paul was accused of being “a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). As an observer of the law, Herod, like other enemies of the cross, was inclined to bring an end to the faith of Christ. In addition to this, as a ruler among the Jews, especially in Judaea, it was to Herod’s advantage to oppose the church.

The Greek word translated “to vex” in Acts 12:1 is translated “to afflict” in the American Standard and is defined by Thayer as “to oppress, afflict, harm, maltreat” (320). The word especially carries with it the sense of torment or oppression (“Vex”). Of this verse Robertson states,

Probably the first who were afflicted were scourged or imprisoned, not put to death. It had been eight years or more since the persecution over the death of Stephen ceased with the conversion of Saul...Herod Agrippa I was...anxious to placate his Jewish subjects while retaining the favor of the Romans. So he built theaters and held games for the Romans and Greeks and slew the Christians to please the Jews (163).

How tragic that Herod's mighty hand, which could have been used to sustain and spread the church of Christ, was instead employed to persecute and put down the saints of God. The persecuting hand of Herod demonstrated Herod's abuse of the power given him, not simply by Rome, but by God (Dan. 4:25)!

The Political Hand of Herod (3)

Another characteristic of the mighty hand of Herod was political expediency. As king, Herod had great authority, yet his authority was granted to him by the Roman throne. For this reason Herod played the role of a politician, constantly seeking to please the emperor that his rule would not cease, while at the same time pacifying the people to increase his popularity. This nature of Herod is evidently seen in Luke's account: "And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also" (Acts 12:3).

Like politicians today, Herod sought to please his "constituency." When those in a position of power act or rule based on the desires of a worldly society, their judgments are always faulty. Herod did not base his actions on right; he did not execute justice in the matter; he did not exercise his authority to protect the innocent; instead he politicized his mighty hand to furtherance of his popularity and influence over the masses.

The Propped-up Hand of Herod (4)

A third element of Herod's mighty hand was the fact that his might was "propped-up" by a power greater than his own. Consider Luke's assessment of this fact as he records, "And when he [Herod] had apprehended him [Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him" (Acts 12:4) Though Herod was King of Judaea, his power to rule was upheld by the mighty Roman Empire. A "quaternion of soldiers" was a company of four; the number of soldiers here was sixteen (Barnes). These soldiers were divided into companies of four, each company keeping a three-hour watch over the prisoner, four soldiers at each watch. In prison, Peter was held chained between two soldiers while two more were stationed outside the prison gate. Every three hours a fresh company kept watch.

These soldiers were supplied by the Roman guard stationed at Jerusalem. Luke records that the "chief captain of the band" at the temple in Jerusalem "took soldiers and centurions" and carried Paul up out of the temple to safety from the Jewish mob "into the castle" (Acts 21:30-34). The castle refers to the castle of Antonia. Josephus describes this castle as consisting of four towers, one of which overlooked the temple. It was built by John Hyrcanus but given the name "castle of Antonia" by Herod the Great in honor of his friend Mark Antony. According to Josephus "there always lay in this tower a Roman legion" (**Wars** 5.5.8). The "chief captain" refers to one who commanded one thousand soldiers while a "band" was a tenth part of a legion and consisted sometimes of four hundred and twenty-five soldiers, at others of five hundred, and at others of six hundred, according to the size of the legion (Barnes "Acts 21:31").

As earlier stated, Herod Agrippa was one who was careful to choose his friends and always took advantage of his circumstances. His cleverness and unique ability to establish relations with those who could secure for him power and

authority is demonstrated in the following summary of his rise to the throne. When his grandfather Herod the Great put to death Aristobulus, his father, Herod was only six years old and was sent by his grandfather to Rome. In Rome, Agrippa became a close companion to Drusus Caesar, son of the Emperor Tiberius (Brann). With his royal companion Herod lived a life of extravagance and excess and soon found himself deeply in debt. When Drusus died the emperor refused any longer to receive Herod (Brann). Soon his other companions also forsook him and he left for the fortress of Malatha in Idumaea (“Agrippa 1”). Through great efforts and intercession by his wife Cypros and his sister Herodias, Herod Agrippa was given a large sum of money by his uncle/brother-in-law Herod Antipas who also appointed him to the rank of aedile (market overseer) in the city of Tiberius (Brann).

After quarrelling with his uncle, Herod fled to Syria for protection under the proconsul Flaccus. While in Syria he was accused and convicted of having received a bribe from the Damascenes who were trying to purchase influence with Flaccus. Herod again fled, but this time was arrested for money he owed the treasury of Caesar. He escaped and reached Alexandria, Egypt, where once again his wife secured for him a supply of money. Herod sailed for Puteoli where he was favorably received by Tiberius and entrusted with the education of the emperor’s grandson. Again, Herod took advantage of his circumstances and formed a close relationship with Caligula, the son of Tiberius and heir apparent to the Roman throne. When Herod was overheard expressing his wish for Tiberius’ death and the advancement of Caligula, he was cast into prison where for six months he was kept in chains and constant fear of death (“Agrippa 1”).

Following Tiberius’ death and the ascension of Caligula as emperor of Rome, Agrippa was not only set free but brought out of bonds by Caligula himself (Brann). For his

loyalty and support, Caligula awarded Herod first with the governorship of the territories of Batanaea and Trachonitis that his cousin Herod II had held. Some time later Herod was given by Caligula the tetrarchy of his uncle Lysanias with the title of “king.” To these honors the senate added the rights and title of praetor, an office which granted the authority to command an army, serve as a judge in civil disputes, and to serve as superintendent of Roman games (“Agrippa 1”). Herod’s change in fortune brought to surface a deep-seated jealousy of him in his sister Herodias, who encouraged her husband Herod Antipas to seek for himself at least the equal rank and titles from the emperor his nephew had gained. But Agrippa, with the help of his friends in the Roman palace, thwarted the efforts of Antipas and even brought about his demise through veiled hints of treason and rebellion. The districts of Galilee and Perea over which Herod Antipas had ruled were given to the charge of Herod Agrippa (Brann).

After Caligula’s death, Herod once again made for himself friends in high places. Before the Roman Senate, he both pleaded for Claudius’ right to the throne and sufficiently flattered Claudius into accepting the Roman crown. At his ascension, Claudius not only confirmed Herod’s seat but also added Judaea and Samaria to his domain. Thus, he gained control of all the land Herod the Great, his grandfather, had ruled (Vos 403).

All of this serves to demonstrate the clear and simple fact that even though Herod Agrippa had a mighty hand, his might and power, from the very beginning, was propped-up by friends with power and authority that far exceeded his own!

The Powerless Hand of Herod

In the end, the mighty hand of Herod proved powerless. His great persecuting hand could not preserve his life. His political savvy was insufficient to provide length of days. His powerful friends on whom he so many times relied for

strength and support could do little to thwart the strength and purposes of the Almighty. Ultimately, Herod will face the Mighty hand of God where with great fear and trembling he will receive the just recompense of reward for his deeds (2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:1-9).

The Mighty Hand Of God

The greatness of the might and power of God is undeniable! The fact of humanity and all creatures great and small; our planet and solar system and all that is beyond; the intricate design that is in life--all demand a great omnipotent Creator. Modern technology provides humanity with overwhelming evidence of God's existence and power and of His mighty hand at work; much more evidence than any who came before us! Still, many persist in their foolish affirmations of atheism, agnosticism, humanism, and far-fetched evolutionary nonsense.

The Bible clearly affirms God's existence and might. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood [being perceived-ASV] by the things that are made, even his **eternal power** and Godhead [divinity-ASV]; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20; emp. mine, RLS). The term translated "power" in this verse is defined by Thayer as "strength, power, ability; inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature" and it is used here in relation to the power of God (159).

Isaiah wrote of the power and might of God: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God [the mighty one], and there is none else; I am God, and **there is none like me**" (Isa. 46:9; emp. mine, RLS). Fifty-seven times in the Bible the word "Almighty" is used of God. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word means "almighty; most powerful" (Brown Driver Briggs). This word is found forty-eight times throughout

the Old Testament; thirty-one of those are in the book of Job. Without fail the word is ALWAYS used of God! On one occasion Elihu declared of God, “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power” (Job 37:23).

In the New Testament the Greek word translated “Almighty” is found ten times. Nine times in the King James it is translated “Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; Rev. 4:8; Rev. 11:17; Rev. 15:3; Rev. 16:7; Rev. 16:14; Rev. 19:15; Rev. 21:22) and once rendered “omnipotent” (Rev. 19:6). As in the Old Testament, this word is always used of Deity. Before the throne, the angels continually proclaim, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8). The cry of “Lord God Almighty” highlights three attributes of God, namely supreme authority, divine nature, and absolute sovereignty. The Greek word is from **pantokrator** which is defined by Thayer as “he who holds sway over all things; the ruler of all.” Certainly the great power and might of God is ever before us!

From our text of Acts 12:1-4 we have already demonstrated that Herod’s mighty hand was greatly deficient without the help and support of others. In view of the mighty hand of God, Herod is hardly worth noting! From the remainder of this chapter we will note a few of the great characteristics of the “Mighty Hand of God.”

The Dependable Hand of God

The mighty hand of God is a dependable hand. After Peter was seized by Herod, Luke records that “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5) At once, focus turns to the saints of God and their deep trust in God’s mercy to hear their intercession for Peter and for the church at Jerusalem. However, it is the faithful and just hand of God on which the saints know they can depend.

The Bible abounds with evidence testifying not only to the truth that man must depend upon God (Jer. 10:23), but also to the fact of how man can depend upon the mighty

hand of God. A few examples from both the Old and New Testaments will be sufficient for our study.

To Abraham God declared, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance...But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again...Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:13-14; Gen. 15:16; Gen. 15:18; cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 13:15-16). God repeated this promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4, 24) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14) and in time brought to complete fulfillment all that He swore to these great Hebrew patriarchs:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. **There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass** (Josh. 21:43-45; emp. mine, RLS).

Another Old Testament example of the dependable hand of God is demonstrated in the victory of Gideon and his army facing overwhelming odds (Judges 6-7). The inspired writer records, “The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years” (Judg. 6:1). Seeing his own in great poverty and oppression and hearing Israel crying out because of the Midianites, God sent a prophet who declared

Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land; And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice” (Judg. 6:8-10).

As seven years came to a close God visited Gideon and said “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites... Surely I will be with thee” (Judg. 6:14; Judg. 6:16). After shrinking his army from 32,000 to a mere 300, Gideon prepared his men to fight a military force of more than 135,000 (Judg. 8:10). With what could be considered a rather unorthodox approach to battle, Gideon and his army put to flight all the host of Midian and slew “a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword” (Judg. 8:10). Once again God had demonstrated that man can depend upon His mighty hand!

In the New Testament, the dependable hand of God is especially seen in the life of Paul, particularly in the apostle’s journey to the city of Rome. One event that occurred during this voyage that suitably displays the steadfastness of God’s dependable hand is the shipwreck at Melita (Acts 27). Traveling to Rome, Paul warned the Roman guard about the harm that would come to the ship, its passengers, and crew if they sailed during the winter, “Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul” (Acts 27:10-11). Just as Paul warned, the ship encountered treacherous seas that threatened to tear the ship to pieces. Still, by the mouth of an angel it was revealed to the apostle, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee

all them that sail with thee” (Acts 27:24). The words of Paul show how that the great apostle to the Gentiles knew that man can depend on the mighty hand of God: “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25).

Encouraging the Hebrew Christians at Jerusalem to remain steadfast in their calling, Paul recalled the words of God to Joshua in the long ago, “for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Truly the mighty hand of God is a dependable hand!

The Delivering Hand of God (6-11)

The mighty hand of God is a delivering hand. Luke records that Peter was not simply put into prison or a holding cell as we would think today, but rather he was kept under a strict watch, “...between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison” (Acts 12:6). There seems to have been no means of escape for Peter. Herod, no doubt, was satisfied with his safeguards of Roman-trained battle-hardened soldiers. To the guards this was little more than routine work; after all, how difficult could it be to keep watch over a fisherman/philosopher rebel of the Jews. The prison itself surely was secure enough, likely a product of Roman engineering and construction. In a city such as Jerusalem it would have been built to hold even the most dangerous and threatening of traitorous rebels. Even Peter, it seems, had peacefully resigned himself to martyrdom for the Lord, such peace in fact that he was able to sleep while he awaited his end. The delivering hand of the Almighty, however, had not been considered by Herod!

Luke next records that “the angel of the Lord came upon him...and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up [awoke him, ASV], saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands” (Acts 12:7). Putting on his sandals and clothing himself with his outer robe, Peter proceeded to follow the divine messenger, all the while supposing he

was seeing a vision (Acts 12:7-9). Having safely brought Peter without the prison the angel departed, leaving Peter to discover for himself the events that had just transpired. Coming to his senses, Peter realized that the mighty hand of God was in fact a delivering hand: “And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, **and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod**, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (12:11; emp. mine, RLS).

Long before Peter’s deliverance from Herod’s political power grab, God evidently and forcefully demonstrated His absolute power to deliver. Consider the volumes that have been written of Noah and the seven souls with him who God delivered from the judgment of the global flood (Gen. 6-8; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:18-22; et al.); of Lot who was delivered by God’s mighty hand from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain (Gen. 19; 2 Pet. 2:7-8); of Joseph who by divine providence was delivered from the murderous hands of his envious brethren only to serve as a savior for them in Egypt (Gen. 50:15-17); of Israel who God “through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm” was delivered from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:15); of David who, with neither shame nor hesitation boldly testified to the faithless King Saul, “The **LORD that delivered me** out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, **he will deliver me** out of the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:37; emp. mine, RLS) Truly the mighty hand of God is a delivering hand!

The Disconcerting Hand of God (12-19)

The mighty hand of God is a disconcerting hand. The enemies of God are always confused about what to do in light of the power of the Almighty! After Peter’s deliverance from prison and his appearance to the saints, he departed from Jerusalem to another place for safety. Imagine the mass hysteria and complete chaos among the soldiers and Herod

when Peter's escape was discovered: "Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death" (Acts 12:18-19). Rather than bolstering himself as a chief power among men, Herod appeared as the helpless and feeble man he truly was. Herod was little more than a politician whose ancestry was that of corrupt and treacherous means to accomplish their wicked and worldly purposes. Now, instead of terrorizing his rivals into fearful submission, he is shown to be weak and vulnerable to defeat. Oh how disconcerting to His enemies is the mighty hand of God!

Inspired history provides other occasions of the disconcerting nature of God's mighty hand. One extraordinary case which is particularly worthy of consideration is the deliverance of Lot and God's messengers from the wicked men of Sodom. Disgusted with Lot for not delivering the visitors into their hands, Moses records that the men of Sodom "pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door" (Gen. 19:9). Nevertheless, the angels of God "smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door" (Gen. 19:11).

Another example of the disconcerting nature of God's mighty hand can be observed in the Jews early efforts to destroy the church. Not wanting the gospel to take deep root among the populace, the Jews exceedingly persecuted the saints at Jerusalem. However, their efforts only aided in the furtherance of the spreading of the gospel, "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:1; Acts 8:5). Paul testified to the fact that man in his foolishness is

always confounded and disconcerted by the mighty hand of God: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness....But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:23; 1 Cor. 1:27).

The Destroying Hand of God (19-23)

The mighty hand of God is a destroying hand. Though the enemies of God always seek victory over the Almighty, their cause always suffers defeat. Herod, who had been placed in a position of authority not simply by Rome but by God (Dan. 4:25), perverted and abused his power by seeking to strengthen himself even to the destruction of God’s faithful. Because of this, he was destroyed!

According to the divine record “upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration” before an embassy from the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:21). Desiring peace and especially the economic benefits that Herod could provide for their country, “the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man” (Acts 12:22). Once again Herod finds himself in privileged circumstances. In such a high place of authority and with far-reaching influence, Herod could have been a tremendous ally to the gospel of Christ. Instead, time after time he selfishly chose to benefit himself. Now, he is afforded one last opportunity to humble himself and to show forth the true greatness and power of the Almighty. Being called “a god, and not a man,” Herod could immediately have declared the might and sovereign power of God. Drunk with power and starved for the adoration of men, he rather accepted the praise. Luke says, “And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:23).

All whose actions and purposes hinder the purposes of God will ultimately be destroyed; of this fact the Bible is abundant. But for the righteousness of Noah, humanity would have lost its place to history through wickedness and perversion of all that is right (Gen. 6:5-8). The ungodly purpose of man, to make a name for himself and to keep his posterity from being scattered throughout all the earth by the building of “a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven,” was defeated by the mighty hand of God (Gen. 11:1-9). The great and powerful Pharaoh of Egypt sought to hinder God’s purposes and was soundly defeated by the mighty hand of God (Exod. 14). The efforts of Balak and Balaam to curse Israel and to hinder the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came to a fruitless end as they were destroyed by God’s mighty hand (Num. 22-24; Num. 31:18; Josh. 24:9-10). Even the mighty empire of Rome with all her kings and all her armies could not defeat the kingdom of heaven (Dan. 2:44-45) but was overcome by the Lamb of God: “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

The Dominating Hand of God

The mighty hand of God is a dominating hand. How simple and yet how profound are the words of the inspired penman: “But the word of God **grew and multiplied**” (Acts 12:24; emp. mine, RLS). As his father, Herod the Great, before him, Herod Agrippa had built up a kingdom and rule that was considered mighty among men. In his pride he opposed God and exalted himself. Because of his pride and opposition to God’s purposes, he was destroyed. After his death his kingdom was divided, but the kingdom of God and the power of His might, which Herod had labored to oppose, continues still.

The dominating might of God’s hand is not left to chance or random happenstance, neither is its dominance a

surprise to those who know of the power and might of God's hand. In the long ago, Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon, had a very disturbing dream (Dan. 2). In this dream the king beheld a great image of gold, silver, brass, and iron mixed with clay (Dan. 2:31-33). In addition to this, the king witnessed "a stone...cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces" (Dan. 2:34). The stone "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). The gold, silver, brass, and iron mixed with clay stand for four great world empires while the stone represents the church of Christ, the kingdom of the God of heaven. Each of the empires rose to great prominence, but in time their might was brought to an end and their sovereignty passed to another. The mighty hand of God, however, will never be subdued. While the enemy of God ever seeks to overtake His authority and though the great adversary of man continually strives to convince humanity that his might is greater than the Almighty's, God has decreed that His mighty hand will forever dominate: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa. 46:9).

In The Hands of Herod—In The Hands Of God

As we bring our study to an end, let us consider briefly some practical observations about what we have learned. First, it must be emphasized that there is no power greater than God. The mighty hand of God delivers the righteous to freedom from the condemnation of the guilt of sin. All who humble themselves to God's mighty hand will find a peace that is beyond human understanding; such peace that we can face death without fear or dread. By His death Jesus destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14); therefore, we like Paul may say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55)

Secondly, just as God by His mighty hand has the power to deliver the humble and obedient from sin and death, He also has the power to deliver the guilty and disobedient to judgment. Peter revealed that the heavenly hosts that rebelled against God were cast “down to hell” and delivered “into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). Speaking of the great judgment, Jesus made known that the obedient joyously will receive the charge “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34) while the merciless and unloving are commanded “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Those cast into the everlasting fires of punishment will be for an eternity crying out in torment and grinding as it were their teeth in pain and anguish (Matt. 13:42).

Finally, Christians should neither fear nor despise the governing power of men. Though we live in a world that is ruled by the hands of men, we must ever realize that it is God who rules in the kingdoms and affairs of men. The Bible very forcefully demonstrates that the Judge of all is also the Ruler of all. Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson in a most difficult manner. Lifted up with pride the king boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). According to the words of Daniel’s prophecy, at once Nebuchadnezzar was changed and lived as a wild beast until a time appointed by God (Dan. 4:25), after which time Nebuchadnezzar wrote:

I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion,

and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:34-35).

In prophetic prose, Isaiah demonstrated God's ruling power among the rulers of men. Regarding Cyrus the Great who brought the Medo-Persian Empire into supremacy he wrote,

Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel" (Isa. 45:1-3).

In a very vivid and graphic figure, God made known to Jeremiah that all nations, though ruled by the hands of men, exist and persist at the hands of the Almighty.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he

made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:1-10).

From the potter and the clay God revealed that not only are rulers of men subject to Him, but entire nations are also under His dominion. How urgent is the need for our own nation to realize this great truth!

In the presence of Deity and ignorant of his role in God's great scheme of redemption, Pilate was instructed that his power came neither from himself nor from the greatness of Rome, but heaven:

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?

Jesus answered, **Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above** (John 19:8-11; emp. mine, RLS).

Paul affirmed the sovereign rule of God over man testifying of Jesus, “Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords” (1 Tim. 6:15).

Though humanity is under the rule of men by civil government--a civil government ordained by God for man’s good (Rom. 13:1-5)--we are ultimately under the rule, dominion, and authority of Christ. Perhaps this one simple and undeniable truth is the greatest lesson of all. The apostles knew well the authority of Christ, and they lived and spoke accordingly: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Paul did not fear the power of men’s hand, neither did he despise governing authorities but was willing to submit unto them: “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:10-11).

While in the hands of Herod, Peter could live or die without fear for he knew that God is the ruler of all. Peter’s life is characterized by many traits, some admirable and worthy of emulation, others flawed imperfections which ever he fought to overcome. One of Peter’s greatest attributes was his faithful dependence upon God in times of trial or peace. Because of this Peter could genuinely and sincerely say, “Though in the hands of Herod I am of a truth in the hands of God; therefore, I will fear not him which can kill the

body only, but is not able to kill the soul: but rather I will fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Notes

1. This period of Jewish history is recorded in Flavius Josephus work *Antiquities of the Jews*, books 12 and 13 and also *The Apocrypha* in the books of 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees.

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**THE
POPE?**

CHAPTER 22

Not The Pope: Rebuked By Paul

Sean Hochdorf

Introduction

As one can infer from the title, this portion of the book has to do with the apostle Peter and the claim made by Roman Catholicism that he was the first pope. The usual methods, however, of dealing with the proofs given to refute such a claim will not be employed herein. The assignment specifically requested of me is to deal with the text of Galatians 2:11-14. I have been asked to explain the reason this text can be used to refute the Petrine papacy and, then further, to discuss the numerous lessons that can be learned and applied for Christians today.

While a casual reading of Galatians 2:11-14 gives the overall sense of the event, it does not take much investigation to realize there is much more here than meets the eye. One of the difficulties lies in the timeline of events. Did the rebuke by Paul take place after the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15 or did it happen after the events described in Acts 11? There are good arguments for both sides that I believe are outside the scope of what has been requested for this manuscript. I will say, however, that it appears to me that the events unfolded after the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15 and, hence, my comments are predicated on this viewpoint.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind the overall context of Paul's letter to the brethren in Galatia. Judaizing

teachers had come in among the brethren and had begun to teach a false gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) which, in turn, did two things: primarily, it drew them away from the truth of the gospel by teaching that Christianity was simply Judaism plus the plan of salvation and secondarily, it challenged the authority and authenticity of Paul's apostleship. Paul's letter, therefore, is a convincing treatise and defense of the purity of the gospel that, in turn, gives a stamp of approval on the validity of his apostleship. With these brief comments in mind, let us now take a look at the text under consideration.

Galatians 2:11-14

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:11-12, NKJV). It is uncertain when or why Peter came to Antioch. If the rebuke took place after the events of Acts 11, it is possible that he traveled there after the persecution began in Jerusalem as we are told that he “departed and went to another place” (Acts 12:17-19) (McKnight 100). While Antioch had a population of some 65,000 Jews (George 170), it was primarily a Gentile city. We are told that Peter was the apostle to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-8). We should not assume, however, that because his primary mission was to the Jews that he never associated or worked with the Gentiles for it was Peter who was used as the vessel through whom the Gentiles would be introduced into the kingdom (Acts 10-11). In fact the tense of the language of verse 12 shows that it was his practice to eat with Gentile brethren and he had been doing so for quite some time. Years prior Peter had uttered, concerning the Gentiles, “If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God” (Acts 11:17). At the Jerusalem conference he declared

“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:10-11).

It is a false assumption to attribute any of Peter’s withdrawal to James due to the fact that “certain men came from James” (Gal. 2:12). James was one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9) and had spoken powerfully at the Jerusalem conference against the binding of circumcision on the Gentiles as a matter of salvation (Acts 15:13-21). It needs to be understood that the text does not say that James sent these men to Antioch. There are a host of possible meanings and commentators are divided on this matter. There does, however, seem to be a general consensus that these were men who were in the circle of James but not necessarily representative of him. Lenski says “These people were not sent by James, did not represent him...when they came...they ate kosher as many Jewish Christians did, which was their privilege.” He further notes that Paul pictures those from James as the innocent cause of Peter’s hypocrisy. In essence, when those from James came, Peter changed (95). Our English text says that Peter “withdrew and separated himself” (Gal. 2:12). The Greek gives a little more insight by showing that Peter’s action wasn’t instantaneous but rather was a gradual withdrawal from the Gentiles which resulted in complete separation. One of the two verbs used to describe his withdrawal is a military term that describes “a retreat or a retrenchment to an inconspicuous sheltered position” (Witherington 154). Why did the man who witnessed the Gentiles entrance into the kingdom (Acts 10-11) and defended their rights as citizens (Acts 15:7ff) defect at such a crucial time in the history of the church? He did it for the same reason that we often forsake faithful living; he did it because he was afraid. Peter feared “those who were of the

circumcision” (Gal. 2:12). Those of the circumcision clearly refer to the Jews. There is some obscurity as to whether these were Jewish Christians or simply Jews that desired to bind Mosaic law. While an investigation of this might be interesting, it bears no significance to our understanding of the text and the lessons for Christians today.

“And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:13). Peter’s defection had caused others—his fellow countrymen and even the great encourager and stalwart Barnabas—to follow suit. We are told that these brethren did as Peter and “played the hypocrite.” Hypocrite, in this passage only, is a compound verb in the original language and is worthy of noting. While it eventually came to be associated with the theatre and play-acting, its meaning here is much stronger. “Here is neither hypocrisy nor deception but rather a betrayal of the gospel and thus an expression of unbelief (cf. also vv. 15-17)” (Balz and Schneider 403). “The idea behind both the noun and the verb is that someone is acting in a way that belies their true nature. They are concealing their true nature under a guise” (Witherington 156). It seems clear that Peter was acting in a way that was contradictory to his true convictions. Such is the result when one allows fear of acceptance or persecution to drive him instead of fear being secondary to our devotion to God.

How painful it must have been for Paul to witness the defection of his dear friend Barnabas.

Barnabas had introduced Paul to the Jerusalem believers when others in that city thought he was still a persecutor in disguise. It was Barnabas who had sought out Paul in Tarsus and persuaded him to become a part of the ministry team at Antioch. Barnabas

too had stood with Paul in Jerusalem when he defended the liberty of the gospel against the false brothers. And, of course, Barnabas had accompanied Paul on the first missionary journey when many Gentile believers were won to Christ and the churches of Galatia themselves were established. For “even Barnabas” to be carried away was a severe blow! (George 176).

“But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews” (Gal. 2:14)? The word straightforward comes from a word that means to walk in a straight or upright manner, to proceed down the right road (Witherington 157). Our English word orthopedic, and others like it, is derived from this term. In other words, “their conduct did not match the truth of the gospel, nor did that truth match their conduct. The two were out of line, badly so” (Lenski 99).

Paul here shows that Peter was not satisfied with ceasing to eat with Gentiles; he wanted to take away their freedom in the gospel by binding Jewish law upon them. The word *compel* is stronger in the original language. It brings with it the idea of force, in this case, by Peter’s very prevalent example (Zodhiates 882). If the Gentiles wanted to participate in a common meal or the Lord’s Supper with Peter and their other Jewish brethren, they were going to have to conform to the Mosaical law. This, of course, would rob all involved of their liberty in Christ.

While much more could be said about the aforementioned verses, I have spent a sufficient amount of time to give the overall sense of the passage. Yes, there are a number of technical issues that are outside the scope of this paper.

Nevertheless, let us not lose sight of the scriptural forest for the technical trees. “The force of the apostle’s argument is sufficiently clear to compensate for our relative ignorance of other factors” (Silva 139).

Catholicism’s Claim That Peter Was The First Pope

It is well known throughout the religious world, and even the secular realm, that Roman Catholicism claims that Peter was the first pope. Beginning in the late second century and early third century AD, the doctrine of apostolic succession began among the Gnostics. “The Gnostics claimed to possess a secret tradition handed down to them from the apostles” (Higginson 89). “The claim to an apostolic succession of teachers, by Irenaeus’s [115-202 AD] own testimony, was first made by Gnostic teachers” (Ferguson 108). Irenaeus used Hegesippus’s lists of bishops, who were located in various cities, to offer a rebuttal to the Gnostic ownership of apostolic succession (108). “In the hands of Irenaeus, apostolic succession was an argument, not an article of faith; but it often happens to successful arguments that they become integral to the position they support and are no longer solely an argument for the position” (108). Hence, the Catholic Church pointed to each “bishop as a true successor to the apostle who had founded the see and therefore to the truth the apostles taught” (Higginson 89). Higginson goes on to remark “the terminology [apostolic succession] is not found in the NT...is absent from both the NT and LXX... all early succession lists were compiled late in the second century” (89). Hence, the doctrine has its origin among the Gnostics--something John battled extensively--and then later was adopted by Catholicism. All popes are considered successors of Peter and each is viewed as the Vicar of Christ. “For Catholics the papacy represents an office divinely instituted by Christ...and therefore something to be revered and obeyed” (Van Engen 891).

Also of importance to our discussion is the doctrine of papal infallibility. The doctrine of papal infallibility is a subject that has been given untold numbers of pages in creeds, letters, and books. Indeed we could spend much of our time discussing its origin and history, but we would still come to the same conclusion; it is unbiblical.

“The Roman Catholic Church believes that the pope is personally preserved from error by God” (Proctor and Van Engen 605). The doctrine of infallibility was defined by the Roman Catholic Church in 1870 at Vatican Council I (Van Engen 889) and declares that, when the pope speaks *ex cathedra*, he is enabled by God to express infallibly what the church should believe (Proctor and Van Engen 605). There were four chapters dedicated to the definition of papal primacy and infallibility at Vatican Council I. The chapters underwent numerous revisions and amendments and finally resulted in what they claimed was the *magisterium*, or doctrinal authority (McIntire 1238). Eighty bishops initially voted against the definition at the first vote. Fifty-five bishops decided to be absent formally from the second vote. The council came to a close with no final vote deciding the outcome. The persistence of the powers that be eventually wore down the dissenters and the definition was accepted (1238). In Vatican Council II it was reaffirmed that the pope alone has the “divinely given power to convoke councils and authorize their decisions” (Van Engen 889). In essence, the doctrine teaches that whenever the pope speaks of religious matters he is the mouthpiece of God and does so without error. Again, there is much more to the doctrine and its history, but this brief definition will serve our purpose.

Was Peter The First Pope?

It seems anti-climactic to answer such a question when the scriptures are so clear, but such is my assigned duty. I could simply answer no and end the conversation here. However,

let us consider how Galatians 2:11-14 can sufficiently be used as a text to refute the Roman Catholic claim for the Petrine papacy. I would remind you that my assignment is to refute the doctrine from this passage only. Hence, other passages and arguments will not here be employed.

I believe the overriding proof against Peter as pope is seen in the area of papal infallibility. While the doctrine of papal infallibility does not claim sinlessness on the part of the pope, it does claim that when he speaks or acts on matters concerning doctrine, he does so infallibly. This doctrine must leave those who study the scriptures, at the very least, confused if not dumbfounded. Are we to accept Peter's ruling concerning the Gentiles in Acts 10, then accept his word concerning circumcision in Acts 15 only to have him vacillate and undo it all at Antioch? When Paul upbraided Peter, did Peter instantly rebuke Paul for dressing him down in front of his subjects? Could it be that Peter publicly changed the policy concerning Gentiles and table fellowship at Antioch and Paul simply did not get the inspired memo? No! The scriptures are silent and clear. Peter played the hypocrite and stood condemned (Gal 2:11-12).

If Peter was the pope, why was he afraid of those who were of the circumcision? If he, as Catholics claim, determined policy, why did he not inform them of the change? Why did they not fear him? If he were the policy maker and head of all things spiritual, certainly they would have been fearful.

Another interesting matter to consider is Paul's statement concerning Peter, James, and John in 2:9. All three were perceived as pillars. The language requires that all were equal; none was higher than the others. Are we to suppose there were three popes? Is there any Scripture that elevates Peter above James and John? Too, Peter was no higher than Paul. In fact, in this instance, Peter stood as a hypocrite before the brethren at Antioch while Paul stood as one convicted of the true gospel.

Hence we see that Peter could not be the pope Catholics claim him to be. His inconsistent actions and habit of giving in to his impetuosity do not coincide with the Catholic claim of papal infallibility.

What Can I Learn From Peter's Action?

It is easy to open our Bible and look back at Peter, shake our head, and wonder what in the world was he thinking. However, let us not be too hasty to condemn Peter. For, while he was wrong, we too find ourselves being trapped by the same snare. Peter gave in to the political correctness of the day, he gave in to peer pressure, he gave in to prejudice, he gave in to fear, and he gave in to selfishness. The number of lessons that can be learned from this account are legion. I am going to discuss a few at length and then give a brief synopsis of other lessons that could be developed from the event in Galatians 2:11-14.

We Rarely, If Ever, Sin In Such A Way That It Does Not Affect Others.

Peter teaches all of us a valuable lesson through his capitulation at Antioch. While he may have thought he was acting in such a way that he alone would notice the consequences of his sin, reality shows something different. Peter's actions not only compromised his faithfulness, but he also took along the Jews that were present including Barnabas. Prominent, powerful, and influential men were drawn away, all because of the sin of one man. All the barriers that had been bridged up to this point were broken down, division was introduced in Antioch, and the body of Christ was rent. Examples are replete throughout the Bible of this simple lesson: we do not sin to ourselves. Eve, Cain, Lot, Esau, Eli, Saul, David, Solomon, the list literally runs through the scriptures--all sinned and affected others when they did so. We must also beware of this truth; we do not sin where others are not affected.

If We Give In To Political Correctness, The Church Will Not Resemble That For Which Christ Died.

One of the contributing factors of Peter's withdrawal was that he gave in to the political correctness of the day. In addition, once he withdrew, he began trying to force the Gentiles into the Jewish politically correct mold as well. Can anyone truthfully deny that the church is permeated with the leaven of political correctness today? In many places we have exchanged saying things the way God says them for the way our society tells us to say them. We have so watered down doctrinal terms that we can hardly be recognized as those who are separate (2 Cor. 6:17) and have been called out of darkness into the marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). We so desperately want to blend in that it makes it impossible to win others to Christ because we have not been won to Christ ourselves. We must remember that no matter what decisions we choose to make someone *will* criticize us for it. Why not stand for the Lord, accept the criticism, win some to Christ along the way, and go on to glory when our earthly life comes to an end?

If we are handcuffed by the fear of people's criticisms, we will never accomplish anything. Such fear is nothing more than peer pressure. Peter made a bad decision when he felt that pressure; we will too. But God calls us to a fearless obedience of his will...What we need is courage, courage to live according to our faith [like Paul] and its implications rather than according to our emotions, fleeting passions, and fear of others (McKnight 113).

We Cannot Afford For Our Leaders To Be Indecisive.

At one of the most crucial times in the history of the church, one of the most crucial and influential leaders

vacillated. Instead of going with his convictions, he made the wrong decision and it cost the brotherhood greatly. While I do not wish to continue to belabor the point, we cannot help but again mention that the Holy Spirit wanted us to know that “even Barnabas” (Gal. 2:13) was pulled into error as a result of Peter’s decision. Let the leaders of today be very much aware that their decisions, or lack thereof, have a profound effect upon those whom they lead. With the Lord’s church suffering at epidemic proportions from every device of Satan, let us pray that one of those devices will not be indecisive leaders.

Elders are not above public confrontation and rebuke.

This is a difficult lesson to learn and even harder to have the wisdom to know when to do such. However, our text makes it abundantly clear that leaders are neither above the law nor above being publicly rebuked for transgressing it. It is here that I am most grateful for Paul. Paul was consistent. Paul told Timothy “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20). In the context of this passage Paul was speaking specifically of elders (the principle applies to all guilty of public sin). Paul did not ask Timothy to do something that he was unwilling to do himself. In fact, Paul simply did that which God desired and commanded Timothy to do the same. What of the church today? We have the mentality that, while not publicly spoken, says “once and elder always an elder.” We have lazily eased into thinking that if an elder does something wrong we cannot say anything because after all, he is an elder. Please do not misunderstand; I am not advocating spending our time seeking an opportunity to publicly rebuke our leaders. On the contrary, let us uphold their hands in all things righteous and do our best to be their Christian friend when they stumble. But when an elder continues to live in sin, it cannot go unchecked. Obviously there needs to be wisdom and good judgment exercised and I readily admit that sometimes it is

difficult to know when to speak up and when to keep your mouth shut. The point is this: leaders are not above public rebuke regardless of what we have conditioned ourselves to believe.

Opportunities For Growth Can Be Achieved If All Parties Concerned Maintain A Christ-like Spirit.

Sometimes when we view a passage such as the one under consideration, we tend to paint a picture in our minds that is different than what actually happened. Perhaps you, like me, viewed Paul as being somewhat angry, terse, or maybe even a little mean, as he publicly rebuked Peter. However, I am convinced the scene was quite different from this. While it is certain that the situation was highly charged, could there be any doubt that Paul acted firmly but with the love and compassion that should accompany the rebuke of a fallen brother? With the numerous passages from his inspired pen we can be assured that the rebuke was tempered with kindness. We are never allowed the opportunity to be mean or hateful or even to rejoice in the rebuke of the erring (1 Cor. 13:6). But what about Peter? What was his reaction to being put in his place publicly before the Gentile brethren and those he feared? The text does not say but would we be wrong in saying that Peter did as he had done in the past and repented? His life course after this event shows that he did repent and then labored faithfully for the Lord and died as a martyr for Christ as the Lord had earlier prophesied (John 21:18-20).

Nobody likes to be rebuked or told they are wrong. We must realize, however, that **all of us are going to be wrong from time to time**. How much sweeter the fellowship is between brethren when all possess a Christ-like attitude at such stressful times. So, whether we are doing the rebuking (Gal. 6:1-2) or we are the one being rebuked, let us do so the way Christ desires (Gal. 6:3-5).

Numerous Other Lessons Could Be Gleaned From This Account

One could literally spend an overwhelming amount of time discussing the lessons that could be derived from this account. I would like to close here by giving some simple “one liners” for you to study and apply further:

1. Christians need to be courageous, even as the minority, Paul, was on this occasion.
2. Christians must be compassionate: Paul loved Peter, his brethren, and most importantly Christ enough to handle the matter and he did so correctly and swiftly.
3. There is no place in the kingdom for prejudice.
4. No matter how close we may be to someone, if he deserts the cause of Christ, we must uphold the truth.
5. Christians must not jump to conclusions. Paul observed before he acted (Gal. 2:14).
6. Christians hinder the gospel when they live a different life than the one they profess.

Conclusion

This account provides the child of God with a challenge to live a consistent life in faithful service to the Lord. As we face peer pressure and the pressure to conform to the world, let us look to Paul’s example and do our best to endure in the midst of the trials and temptations of life.

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CHAPTER 23

Not The Pope: He Led About A Wife

Steve Higginbotham

A well-known maxim states that if you say something long enough, people will believe it is true. That maxim is nowhere better illustrated than when one affirms that the apostle Peter was the first pope. It matters not that such an office is nowhere described or even mentioned in Scripture. For literally billions of people throughout the centuries, the primacy of Peter as the first pope seems axiomatic.

However, for those who accept the Bible as the final authority in religion, the papacy of Peter is not proven by unsupported affirmations, though they be advanced by billions of people. Whether Peter was or was not the first pope must be answered by the Scriptures.

What Is The Pope?

The word *pope* literally means “papa.” This is just one of several titles attributed to the Bishop of Rome. Other titles include “Vicar of Christ,” “Holy Father,” and “Supreme Pontiff.” The Catholic church believes that the pope is authorized to function as a substitute for Jesus and is head of the church on earth.

Some have supposed that Matthew 8:14 quickly dismisses any notion that Peter was the first pope because he was married. In this passage, reference is made to Peter’s mother-in-law. Furthermore, Paul argued that he had the right to

lead about a wife like Peter and the other apostles (1 Cor. 9:5, NKJV). The line of reasoning is this: If the Pope cannot be married (and he cannot according to Catholic teaching), and if Peter was married (and he was—he had a mother-in-law), then Peter could not have been the first pope.

That line of argumentation would be true if those who affirm that Peter was the first pope accepted the Scriptures alone as the final authority for religious matters. However, they do not. Catholicism claims to accept both the authority of Scripture and the authority of tradition. The Catholic Church would argue that celibacy of the priesthood is not an unchangeable dogma but rather a disciplinary rule that was not introduced until the Middle Ages. Therefore, the fact that Peter was married would be of no concern to them and would not mitigate against him being the first pope.

Reasons Peter Was Not The Pope

The most compelling argument against Peter being the first pope is that no such office is mentioned in Scripture. It is entirely the invention of man. Where does the Bible ever speak of a “pope”? Where does the Bible ever teach that Jesus would have a “vicar” on earth? Where does the Bible ever teach that anyone, saving for Jesus Himself, is head of the church? Where are the qualifications for such an office listed? Where does the Bible ever elevate Peter above the other apostles? It does not.

If Peter was the pope, then why did he never claim to be the pope? Peter did introduce himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1), but he never said he was the “Supreme Apostle” of Jesus Christ. Peter called himself a “fellow elder” in 1 Peter 5:1, but he never claimed to be the “Chief Shepherd.” Nowhere did Peter ever argue for supremacy or exalt himself above his fellow apostles and elders.

If Peter was the pope, then why did he not render the decision at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)? Actually, it was

James who said, “Therefore I judge.” If Peter was the pope, would he not have exerted himself and would not the others have deferred to him?

If Peter was the pope, then why was that not explained when the disciples were arguing about who was greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28)? If Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18 meant that the church would be built upon Peter, then why would James and John be asking who was the greatest in the kingdom? And if for some reason they did not comprehend that Peter was given supremacy in Matthew 16:18, then why was it not explained to them at this later time?

If Peter was the pope, then why did Paul state that he was not inferior to Peter, James, and John (Gal. 2:6-9). If Peter was the pope, would Paul not have shown deference to him? Furthermore, if Peter was the pope, would Paul have referred to him as a “pillar” in the church in the same way that James and John were “pillars,” making no distinctions?

There is not a shred of evidence in the Bible that would suggest that Peter was the pope. The proof that Peter was not the pope is not established by the fact that he was married but is established by the fact that this office is an invention of man, never described, never mentioned, and nowhere supported by the Word of God.

Acting Like A Pope

While the Bible nowhere speaks of a pope, there certainly are a lot of people who act as though they are the pope, especially in the home. Husbands, wives, and even children have forgotten, or have never known what it takes to have a successful home. They behave selfishly as though everything revolves around them. God’s divinely appointed roles within the home have all but been abandoned in many homes today. Husbands will not love, wives will not submit, parents will not lead, and children will not obey. Like the religious office

of the pope, many have turned aside from God's pattern and have invented for themselves new roles within the home. As a result, the home is suffering. A divine institution which God gave to bring fulfillment and joy has been perverted into something that has brought unimaginable pain and sorrow to so many people.

Fortunately, there is a solution. If we would simply go back to God's original arrangement and restore his pattern for the home, then we would rediscover the joy and fulfillment that God promised and intended for the home to bring. Otherwise, we will continue to suffer at our own hands.

How To Lead About A Wife

Restoring God's pattern for the home should begin with the spiritual leader of the home: the husband. A husband needs to love his wife, even as he loves himself (Eph. 5:28). The problem with many men is that they do not know what it means to truly love their wives. It goes without saying that women are different than men, physically and emotionally. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a husband to try to understand the way she thinks and feels. In fact Peter said that a man who does not try to understand his wife will not have his prayers answered (1 Pet. 3:7). Loving one's wife requires that a man "nourishes" and "cherishes" her (Eph. 5:29).

How To Submit To Your Husband

Because of the influence of radical feminism, the concept of submission has all but become a joke. Many women would refuse to say wedding vows that included the phrase "love, honor, and obey," but that is precisely God's design (Eph. 5:22-24). Wives need to give more than lip service to the idea of submission. Furthermore, the concept of submission should not be dismissed and trivialized by jokes, because after all, this is God's divine arrangement.

When husbands love their wives, and wives submit and honor their husbands, the relationship will deepen and will grow. The more a husband loves his wife, the more she is willing to submit, and the more she submits, the more he is willing to express his love for her. If done God's way, this cycle will gain momentum as the years go by.

How To Raise Your Children

Children are a wonderful gift from God (Psa. 127:1). However, children are a gift on loan. God wants them back, but in far too many homes very little thought is given to eternity. Countless parents will fret over a child's grades, concern themselves with their child's peer status, and never allow them to miss a sporting or extra-curricular activity (even when it conflicts with spiritual activities and responsibilities), yet they allow their children to grow up Biblically illiterate and spiritually bankrupt. Parents need to remember the warning Jesus gave in Luke 17:1-2. Parents who equip their children to earn an education, hold a good job, make good money, have good friends, and be a productive citizen have woefully failed as parents if they have not prepared those children to be disciples of Jesus.

How To Obey Your Parents

The greatest challenge of every young person is the challenge of obedience. The role that God has given every child in the home is that of honoring and obeying one's parents (Eph. 6:1-3). Think of how much harmony and joy has been destroyed in the home because of a rebellious child. A young person should appreciate the complexity of the role of his parents, understand his own role in the home, and view it as a proving ground for submission and obedience to Jesus.

If we all (husbands, wives, parents, and children) would honor God's divine appointments in the home and not

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venture beyond what he has asked from us, we could avoid so many pitfalls and obstacles that have made the home a drudgery, and instead find the love, joy, and fulfillment that the home was intended to provide.

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CHAPTER 24

Not The Pope: He Refused Worship

Russell M. Kline

His noteworthy titles include: “*Papa, Summus Pontifex, Pontifex Maximus, Servus servorum Dei*.” More commonly, he is called “Pontiff” and “the Vicar of Christ” but most know him best as “the pope.” According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the pope has been an object of reverence for Roman Catholics for about fourteen centuries. There are many ways in which adoration is shown to the pope, including the kissing of his foot which is said to be “the characteristic act of reverence by which all the faithful do honour to him as the vicar of Christ.” It is reported that such devotion was given to the Pope as early as the eighth century, when Emperor Justinian II kissed the feet of Pope Constantine, who sat in the “Chair of Peter” from 708 to 716. Also, it is known that Emperor Justin prostrated himself before Pope John I (523-526) and Emperor Justinian I before Pope Agapetus (535-536). It is not known which pope was the first to receive worship from his followers, but the justification for it seems to be that, since he is the Vicar (one who stands in the place of) of Christ, he is deserving of the same reverence and worship as Jesus Himself (Joyce).¹ And so, the pope continues to be an object of reverence who receives worship from a devoted following to this very day.²

Why is it so important to Roman Catholics that they be able to link the papacy to the apostle Peter? One writer, in a

publication of the Knights of Columbus, has expressed it in this way:

The name of Peter, which means the foundation, has become inseparable from his person. He carries and takes about with him his position as a Rock. And as that position is one of those which can never again be absent from the church, any more than the foundation of a building can be taken away, all the indications are that the successors of Peter must inherit his title, his mission, his authority. The whole doctrine of the Catholic Church rests upon this basis (qtd. in Hicks 614).

In the fifth century, Pope Leo I argued that the Bishop of Rome held primacy in the hierarchy of the universal church, using passages like Matthew 16:16-19, Luke 22:32, and John 21:15-19 in an attempt to prove his point. Leo hinged his argument upon a tradition that Peter was once the bishop of Rome and that an unbroken line of succession could be traced back to him.³ The only proof of his assertions was the oral tradition and apocryphal writings popularized by the Roman Catholic Church in those days (Mattox 166). To modern Catholics, the standard of accepted tradition is just as authoritative as that of the Bible—perhaps even more so. Therefore, the pope is viewed by many as the Lord's own representative on Earth, and as such, he is deserving of respect, reverence, and worship (Ratcliff).

The problem with all of these assertions about Peter and the papacy is that none of them are substantiated by the Scriptures. It is the intention of this writer to show that Peter was not, as the Catholics claim, the first pope, by proving that he never accepted worship from anybody. If Peter really was the Vicar of Christ, then he ought to have accepted worship

from others, as modern popes do. But, because Peter refused worship, and because the New Testament teaches us to offer worship to God—and to no one else—we may rightly conclude that Peter was not the first pope, and that the Catholics are utterly wrong about the papacy.

Peter Refused Worship

In the tenth chapter of the book of Acts, there is a remarkable account of conversion, which heralded a paradigm shift in how Christianity spread through the ancient world. Prior to Cornelius' conversion to Christianity, the gospel was preached mainly to Jews and to those of Jewish ancestry (i.e., the Samaritans), but after his conversion, the gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles en masse (Marshall 180-81). At the beginning of the account in Acts 10, we find that Peter is in the midst of a missionary journey of his own (Acts 9:32, KJV). At Lydda, he healed a man named Aeneas and converted many people (Acts 9:33-35). Brethren at Joppa sent for Peter and he came and raised a woman named Dorcas (Tabitha) from the dead (Acts 9:36-42). Afterward, Peter spent several days in the home of a man named Simon, who was a tanner by trade (Acts 9:43). It was at this point that events were set in motion which led to the conversion of Cornelius and his household to Christianity.

Cornelius lived in Caesarea, an important sea port, which was built by Herod the Great and was the primary base of Roman operations in Palestine (Acts 10:1). Furthermore, the text says that he was a "centurion" which meant that he was an officer in the Roman army, who led a band of men, which were known as "the Italian band" which seems to indicate that the men under his command were from Italy. He is described as devout with the indication that his family shared his religious views. His charity to the Jews as well as the frequency with which he prayed indicate the depth of his devotion to God (Acts 10:2) (Boles 159-60). He was

presented with a vision in which he was instructed to send for Peter (Acts 10:3-8). The next day, Peter was presented with a vision in which he was instructed to go with the men whom Cornelius had sent to fetch him (Acts 10:9-20). The purpose of the vision was to help Peter understand that Mosaic laws about ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness no longer apply, in the Christian Age (Col. 2:14) (Jackson 123-25). The next day, Peter went with the men, and they brought him to Cornelius (Acts 10:21-24).

When Peter entered Cornelius' house, the Bible says that "Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him" (Acts 10:25). There is some disagreement among commentators about exactly what Cornelius did. As Boles puts it, "Cornelius regarded Peter as a messenger from God and sought to do honor to him; 'worshipped' is from the Greek 'prosekunesen,' and means a high degree of reverence and not actual worship, for Cornelius was not an idolator, and would not have worshipped Peter as a god" (168). McGarvey wrote, "Cornelius worshipped Peter only in the sense of paying him that homage which, according to oriental custom, was due one of greatly superior rank" (207). Both men suppose that Peter mistook Cornelius' show of respect for worship, which accounts for his response in the next verse (McGarvey 207; Boles 168). But Jackson takes a contrary view:

When Peter encountered Cornelius, the latter was overcome with emotion and fell at the apostle's feet in worshipful prostration. Some (Harrison, 169-70; Barnes 175) doubt that the Gentile captain really expressed "worship" to Peter. If he did not, the apostle reacted rather radically! Larkin points out that all other uses of the term suggest either true or false worship (127).

Although there may be disagreement about Cornelius' intentions, one thing is clear: Peter refused to accept Cornelius' prostration (Acts 10:26). He literally pulled Cornelius up off the ground and argued that he was unworthy to receive such treatment for "I myself also am a man" (Jackson 127). The point of Peter's statement here seems to be that the honor of prostration belongs to God and not to man (Boles 168). This flies in the face of Roman Catholic doctrine about the pope's status as "the Vicar of Christ." Peter never behaved as though he considered himself worthy of worship. Even his office as an apostle and an elder in the Lord's church did not make him worthy of worship (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Obviously, Peter did not consider himself to be "the Vicar of Christ" because he never was!

Worship Is for God

Peter was not the only one in the New Testament who refused to accept worship. Paul and Barnabas refused to accept the worship of the people of Lystra (Acts 14:8-18). Angels refused to accept worship offered to them by the apostle John (Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9). No human being may rightly claim that he is worthy of being held in reverence by his fellow man. That is why New Testament Christians refuse to wear religious titles like "Reverend" or "Father." The Scripture says that **God's** name is "holy and reverend" (Psa. 111:9). Jesus instructed His disciples to "call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). The pope assumes for himself many religious titles; yet the Bible affirms that men may not wear them.

In the twentieth chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus taught His disciples that there is no such thing as a hierarchy of leadership in His church. Following His response to a request that two of his disciples be placed in the two highest-ranking positions in His kingdom, Jesus said, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and

they that are great exercise authority upon them. **But it shall not be so among you**” (Matt. 20:25-26; emp. mine, RMK). The kingdom of the Lord is not like the kingdoms of Earth, in that the Lord is the absolute ruler of His kingdom, and there is no bureaucracy beneath Him (Scaggs). God holds every member of His church in equal esteem, and so should we (Acts 10:34). “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Prophecy and the Papacy

It would not be entirely correct to say that the Bible makes no mention of the pope. In Second Thessalonians 2:1-10, Paul wrote a prophecy which predicted the rise of the papacy and helps us to understand just how dangerous the pope really is. In Second Thessalonians, Paul addressed some of the same subjects that he did in his first epistle to the church in Thessalonica, and he expanded upon them. It seems that the Thessalonian Christians had the mistaken impression that Jesus Christ was going to return to the Earth very soon, and they had basically been sitting around, waiting for the big event to take place. Paul made it very clear that he did not intend in his first epistle to give them the impression that Jesus was coming soon (2 Thess. 2:1-2). This is rather interesting, in light of assertions made by modern Bible scholars, that the apostles expected Jesus to return to the Earth within their lifetimes (Taylor 95).⁵ Paul went on to offer a reason why the second coming of Christ was not imminent: “That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). It is in Paul’s description of the “son of perdition” that we see evidence of a papal prophecy.

It is important to note that the “man of sin” did not produce the “great falling away,” but rather the “great falling

away” produced the “man of sin” (Taylor 96). Concerning his name, Taylor aptly observed:

He is styled the man of sin because he is the very personification of sin. He is a partaker of sin just as the opposite designation—man of God—is a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). He is aptly styled the son of perdition because that is where his ultimate destiny will be—perdition. All who are influenced and deceived by him are likewise headed for perdition (96).

Paul wrote that this man of sin “opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 3:4). Remember that the justification offered for worshipping the pope is that he is believed to be the Vicar (one who stands in the place of) of Christ, and is therefore entitled to all of the reverence that is due the Son of God Himself (Joyce). That is exactly the kind of claim that Paul said the son of perdition would make for himself. Some commentators, like Lipscomb, think that this is not a direct reference to the papacy (95-97). However, other commentators, like Taylor are convinced that Paul is clearly describing the pope, in this passage (96-97).⁶

Paul described the pope as being utterly evil: “Even him, whose coming is after the working and power of Satan” (2 Thess. 2:9). Some may argue that the Roman Catholic Church has done a great deal of good and many charitable things in the world and that the pope has been a force for good on the global political landscape, and I would agree that those assertions are essentially true. However, the great evil that resides in the Roman Catholic Church and in the papacy has to do with that fact that the pope and the institution he leads has deceived **billions** of people into the practice

of false religion. Countless souls will be lost to eternity in Hell because they followed the edicts of a megalomaniacal man who believes that he is God's personal representative on Earth. It is interesting to me that mental institutions in this country are full of people who claim to be the same thing as the pope—yet he is allowed to get away with his delusion!

Conclusion

There are many reasons why it can be conclusively established that Peter was never a pope, but the facts that he refused the prostration of Cornelius and that he never considered himself worthy of worship are some of the more powerful evidence. God is the only being that deserves our worship, and we are obligated to worship Him as He has commanded (John 4:23-24). Modern popes, who demand worship from their fellow men, are indeed “men of sin” and “sons of perdition.” However, the Bible does tell us how to defeat the papacy and Roman Catholicism: we must fight it with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Concerning the man of sin, Paul also wrote “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth” (2 Thess. 2:8, NKJV). Like any false teacher, the Pope is exposed to the truth of God's Word. Let every New Testament Christian be devoted to exposing the truth about the papacy and about every false doctrine and false religion in the world. In the immortal words of Sabine Baring-Gould, “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before” (558).

Notes

1. The argument is found in the **CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA**, but the definition of the word *vicar* is found in **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**.

2. Interestingly enough, the **CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA** argues that the worship given to the pope,

saints, angels and Mary is not the same as that given to God. “The worship of *latria* (*latreia*), or strict adoration, is given to God alone; the worship of *dulia* (*douleia*), or honor and humble reverence, is paid the saints (etc.)” (Beccari).

3. For an official list of men who have allegedly served as “pope,” see <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12272b.htm>>. For an even more detailed history of the popes, see Gontard, Friedrich. **The Chair of Peter**. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1964.

4. In fact, Jackson made the point quite forcefully, as he wrote, “Peter, raising him up, said: “Stand up: I myself also am a man.” If Peter was the original “pontiff,” as Roman Catholic theology alleges, why did he not accept the adoration? The papacy has—for centuries!”

5. To substantiate this conclusion, Taylor wrote: “Chapter two discusses why the second coming of Christ was not at hand or imminent in A.D. 52 or 53. Paul lists reasons why they should not be shaken or troubled. (1) He predicts the coming of a great apostasy. (2) He depicts the development of the man of sin, the son of perdition and what would be his basic nature. (3) Paul speaks of a hindering power in the way of this developing system of sin, this falsehood of folly. (4) This system of sin will last till the coming of the Savior.”

6. Also, he reports that Guy N. Woods, “one of the ablest Bible scholars since the days of inspiration,” favored this view, as well.

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CHAPTER 25

Was The Church Founded Upon Peter? Did Heaven Follow Peter's Lead?

Tom Holland

Foundations are vital to the strength and the stability of buildings. Foundations, or that which is asserted as fundamental, are necessary for religious organizations. Can one imagine Islam without the embracing of Mohammed as “Allah’s” true and final prophet? Is the Mormon religion possible without the acceptance of Joseph Smith as the final prophet? Is Seventh-Day Adventism possible apart from the confidence in Ellen G. White as more than just another religious leader? Is Roman Catholicism possible without acceptance of the pope as the “Vicar of Christ”? Is the position of the pope possible without believing that Peter was the first pope?

A church is certainly revealed in the New Testament. One reads about the church more than 100 times (about 114) in the New Testament. The New Testament church was conceived in the mind of God (Eph. 3:10-11, NKJV). The material for the church, a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), was purchased by the blood of Christ (Eph. 5:25). The identification of the foundation of the New Testament church is important to those who desire to identify with that church and to be identified as that church.

Identification Of The Foundation

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul, who was using the building metaphor to impress on the church at Corinth the importance of the material in God's spiritual house, to specify the foundation of the church. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

God's spiritual house is built on the solid ledge of Rock and That Rock is the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Boles said, "It seems clear from the context that Jesus by using the term 'Petra' referred to the truth that Peter had just confessed, which was the deity of Jesus. The truth that Jesus is the Son of the living God is the most fundamental and basic of all truths pertaining to man's redemption" (345).

It is not possible to become and be the church of Christ without respecting Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God.

Foundation Of The Head

As surely as the church, a called-out spiritual body of saved people, is built on the solid foundation of the Deity of Jesus the Lord and Savior, He is also recognized and respected as the Head of God's spiritual house (Eph. 1:18-22).

The "head" is one who is in charge. The "head" of a company, the CEO, is the "chief executive officer." The "head" football or basketball coach is the one in charge of the team. The "head" of State is the one in charge of the government's affairs.

The Lord Jesus Christ is not one of the heads of the church revealed in the New Testament. He is **the** Head (Col.1:18).

A Functioning Head

How does the Lord Jesus serve as Head of His church? He is not on earth where His church is serving today as His body. Nine times in Hebrews we are assured that Jesus is in heaven. The Head of the church of Christ on earth is now in

heaven seated by the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-3). So how does Jesus function or serve now as the Head of the church? Does He function as the Head of church through a Vicar? A vicar is “One who is authorized to perform functions in the stead of another” (Webster 822).

The inspired writer of Hebrews used the illustration of a will or testament to emphasize the way the blessings and responsibilities are presently dispensed (Heb. 9:15-17). The New Testament is the New Covenant predicted by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34). The reality of the New Covenant is declared (Heb. 8:7-13).

How does the Head of the true church of Christ function as “the Head”? He does so through His New Testament.

People need to remember that Jesus is **the** Head, not one of the heads. Furthermore, it is important for people to also remember that Jesus, not Jesus and His “Vicar,” is **the** Head of God’s spiritual house.

With all respect for God’s Holy Spirit, people need to know that the Holy Spirit is not the Head of the church. Jesus the Christ is **the** Head of His church (Col. 1:18).

Peter, The Earthly Head?

Why was it necessary to develop a doctrine that would assert the primacy of Peter? If Jesus functions as the Head of the church, and that church embraces practices that are unknown to the New Testament, then how can these practices be justified? How could the establishment of a special priesthood be accepted under the new covenant where the saved people are priests (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:9)? How could the addition of mechanical instruments be accepted when the Lord has specified the heart as the instrument to accompany the singing (Eph. 5:19)? How can “infant baptism” be practiced when **the** Head of the church authorized the baptizing of taught, penitent people (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-47).

For these and other practices not found in the New Testament to be accepted as “authority,” an addition to **the** Head of the true church had to be respected.

The apostate church began to use Peter as the justification for religious practices that were not authorized by The Head of the true church. Philip Schaff, writing about “The Peter of Fiction,” declared:

No character of the Bible, we may say, no personage in all history, has been so much magnified, misrepresented and misused for Doctrinal and hierarchical ends as the plain fisherman of Galilee who stands at the head of the apostolic college. . . .Peter as the Vicar of Christ, and Mary as the mother of Christ, have in this idealized shape become and are still the ruling powers in the polity and worship of the largest branch of Christendom (257).

Writing about the claims of the Papacy, Schaff observed:

On this tradition and on the indisputable preeminence of Peter in the Gospels and the Acts, especially the words of Christ to him after the great confession (Matt. 16:18), is built the colossal fabric of the papacy with all its amazing pretensions to be the legitimate succession of a permanent primacy of honor and supremacy of jurisdiction in the church of Christ, and—since 1870—with the additional claim of papal infallibility in all official utterances, doctrinal or moral (261).

There are interesting political dimensions of the papacy which do not come in the purview of this study, other than

to observe that a full-blown papacy did not believe that Christians should “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s”; rather, the people should render to “Caesar” what the church said should be rendered to Caesar. Reliable historians have recorded the absolute control that the Papacy had over civil governments. Scholars will have to determine from the records if the Roman Empire was and is perpetuated by “The Holy Roman Empire.”

A Fabricated Foundation?

If religious practices cannot be found in the New Testament, by what means may people embrace unauthorized practices while at the same time supposedly honoring Jesus the Christ as Head of the church? A plan developed whereby “**the** Head” of the church was given a “vicar” on earth.

It seems ironic that evidence for an additional “head” of the church would have to come from the New Testament whereby the true Head of the church functions. Why was any New Testament evidence needed?

But the “authority” for the papacy supposedly came from the Head of the church when Jesus acknowledged the truth of Peter’s confession and said to him: “Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:17-18, Douay Version). The footnote in the Catholic Bible asserts:

Verse 18. “Thou art Peter”...As St. Peter, by divine revelation, here made a solemn profession of his faith of the divinity of Christ; so in recompense of this faith and profession, our Lord here declares to him the dignity to which he is pleased to raise him: viz., that he to whom he had already given the name

Peter, signifying a rock, St. John 1.42, should be a rock indeed, of invincible strength, for the support of the building of the church; in which building he should be next to Christ himself, the chief corner-foundation stone, in quality of chief pastor, ruler, and governor; and should have accordingly all fullness of ecclesiastical power, signified by the keys of the kingdom of heaven... So that, by the plain course of the words, Peter is here declared to be the rock, upon which the church was to be built; Christ himself being both the principal foundation and founder of the same (Footnotes on Matthew 16:17, 18).

Is this interpretation of Matthew 16:18 correct? Did the Lord build the church on Peter as this footnote in the Catholic Bible asserts? If so, then the church is still built on Peter! It takes a swift shifting of hermeneutical gears to get the idea that the Lord built the church on Peter **and** his successors! If the Lord Jesus gave Peter such a prominent position, it seems that Peter should be the Vicar of Jesus and not the papacy.

Furthermore, a careful reading of what Jesus actually said, not the “official interpretation by the Catholic Church of what Jesus said,” reveals the true position of the apostle Peter: he was not put in the foundation; he was put at the door with the keys!

William Barclay noted that “It is further argued by the Roman Catholic Church that Peter...became the bishop of Rome; and that this power descended to all the bishops of Rome; and exists today in the Pope, Who is the head of the church and the Bishop of Rome” (153).

Burton Coffman said that Matthew 16:18 is “inscribed in letters of gold four feet high inside the massive dome of the Basilica of St. Peter’s in Rome.” However, these gold letters

do not show the difference in the words that is evident in the original language. “Peter, ‘a stone,’ has six letters, *petros*, and is masculine; but the *petra* on which Jesus promise to build the church has five letters and is feminine and signifies a ledge of rock” (246).

There are so many contrasts in the Primacy of Peter relative to the church and the assertion that his position authorizes the papacy. For instance: the New Testament does not give Peter the “chief apostle” position. Jesus gave to all the apostles “binding and loosing” power (Matt. 18:18). Peter was not alone when he used the “keys” to open the kingdom of heaven to people on the day of Pentecost. He stood up “with the eleven” (Acts 2:14). Peter’s authority was no greater than the apostolic authority of Paul (Gal. 2:7-8). Peter did not exclude the other apostles when he wrote the “commandment of Christ”; Peter included them (2 Pet. 3:2).

If something is as important to the papacy for Peter to be the first Bishop of Rome, it is more than a passing interest that the New Testament says nothing about it.

The New Testament does make it clear that Peter was married (Matt. 8:14). His wife accompanied Peter on some of his missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9:5).

If the Lord Jesus made Peter the foundation on which the Savior built his church and if Peter was infallible, is it not strange that the council convened in Jerusalem to receive information from the Holy Spirit relative to the true status of Gentile Christians? Why did Peter not speak the decision? Why did the letter to the churches include “the apostles,” not Peter only (Acts 15:23)? Why did the letter state, “It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord” (Acts 15:25)? Why did the letter not say, “Peter speaking ex cathedra declares?” Furthermore, why did the letter state, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28). If there was ever a time for Peter to demonstrate that he was the first pope, surely the council in Jerusalem afforded the opportunity.

There are too many problems connected to the theological assertion that the Lord Jesus built the church on Peter. If the Lord built the church on a stone, Peter, instead of a ledge of rock, then Jesus obviously built His church on a faulty foundation.

Peter had a prominent place in the Church. He was given the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:18); the Lord Jesus put Peter at the door with the keys, not in the foundation. Peter took the “keys” and opened the kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 10; Acts 11). This apostle was used by the Holy Spirit to write two of the great books of the New Testament.

Peter should be recognized with respect for the vital contribution that he made to Christianity, both by his preaching and his writing. However, it is unfortunate that a religious system which teaches and practices things unknown and unauthorized by the New Testament, would, in a sense, abuse the apostle Peter by asserting a position that Peter never had.

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**THE
PENMAN**

CHAPTER 26

Eyewitness Of His Majesty

Kyle Butt

First Peter 3:15 is often hailed as “**the** apologetic verse” in the Bible because of its command to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [*apologian*] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (NKJV).

The inspired apostle instructed believers to be ready to give a defense. Offering a defense for the hope that lies within the heart of faithful Christians is sometimes an easy thing to do. Whenever a person is surrounded by others of “like precious faith,” it proves an easy task to defend New Testament Christianity boldly. Perhaps it is for that very reason that Peter carries the thought a step farther by saying that Christians should stand ready to offer a defense “to **everyone** who asks you.”

Imagine Peter penning these words as his mind drifted back to the hour of Jesus’ arrest and trial. Shortly before the events of that night unfolded, Peter boldly and bravely had declared that he would die with Christ. Yet once the murderous mob apprehended His Lord, Peter was reduced to lurking in the shadows and following at a distance. His weakness and ignominy would only multiply as he was ushered into the courtyard of the High Priest. Waiting for him outside the trial was an enemy he was unable to fight—one so fierce and heinous that his mouth seemingly could

not utter a defense of either his faith or his Lord. That enemy was...a servant girl!

“You also were with Jesus of Galilee” she accused. And Peter, who had been the first among the disciples to declare that Christ was the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), and who had been the one among the disciples to voice his affirmation that Christ alone had the words of life (John 6:68), stood dumbfounded as he cowardly muttered, “I do not know what you are saying” (Matt. 26:70).

Peter had faced a primordial challenge to his faith—and had failed that challenge miserably. He thus knew from firsthand experience exactly how it felt to have his faith collapse under the weight of pressure from the enemy. Yet only a few weeks after his shameful denial, the Lord granted him the privilege of preaching the sermon that opened wide the doors of the Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter’s admonition to those who were to follow after him, therefore, becomes somewhat like the warning of a loving mother who has burned her hand on the stove many times and wants to save her child from making the same mistake and enduring the same pain. Peter’s life-changing experience, no doubt, was why the apostle urged every Christian to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” He understood all too well the alternative—denying the Lord in the face of the enemy—and knew far better than most that it was too horrible to contemplate.

The Gospel is No Myth

In academic circles these days it is not unusual to hear a person suggest that the events recorded in the Bible are myths. The word *myth* is given various meanings, but one that is commonly understood in modern parlance is the idea that the person or event being discussed has “only an imaginary

or unverifiable existence” (“Myth”). Thus, the listener or reader is led to believe that the stories found in the Bible do not have a “verifiable” historic base, and are founded on little more than the imagination of the authors. This allegation describing the Bible stories as myth, however, falls woefully short of the truth on a number of grounds.

First, the Bible has been proven to be the most accurate, historically verifiable book that has ever been produced. Years of archaeological finds have unearthed enough evidence verifying the Bible’s accuracy to bury the claim of myth a thousand times over.¹

Second, not a single, legitimate contradiction has been found that would suggest that the Biblical writers falsified information. For years, skeptics have found alleged contradictions between the Biblical texts. These alleged “contradictions” have been proven to be false, and adequate answers proving the non-contradictory nature of the Bible texts have been given.²

The list of other evidences that silence the allegation of myth could get quite lengthy. Such aspects as the scientific foreknowledge of the Bible, its predictive prophecy, and its unity over hundreds of years of writing are just a few of these powerful evidences.

Testimony Of The Writers

It is important to note that along with these various evidences, the testimony of the writers themselves must be added to the material that points overwhelmingly away from the idea that the Bible is mythical. The Bible writers insisted that their writings were not based on imaginary, non-verifiable people and events but were instead grounded on solid historical facts. The apostle Peter, in his second epistle to the Christians in the first century, wrote: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,

but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (1:16). In a similar statement, the apostle John insisted: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.... [T]hat which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1; 1 John 1:3).

When Luke wrote his account of the gospel of Christ, he specifically and intentionally crafted his introduction to ensure that his readers understood that his account was historical and factual:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

In a similar line of reasoning, Luke included in his introduction to the book of Acts the idea that Jesus, “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

The testimony from Peter, John, and Luke reveals that the Bible writers insisted with conviction that their writings were not mythical but were indeed based on factual events. Furthermore, they specifically documented many of the eyewitnesses who could testify to the accuracy of their statements. The claim that the Bible is filled with myths can be **made**, but it cannot be reasonably **maintained**. The

evidence is overwhelming that the Bible writers understood and insisted that their information was accurate and factual. Their claim of factual accuracy has been verified by the discipline of archaeology as well as by refutations of alleged contradictions between the various writings and history. The Bible is not a book of myth that belongs beside the likes of Mary Poppins or Peter Pan. It is a book of inspired, factual, historically accurate information that deserves its rightful place in the annals of history as the most amazing book ever written—bar none.

The Testimony Of A Man From Tarsus

Since Christianity is, and always has been, based on historical fact, then any person trying to discount the story found in the New Testament must create a scenario that adequately explains all of the facts better than the scenario found in the Scriptures. This task proves Herculean, to say the least, and in more than a few instances becomes absolutely impossible. One of those instances is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

From Saul's own pen, we learn that he was a zealous Pharisee who had surpassed many of his Jewish contemporaries in his efforts to keep the Jewish traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:13-14). He was educated by Gamaliel, one of the most respected Jewish rabbis of his day. His hometown of Tarsus stood as one of the larger metropolitan areas. And his Roman citizenship gave him access to some of the most coveted civil rights of the first century.

In his zeal for keeping the Jewish tradition, Saul made it his mission to crush Christianity—a new sect that seemed to be rising out of Judaism. These Christians were proclaiming that their leader, Jesus of Nazareth, after being crucified by the Roman authorities, had come back to life three days after His crucifixion. Thousands of Jews who heard the message of Christ were converting to Christianity, and consequently,

were leaving the paths of ancient Judaism. One Christian preacher, Stephen, had so aggravated the Jewish authorities with his preaching and condemnation of their hypocrisy that they stoned him to death. As an interested observer fully consenting to his death, Saul stood by and watched the garments of those involved in the stoning (Acts 7:58).

It is not difficult to imagine Saul's motive in persecuting the Way. At the core of Old Testament teaching—the Ten Commandments—God specifically instructed the Jews to have no other gods before Him (Exod. 20:3). Moses also had written: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Yet those following Jesus were proclaiming that He was God, and that He was one with the Father (John 1:1; John 10:30). This heresy deserved the severest penalties.

Having his heart set on destruction of this perverse new religion, Saul, armed with letters of authority from the High Priest, turned his faced toward Damascus. Yet, something happened on the trip to Damascus that changed the course of Saul's life—and the course of history itself. Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul's named changed to Paul, and with that change came a transformed life. Paul's own pen testified to the fact that he was converted from an adamant **enemy** of the cross to an ardent **follower** of the Christ (Gal. 1:13-14).

Therefore, we must ask ourselves what type of evidence must have been presented to this well-educated Roman citizen that not only made him rethink his position but also caused him to do an about-face and preach that Jesus was the Christ. What facts and arguments could convince a brilliant mind like Paul that his murderous intentions toward the Way were misguided, and that his view of Jesus was altogether inaccurate? If we look to Paul's writing for the answer, we find it in 1 Corinthians 15. There, Paul explained that Christ died and rose again. After He rose from the grave, “He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was

seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (7-8). Paul said that he personally saw the resurrected Christ; he was an eyewitness to the fact that the grave where the body of Jesus had once laid, was empty.

Whether or not a person believes in the resurrection of Christ, he cannot begin to challenge the fact that Paul was converted because he believed strongly in that resurrection. A quick glance at his writings shows even the casual observer that the resurrection of Christ was at the core of the message Paul preached (Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

During Jesus’ time on this Earth, Paul was the farthest thing from His follower. He did not travel with Jesus around the Galilean countryside helping Him preach and minister to the villagers. He was not in the chosen group of apostles who ate with the Christ or who were sent out to preach. Yet, after Paul’s conversion, he wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and became the leading apostle sent to the Gentiles. F. F. Bruce wrote:

It is reasonable to believe that the evidence which convinced such a man of the out-and-out wrongness of his former course, and led him so decisively to abandon previously cherished beliefs for a movement which he had so vigorously opposed, must have been of a singularly impressive quality. The conversion of Paul has for long been regarded as weighty evidence for the truth of Christianity. Many have endorsed the conclusion of the eighteenth-century statesman George, Lord Lyttelton, that “the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation” (77).

Anyone attempting to discredit Christianity must first adequately discredit the testimony of Paul and the evidence responsible for his conversion. Attempts at this have failed miserably in the past, and will do the same in the future. Irrefutable evidence for the truth of Christianity comes from the testimony of a man from Tarsus.

The Apostles Died to Confirm Their Testimony

It is a verified historical fact that the majority of the apostles suffered cruel, tortuous deaths because they preached that they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ. Documenting these persecutions is no difficult task. **Fox's Book of Martyrs** relates that Paul was behead, Peter was crucified (probably upside down), Thomas was thrust through with a spear, Matthew was slain with a halberd, Matthias was stoned and beheaded, Andrew was crucified, and the list proceeds to describe the martyr's death received by every one of the Lord's faithful apostles except John the brother of James (2-5). Additional testimony comes from the early church fathers. Eusebius, who was born about AD 260 and died about AD 340, suggests that Paul was beheaded in Rome and Peter was crucified there (Book 2, chapter 25).³ Clement of Rome (died about AD 100) in his **First Epistle** to the Corinthians, chapter 5, also mentions the martyr's deaths of Peter and Paul. Luke, the inspired writer of Acts, documents the death of James: "Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:1-2, ASV). The inspired apostle Paul summed it up best when he said:

For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonor. Even unto this present

hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, even until now (1 Cor. 4:9-13, ASV).

Recent attempts have been made to deny the fact that the apostles died because of their belief in and preaching about the resurrection. It has been proposed that the apostles died because they were political instigators or rabble-rousers. However, combining the high moral quality of their teachings with the testimony of the early church fathers, and the fact that their primary task was to be a witness of the resurrection, it cannot be reasonably maintained that the apostles suffered for some reason besides their confession of the resurrection. The apostles died because they refused to stop preaching that they had **seen** the Lord alive after his death. Their deaths forever sealed their eyewitness testimony as valid. Wayne Jackson correctly noted “while men may die out of religious deception, they do not willingly go to their deaths knowing they are perpetrating a hoax” (2:34).

Notes

1. See Butt, Kyle. “Archaeology and the Old Testament” and “Archaeology and the New Testament.”
2. See the **Alleged Discrepancies** section of ApologeticsPress.org.
3. Exactly how and where the apostle Peter was martyred is unclear from history. The fact that he was martyred is not.

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CHAPTER 27

Things Most Precious

Ben Wright

I am so thankful to be a part of the Power Lectureship this year. Having grown up in Memphis, I attended this great lectureship numerous times and was always encouraged and edified by attending it. As a young person, I had several friends who attended Southaven and I loved to come and visit this great congregation. So I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to play a part in this year's lectureship.

The books of First and Second Peter should be studied by every Christian because of the tremendous emphasis on an active faith that are found in these two letters. Having preached through these two gems, I came to a greater appreciation for the words given by inspiration that are found in these two epistles. One will draw much closer to God after studying the Holy Spirit-inspired words given to Peter.

It has been given to me the opportunity to speak to you about a word that Peter loved to use in his writings. It is the word *precious*. We often use this word to describe things of value to us. This word may be used to describe a spouse. We often refer to our children as being precious. The use of this word to describe our children or a spouse shows to others how much we value the one to whom this word is applied. We may have what is considered a precious gem. By this descriptive term, we understand that the gem that is possessed is of great value.

The English word *precious* is found seven times in these two letters. However, four Greek words are used that

are translated *precious*. Three of these words come from the Greek word translated *precious* in 1 Peter 2:7 (KJV). This word is defined as: “honor, value, respect; nobility, specialness; money, cost” (Strong “Time”). This word is derived from another Greek word that means “to pay (a price, as a penalty)” (Strong “Tino”). From this we see that this word carries the idea of having value. To whatever Peter applied precious, there is the idea of it being extremely valuable.

If an apostle found something to be of value spiritually, then we should make sure that we pay special attention to that item. In this case, five things are said to be precious by Peter and we will notice each of them in their order in the text of these two wonderful works of inspiration.

The Trial Of Your Faith

Peter writes by inspiration that the trials of life are “much more precious than of gold that perisheth” (1 Pet. 1:7). If you are like me, you probably are wondering what make trials precious. Trials are precious because, when passed through successfully, they will bring approbation to the Christian at the return of Jesus. Notice that Peter says the trial of our faith “might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” When a Christian makes it through a trial it strengthens him to be able to continue to walk the Christian walk (Jas. 1:2-3). It creates endurance in the Christian. When Jesus returns, we will have His approval if we have made it through the trials of life.

A key concept that Christians must grasp is that we will have trials in life. Paul told the Thessalonians: “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thess. 3:3-4). Paul also had this to say to Timothy: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). It

should be extremely plain to us that we will suffer afflictions in this life.

It is sad to hear Christians wonder aloud why they have to suffer. Admittedly, it is hard to view afflictions as being precious. However, that is the worldliness in us talking. As we mature, which prayerfully we all are, we will view these trials as being valuable to us in giving us the patience that we need to make it to heaven. Jesus plainly stated, “In your patience, possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19).

Suffering now strengthens us for the trials that lay ahead. Of the word *trial*, Woods wrote that it suggests “a trial or test for the purpose of determining the worthiness or character of that tested. As the assayer takes the gold ore and runs a test on it to determine the quality. . . so the trials through which the saints were passing constituted a crucible which tested their faith and revealed its true character” (30). Trials are extremely important because they reveal our strengths and weaknesses to us. Each of us has weak spots and we may be blind to them, but trials will bring them to our attention. We must never have the attitude that we should not suffer, because we will not become stronger without suffering.

Jesus said to the disciples that the servant is not above his lord (Matt. 10:24). Our Lord suffered greatly, leaving us an example to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). It was by His suffering that Jesus was perfected to be the “Author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8-9). In that context, the Hebrews writer was pointing out the fact that Jesus was greater than Aaron. Jesus is our Great High Priest. The reason He can be such is that He endured affliction and it completed Him for the work that He had to do in order to be our High Priest. One of the qualifications of the high priestly office that had to be met is that the one being named high priest had to “have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity” (Heb. 5:2). By the trials through which Jesus went, He was able to have compassion because

He was compassed with affliction. He is that High Priest who can be touched by our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). It was the trial through which He went that allowed Jesus to fill this vital role for us.

It is through precious trials that we will mature and head toward completeness, or perfection, in our Christian lives. In the first recorded sermon by Jesus, He stated: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). It ought to be the desire, aim, and ambition of each Christian to gain maturity, which is the idea of the word *perfect*. The only way that we will do this is to learn to view our trials as precious.

The Precious Blood Of Christ

Peter describes the blood of Jesus as being precious (1 Pet. 1:19-20). It does not take a Solomon to figure out why the blood of Jesus is precious. It is so very valuable because it frees one from contamination brought by sin. Value is based on worth. One could imagine how valuable a cure for cancer would be. There is only one cure for sin, and it is the blood of the Great Physician. Jesus “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5).

The Bible reveals to us numerous reasons why the blood of Christ is precious. It is extremely valuable because by it we are redeemed (Eph. 1:7). You and I are not redeemed by things that will perish from this earth (1 Pet. 1:18). The only thing that is said to redeem us is the blood of Jesus (Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12). Those who are Christians had to be bought back from sin and the blood of Jesus is the only thing valuable enough to pay the price of our sins.

It is precious because it brings us to God. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). This was written specifically to Gentiles but is applicable to all who are in sin. The Gentile world was described by Paul as “having no hope, and without

God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But because Jesus shed His blood on the cross, we all have the opportunity to be brought close to God. Nothing on the face of this earth can bring us close to God except the blood of Jesus.

The blood of Jesus is precious because it purges our consciences (Heb. 9:14). Sin bothers the conscience of a person with a tender heart. Guilt rides many of us because of the sins we have committed. But the blood of Jesus can remove that guilt and purge our consciences. How many people are suffering with a guilty conscience and looking for any way to remove that guilt? We can search high and low, but that conscience will only be relieved and purged by the blood of Jesus.

The blood of Jesus sanctifies those who come into contact with it (Heb. 13:12). Sanctification carries the idea of being set apart from the world. One who has been sanctified has been taken from the world and placed into Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2). The Corinthians, before sanctification, were a group of heinous sinners (1 Cor. 6:9-10). However, upon their sanctification they became saints (1 Cor. 6:11). Sanctification is only possible because of the offering made by Jesus on the cross (Heb. 10:10).

To those who are in Christ, the blood of Jesus is precious because it offers continued cleansing (1 John 1:7). That verse states that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” I often mention in sermons that when you see “eth” on the end of a word, that word is usually in a tense that indicates continued action. The blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing those who are walking in the light of truth. It is not a one-time action of cleansing but a continued cleansing by the blood of Christ. Every time we commit a sin and repent of it, God is faithful and just to forgive us of that sin and cleanse us with the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9).

One might ask how our conscience is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Peter provides that answer for us: “The like

figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21). You might ask how one can have his sins washed by the blood of Jesus. We see the answer in Ananias’s challenge to Paul: “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). You might ask how one can be sanctified. The answer is given by Paul to the Ephesians when writing about the church: “That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26).

All of these point to the fact that baptism is the only way one can come into contact with the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus was shed at his death (John 19:34). We take part in His death when we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Only through baptism into Christ can one come into contact with the precious blood of Christ.

“A Living Stone, a Chief Cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:4-7)

Upon reading these verses, one might ask why Jesus is designated as a precious cornerstone or living stone. The reason is that Jesus provides unification as the Cornerstone. At least two Old Testament passages prophesy of the Messiah being a stone that would be rejected by men but set up as the Cornerstone (Isa. 28:16; Psa. 118:22). Zechariah 10:4 speaks of the “corner” coming out of Judah, which is almost definitely a Messianic prophecy. These passages are referenced or quoted numerous times in the New Testament (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17-18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-7).

A cornerstone is not the important stone in a building in our time the way it used to be. The cornerstone was that stone that tied the building together without which there was no stability. There were two types of stones used for this in

Old Testament times. One was the cornerstone at the bottom of the building, also called a foundation stone. The other type was known as the capstone, which linked the last tier of the building together (Mack). Both of these were used for the Messiah in the Old Testament. The first type is used of the Messiah in Isaiah 28:16. The second type is used of Him in Psalm 118:22. Both of these stones were necessary in the architecture of the day when these passages were inspired to be written.

Jesus provides unity as the Chief Cornerstone between many things. Coffman, in his commentary on 1 Peter, lists several of these things for which Jesus provided unity: the Old Law ended and the New began; the wicked find their doom and the righteous find their salvation; old Israel was done away with and the new Israel began; and God and humanity are united (“1 Peter 2:6-8”). Another to be added to that list is that Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ (Eph. 2:14). Without Christ, there could be no type of unity between any of these.

Sin causes separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Because of sin there is a need for man to be reconciled to God. There can be no unification of God and man without this. God provided Jesus to be the One who reconciled man to Him (2 Cor. 5:18). Because of this reconciliation, man can be saved: “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). Jesus provides for man the means of unity with God.

We should thank God that Jesus came to be our cornerstone. Without Him there would be no unity with God. Without Him, Jew and Gentile could never be united to be in one body, the church. He is the foundation stone upon which His church is built (1 Cor. 3:11). Without Jesus as the Cornerstone, the building is built in vain because it is not of God (Psa. 127:1).

“Like Precious Faith” (2 Peter 1:1).

When Peter wrote of this “like precious faith,” he was writing about the belief in the gospel, the system of faith. Both Jew and Gentile could be believers in the same system of faith. This faith is extremely valuable because it leads to salvation.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is referred to by several names in the New Testament. “The truth” is one such designation (John 17:17). “Gospel of the grace of God” is another (Acts 20:24). “The faith” is another such designation (Acts 6:7; Acts 16:5; Rom. 1:5). This stands for the system of faith which must be obeyed.

Those to whom Peter wrote had heard the faith preached to them and they were obedient to that message. It is a simple message dealing with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Paul, by inspiration, tells us that if we receive the gospel and stand in it, we will be saved by it. This is exactly what Peter and the apostles preached on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2. They preached that Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected by God (Acts 2:23-36). This is the message that the Pentecostians believed and obeyed (Acts 2:38-41).

This message is the simple gospel of the New Testament that all must obey in order to obtain the gift of salvation. Each of us must have this “like precious faith.” It is necessary for sanctification (John 17:17). It is necessary for salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-2). It is necessary for justification (Gal. 2:16). It is necessary for redemption (Heb. 9:15). Without this precious faith we would have none of these things. Truly, this faith leads to salvation.

“Exceeding Great and Precious Promises” (2 Peter 1:4)

The last thing Peter referred to as precious are promises from God. These promises are valuable to us because they bring consolation in times of trouble. Woods had this to say

about this phrase: “The promises are precious because of what they mean to the human soul; and they are exceeding great because they include forgiveness, peace, the promise of eternal life and a share in the divine nature” (149). Truly, in difficult times like those Peter’s audience were facing, pondering on the promises of God would bring consolation.

The great thing about God’s promises is that they are made by One who cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). God has always been one who keeps His promises. The Old Testament is given to us for learning (Rom. 15:4). One of the lessons we should learn from the Old Testament is that God keeps His promises. God promised Eve that through woman would come one who would bruise Satan’s head and He fulfilled this promise (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4). God promised Abraham a son and He fulfilled that promise (Gen. 17:16; Gen. 21:1-2). God promised David that the Christ would come through his seed and He fulfilled that promise (2 Sam. 7:12ff; Matt. 1:6). These are just a few of the many recorded promises God made that He fulfilled. All of which were written for us to demonstrate that God keeps His promises.

God has promised salvation to all those that obey Him (John 3:16). Whoever believes in Jesus, which is a synecdoche, or part put for the whole, will have eternal life. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we will do what He says to do in order to have eternal life. The promise to those that do this is that they will have eternal life with Him.

Why stay faithful in time of trouble? Because we will have eternal life if we do so. How do we know that? The God that cannot lie promised us we would have it. What great consolation!

Why not be swallowed up with worry? Because God told us to cast all our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7). How do I know He will take care of me? He promised He would (Matt. 6:33).

Why should I forgive those that wrong me and seek my forgiveness? Because God will forgive us only if we forgive

others (Matt. 6:14-15)? How do I know He will forgive me? The God that cannot lie promised He would.

God has made great and wonderful promises to those that follow Him. Jesus made the promise that He is preparing His followers a place and that, one day, He would come back and bring His followers home with Him (John 14:1-3). In troublesome times, that should bring great consolation to the followers of Jesus.

Conclusion

When one contemplates those things that are mentioned by Peter as being “precious” there should be prayers of thanksgiving offered up to a great and benevolent God. Life is worth the living when these precious things are in it.

Our trials are “precious” because they bring the approbation of God when faithfully endured. The blood of Jesus is “precious” because it frees us from the contamination of sin. The Cornerstone is “precious” because it allows unification with God. The faith is “precious” because it leads to the salvation of our souls. God’s promises are “precious” because they lead to consolation in troublesome times. Indeed, these are “things most precious.”

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**THE
PARTNER**

CHAPTER 28

Peter and John: Brothers

Todd Crayton

“The discipline of leadership is in the devotion to duty and always doing the right thing even if no one will ever give you credit for it” (Thieme).

No truer words have ever been spoken than when applied to the apostle Andrew. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one who saw his duty to serve the Lord without regard or desire to be the greatest or the most well-known apostle. While more is written in the scriptures concerning the works of Simon Peter, Andrew’s impact on his own brother and others he brought to Christ is unquestionable. Andrew may never have received public acclaim and praise for bringing Peter to Christ, but his role as a soul winner and a man of humility and zeal was vital to the other eleven apostles and especially to his brother, Simon Peter.

Who Was This Apostle Andrew?

One may ask, “Who was this Apostle Andrew and what was his part in spreading the gospel of Christ?” Andrew, brother of Simon (also known as Peter), spent his earlier years as a fisherman from Bethsaida (“place of fish”) on the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44, KJV). Andrew and Peter were the sons of Jona (John 1:42) and were in partnership with fellow disciples James and John (Luke 5:10; Matt. 4:18) in the fishing business.

The Bible states that Andrew was present in Bethabara (Bethany), beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing (John

1:28). There Andrew learned for the first time of the greatness of the “Lamb of God” and “followed him” (John 1:40). After the apostles John and Andrew heard Jesus speak, they spent the better part of a day with the Master (John 1:37-40). And immediately upon leaving the Messiah, the scripture says Andrew, “first findeth his own brother” (John 1:41). What a testimony of the urgency Christians should have in taking the message to the lost. Andrew spread the gospel in his own household, with his own brother, Peter. He understood that going to others with the message—and not waiting for them to come to him—was at the heart of the mission of Christ.

It is possible that he did not know everything about the Lord to be the most effective evangelist, but he knew enough to go to his own brother. Both brothers had listened and obeyed the teachings of John and were in the perfect position to heed the message from the Master teacher himself. It is notable that it did not appear to take much convincing to get Peter to go see the Messiah because John 1:42 says “And he brought him to Jesus”. They were waiting the Messiah’s coming and were ready when they found him.

Heeding The Call

Both Andrew and Peter were ready when Jesus formally called them to leave their occupation and to become fulltime, lifelong followers.

And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they left the nets and followed him (Mark 1:16-18, ASV).

This was not the first meeting of Jesus with these disciples; for the apostle John gives details of their first meeting in

his gospel (John 1:35-51). The reference here is to a more formal calling to the apostleship and involved their leaving their occupation to attend Jesus continually (Barnes).

Likewise, God's desire for His people is that they leave their worldly cares and stand up for the Gospel by telling others what He has done for them. Just as Jesus appeared in person to Andrew and Peter, he has appeared to every Christian through His Word. Jesus said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). For all who would believe on Jesus would do so "through their word," that is, through the word of the apostles. There is no other way that belief and faith can be produced outside of the Word. One can not tell others of Jesus and not know the One of whom he tells. Both Andrew and Peter had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. They were intimately acquainted with his teachings, miracles, and message and were able to walk with Jesus by his invitation. Similarly, invitations must be extended to the lost today. Just as fish will not jump into the boat of fishermen by themselves, men will not jump on the band wagon with Christians just because the lights at the church building are on. Jesus found Andrew and Peter in their comfort zones— two commercial fishermen—and he related to them in words and a manner that they could identify with His message. The effective Christian will take a person wherever he is in his life and guide him to Jesus so that they too, can heed the call of Christ.

Today, Christians have greater access to the Word of God than any other time in history. With modern technology such as computers, the Internet, and even cell phones, the Word of God is literally at one's fingertips. The opportunity to know God intimately is abundantly available. Yet, many are still not heeding the call to evangelize the world (Matt. 28:19). Many are distracted by the riches of this world (Mark 4:19; Mark 8:36) in the pursuit of the American dream. But

the American dream is not God's desire for mankind. God's desire is that the whole world might come to know the Truth and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4).

Andrew was so compelled to spread the message that he totally committed himself to the cause of Christ and willingly left all he had ever known. By leaving his secular job, he saved his life by taking up his cross and following Christ (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23). Jesus said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25).

Soul Winner For Christ

Andrew was a soul-winner who understood the command of Christ to become a "fisher of men" (Matt. 4:19). Andrew did not allow fear or complacency to prevent him from fulfilling his obligation to teach others. He did not wait until he had studied or learned more about Christ. He was like the woman at the well in Samaria, who after talking with Jesus went immediately to those in the city and said, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29). Did either have any training in "personal work"? Did either wait to take a class in evangelism or wait to call the preacher or elders? The answer is an emphatic NO! Neither Andrew nor the woman at the well thought that someone else should go for them. They did not wait for Jesus or the other apostles to begin sharing the message. Their message was based on and motivated by their own faith and experiences with the Messiah. They heard and believed the message (Rom. 10:17) and shared it right way.

Andrew was active and zealous for the cause of Christ. One can deduce that his zeal was motivated by his love for Jesus, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Jesus had prayed to the Father, "And I have declared unto them thy name,

and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). Andrew’s love prompted him to act immediately. Christians are not to be stationary in taking the message to a dying world. A street light by its mere existence can be a good example by standing and lighting the road. However, it will neither tell you where you are headed nor where the road on which you are traveling may end. But Christians are to be the “light of the world” (Matt 5:14) which requires action. It is implied that one must boldly speak the truth so that the world may behold the light of Jesus. Furthermore, it is important that a Christian uses his influence to amplify the “light of the Gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:10). The message of Christ will go unhindered when Christians demonstrate the genuine love for men’s souls that both Andrew and Peter showed to the world. Wendell Winkler said, “We are either a blot or a blessing, but never a blank.” Therefore one’s example ought to be literally “in word or deed” (Col. 3:17). Flattering words are not enough; for John says, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). James wrote we are to be “doers of the word and not merely hearers only” (James 1:22). Andrew had a drive about him that could be compared to Jeremiah who said, “His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jer. 20:9). Andrew’s love for Christ translated into a sense of urgency so that he, like Peter and John “cannot but speak the things they had seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). As Jack Welch, former CEO of The General Electric Company, was known for saying, one must “Walk the talk.” That is something Andrew was certainly known to do.

Willingness To Operate Behind The Scenes

Andrew allowed the Lord to use him as he was most needed for the exhortation of the other disciples. His name is recorded often as the “brother of Simon Peter” (Matt. 4:18;

Matt. 10:2; John 1:40; John 6:8). It's as if without Peter, Andrew would be unknown. One may wonder how one balances a sense of self-worth when thought of as the effect of another man's presence. The answer was aptly demonstrated by Andrew who kept his eyes on "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). The very fact that Andrew is the one who brought Peter to the Lord is significant. For truly without Andrew where would Peter have been but possibly lost? Jesus tells us there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety and nine wise men which need no repentance (Luke 15:7). Andrew was concerned for the souls of his brother and others. He was not concerned about how others referred to him. He went about doing the "work of an evangelist" and making full proof of his ministry (2 Tim. 4:5).

Because of his focus and love for Jesus, Andrew exhibited remarkable humility in serving where he was needed. God uses the faithfulness of one as a glory and strength for another. God said to Joshua:

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them (Josh. 1:5).

The faithful and diligent service of Moses was never lost on Joshua. He relied on their work together as a source of strength. He knew God would be with Him because God had been with Moses. Likewise, Andrew saw the way Jesus interacted with his brother Peter and knew that Jesus would be with him also. In the church today, there is a vital need for the spirit of Andrew: a spirit of one who is willing to serve

faithfully from the heart and allow others to take the role in which they are best suited.

Often we hear the beautiful music of an orchestra and marvel at the skill and talent of the musicians. Anyone who has played in a band or orchestra understands that the “first chair” is the most sought-after seat. This position has the lead or solo most often and receives the most direct attention from the band leader or conductor. While it may be an honor to play in the first chair, it is actually the second chair which makes the harmony. Alone, the solo player could not make a complete melody. It is the ability of the instruments working together in harmony that makes a sound more full and rich than either could make on its own. This is a sound analogy of Andrew and Peter. They worked together to accomplish what otherwise may not have gotten done. Jesus said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor” (John 12:26).

Jesus taught that the greatest among them should seek to be the other’s servant (John 13:4-15). It is unthinkable that Jesus did not know that certain apostles had sought the “first position,” wanting to be at His right hand (Mat. 20:21-22). Pride and grandiose beliefs in one’s own greatness can and will hinder the work of the Lord. Christians are to seek to be humble in all things, especially with regard to those they may lead to the Lord (Luke 14:10; Jas 4:5; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). There is no place in this kingdom for one person to look down on another. Someone has said, “The only time that you should look down on a man is when you’re picking him up.” Paul wrote:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but

to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

God is not pleased when one measures himself by the ruler of his own mind or the perceived gifts of others. Whatever one's station in life, that is the place that God wants him to be if he is doing his very best (Phil. 4:11; Heb. 13:5). This is not to make excuses for imperfection, but it describes the Christian's goal to be like Christ and to be used for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31; Heb. 13:21). The Lord's church needs members like Andrew who are willing to work behind the scenes to accomplish the work rather than those who accomplish the work to be seen. Lt. Col. Thieme promotes an interesting idea that will serve Christians well: "One should take the blame whenever possible, but always pass the credit on to someone else."

Ready When Needed

As a disciple (mathetes: "a learner, a scholar; a follower who has learned to believe in the truth of the doctrine of his teacher") ("Disciple"), Andrew understood his mission was to learn and do the will of Christ. From the first day Andrew saw Christ and immediately followed after him, he continued steadfastly in the work set before him (1 Cor. 15:58). While the accounts of Andrew in Scripture are limited, the Bible does record that he was a valuable and industrious worker with his brother and the other disciples. Andrew was with Jesus and the other disciples in Cana of Galilee where Jesus performed the miracle of turning water to wine (John 2:1-ff). He followed Jesus from Cana of Galilee to Capernaum (John 2:12). In Judaea, he may have aided the other apostles as they baptized there (John 3:22) for at that time "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples" (John. 4:2). Andrew was chosen by Christ to be one of the twelve disciples (Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:14). He was ordained by Christ to "be with him...to preach. . .to heal sicknesses and to cast out devils"

(Mark 3:13-19). Andrew was one of the inner-circle of Jesus' disciples when the destruction of Jerusalem was discussed; Andrew privately inquired of Jesus what these things meant:

And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately. Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? (Mark 13:3-4)

Andrew answered Jesus' question about where they should buy bread by mentioning to Him the five loaves and two fish to feed the five thousand (John 6:8-9). He may not have fully understood Christ's power yet because he asked, "But what are they among so many?" (John 6:9). This writer is sure Jesus' response quelled any further doubts. Andrew was also "in the right place" to act as a mediator when the Greeks wanted to see Jesus (John 12:20-22).

Andrew was where he needed to be to accomplish what needed to be done. Christians are to be prepared for service: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). Isaiah answered the Lord's call "...Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). Would the Lord be pleased with the response you give?

It Is A Family Affair

It has been said, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." One's earthly family can be a source of great encouragement or great discouragement. As true as this statement is, Peter could not have chosen a better brother than Andrew. Andrew apparently did not suffer from sibling rivalry with Peter, because upon finding the Messiah, Andrew "went first to find his brother." He shared the most important

information possible: how to find eternal salvation. Loving your brother and working with your brother on a daily basis may be a matter that requires great consideration. Most people will say it is never a good idea to go into business with relatives. But that is exactly what Andrew and Peter did. They were business partners in their fishing business; then they went into the “Fisher of Men” business together. Yet these brothers must have had a mutual respect for one another because they worked side by side. This is the model that the church needs today: brothers and sisters working side by side.

At the start of the early church, the disciples shared and provided for one another’s needs, even selling their possessions (Acts 4:32-37). This denotes closeness beyond just fellowshiping together over a common meal. They were involved in each other’s lives. They knew who was in need and who was willing to give. What a wonderful picture of brethren dwelling together in unity (Psa. 133:1).

Andrew and Peter had the comfort of having each other during times of trials. They had a relationship that was forged from a bond of mutual experiences and a singular goal. As apostles, they were able to encourage and comfort one another during their darkest hours. The Bible does not record whether these brothers suffered ridicule or scorn from their family for following Christ, but they had each other to lean upon if they did. Many today experience rejection and contempt from their families for choosing to submit their lives to Christ (1 Pet. 1:7; Matt. 10:37). It seems as though the world can see the change a Christian makes from the old man of sin to the new man of faith (Rom. 6:6), but Satan can use loved ones to bring up everything the Christian is trying to forget about the past. Those things which one dreads, regrets, and abhors are used by others sometimes to justify their own disobedience. This author has experienced this first-hand from his own brothers. After I obeyed the

Gospel, one of my brothers stated, “It’s is just a phase; you’ll be back to your old self soon.” Thanks be to God that he can bring us to the place where our pasts (Eph. 2:2; 1 Pet. 4:3) will not be greater in the eyes of men than our present life of character, kindness, and good works (Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus himself must have experienced family rejection; at least the Bible implies that he did by the fact that his brothers did not obey the Gospel until after His resurrection. “But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house” (Matt. 13:57). Jesus worked as a carpenter until beginning His earthly ministry; yet when He showed miracles, those who knew Him as the “carpenter’s son” could not believe Him to be the Messiah (Matt 13: 54-58). His family and those who knew Him in the past refused to acknowledge his deity.

Reaching out to friends and family is the obligation of every Christian. The Bible teaches there is no greater blessing than leading a person to the Lord and it is a special blessing when that person is a member of one’s own family. It is recorded in Jas. 5:20, “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” It is part of the design of the Gospel message that we communicate it to others, especially those we love. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

It is a challenge for the Christian when one’s family is a source of discouragement and heartache. It is difficult to be at ease in one’s heart knowing those you love the most are lost. But one cannot allow his family’s disobedience to discourage him from fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). Jesus clearly stated the priority of devotion to family and service to him in Matthew 10:37: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Barnes notes in his commentary:

The intent of this passage is, to show, that as Christ is infinitely above all creatures, he is to be loved above the nearest and dearest relations and friends; being God over all blessed for ever, and also the Saviour and Redeemer; which itself, makes him more amiable and lovely than a common parent.

Christians can not allow their authority in Biblical matters to begin and end with “mama says” or “grandmother says.” We are to “honor thy father and thy mother” (Matt. 19:19). But it is clearly disobedience to the command of Christ and a denial of him to follow traditions or wise sayings of family members versus the sound doctrine of Christ. How many today are struggling with sin because they will not surrender to the Word of God knowing it will anger or alienate a loved one? Remember Joseph’s brothers did not accept him, but he always dealt kindly with them and in the end saved their lives:

And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we *be* thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them (Gen. 50:18-21).

Family members may be converted based on one’s actions and attitude toward them. The duty that Andrew fulfilled as a brother to Peter was a great blessing to Peter. And Peter later became a great blessing to many in the first century and the twenty-first century, when he preached the first Gospel

sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Andrew aided his brother by bringing him to Christ. Christians today must also start in their own households (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33).

Conclusion

Andrew was a man of trust, action, and great zeal. He did not waste time debating what to do when called to follow Christ. He left his livelihood immediately. He understood the urgency in preaching the gospel. He understood that love required action on his part. He understood that pride had no place in the mission before him and he understood that his brother could be lost without his intervention. He was a man of faith and love, loyalty and obedience, resourcefulness and humility. He labored where he was needed and he was needed where he labored. While he may forever be referred to as “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother,” Christians may rejoice that he “first findeth his own brother Simon.” May God help us all to have the devotion to duty and to do the right thing always, even if no one will ever give us credit for it, “For our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20, ASV). And may Christians everywhere be the brother that Andrew was to Peter.

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CHAPTER 29

Peter and John: Thunder and Lightning

Brandon Britton

Introduction

This Sunday, just before worship begins, take a minute to look around the auditorium. Who do you see? There will be several who appear to be just like you, some who appear to be nothing like you and others you are not too sure about. Amazingly, God in His infinite power and wisdom saw fit to combine us all into one body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13, KJV). The working together of many different parts we see in the body serves as an illustration of the harmonious workings of the many different people that make up the church of Christ.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But

now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him (1 Cor. 12:14-18).

Although we are different and serve in a wide variety of capacities, each is important and each has an important role to play.

What we see in the physical body with our members and what we see on a larger scale in the body of Christ, we also saw on a smaller scale within the twelve apostles. John MacArthur once wrote that just like us, the apostles “spanned the political spectrum. One was a former Zealot—a radical, determined to overthrow Roman rule. But another had been a tax collector—virtually a traitor to the Jewish nation and in collusion with Rome. At least four, and possibly seven, were fishermen and close friends from Capernaum, probably having known one another from childhood.” Like us, they sometimes disagreed, argued, and failed one another because they were human. MacArthur further explained, they “were perfectly ordinary men in every way. Not one of them was renowned for scholarship...they had no track record as orators or theologians. In fact, they were outsiders as far as the religious establishment of Jesus’ day was concerned. They were not outstanding because of any natural talents or intellectual abilities. On the contrary, they were all too prone to mistakes, misstatements, wrong attitudes, lapses of faith, and bitter failure—no one more so than the leader of the group, Peter. Even Jesus remarked that they were slow learners and somewhat spiritually dense (Luke 24:25)” (XII). Despite all of these weaknesses and disadvantages, the Lord was able to glorify His Father and accomplish His will through these flawed individuals, and He can through His church today as well. Jesus knew all their faults and frailties long before He chose them and yet He still used them to teach us many valuable lessons that will assist us in working together in His

kingdom, nearly two thousand years later. Perhaps the two apostles most frequently used as models and examples, for both good and bad, are Peter and John. Their partnership, which may have lasted for many decades, serves as a godly example of Christians working together as partners in the kingdom to glorify God.

Peter And John: Fishing Buddies

In the south there is a common expression that describes people who have known each other for a long time, and therefore know a lot about each other: “We go way back.” Well, the two that we know best as Peter and John, go way back. Long before they were two of the eleven graduates (remember one of the twelve failed) of the Jesus School of Preaching Class of 33, they were co-workers and likely close friends.

When we are first introduced to Peter, we are also introduced to his brother Andrew and two other brothers that were partners with them in a fishing business, James and John (Luke 5:10). Zebedee, the father of James and John, was apparently a wealthy and influential man, as evidenced by him owning a fishing business that employed servants (Mark 1:20). Also, his son John was known by the high priest and he was even able to get Peter into the courtyard of the high priests house on the night they tried Jesus (John 18:15-16).

We know the two sons of Jona lived in the small fishing village of Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:5-14), and it is likely James and John did, too. Although it might not be explicitly provable from the Scriptures, when we look at all that is said in the Bible about these four, it is highly likely that they had known one another for a long time, possibly even their entire lives. They were likely very good friends as well as co-workers. **Every** listing of the apostles in the New Testament always puts these four together in the first of three groupings of four (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke

6:14-16; Acts 1:13). They were, no doubt, a very cohesive unit that had spent countless hours together in their village and on their boats. John and Peter could have been side by side on scorching hot days, sleepless nights, and fruitless fishing excursions, during bountiful harvests of fish or terrifying storms, and while tediously cleaning and mending nets. During all of that time, they likely talked extensively about everything under the sun, from family to fears to faith. A tight-knit bond tends to develop in those types of situations.

When people spend extended periods of time together, focusing on a common goal and existing in similar circumstances, they are usually welded together. One of the most enjoyable aspects of playing teams sports is the time spent with your teammates. It might be long days on the practice field, hour after hour on a bus going to away games, pushing each other to give a little more in the weight room, motivating others to give everything he has in the game, encouraging everyone to never give up, or just goofing off and having fun. This is also seen with fellow soldiers in the military. Your brothers-in-arms are often the difference between life and death; they keep you focused when you are afraid and watch your back when you are distracted.

Probably all of us have shared in similar experiences whether at work, on a team, or in the military, but do you also enjoy this blessing in the church? Do you view your fellow Christians at your regular place of worship as your closest friends and family or are they just people you “go to church with”? If your answer was the latter, you will need to spend time together in order to change that. The Bible says, “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly” (Prov. 18:24). Being friendly with your fellow congregants is a start, but it will take time together for strangers with the same beliefs to become your brothers and sisters as God intended. It is important that we spend time together outside of the assembly. If we only interact with one another in the assembly,

we will likely not be together enough to truly bond with one another. Just as Christians need to draw near to God more than four hours per week (Sunday worship and Bible classes and Wednesday Bible class), His children need to be together more often than this as well. We would all agree that worship is vitally important to the spiritual health of the church, but so also is fellowship.

The early church spent a great amount of time together on a regular and sometimes daily basis. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship...and all that believed were together, and had all things common... and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:42-46). Since the restoration movement, we have done wonders in restoring the doctrines and practices of worship in the church, but in the last generation we have done poorly, in most cases, restoring the fellowship of the first century church. God intended for these people to be our family, even choosing the designation of “brothers and sisters” to describe Christians and “house and family” to describe the church (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 4:17). Clearly His desire is that we enjoy closeness and intimacy that will result in our willingness to serve one another (Matt. 23:11) and even die for one another (John 15:13) if necessary. Are you fostering that sort of relationship personally with your brethren? Does the congregation where you worship promote these activities and opportunities for her members to have their hearts knit together? If they do, are you taking part and taking advantage of these opportunities? Fellowship meals are much more than just dinners. They are opportunities for us to share together in one of the most bonding practices available to humans, gathering around a table to eat. Eating together is such a powerful means of communion that the Lord included a shared meal as part of His worship. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not

the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Many of His parables used the illustration of meals and banquets to teach important spiritual truths. Whether at fellowship meals at the building, or in one another’s homes, Christians should spend time together around the dinner table to develop the closeness that John and Peter enjoyed.

Working together can also generate the kind of closeness that the church desperately needs. Look around the meeting house where you worship each week. Do you see any work that needs to be done on the building? Could the walls stand to be painted, carpets shampooed, bathrooms remodeled, or landscaping redone? Make a list, talk with the elders, and organize a group of brethren to conduct a work day or spend a few Saturdays working together. If the building is in order, help work at the homes of the members who might not be able to do it themselves, or who would just enjoy the time together. If the church building is in pristine condition and no members need any work done at their homes, organize a team to look to work that needs to be done in the community to help out our neighbors. You will recall that two of the apostle Paul’s closest friends were co-workers in the tentmaking trade, Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:3). During his missionary journeys, he and his travel companions worked together to provide for their own and encouraged other Christians to follow this example (2 Thess. 3:7-9). Sharing in physical labor brought about closeness in John and Peter, Paul and his brethren and it will do the same for us.

Peter And John: Preacher Pals

Most every youth day or devotional I have been a part of has ended with us singing the songs “Bind Us Together” or “A Common Love.” “Bind us together Lord, with chains

that cannot be broken, bind us together with love, there is only one God, there is only one King, there is only one body” reminds us that partnership, fellowship, comes through love and truth. Both songs illustrate what is a natural outgrowth of people being united in a common spiritual interest: closeness. I have always been taught that fellowship is more like a triangle than a line. I represent the angle at the base of one side of the triangle, you represent the base of the other side and God represents the apex of the triangle. As we each draw nearer to God, we get closer to one another as well. In this regard, Peter and John had an amazing opportunity afforded them as fellow students of the Lord Himself, but perhaps even long before this unique situation arose they were spiritual brothers. Peter, Andrew, James, and John “apparently shared common spiritual interests even before they met Christ. They evidently took a sabbatical from the fishing business, visited the wilderness where John the Baptist was preaching, and became disciples of John. That is where they first met Christ” (MacArthur 62; John 1:35-51). This common spiritual interest would serve as a catalyst for them being chosen for a very demanding (they forsook all, Luke 18:28), very difficult (hated by all, Matt. 24:9), but also very prestigious (one of only twelve chosen, Luke 6:13) and very rewarding (names written in the holy city, Revelation 21) position.

Guys who go through boot camp together are usually welded together for life, enough so that they would even give their lives for one another. Peter and John underwent a spiritual boot camp like no other for nearly three years, but it fused them together for a lifetime. Day after day they sat together at the feet of Jesus, gathered around a dinner table with Him, walked the roads of Israel with Him and sailed across the Sea of Galilee with Him. Together they witnessed the miracles He performed: raising the dead, feeding the masses, restoring sight to the blind and the ability to stand

to the crippled. They witnessed Him casting out demons, walking on water, and stilling a storm with just a word. They saw things together that very few saw and heard things that very few were privileged to hear. Jesus took them from fishermen to fishers of men in less than three years (Luke 5:10). They became preachers of the Gospel who enjoyed tremendous success, even opening the gates to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:18-19).

They became much more than just preachers; they became apostles and ambassadors for Christ Himself (2 Cor. 5:20). The miracles they saw Him perform, they performed (Mark 16:19-20). They were charged with the single most important work in the history of the world, spreading the Gospel to the world, converting lost sinners to Jesus, and helping infant congregations mature into spiritually self-reliant churches. Where would we be today if not for the work of men like Peter and John so long ago? The Lord placed a heavy burden on their backs, but He promised to help them carry it Himself, and He also taught them to help bear one another's burdens, too (Matt. 11:28-30; Gal. 6:2). The spiritual bond they formed with the Lord carried over to one another. Because they were both close to the Lord, they were close to each other.

I know firsthand the bond that is formed when brethren spend extended periods of time together in worship and study of the Scriptures. When I enrolled in the Memphis School of Preaching, I knew nothing about the Bible and I had no friends within two hundred miles. Two years later, I walked away with the equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree in Bible Studies and the closest friends I have ever known. I was privileged to learn by experience the interpretation of Proverbs 18:24, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." When you spend six or more hours a day studying the Bible together, praying, singing, preaching, and participating in other edifying spiritual works, your love for Christ spills

over onto others. My time in preaching school cannot compare to what the apostles experienced, but the love for my fellow preachers was the same as what they shared. One of the reasons is because drawing near to God causes you to learn to love others unconditionally. Rather than allowing hurtful words or careless actions to drive a wedge between us, Christians learn from the Lord to be willing to forgive (Matt. 6:12), to be willing to ask for forgiveness (Jas. 5:16) and to go to one another when a problem arises (Matt. 18:15; Matt. 5:23-24). Another reason is because the Lord teaches us to seek unity (John 17:21) and have the same goals spiritually and to be united in doctrine (1 Cor. 1:10ff). Eliminating these sources of division enables our relationships to bloom and reach their full potential.

It does not take two years at a preacher training school to enjoy the spiritual unity and closeness that is such a blessing to me and was such a blessing to John and Peter. Wise is the congregation that sees the benefit and need for its various types (marrieds, singles, divorcees, youth, seniors, leaders) of members to spend time together outside of corporate worship. Youth devotionals, marriage retreats, divorce care, mom's night out, Bible camp, leadership seminars and prayer breakfasts are just a few of the limitless resources available to us that nurture a greater devotion to Christ and bond with His people. Do you want your children to be surrounded by Christian friends and to marry a godly spouse? If so, make sure they have opportunities to be with those like-minded young people in a spiritually healthy and stimulating environment. Provide them with places to have fun and to learn how to serve Christ. Do you want your young couples to have the roots and foundations they need to weather the storms their marriage will face? Help them to have a support group that is going through the same trials and can rejoice and weep with them (Rom. 12:15). Is it important for people who are hurting and lost due to broken homes and marriages to find

solid ground and begin rebuilding their lives? Surround them with others who have made the same mistakes, suffered the consequences, and discovered a strong faith in and love for Jesus. Peter and John loved one another and were close throughout their lives because they loved the Lord together and drew closer to Him throughout their lives and the same will be true for us if we do today what they did then.

Peter And John: Best Friends

I do not hesitate to tell you that Mark Reynolds is the best friend I have ever had. We have shared more laughs and shed more tears than I could ever remember. He knows things about me that my own parents do not even know, and I would trust him with my life if the situation ever called for it. Although we are separated by nearly five hundred miles geographically, all it would take would be a phone call and the words “Mark, I need you” to bring him to my doorstep. Mark is blessed with physical siblings. I was not, but in him the Lord gave me a true brother, a brother I would not have if not for the Lord and a brother I would not be so close to if not for the work of the Lord. Mark helps me to be more like what Jesus wants me to be. Our friendship began at the Memphis School of Preaching in 1997 and I pray that it will never end, not even with the grave, but continue for eternity at the throne of God. I hope you have a friend like that. Peter did, and his name was John.

Peter and John, along with John’s brother James, were part of the Lord’s “inner circle.” These three were the closest to the Lord of all the apostles. They were privileged to see and hear things that no one else did, not even the other apostles. This trio was invited by Jesus to enter the home of a ruler of a synagogue to witness the resurrection of a little girl (Luke 8:49-56). John and Peter were trusted with the somber task of preparing the final Passover the Lord would participate in, which culminated in the institution of the Lord’s Supper

(Luke 22:7-14). These three were called to a high mountain where they witnessed His transfiguration and conversation with Elias and Moses (Matt. 17:1-3). These three were invited into the most intimate scene in the life of Jesus, His final night of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane before He was betrayed and crucified (Matthew 26:36-38). Two of the most spiritually uplifting and profound scenes in history were played out before their very eyes. They were far more than spectators—they were joint participants— and they would never be the same because of it.

This does not mean that Jesus loved these three more than the others—He loved even His enemies enough to die for them (Rom. 5:8) —only that He drew nearer to them than anyone else. Or perhaps it was the other way around; they drew nearer to Him than any of the others. “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:8). John is often referred to as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:7), perhaps because we read of him being hidden in the protection of His arms (John 21:20). As for Peter, whenever the Lord asked for a volunteer, asked a question, or wanted something done, it was Peter who responded. The argument could be made that Peter often made a mess of these opportunities, but it cannot be overlooked that he was willing to respond immediately. When Jesus was walking on water, it was Peter who asked if he could walk on the water to come to be with Him (Matt. 14:28-30). When He asked the apostles what they thought of Him, it was Peter who confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). Both Peter and John shared a precious faith in Christ, common spiritually enlightening experiences, a desire to be near the Lord, and an undying devotion to Him, all of which cemented them as the closest of friends for life.

Peter and John were not just close friends when Jesus was around. They would remain friends for many more years after the ascension of the Christ. In the earliest days of the

church, Peter and John continued to be “prayer partners” as they went up to the temple to pray together and wound up healing a man born lame (Acts 3:1-11). When they preached Christ in Jerusalem, they were called before the council and together withstood their hypocrisy. The years spent together in the presence of Jesus changed them, a fact that was noticed by the council, but their bond did not change (Acts 4:1-13). A few years after Jesus returned to Heaven, a missionary, Phillip, was sent to preach Christ in Samaria (Acts 8:5ff). While enjoying tremendous success and great responses, Phillip was limited in his abilities. Although he possessed spiritual gifts himself, he did not have the ability to confer these gifts on others. When word of the conversions in Samaria reached Jerusalem, the apostles sent two old friends and longtime co-workers, Peter and John, to lay hands upon the new Christians so that they might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). Once their work in Samaria was completed, together they continued to carry out the work that the Lord gave them to do and “preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” (Acts 8:25). Whether fighting, preaching, praying, or healing, Peter and John were more than co-workers; they were best friends.

Aside from their bond as preachers of the Gospel and servants of the Lord, they had a lot in common personally as well: one had a tendency to shoot off at the mouth and the other was nicknamed by Jesus “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17). Although we tend to think of him as the “apostle of love,” John did not always have a lovingly calm temperament. When a Samaritan village refused to give quarter to Jesus and His apostles, John wanted to “command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did” (Luke 9:51-54). His tone and intentions were so harsh that the Lord was forced to rebuke him (Luke 9:55-56). John’s dear friend, partner, co-worker and fellow apostle Peter was not much different. If anything, He may have been even more harsh.

Peter went as far as to rebuke the Lord (Matt. 16:22). We do not know if John would really have acted on his words or if this was just “big talk,” but we know that Peter certainly would. He did not hesitate to draw a sword and swing at the head of Malchus, the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). The rumble of thunder is harmless, but the strike of lightning can be deadly. Peter seems to be the lightning to John’s thunder.

In their shared experiences, united goals, joint works, and communion of sufferings, Peter and John share many characteristics with two best friends from the Old Testament, David and Jonathan. Their bond was undeniable. “The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul...Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul” (1 Samuel 18:1-3). The examples of Peter and John and David and Jonathan’s friendship are beneficial to us because it is this type of love that God commands His children to have for one another. The Lord used one of these two participants in this powerful friendship, John, to address this subject above all others. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light...this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren...if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another...if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us...he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 2:10; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:14; 1 John 3:16; 4:11-12; 1 John 4:21). The people who populate the family of God are the people we are destined to spend eternity with. They are some of the best people in the world. God has given us these people to be our family and friends, our strength and allies, our help and future. “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father,

or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time" (Mark 10:29-30). We need these friends to help us to remain faithful, strong, zealous, and active in the work of the Lord. Obviously it is not possible for us to become "best friends" with every Christian, but we are to love all of our brethren. We are to be friends with our brethren. There will be some with whom we share an almost natural bond and kinship. The Christian who finds such a brother/friend is truly blessed by God and will likely be able to enjoy tremendous success in their faith and in their service to the King of kings.

Christians need one another. The wise Solomon instructed us that, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9-12). Peter and John had their share of flaws, but they also had enough sense to realize they needed others if they were going to do the work the Lord gave them to do and make it to His throne one day. God bless each of us despite our flaws, faults and weaknesses with that same wisdom.

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**THE
POLEMICIST**

CHAPTER 30

Ready Always To Give An Answer

Caleb Colley

Let us reason together” is not the only thesis of Christianity, but it is critical because God gave us our rational capacity and expects us to use it to His glory (Isa. 1:18, KJV; cf. Warren, **Logic**). This is a brief introduction to a particular application of reason: Defending the hope involved in Christianity. Peter enjoins this: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). The word *answer* in this text is translated from *apologia*, the Greek word meaning “verbal defense, speech in defense” (Thayer 65). Therefore, “Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith” (Geisler 37). Faith and reason cooperate rather than oppose one another in Christianity.¹

Biblical passages where *apologia* or derivatives appear help us understand the meaning of apologetics. For example, Festus explained to Agrippa that the reason Paul had not been delivered into the hands of the Jews was because “it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense [*apologias*, CC] concerning the charge laid against him” (Acts 25:16, ESV). Godly sorrow prompted the Corinthians to repent and want to “clear” themselves (*apologian*—CC; 2 Cor. 7:11). The Philippians supported Paul

in the “defense” (*apologia*) of the gospel (Phil. 1:7; cf. 1:17). Paul greatly appreciated prayerful, moral support, especially because at his “first answer” (first *apologia*), probably before the Roman emperor, no one stood with him (2 Tim. 4:16; see Barnes, **Notes on the New Testament: Thessalonians** 252). While the word *apologia* does not appear in Acts 7, we might suggest that the deacon Stephen offered an apology—a defense—in the speech that led directly to his martyrdom. Apologetics was an integral part of Christian ministry in the early church, and it involved a rational, written or verbal, defense of the Christian belief system.²

There is no Biblical indication that Peter’s command that the Christian be prepared for apologetics should be confined to antiquity. A review of the cultural landscape of our time would indicate that the need to defend Christianity is great.³ An understanding of *apologia* and an appreciation for the divine command for us to defend the faith leads us to ask at least two major questions: (1) What kind of answer are we to prepare, in order to meet challenges to our hope?; and (2) How should we prepare to give this answer?

What Kind of an Answer Should We Prepare?

There is more than one way in which people answer the question, “Why do you have hope in Christianity?” Those who claim Christ are often divided concerning the apologetic approach that is most effective or even Biblical. By considering each of five general approaches in turn, we can better define the kind of answer Peter is, by inspiration, instructing us to prepare. We should bear in mind that these divisions will be somewhat artificial (i.e., an author who typically is categorized as being one “type” of apologist may not always seem to fit a rigid mold) and perhaps too simple. Also, it is not implied that apologists are Christians in the Biblical sense simply because they write in defense of generally Christian theology—we may not agree on every

point with any apologist. Still, it is instructive to understand each general approach in order to clarify and strengthen our own approach.

Experiential Apologetics

A purely experiential apologist seeks to validate Christianity by first asking: “Have we experienced God?” The experientialist appeals “primarily, if not exclusively, to experience as evidence for Christian faith” (Geisler 43). According to the experientialist, we know God exists because we experience His being mystically as present in the world around us.⁴ A person who justifies Christianity solely on the basis of the benefits of Christianity to life (e.g., rids one of harmful habits, makes one a better employee, makes family life more enjoyable, etc.) is practicing experiential apologetics. Rational proofs are invalid according to the experientialist. For Kierkegaard, for example, “To try to prove God’s existence by objective, i.e., rational means, is impossible because God is Subject and is known only by our subjectivity” (Ramm, *Varieties* 53; cf. Westphal; Davenport, et al., 27). Those who claim to have had a supernatural “conversion experience,” as John Calvin did, fall into this category generally (Kerr and Mulder 24-28).⁵

The experiential approach is sometimes expressed in mystical terms and may sound spiritually appealing. Also, life is a temporal and spatial experience (and the Christian life is the best of all [John 10:10]). However, experiential apologetics is absent from Scripture—Christian apologists *reasoned* about their faith rather than “basing their credibility on some mystical or transcendental experience” as many false religionists do (Miller). Furthermore, while we are assured of God’s working in our lives (Rom. 8:28), the persuasive value of personal experience is dubious in an age of increasing skepticism and materialism. Even those who would separate faith from reason utilize reason in their arguments.⁶

Presuppositional Apologetics

The presuppositionalist seeks to validate Christianity by first asking: “Does anything except Christianity allow us to make sense of the world?” One who takes the presuppositional approach believes that one must presuppose that Christianity is true and then proceed to show that all other religious systems are false (Geisler 44). Greg Bahnsen, a presuppositionalist, defines the approach: “Presuppositional apologetics as taught by Cornelius Van Til urges the Christian to argue with unbelievers in an ‘indirect’ fashion, doing an internal analysis of the unbeliever’s worldview (his fundamental assumptions about reality, knowledge, and ethics) and comparing it to the worldview revealed in the Bible” (parenthetical item in orig.). Presuppositionalists, with philosophers such as David Hume, reject the proofs for the existence of God even though they believe that God exists. Gordon H. Clark expressed this view: “The cosmological argument for the existence of God, most fully developed by Thomas Aquinas, is a fallacy. It is not possible to begin with sensory experience and proceed by formal laws of logic to God’s existence as a conclusion” (qtd. in Fernandes; cf. Van Til 31).

While the presuppositionalist is right that worldview is important, the presuppositional approach is in conflict with Paul’s prescription of the cosmological argument in Romans 1:19-20: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (ESV). God does not expect us to presuppose that His revelation is true; He wants us to examine the evidence.⁷ People will be lost, not because they failed to make a presupposition, but because they failed to reason from the revealed order to the One who revealed it.

A presuppositionalist once told me that the unbeliever has a “heart problem,” rather than intellectual difficulty, that keeps him from obeying Christ. This presuppositionalist explained that the unbeliever was unable to develop faith rationally because, having a “sinful nature,” he was unwilling to presuppose that Christianity is valid. I admitted that some are prejudiced against Christianity but then asked whether it was at least possible that an unbeliever wants to obey Christ but has an intellectual objection, such as the problem of evil, to the existence of God. The presuppositionalist, in this case at least, admitted that such was possible, thus voiding his argument.

Evidential Apologetics

The strictly evidential apologist asks, “What evidence is there that Christianity is valid?” Apologists who fall into this broad category stress “the need for evidence in support of Christian truth claims. The evidence can be rational, historical, archaeological, and even experiential” (Geisler 42). For example, Josh McDowell’s book **Evidence that Demands a Verdict** starts with evidence that the Bible is unique (17). Bernard Ramm’s *Protestant Christian Evidences* is another example of the evidentiary approach. The pure evidentialist may treat evidence for God’s existence but does not hold it logically necessary to start by establishing the validity of theism (i.e., that God exists). “Christian evidences” are popular because they are persuasive and overwhelmingly numerous. Evidentiary arguments can be used in conjunction with the theistic arguments of classical apologetics (discussed below).

To illustrate the significance of evidence to the Christian, consider an example from the creation/evolution controversy. W.R. Bird’s monumental, two-volume work *The Origin of Species Revisited* presents seven lines of evidence concerning the fossil record, and the conclusion is decisive, as Ralph Gilmore has noted: “Life forms abruptly

appear in the fossil evidence, and there are systematic gaps between categories of plants and animals that cannot be explained by the fossil evidence or by genetics. Of course, there would be no systematic gaps to explain had there not first been abrupt appearance, given the viewpoint of a supernatural origin of the universe” (135). Bird produced a systematic, anti-Darwinist interpretation of the fossil record that is purely scientific and shows—without religious appeals—that paleontology disproves evolution. Christians can use Bird’s research to show that the honest evaluation of the paleontological data is replete with hopeless difficulties and unexpected anomalies apart from a Creator.⁸ We could illustrate time and again the significance of dealing with the evidence in preparing our answer for those who inquire about our hope. Recall, however, that the strict evidentialist does not think it logically necessary for apologetics to begin with the existence of God.

Historical Apologetics

The strictly historical apologist asks “Does history validate Christianity?” He “stresses historical evidence as the basis for demonstrating the truth of Christianity. These apologists believe that the truth of Christianity, including the existence of God, can be proven from the historical evidence alone” (Geisler 43). He deals with a particular kind of evidence: historical data. John Warwick Montgomery is considered a historical apologist, and his clarion call is that “Christian faith is founded on fact” (xiv). He wrote: “When world-views collide, an appeal to common facts is the only preservative against philosophical solipsism and religious anarchy....Non-Christian positions must be destroyed factually and the Christian religion established factually” (**Faith Founded** 119). Also, Montgomery’s **The Quest for Noah’s Ark** (1974), a survey of Biblical and extra-Biblical historical data, is typical of the historical apologist’s project. It is faith-building to observe that the archaeologist’s trowel

continually uncovers artifacts that corroborate the Bible and never any artifacts that contradict the Biblical historians.⁹ And we would have to do some serious “backtracking” if we found that the Bible writers were wrong about historical or scientific facts. Still, Christian faith is not proportional to the number of extant artifacts that corroborate Scripture. While it is imminently interesting that the Hittite empire was discovered, Christians defended the faith prior to that discovery (Sayce; cf. Winckler 677-696). The strictly historical apologist’s conclusion is that the Bible must be inspired **because** it is historically accurate and that Christianity must be true **because** it fits the historical facts.

Classical Apologetics

The classical apologist asks, “Does God exist? If so, what follows from that fact?” He objects to every other apologetic system on the basis that theism must be established first. This approach “stresses arguments for the existence of God... as well as the historical evidence supporting the truth of Christianity. Classical apologetics is characterized by two basic steps: theistic and evidentiary arguments” (Geisler 41). It was in this spirit that I began a book on Christian leadership for teenagers by discussing the existence of God and stated: “The rest of this book will not make much sense to you if you do not believe in God” (Colley, **G.U.A.R.D.** 9). Evidence is crucial to the classical apologist, but he believes that the evidence for the existence of God should be considered first. Apologists of the classical mold include Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and more recently C.S. Lewis, Henry M. Morris, William Lane Craig, and Norman Geisler.¹⁰

Our apologetic must not be purely pragmatic (i.e., what we think will “work”), but Biblical (i.e., every argument must be authorized by Christ [Col. 3:17; cf. Warren, **When Is**]). We will utilize evidence that the Bible is inspired by God and that Jesus is God’s Son but present this evidence in the light of theism. Lewis, for example, began **Mere Christianity** by

discussing the moral argument for God's existence. Likewise, Paul's address to pagans on Mars' Hill did not deal with evidences for the resurrection, but rather an argument for the existence of God and for creationism (Acts 17:23-28). On the other hand, Peter's sermon on Pentecost dealt with the divinity of Christ, because those present were already theists (Acts 2:14-39). Because Peter's audience was already convinced that God exists, Peter could begin his apologetic by providing evidence that God raised Jesus from the dead (cf. Acts 4:10; Acts 5:30); he did not need to establish God's existence first. Indeed, the council members' response to Gamaliel's argument indicates their respect for God, even though they were reluctant to admit that God's power was with Peter (Acts 5:34-42).

Peter's command in 1 Peter 3:15 is general. Whoever honestly asks why we have hope in Jesus deserves an answer. Barnes wrote on this point: "Any one has a right respectfully to ask another on what grounds he regards his religion as true.... [W]e are under obligation to state those grounds in the best manner that we are able" (**Notes on the New Testament: James** 172). Our answers will vary depending on who asks the questions, but this variation occurs within the apologetic system we have introduced.

How Should We Prepare?

Once we have decided on our apologetic method, how can we implement that method?

Study the Bible.

Our hope for eternity is grounded in the pattern of the revealed Word (Heb. 6:19; Rom. 6:17). It is unreasonable for a person to acknowledge this and then treat knowledge of the Bible as unimportant (Jas. 1:21). Until we are well-versed in the Scriptures, cognitive dissonance in the area of apologetics will probably pain us to the point that we will be unwilling to defend our hope amidst critical scrutiny. Furthermore, Bible

knowledge is required to answer allegations that Biblical doctrine is inconsistent with itself (Lyons 5-19) and to point out those internal evidences that demonstrate the inspiration of the Bible.¹¹

Use Resources.

We would be wise to take advantage of the wealth of apologetics material our own brotherhood has produced. A good starting point for the individual or group is the overview of Christian evidences, **Surveying the Evidence** (Jackson, Lyons, and Butt). I frequently recommend the apologetics information on two Web sites developed by members of the church of Christ: www.ChristianCourier.com and www.ApologeticsPress.org.

Engage Others.

Having armed ourselves with a measure of information concerning apologetics, we must kindly engage unbelievers and non-Christians in discussions about Christianity with the ultimate goal of bringing them to the Lord (Matt.16:26; Matt. 28:19-20). Study in apologetics is not for the purpose of winning arguments or demonstrating intellectual supremacy (Peter prescribes meekness), but rather to fulfill a divine command and remove “roadblocks” between unbelievers and saving faith (Eph. 2:8-9). All the expertise in the world will not matter unless we apply it to godly purposes.

Conclusion

Recently, I had a conversation with several Christian teenagers at a Christian summer camp. As an exercise in apologetics, I asked them why they believed that Jesus was the Son of God. The teens said that they had faith. I asked why they had faith. The thoughtful young people replied that they believed because the Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God. I agreed, but then asked them why they believed that the Bible was accurate in its assessment of Jesus. One particularly bright youngster cited 2 Timothy 3:16, appealing

to the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Continuing the exercise, I responded by noting that the Bible is not the only book that claims inspiration for itself, and asked why we should think that the Bible was inspired and works such as the **Quran** and the **Book of Mormon** were not. There was no answer.

I was glad that a Christian was asking the questions in an effort to solidify faith, but saddened by the realization that a skeptic or atheist might have been asking the questions in an effort to dismantle faith. We immediately had a “crash course” in classical apologetics. My limited experience suggests that the sincere ignorance of those youngsters with whom I spoke is somewhat typical of many of us. The world has good questions concerning our hope. God has provided the answers for both young and old. May He bless our efforts to learn and articulate His answers.

Notes

1. A study of this integration is important and has been done elsewhere, but is beyond the purview of our topic (see Lipe; Sztanyo).
2. Further information concerning how the Greek mind understood the rhetorical form of the apology is available in Socrates' **Apology** and corresponding commentaries (Plato 17-36; Stone).
3. See Meacham 34-38; Colley “Secular Humanism”; Lyons and Butt.
4. See “Meister Eckhart.”
5. Calvin typically is not considered an experientialist.
6. See Colley, “Reasoning.”
7. See Lipe.
8. See Gilmore 132-150.
9. See Butt, “Archaeology and the New Testament” and “Archaeology and the Old Testament.”

10. See Augustine, Anselm, Kreeft, Lewis (**The Problem and Mere Christianity**), Morris (**The Long War and The God**), Craig, and Geisler and Bocchino.

11. See Butt, **Behold**.

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CHAPTER 31

The Debate Over Circumcision

Tony Lawrence

The apostle Peter seemingly was always at the forefront, sometimes exhibiting courage and conviction and at other times cowering with fear and inconsistency. He was a very colorful man who in many ways mirrors the struggle that exists in the lives of various disciples of the Lord. It is entirely fitting that this lectureship examines Peter's life with a view toward appreciating his greatness as a servant of God, while also frankly facing his failures. The portion of text assigned for this lesson emphasizes an occasion in which Peter learned, grew, and exhibited courage.

In order to adequately address the topic, one must consider several aspects of the background and details of the passages. These items will furnish an outline for the lesson: (1) The Matter of Circumcision; (2) The Maturing of Cephas; and (3) A Medley of Conclusions.

Matter of Circumcision

The matter of contention that resulted in the debates was that of circumcision. It was those of the "circumcision" who contended with Peter because he went to and ate with "uncircumcised" men (Acts 11:2-3, KJV). Before one could expect to understand the debate fully, he must understand the matter of circumcision and its importance to those involved. So, one must start with at least a brief survey

of the issue of circumcision and understand its practice in the first century.

The rite of circumcision was so intertwined with Israel that it became a synonym of the people themselves (Gal. 2:7-12). While Jesus drew attention to circumcision as having a basis in the Law, he noted that it preceded the Law, being given to Abraham (John 7:22). Circumcision was God's "sign" of the covenant between Him and Abraham's descendants (Gen. 17:9-14; Rom. 4:11). It was a requirement not only of those physical descendants of Abraham, but also the foreigner or stranger who lived among them and wanted to serve God (Exod. 12:48-49). As an early illustration of this principle, the sons of Jacob stressed the necessity of circumcision for those who would be accepted into a close relationship with the children of Israel (Gen. 34). While this was a deceitful ploy on their part, it nevertheless demonstrates the principle that those accepted into Israel must be circumcised.

It is not difficult to see why some in the first century saw Christianity as a sect of or an outgrowth of Judaism (cf. Acts 24:5; Acts 24:14; Acts 28:22). The Gospel was first preached **to Jews by Jews** (Acts 2:5; Rom. 1:16). The apostles of Christ were all Jewish men and on their first major preaching tour (often referred to as the limited commission), they were sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6). Jesus Himself was a Jew and kept the Law perfectly. Thus, many of those who became converts of Christ simply saw this new way as an extension of their heritage from Abraham.

By the time of the New Testament, there were those of various nations who desired to worship and serve the God of Israel, recognizing Him as the One True God. These Gentile converts were known as proselytes and they worshiped with the Jews (Acts 2:10; Acts 13:43). While there is much that is still debated regarding the various types of converts to Judaism, it is generally admitted that a "proselyte" would have to do three things: (1) be circumcised, (2) be baptized, and

(3) offer sacrifices at the temple (Nunnally). Lake observes, “Christian baptism has its specific background in the OT acts of ritual purification as well as the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism and the ritual lustrations of the Qumran community. Although Jewish proselyte baptism has been questioned, the references in Epictetus, the Sibylline Oracles, and the Mishnah confirm a first-century practice.” What the Scriptures clearly reveal is that the Pharisees were aggressive in making proselytes (Matt. 23:15) and some of that sect who became believers were pressing the matter (Acts 15:5). They had previously made proselytes by circumcising, baptizing, and enjoining the offering of sacrifices at the Temple. In their minds, it made perfect sense that the Gentiles should “convert” by not only being baptized but also by being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses.

Thus, one can begin to see the contended matter developing. The difficulty began when the Gospel was carried to the Gentiles and they began to accept it. Would they be required to become Jews before becoming Christians? That was the crux of the debate. Many of the Judaizing teachers saw this as a matter of faith. How would the early church address this situation? Peter, along with Paul and others, was instrumental in standing up to address this situation. Peter’s involvement in facing this problem was recorded in Acts 11 and 15. Luke then recorded Peter’s preparation by God to handle this matter.

Maturing Of Cephas

Cephas or Peter (his better known Greek name) could certainly be considered a “diamond in the rough.” He was a man of tremendous zeal and talent whose enthusiasm was often right on target; however, there were other times in which it totally missed. One is so impressed at his insight and the confidence he expressed during his confession of the Christ (Matt. 16:16), but that impression quickly turns to dismay

as shortly thereafter he contradicted Him on His mission (Matt. 16:21-23). As certainly as the Lord praised Peter for his heavenly confession, He subsequently rebuked him for his worldly thinking. In a similar way, Peter expressed great faith in Jesus when he asked Him to command him to come to Him on the water (Matt. 14:28-29), then exhibited such doubt when he saw the wind (Matt. 14:30-31). Jesus saw in Peter the potential to be a great leader among the brethren. While He knew that Peter would fail in standing against the persecution surrounding His arrest and crucifixion, He also knew that Peter would “turn again,” and that eventually Peter could “strengthen the brethren” (Luke 22:32). Thus, Peter was a man who could appropriately be described as taking two steps forward and one step back. He was being molded and mentored by the Master.

Peter stood the strongest when he looked toward and listened to the voice of God. It was only when he allowed himself to be distracted by worldly things that he failed. In preparation of Peter, God provided him with a vision that instructed and matured him regarding the Gentiles. On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up with the eleven to declare the Gospel. They provided the directions for obedience that involved repentance and baptism resulting in remission of sins. Peter then stressed, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The “afar off” was clearly a reference to the Gentiles. Yet Peter evidently did not fully grasp what he had preached by inspiration. It was only in Acts 10 that he learned “of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Peter had learned the lesson that one must listen to the directions of God. While rehearsing the events, he plainly stated, “And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing

doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house" (Acts 11:12). He further explained how the household of Cornelius had received the Spirit's gifts and observed, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). In chapter 15, Peter's primary line of reasoning again called attention to the fact that this was God's choice to use him and that they should hear the Gospel to believe: "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7). Peter's position was then reinforced by the teaching of Paul, Barnabas, and James.

It is sad to note that Peter did not always live in complete harmony with his teaching. Paul had to rebuke his behavior in Antioch by pointing out his inconsistency and hypocrisy. Paul specifically addressed the very point: "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. 2:14).

Medley of Conclusions

There are numerous applications that can be derived from these texts. It is the challenge of modern man to learn how to apply the teachings of Scripture to the context of the world in which he lives. The purpose of this section will be to set forth some of the conclusions which one may draw from this circumstance involving Peter and the debates that surrounded it.

1. There will arise issues of contention within the Lord's church. Many of those who bring about contention will do so based on their previous practices. Sadly, those who insist on doing something that they had previously practiced

within their religious activity have many times disrupted the fellowship of the Lord's church. To them these practices may seem perfectly natural and Scriptural. These must be addressed in a kind but firm way.

2. Men from time to time seek to bind matters of opinion upon others. The actual practice of circumcision was in itself neither right nor wrong (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 6:15). In the same way, the personal observance of dietary restrictions is not a matter of faith (1 Cor. 8:8). However, the problem arises when these matters of judgment are bound upon others (Rom. 14). Where God has legislated there can be no matter of judgment; however, one must never bind what God has left to man's discretion. The proponents of circumcision had stated that unless the Gentiles were circumcised, they could not be saved. This was a serious matter that had to be addressed. Paul said, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:5). It is just as wrong to bind something which God has not bound as it is to loose something that God has not loosed.

3. There is a time and place to "stand up" for the Lord's cause. Peter not only learned the importance of loyalty to Jesus, but he also learned to listen to His voice. As Peter stated in his first epistle, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). In this debate, Peter used the only indisputable standard—he referenced the will of God. To those who respect the will of God, the Word will be the end of all disputes.

4. When one stands up for the Lord, there will be those who will take note of the boldness and will be encouraged to stand themselves (Phil. 1:14; Acts 4:13; Acts 4:29-31). In Acts 15, Peter's example of standing up was followed by Paul, Barnabas, and James.

5. In order to adequately meet an opponent in debate, one must be sure he understands what he is saying and the position from which he argues. It is shameful for one to fail to do adequate preparation to meet another in debate. Jesus taught the value of one sitting down and counting the cost (Luke 14:28-32). There are two aspects of counting the cost. First, one must understand the meaning of the topic under discussion and what God says on the subject. Second, one must evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of debating about the topic. Paul clearly showed that there are some matters which should never become a matter of contention (2 Tim. 2:14-15), and Solomon stressed that some issues should be resolved privately (Prov. 25:9).

Conclusion

The debates of Peter in Acts 11 and 15 reveal a man trying to follow God's plan in the face of strong, forceful personalities. He stood strong for God and insisted that God wanted the Gentiles to hear the Gospel and be saved. Peter desired only to accomplish God's will and work for the salvation of all mankind. Those who stand up as he did must strive to have the same desire and dedication to God's truth.

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CHAPTER 32

Confronting False Teachers and Scoffers

Robert Taylor

Introduction

Minus exception, it is an annual delight to participate in the great Power Lectureship as I have done on all previous ones. My thanks to Wade, Larry, Con, and all Southaven members for the extended invitation to speak and write for the 2009 Lectureship. Wade does a job par excellence in crafting a good, grand, and great program of studies. The one on Peter is surely an idea whose time has come. Special thanks are due to Tommy and Peggy where Irene and I stay each year. Food and fellowship in their hospitable home are par excellence. Simon Peter is a marvelous mentor in helping us to refute false teachers and false teaching by methods tried and tested. Peter's life had been spent in a dynamic defense of truth against Pharisaic traditionalism, persistent Judaism, Sadducean skepticism, pagan practices, snobbish Gnosticism just emerging, and innovations he witnessed among his own brethren. Peter had been trained by the Master Controversialist of all times—the Christ Who drew the sword of the Spirit on Jordan's banks subsequently to His immersion and threw the scabbard away permanently. Peter was inspired to write by the Spirit of truth who was an enemy of all error. Peter knew that error must be opposed and exposed like he did in 2 Peter 2-3. He had witnessed Jesus in such exposing actions in Matthew 7:15-20 and all of Matthew 23. He was

on the same wavelength as was the militant Jude in his one chapter missive. Peter did not consider it an unloving thing to unmask the errors of hardened, impenitent, and persistent false teachers and scoffers.

False Teachers in Second Peter Two

The Old Testament had more than its share of false teachers such as Jannes, Jambres, Balaam, Korah, Abiram, Dathan, Zedekiah in Ahab's era, Hananiah in Jeremiah's time, and countless others. They also were part and parcel of the first century in general and Peter's old age in particular. Peter said they would appear in the future. Jude declared they are already here plaguing God's people. In sly and secretive fashion, they would bring in damnable doctrines or destructive teachings. They would even deny Christ's Deity though he had bought them with His precious blood. They would sow error and reap sure and swift destruction awaiting false teachers. They would influence not just few, but many. Both the leaders and the lead are on a speeding roller coaster, as we might express it currently, with eternal Gehenna the sure destiny. Evil shall be spoken against the way of truth by these purveyors of falsehood. Their deceived followers will swallow such hook, line, and sinker (2 Peter 2:2). Covetousness will be their stock-in-trade. Feigned words will be employed. These are artful words used by slick manipulators who view their prey as merchandising prospects. Soul salvation is far removed from their Satanic minds or devilish dispositions. Damnation for such will neither linger nor slumber. It will come surely and swiftly (2 Peter 2:3).

Three examples of daring disobedience are then presented by the inspired apostle. Angels, when they sinned, were cast down to hell (Tartarus or place of dark punishment in the Haden realm) reserved for sure judgment ahead. Jude alludes to this in verse 6 of his militant missive (2 Peter 2:4).

Noah's evil peers were not spared as the God of demanded justice brought "in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5). God saved the obedient eight and punished the disobedient many with watery destruction.

Sodom and Gomorrha (also Admah and Zeboim as we learn from Deut. 29:23) were turned into ashes (2 Peter 2:6). They were condemned with a complete overthrow by divine sovereignty. They remain a standing example to "those that after should live ungodly." Ten righteous souls in Sodom could have saved the doomed city. That number could not be found in Genesis 19. (See Genesis 18:23-33 for Abrahamic intercession for Sodom.)

In verses 7-8 Lot is called just and righteous. His soul was vexed daily by what he heard and saw from the Sodomite sinners, the very neighbors he had chosen to live among in Genesis 13. The judicious commentator James MacKnight thought Lot may have lived in Sodom for sixteen years. We are made to wonder if his soul were not vexed daily as he saw what Sodom was doing to his family. Surely, he lived to rue the deadly choice he made in Genesis 13. Some of his family remained in Sodom. In the latter part of Genesis 19 the incestuous unions the drunken Lot had with two of his daughters were sad and tragic beyond description. In verse 9 we are told that God will "deliver the godly out of temptations" and will "reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

The profile of false teachers is drawn vividly beginning in verse 10. They walk after the flesh; truth is not to their liking at all. The lust (evil desires) of uncleanness is their malicious major. They hold government in total derision; for it they have nothing but contempt; they are a lawless breed. They are presumptuous, rebellious, and deeply defiant. They have one will—their own. God's will does not matter and neither does the will of others. They were somewhat like the unjust judge in Luke 18:4 who feared not God and regarded not man. I say

somewhat because, at least, he was moved to judicial action by the persistent widow. Nothing but self-will moved these false teachers and leaders of destruction Peter profiled.

These arrogant teachers of fatal falsehood dared do what angels refused to do (v. 11). Angels are greater in power and might than false teachers, but they do not “bring railing accusation against them before the Lord.” Jude 9 tells us what Michael, the archangel, did when contending with the devil relative to Moses’ body. Michael left vengeance in the hands of the Lord. This is where Paul left it in Romans 12:19. This is where we need to leave it as well.

These false teachers were likened to “natural brute beasts made to be taken and destroyed.” This is an in-depth evil embedded in their speech springing from depraved hearts. Their ignorance was glaring but did not steel their lips nor stay their tongues. Total destruction awaited them. They chose corruption and in it they would perish. It would be an open grave to them. Sin pays a reward and it surely would with them. They did not wait till the cover of darkness but rioted in daylight hours. They had lost all ability to blush. Shame was a stranger to them. They were not unspotted from the world that James 1:27 demanded. Spots and blemishes were their transgressing trademarks. They were totally unlike what Paul portrayed in Ephesians 5:25-27. Paul envisioned a glorious church minus spot or wrinkle. By heart, lips, and life, they aided Satan in producing an inglorious church filled with blemishes, spots, and wrinkles. They feasted on falsehood while consuming food with consecrated Christians, with generous saints. There were no depths of deception to which they would not descend willingly.

Having eyes filled with adultery, it may well have been the case that they lusted after the very Christian women who prepared and served the very food they ate at these love-feasts (2 Peter 2:14). All that separated them from overt adultery were time, opportunity, and a willing sexual partner. They

were obsessed with such lascivious longings and would not cease such fantasies. Lascivious women can also have eyes filled with adultery for appealing men. Neither gender is immune from such!

They beguiled “unstable souls” or enticed “unsteadfast souls” (2 Peter 2:14, ASV). These became their prey. They used bait here, perhaps an allusion to Peter’s former occupation. He knew what it was to bait fish. They exercised their covetous hearts but not to godliness as Paul taught in 1 Timothy 4:7-8. They practiced endlessly to be skillful and proficient in covetous practices. They were “cursed children.” This is a Hebrew idiom where character is linked with sonship. They became a curse to themselves and all others they influenced. Hadean torment and eternal Gehenna awaited both the teachers and the taught.

These false teachers “have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray” (2 Peter 2:15). This means they had forsaken “the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19); “the way of peace” (Rom. 3:17); the way of wisdom (Prov. 4:11); “the way of life” (Prov. 10:17); and “the way of truth” (2 Pet. 2:2). Obviously, they could not have forsaken “the right way” unless they once had part and parcel of “the right way.” Note that Peter said they “are gone astray.” They were not born astray. Psalm 58:3 and 119:176 touch this matter with helpful insights. Peter was not a pre-Calvinist by any stretch of the imagination. These false teachers made a choice to go astray: they executed it to their own damnation. They “followed the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness: But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet” (2 Peter 2:15-16). Balaam’s sordid story is told in Numbers 22-24. He desired to curse Israel whom God had blessed and continued to bless. Jehovah would not allow such on Balaam’s evil part. His picture is threefold in portrayal: (1) He loved the “wages of unrighteousness” or “the hire of wrong-doing” (ASV).

(2) He was mad. He would have been glad and enriched with Moabite money had God allowed him to curse Israel. Instead he was mad. What makes us glad or mad is an accurate index to our character make-up. He found an iniquitous way to harm Israel, seducing the fickle nation into fornication and idolatry by beautiful Moabite women. He died fighting Israel and favoring paganistic Moab (Josh. 13:22). These false teachers in Peter's era were like Balaam in attitude and action. Jude 11 also alludes to Balaam and his error—one damnable to him and all who followed his wicked counsel.

In verse 17 they "are wells without water." The illustration is of a tired and thirsty traveler finding a well, anticipating a cool, refreshing drink, only to find it dry. How disappointing! The second illustration is of "clouds that are carried about with a tempest." The forlorn farmer views coming cloud formations with strong hope they will bring needed moisture for his crops burning up with an extended drought. They pass by with no falling rain. They have a reserved destiny for their false teaching—eternal darkness or that which is called "outer darkness" in Matthew 25:30.

In verse 18, we see them big on words and zero in the producing department. Their appeal is to fleshly indulgence and a lifestyle of wanton demeanor. They seek to engulf again those formerly clean and who had escaped the clutches of fatal error.

In verse 19, they promised what they could not deliver. They promised liberty while the very ones promising were enslaved to corruption mentally, vocally, and in deed. That which overcomes a man enslaves him.

In verses 20-22 we have the profile of apostates. Formerly, they had escaped worldly pollutions through the knowledge of truth and obedience thereunto. For knowledge Peter used a term that meant full, complete, knowledge—not a superficial brand of such. Their conversion had not been shallow. It had been genuine, deep, and complete. Sadly, they did not remain

in this salvational sphere. They became entangled again with the world and its allurements. As a gigantic magnet, these allurements drew them back. They succumbed and were overcome. The latter end was worse for them than at first. Why? (1) God, through Peter, said it was. (2) They brought shame on the Saviour which they would not have done had they been pagan all along. (3) Many apostates become more deeply enmeshed in sin than they were formerly. (4) Many times they are harder to reclaim than they were the first time. (5) They had sinned against light (truth) and will give a stricter account. The Bible said this; this settles it; I had better believe it for the welfare of my own soul. They abandoned truth and from it apostatized. This refutes Calvinism coming and going! They turned from truth which delivered them to error which will damn them eternally.

They are like the dog turning to his own emitted vomit again or the washed sow “to her own wallowing in the mire.” Patrons of Calvinism say the dog was a dog all along and the sow was a sow all along. This misses Peter’s point badly. The dog had gotten rid of its vomit and returned to it again. The sow had gotten rid of the mud but turned to it again. The picture is repulsive but exhibits fully God’s attitude in double emphasis toward apostates from truth. They can repent, pray, and confess their sins with assurance of pardon (Acts 8:22; Jas. 5:16; 1 John 1:9). Tragically, a death in apostasy means eternal Gehenna for a surety.

Scoffers in Second Peter Three

Scoffers in verse 3 have to reject verses 1-2 to maintain their infidelic stance. Peter knew that and desired his readers to be in the know also.

In verse 1 he calls this his second epistle. This adds proof that the same inspired hand indited both 1 Peter and 2 Peter. He styled them “beloved.” How refreshing it must have been for Peter to turn temporarily from false teachers already

portrayed in 2 Peter 2 and from scoffers to be portrayed now in 2 Peter 3 to his beloved brethren in the Lord—people still faithful to truth. These were people with pure minds—not altered minds as in chapters 2 and 3. Peter is an inspired reminder. He desired to stir (to arouse or energize) their minds by the marvels of memory. Repetition is the mother of all learning and the first law of learning. A noted educator once said there are three rules for learning: repeat, repeat, repeat. Peter did not want them to be forgetful of prophetic messages in the Old Testament (2 Peter 3:2). Both groups were God’s mouthpieces—His spokesmen. Note that Peter included himself in the apostleship. This indeed he was (Luke 6:13-16). New Testament books were written by apostolic penmen (Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter) and prophetic penmen (Mark, Luke, James, and Jude). The latter four were just as inspired as were the former four. They were all God’s mouthpieces for the new covenant.

Peter knew, and knew well, about these coming scoffers (2 Peter 3:3). They would come in the last days. This is not the period right before Christ’s second advent as some surmise. The last days are the same as the full Christian dispensation. The last days began on Pentecost as per Peter’s sermon in Acts 2. They will last until Christ’s second coming, the very vital fact the soon-to-be pictured Scoffers will deny vehemently. We are **now** in the last days just as Peter and his peers were in Acts 2. Scoffers would come with a well-planned agenda. They would be lusty men. Lusts produce scoffers. Men want to live lasciviously. A belief in God and an acceptance of truth thwart their philosophy for total fleshly indulgences. They begin to wish that God does not exist. Soon they accept a theistic agenda. This also calls for a rejection of the whole scope of Bible finals. In the Bible, the second coming is joined to the resurrection, final judgment, heaven, hell, and really the whole Bible. Hence, they reject His second coming per se. This also eliminates any accountability in final judgment

for their actions. This also does away with any punishment for a sinful lifestyle.

They raise a question about His second advent by demanding, "Where is the promise of his second coming?" (2 Peter 3:4). In fact, His second coming permeates the entire New Testament just as His first coming permeated the Old Testament. There were 300 plus promises of His first coming in the Old Testament. There are 300 prophetic promises of His second coming in the New Testament. Did the scoffers miss all these? God said His Son would come again as we read in Acts 3:20-21. Jesus said He would come again in Matthew 25:31ff, John 5:28-29, and John 14:1-4. Angels said He would come again in Acts 1:9-11. Apostolic men like Paul, Peter, and John said He would come again in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Peter 3:10-12, and Revelation 1:7. Such precious promises permeate the entirety of New Testament teaching.

But they advanced an argument to sustain their scoffing stance. Since the fathers fell asleep they said all things "continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4). They differ from modern scoffers in that they acknowledged a creation which modernistic mindsets in our day deny arrogantly and defiantly. They argued as uniformitarians who have many disciples in modern times. They said people have come and gone and still no second coming. Therefore, they concluded there will be no such coming out there in the future. Peter unmasks their glaring ignorance.

All things have not continued as they were from the beginning of creation. Great changes were in evidence on days 1, 2, and 3 of that creative week. The earth was compacted or formed out of waters and in the midst of the waters. In Genesis 1 darkness was upon the face of the deep. The Spirit of God moved or brooded upon the face of the deep. Light was made on day 1. The great expanse was made on day 2. It was made in the midst of the waters. There was a division of

the waters under the firmament, the great expanse was called Heaven and the evening and morning were the second day. On day 3 God prompted the waters to be gathered together into one place and the dry land to appear. On this day, we have botany coming into functional existence with plants, shrubs, trees, flowers, etc., bringing forth after their own kind. Evidently, these scoffers had not studied carefully the first three days of that eventful creative week. Surely, they had ignored the flood in Noah's day. The Noahic flood, with all the tremendous changes it brought about, did not fit with the uniformitarian scoffers in the first century nor with their 21st century counterparts.

These arrogant scoffers needed to have been students of what Moses wrote in Genesis 6-8. This would have changed their uniformitarian position had they read such with reverent faith coupled with submission. Peter wrote in verse 6, "Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." Instead of there being no change across the intervening centuries, as the scoffing uniformitarians contended, Peter affirmed that world-wide and earth-shattering changes of a deep and radical nature have occurred. The ignorant scoffers forgot or ignored the Noahic flood. This great deluge overflowed the world that then was. Neither Moses in Genesis nor Peter in 2 Peter 3 accepted the local flood concept (which some say is a valid alternative). This is nothing short of blatant modernism, malicious modernism at that, at infamous work. The world of people in Noah's day perished; they were gone from earthly scenes in a brief moment of time and so was the earth they had known. It did not cease to exist but was vastly changed. Many people who believe both the Bible and true science, not science falsely so-called as Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:20, contend that the flood brought great changes to our earth. The growing experience favors overwhelmingly the fact that the pre-Noahic world enjoyed a world-wide tropical

climate. The waters above acted as a shield, keeping from earth many harmful elements. Longevity of life was the rule then—not the exception. Yet from Noah's day onward, man's average lifespan begins to drop rapidly and drastically. Not any of this tremendous change fits the argument advanced by the scoffing uniformitarians in Peter's day.

Peter continued cogently in verse 7. The same powerful Word that caused creation, brought about the universal flood, and upholds all things will one day cause fiery destruction to ensue. With one brilliant stroke of his penetrating pen, Peter and the Holy Spirit annihilated the flimsy argument made by these scoffers, not a leg upon which to stand.

Will God keep His promise to send Jesus a second time? He is not slack concerning His promise. Men frequently are relative to their promises. They may die before a promise is kept. They may renege on the promise. They may find it impossible to honor it. They may find it more profitable personally to break the promise than keep it. None of these contingencies affected God. He will do as He promised without fail.

He is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. Those who obey the gospel today can be thankful Christ did not come yesterday when they were still in unbelief.

Since the scoffers called in question the Lord's second coming, Peter gives one of the clearest declarations of its factual nature found in the Bible (2 Pet. 3:10-12). In these three verses he refuted Jehovah's Witness doctrine which calls for a renovated earth upon which certain ones will reside. They do not believe all their number will go to heaven. He refuted pernicious premillennialism which calls for 1007 years of earthly continuation subsequent to His second coming for the rapture and a 1,000 year reign of Jesus on David's throne in earthly Jerusalem. The saved will be in new heavens and a new earth, as Peter's affirmation, which is the very same

place that he called heaven in 1 Peter 1:4 (2 Pet. 3:13). The Bible knows nothing of a renovated earth. There will be no earth to renovate into a residing place for people not allowed in heaven. Furthermore, there will be no earth for Jesus' reign in Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Peter refutes popular errors in 2 Peter 3:10-13.

In verse 14 he encourages and exhorts them to be in a state of readiness when that great day arrives and arrive it will. In verses 15-16 he refers to the beloved brother Paul and what he had written. He knew Paul had written epistles, fourteen in all if Hebrews be his, in which there were "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Here is another allusion to false teachers. They **wrest** the Scriptures to their own destruction. Truth is never safe in the hands of false teachers and scoffers. Peter has proved that all the way through 2 Peter 2-3. Sadly, but true, it is not safe in the hands of most religious teachers of our day. Even sadder is the realization it is not safe in the hands of far too many of our brethren.

Verse 17 contains his last warning to mankind, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your steadfastness." Please note that this is addressed to brethren. Peter knew they could be led away; he knew they could fall. Calvinism bats out in a hurry in this verse.

Verse 18 has Peter to exhort his beloved brethren to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." This is his one hundred sixty-sixth verse and how fitting to close out in such fashion. The doxology, directed to Jesus, is marvelous and majestic.

Conclusion

Peter and the Holy Spirit were masters in the refutation of errors propagated by the false teachers and scoffers of the first century. They did it in love for souls.

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**LADIES'
CLASSES**

CHAPTER 33

Mary Magdalene: The Woman Who Told Peter About The Empty Tomb

Cindy Colley

Modern writers have partnered with Hollywood to present to us the sensational new story about the hidden romance between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Many would even have us to believe that Mary and Jesus were married; that indeed the weeping woman at the tomb of Christ was overly distraught because she was his widow. There is but one thing wrong with these hypotheses: there is not one shred of Biblical or historical evidence to support them. In fact, there is, inherent in the detailed description of the ministry of our Lord, much opposing evidence—so much that the very idea that Christ was sexually involved with any woman at any time is blasphemous. But the Bible student today finds much that is sensational about the life of Mary Magdalene. This woman, from the village of Magdala, was once possessed with seven demons. While we do not know all about demon possession, we do understand that demons often made the people in whom they lived behave erratically, often screaming (Mark 1:23, NKJV), writhing, and self-mutilating (Mark 5:4-5). The possessed often had to be physically restrained (Mark 5:4-5) and the demons apparently could use the mouths of their human houses to speak (Matt. 8:28-31; Luke 8:27-31).

Sometimes those who were demon possessed went about naked (Luke 8:27). The possessed, as one can well imagine, became subjects of derision and were avoided by many in society. Barnes describes these evil spirits as “impure and unholy, having a delight in tormenting, and in inflicting painful and loathsome diseases” (33). Sometimes those who were possessed went out from society and lived in caves or tombs to seek retreat and shelter (Matt. 8:28-34). Our Mary was demon possessed. She was tormented, derided, and characterized by a type of insane behavior...until she met the Lord.

**Mary Was Delivered From Bondage By The One
Who Had Power Over The Devil**

“And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons” (Luke 8:2). Mark 16:9 affirms that it was Christ Who had cast the demons out of Mary. Christ is the One, as well, Who can take us from the torturous clutches of sin’s temporal consequences and its eternal torment. We need to reflect on the drastic change that occurred in the life of this woman on her day of delivery. She went from the darkest affliction to the purest affection. She changed from a tormented human to a human testimony. The insanity that was her existence suddenly changed to an eternal peace.

And Christ is still delivering. I am reminded of my friend Michelle, formerly a strip dancer. Scorned and denigrated, Michelle found her day of deliverance. She is a great worker in the local congregation I attend. I think of Marla, who left the casinos, the addictions of tobacco, and her passion for impure forms of entertainment, to become a devoted wife and mother with a steely determination to go to heaven. I think of Maria, my sister on a South American island, who confessed to me many of the sins listed in 1 Corinthians six, verses nine and ten, and then dared to ask if she, too, could be delivered as were those Corinthians who were washed, sanctified and justified

(1 Cor. 6:11). And then there is me. Without His saving blood I am just as black as the vilest sinner. I desperately need the One Who has power over Satan and death.

Praise God for his delivery from the power of Satan. While we are not possessed by evil spirits today as was Mary, we find ourselves bound by the shackles of Satan and sin until we come in contact with the Great Galilean.

Mary Ministered To The Lord

“And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s son” (Matt. 27:55-56). What an amazing privilege to have been among the women who walked the dusty Galilean roads with Jesus. Oh, to have personally witnessed in one’s own flesh, the supernatural healing power of this Jesus! To have come to understand after that cleansing, the source of the power! To be able to wash the feet of Diety! To have Him in one’s home for lunch, bring along His water flask as He traveled through the villages, find shelter for Him among those villagers, or just to sit down on a grassy hillside and be enthralled as He taught simple, yet profound lessons about the lilies or the sparrows as one who had authority (Matt. 7:29)!

Matthew 25:37-40 puts me in the picture:

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,
‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed
You, or thirsty and give You drink? When
did we see You a stranger and take You in,
or naked and clothe You? Or when did we
see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’
And the King will answer and say to them,
‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did
it to one of the least of these My brethren, you
did it to Me.’

I can set the table for the King of Kings. I can sew His clothes or go to the prison and speak words of hope to Him. When He is sick, I can take Him chicken noodle soup and when He is hungry, I can take a loaf of homemade bread and a bag of groceries. Let me never be too busy or self-absorbed to minister in the spirit of Mary Magdalene! May my children grow up knowing that needs of others take precedence over selfish desires. May they take it for granted that our family will stop whatever we are doing to take care of the emergencies of our family in the Lord. When our children complain about the forfeiture of an outing due to an unexpected need in the body, may we open our Bibles to Matthew's judgment scene and elevate the occasion of sacrifice to the divine privilege that it really is. "We are going to the hospital today with Jesus!" "We are taking Jesus to the mental health center today!" "We are getting to give Jesus a ride to services." "Jesus is coming over to talk about problems in His life."

It is relevant to notice also that Mary gave of her substance in this ministry:

And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance (Luke 8:2).

The Greek word for ministered in this passage is a form of the word we translate "deacon." It means "to be a menial attendant, to wait upon" (Strong, "Diakoneō"). The original language for substance means "property or possessions" (Strong, "Huparchonta"). The fact that our ministries to Jesus today should consist of substantial material sacrifice cannot be overlooked. The commission of all we have to his glory is required of Christians today. We should be willing to part

with any material possession that can be used for His glory. The text indicates that Mary was a financial supporter of the ministry of Christ. Our financial support is still needed for His ministries.

For some time, in my daily prayers, I have prayed the following: “O God, I am so thankful for your material blessings in which we bask. We are rich! Help us, Father, to use these blessings for your glory. But if they ever get in our way of serving you faithfully, just please take them away from us. We want to go to heaven!”

It is a prayer that has strengthened my resolve to never let the pursuit of things get in the way of my responsibilities as a keeper at home. It has made decisions about ballgames versus Wednesday night Bible studies seem simple. It has constantly called me to more faithful stewardship. I want to give substantively to the ministry as Mary did.

Mary Stayed Till The End

“When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb” (Matt. 27:59-61). That progression to the foot of the cross had been a grueling and sorrow-filled climb. Mary had followed the Lord from the halls of Pilate to the hill of Golgotha. She watched the agony of the cross from a distance. She felt the earth move under her and witnessed the tearing of the rocks. She was present when the centurion at the foot of the cross made the good confession: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:50-56). She and the other Mary followed the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, as he laid the body of the Lord, wrapped in clean linen in his freshly hewn tomb. She watched as Joseph rolled the stone over the opening of the sepulcher (Matt. 27:56-61).

I recently had a study with a woman who was contemplating becoming a member of the body of Christ. She was unashamed in asking me just what would be required of her family. “Would we need to be there at every service? My kids have a lot of practices and games and our youngest really has a strict bedtime. The older two have loads of homework. Wednesday nights would be really difficult for us. I just need to know what kind of commitment we would be needing to make.”

I recall an elder in the church in one of the places we lived. Through every sermon, he constantly looked at his watch. He became visibly upset if the service exceeded the hour. I have observed, in some congregations, an exodus of a large number of people after the communion is served but before the final song and/or prayer.

Somehow, I do not think Mary was looking at the sundial. I do not think she was wondering if the commitment from here on out would require more time and money. I do not think she was thinking about how nice it would be to get home and wash her tired and dirty feet that had climbed the hill to Golgotha. I do not imagine her thinking about what was for supper or whether there would be time before the Sabbath to go shopping at the market. In short, she was the kind of disciple that willingly stayed till the end. Are you?

Mary Kept The Law

“And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (Luke 23:55-56). The One who came not to destroy, but to fulfill the law was subjected at last to the Hadean realm. His body was lying in the borrowed tomb of a rich man on a hillside near Jerusalem. The adrenalin from the events of the preceding day and night had to

have been flowing through the veins of Mary as she left the tomb and went home. But she was a woman who kept the commandments in all circumstances.

I think it is worthy of note that Mary was a devout law keeper, especially in view of the fact that the chief priests and Pharisees, those who had been so condemning of the Messiah for His healing on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14), were now going about the business of meeting with Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea, setting a secure watch, and sealing the stone to secure the body of the Lord of the Sabbath—all on the Sabbath day! The Lord of the Sabbath was just resting on the Sabbath. He was about to prove once and for all His lordship over it.

May we delight in His commandments (Psa. 119:35), realizing that His mandates are His mercy, His commandments are His compassion, and His will is born of His Wisdom.

Mary Was Busy On Sunday Morning

“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb” (Matt. 28:1). Mary started her trip to the tomb before dawn on Sunday morning. It occurred to me as I was studying the devotion of this woman of God that I know many women who often begin their journey to celebrate the empty tomb each Lord’s day before dawn. I have met women in foreign countries, where congregations are few and far between, who arise before dawn on Sunday mornings to make the trip to a distant village to worship God. I have known women here at home who are diligent on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings to make sure all the clothes and shoes are assembled and ready so the preparation time for worship will be a time of calm and peace. I have known many women who have been on the worship site long before others preparing communion or visuals for children’s classes. It may seem an obvious point, but we all need to have a Sunday morning

agenda that's more important than any weekend relaxation or late Saturday night activity. We should prepare ourselves and our families for on-time, alert, and focused worship. We all have a weekly Sunday appointment at the tomb!

Mary Did Not Fully Understand The Implications Of The Empty Tomb At First

In John's account, we are given details of Mary's visit to the tomb that are not given in the other accounts. It appears from John 20:1-10 that Mary saw the empty tomb, was devastated that the Lord's body had been "taken away," and, in great despair, reported this "theft" to Peter and John. Peter and John came running to the tomb, found it as Mary had reported, and returned to their home. "For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

Looking back from our vantage point, having read and reread all of the Messianic prophecies and having heard Jesus say he would raise up the temple again in three days (John 2:19), we tend to become impatient with the four disciples examining the empty tomb. These two Marys and Peter and John still did not "get it." This lack of understanding about what had actually occurred at dawn on that Sunday left Mary weeping at the empty tomb, when her emotion should really have been great joy.

We often encounter people who are slow in grasping the personal significance of the empty tomb. Sometimes people know the story of Jesus years before they develop faith to obey. As I think of the people in my small sphere of influence right now, I think of one young woman who once believed in the empty tomb, who just confessed to me that her faith has grown cold and she no longer believes in the deity of Jesus. She needs to re-examine the evidence as Mary did. I think of another who once was risen with Christ but has allowed the temptations of the world around him to draw him away

from the risen savior. He needs to go back to the tomb and re-evaluate its significance. I think of another who is in a Bible class I am teaching. She has just discovered the tomb! She is excited and ready to run with the news. New-found happiness and eagerness is written all over her face. May she never lose her zeal as she takes the gospel to those she loves deeply.

While Peter and John went home, Mary went back to the tomb and wept (John 20:11). She peeked back into the tomb and the most amazing part of her Sunday...no...of her life, unfolded before her.

Mary Saw The Gospel

I am blessed immeasurably because I have heard the gospel! It has forever impacted my life and eternity. I will never be the same. Praise God for the telling and hearing of the gospel story! But did you ever think about the fact that Mary Magdalene, along with a very few select people did not have to hear the gospel? They **saw** it. The gospel is defined by Paul as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. These three events compose the Good News of the ages (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Mary, along with many other people, watched him die (Matt.27:55-56). Mary went to the tomb for the interment (Matt. 27:61). It would seem possible from the context that very few people, possibly only Joseph of Arimathea, any helpers he had to carry and place the body and roll the stone, and the two Marys witnessed this burial. I believe it highly probable that a few more of the faithful were present, since it seems likely that Mary, the mother of the Lord would have followed the body to the tomb. It seems that, if she did, then most likely John and perhaps others accompanied her. But in the moments immediately following the resurrection, the two mortals who heard the words directly from the heavenly beings were only two:

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and

the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay (Matt. 28:1-6).

There were to be many witnesses to the empty tomb and the risen Savior. After all, those who saw him die and then later walked and talked with him, were indeed witnesses to the resurrection. But what a remarkable honor was given to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to hear the angel voices say "He is not here, for He is risen." What an amazing and unforgettable event of a lifetime to be invited first to "Come see the place where the Lord lay." This woman, once tormented by the agents of death, was called by heavenly voices into the little arena on the side of the Judean hill, to the very spot where death was conquered for all of eternity. And the good news was then delivered by Mary to Peter and the rest of the apostles, to be delivered by them in Jerusalem on the very next Pentecost to a world of people who could access salvation because of the empty tomb.

Mary Saw The Lord

At some point very shortly after the angels comforted Mary, she saw the Lord Himself. John tells us that the meeting occurred there in the burial garden, because Mary just turned around and there He was, the risen Son of God! Still slow to process the amazing truth with which she was quickly

coming face to face, she thought Jesus was the gardener. She asked this “gardener” where he had laid the body of Jesus. Then Jesus turning to her, said “Mary!”

It was the moment of truth. I wish I could have seen her face when she finally turned to Jesus and realized that this gardener was the great I AM! Processing the events, it just finally dawned on her that if he could cast the demons from her body, he could overcome the grave! She would not be needing those spices she had brought for the dead. She would instead fall down, grab his feet, and worship the living as she cried out “Master!” (John 20:15-16; Matt. 28:9, KJV).

Have you fallen at His feet? Is he your master?

Mary Ran With The Good News

So should we. “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word” (Matt. 28:8). The news these two women were given from heaven was the most precious news ever delivered to mankind. Giving validity to the incarnation, the death, and the burial was this, the truth that He had risen. The truth of the gospel hinges on the empty tomb. Paul said as much in 1 Cor. 15:13-20:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and
has become the firstfruits of those who have
fallen asleep.

Great things will happen to us if we hasten with urgency to spread the good news. And so it was with Mary. She encountered Christ first when He cleansed her of the torturous evil spirits. Realizing that she owed her very sanity to the Lord, she followed him to the cross, the grave, and almost certainly waited for His promised Comforter in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). Thus, she became a part of His eternal kingdom when Peter and the apostles spoke the good news of the resurrection on the day of Pentecost—the news first delivered to them by Mary Magdalene. I believe Mary Magdalene also followed the Lord to heaven. May the empty tomb open heaven's doors for Cindy Colley one day, too. I want to meet Mary Magdalene!

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CHAPTER 34

Peter's Mother-In-Law: Who Showed Her Gratitude By Service

Tanya Cox

Introduction

The life of Jesus Christ has had a profound impact on countless lives through the centuries. He lived a perfect life so that we might know how to live, He died a perfect sacrifice so that we might not die in our sins, and He now rules over His church so that we can glorify Him and render service to others. How thankful we are for our Savior in providing us all blessings for life now and later in eternity!

We are also blessed to read in Scripture those who lived in Jesus' time who were touched by His life and work. Some are well-known, like Peter, James, and John, and some are lesser-known, who nevertheless enjoyed the Savior's influence and were never the same after. One such individual was a nameless woman, mother-in-law to the apostle Peter.

I am sure we have all heard in-law jokes, and maybe in fun have even jested a bit about our own. After all, laughter is good medicine (Prov. 17:22, NKJV), and if we have forgotten how to laugh, we have forgotten how to live.

In a more serious vein, however, some in-laws are not appreciated or loved; they have been shunned and even excluded from the lives of those to whom they should be

closest, which is a real tragedy. Thankfully, such was not the case with Peter and his mother-in-law but more on that in a moment.

Our assigned text for study is Matthew 8:14–17, but we will consult the parallel accounts (Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–39) to get the entire picture and make pertinent application to us today where possible. We divide the text into these four sections: (1) An ailing in-law; (2) A compassionate Savior; (3) A grateful servant, and (4) A blessed community.

An Ailing In-Law

Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house,
He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a
fever (Matt. 8:14).

Setting

In comparing Mark's narrative with that of Matthew's, we see that these events occurred in Capernaum, on the Sabbath day, after Jesus had taught in the synagogue and after He had exorcised an unclean spirit from a man.

At least four major cities played a considerable role in the life of Jesus. Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, an insignificant city by the world's standards but an excellent place to begin an earthly life of humility. Later, after first fleeing to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and then returning to Israel after Herod's death, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus settled in Nazareth in Galilee. Nazareth was the equivalent of Jesus' "home town" for His growing up years. When Christ began His earthly work, it seems that Capernaum was His headquarters or base of operations. And, at the end of His earthly life, Jesus stood trial in Jerusalem and eventually was crucified outside Jerusalem's city limits.

While at Capernaum, Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James, and John (Mark 1:29), entered Peter's house,¹ our

Lord having no home of His own. Upon entering, Christ saw Peter's mother-in-law lying sick of a fever. Other lectures will stress this point, but perhaps here it is also timely to emphasize that Peter was married—he had a wife. It is a bit difficult to have a mother-in-law without having a wife! As Lockyer observes:

If as the Roman Catholic Church claims, Peter was the first pope, then his marital life, which Jesus blessed by visiting his home, cuts clean across the enforced celibacy for popes and priests. As the Roman Church traffics in the dispensation of convenient marriage and divorces, it may be that Peter, as the alleged first holy father, had a special dispensation to remain married. How Peter must chuckle, if he has any knowledge of earthly matters in heaven, of all the Roman Church confers him with (170).

What little we know about Peter's wife is handed down to us from Clement of Alexandria. He

tells us that Peter and his wife were martyred together. Peter, so the story runs, had the grim ordeal of seeing his wife suffer before he suffered himself. On seeing his wife led to death, Peter rejoiced on account of her call and her conveyance home, and called very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, "Remember thou the Lord" (as qtd. in Barclay 307).

A Warm Relationship

Perhaps Peter's mother-in-law was at this time a widow, and living with the apostle and his wife. Whether staying or just visiting, the implication is that this mother-in-law

was welcome in the home of her son-in-law, and that is as it should be!

Sadly, in-laws do not always get along, resulting in awkward relationships at best. In fact, some in-law relationships are so strained that mother-in-laws have been dubbed “monster-in-laws” and in-laws are labeled “out-laws”! Who is to blame? Admittedly, the fault can lie both with spouses and with parents. Well-meaning parents who meddle too much and sons and daughters who have yet to cut the apron strings from parents are all at fault. A healthy marriage involves cleaving and leaving father and mother (Gen. 2:24). All need to remember that developing and maintaining a good relationship takes effort on both sides.

Though we do not know a great deal about Peter's mother-in-law, we can deduce that he cared for and loved her and she felt the same about him. Their example reveals that in-laws can get along, can be close knit, and can provide a positive impact for good on the immediate as well as extended family members.

A Serious Situation

As noted earlier, Peter's mother-in-law was “lying sick with a fever.” Luke, a doctor by trade, adds that it was a “great” or “high” fever (Luke 4:38, KJV and NKJV); first-century doctors often distinguished fevers into great (serious) or small (not serious) (Lockyer 171). Barclay gives a succinct summary of the various fevers of that day and in that land:

There were three kinds of fever which were common in Palestine. There was a fever which was called Malta fever, and which was marked by weakness, anemia, and wasting away, and which lasted for months, and often ended in a decline which finished in death. There was what was called intermittent fever, which may very well have been like typhoid

fever. And above all there was malaria. In the regions where the Jordan River entered and left the Sea of Galilee there was marshy ground: there the malarial mosquitoes bred and flourished, and both Capernaum and Tiberias were areas where malaria was very prevalent. It was often accompanied by jaundice and ague, and was a most wretched and miserable experience for the sufferer from it. It was most likely malaria from which Peter's wife's mother was suffering (307-08).

Perhaps we need another reminder that just because one is a person of God, that does not mean immunity from headaches, heartaches, difficulties, and sicknesses. Some are of the opinion that if one faces maladies in life, that is a sure indication he has done something terribly wrong and is deserving of such. Job's three friends are a prime example of such misguided theology; their accusing him of being a vile sinner only helped to "kick him when he was down." In the end, God vindicated Job and castigated his accusers, calling upon them to repent.

There is no invisible shield of protection for the Christian. Good, godly men and women of Scripture themselves faced illness and death through no fault of their own. Devout Timothy had his share of health issues (1 Tim. 5:23) as did Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20); tradition says all the apostles save John experienced a violent death as martyrs, and Jesus Himself, sinless in every respect, nonetheless suffered in this life. Thankfully, we do have knees upon which to kneel in prayer, shoulders upon which to lean for comfort, and a faithful Father and caring Christians to sympathize with and care for us whenever trouble comes our way. Trials in this life better equip us for stamina now so that we might eventually enjoy eternal life minus all trials!

Consider again Peter's mother-in-law. Evidently, this fever had come about suddenly, as there is no indication that Peter had prior knowledge of her sickness until he discovered it when he came home after the synagogue service. Probably Jesus had simply been invited over for a meal, only to find severe trouble in this home. This woman's condition was not a trivial headache or an upset stomach; rather, her situation was so severe, perhaps even to the point of being life threatening, that they told Jesus about her "at once" (Mark 1:30).

A Compassionate Savior

So He touched her hand, and the fever left her (Matt. 8:15).

Mark adds that with His hand Jesus "lifted her up" (Mark 1:31); Luke indicates while Jesus was curing the disease He "stood over her and rebuked the fever" (Luke 4:39). Interestingly, the word "rebuked" here regarding the fever is the same word translated "rebuked" in Luke 4:35 which speaks of Christ casting out the demon in the synagogue shortly before this event (Butler 50).

Jesus Was Selfless

It had been a busy day, as usual, for our Lord. Having taught and healed in the synagogue, and having healed the centurion's servant on the way home (Matt. 8:5-13), no doubt one reason why Jesus came to Peter's house was for refreshment and rest. Both would have to wait as yet another demand for help and healing confronted the Savior.

Observe also that no crowd was gathered in this home. There was no public eye to look and admire and be astonished; there was just a simple home with a poor woman wrestling with fever and perhaps life itself. Lockyer makes this pertinent and powerful point:

It is fitting to observe that it took place in a home. It was a natural and beautiful “home specimen” of Christ’s healing power, as was the healing of the crowd at evening. His merciful acts began at home. How many homes of the sick and diseased do those modern “faith healers,” who exploit the suffering for their own financial gain, visit? Home visitation to receive the needy would be too humdrum for them. They require the intense emotion of a large packed hall or tent, with all the paraphernalia of mass psychology to stage their so-called “miracles” (170).

Jesus was no thrill seeker; He could heal in private as well as in public. Christ always put the needs of others ahead of His own; instead of selfishness, His life was marked by selflessness. Those hurting were never a bother or nuisance to our Lord.

Jesus Had Compassion

An outgrowth of atheism is the belief that if there is a God, then He is a cruel, vindictive, harsh, mean, unmerciful being; He wound the universe up and withdrew from it, totally unconcerned about the plight of man (Woodward 20). Such a view says that man is no more to God than a fly on a windowpane!

The atheist’s number one argument against the existence of God is the problem of suffering and evil in the world. David Hume held that the existence of evil either indicts God’s goodness or His power, as he repeated Epicurus’ questions:

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able?
then he is impotent. Is he able, but not
willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able
and willing? whence then is evil? (as qtd. in
McCord 338).

Indeed, many are perplexed by the problem of evil in the world. In his book, **When Bad Things Happen to Good People**, Harold Kushner writes:

There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? All other theological conversation is intellectually diverting....Virtually every meaningful conversation I have ever had with people on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long (Kushner 6).

While we make no claim to having all the answers to all the questions that are often raised as per the problem of evil, we do know: (1) God never intended for suffering to be in the world, but man through sin ushered it in; and (2) Suffering can have beneficial effects. With reference to Job, Henry Gariepy writes:

Trial and affliction similarly bring out the quality already present in a life. As pure gold shines all the brighter when put to the fire, so faith glows the more radiant when put to the fiery test. In the end, Job's faith and trust, which already had made him a model in God's sight, enabled him to "come forth as gold" (127).

He continues, describing the precious insights trials can provide us:

The Arabs have a proverb: "All sunshine makes a desert." (They ought to know.) When life is easy, it is possible to live on the surface of things. But when trial and sorrow come, then one is driven to the deeper things. Then one can enter into the secrets and beauties of

God. It is in the storm that God arches His rainbow over us, its multi-splendor revealing all the elements of color that make up the beauty of the world. Life's greatest revelations come in its storms (127-28).

If this account of Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law were the only reference in all of Scripture to refer to God's concern and care and compassion for His people, it would suffice to dispel the atheist's argument that our God is cold, callous, and cruel. His care for this sick woman is underscored by the phrase, "He stood over her" (Luke 4:39). Regarding these words, Butler comments:

The word in the Greek means "He bent over her" (Maclaren). It is the posture of one who is concerned, who has compassion for the one he is looking at. Sometimes we just see the problems of others, but this bending over the troubled one shows compassion for the troubled person (53).

Sometimes we sing the hymn that has as its title a question, "Does Jesus Care?". In the chorus of that hymn we answer in the affirmative:

"O yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief; When the days are weary the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."

Peter's mother-in-law felt firsthand our Lord's caring touch.

Jesus Was Not Prejudiced

Jesus did not hold the prejudiced view of women that many Jews in that day did: "Women did not hold a high position in Israel, and it is doubtful that a Pharisee would have paid much attention to the need in Peter's home" (Wiersbe 33). Some women complain today of not having

equal rights, but how fortunate they are not to have lived in the first century! The plight of women was terrible then due to the bigotry that existed. Jewish rabbis would not even talk to a woman publicly unless it were under an extreme circumstance. They taught that these three consequences resulted from so doing: (1) It would bring evil; (2) One would forget about the law; and (3) One would end up in Gehenna. By contrast, God “so loved the world”—regardless of race or gender—that all might have an opportunity to be saved.

Jesus Was A Real Miracle Worker

This account reveals certain undeniable characteristics of our Lord's miracles. First, this supernatural healing was genuine. Though this miracle was performed in private, Jesus often healed in the presence of many witnesses, leaving no doubt as to the divine nature of the act—even His most bitter enemies would have to admit such. Second, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law instantaneously. There was no need for long-term treatments, bed rest to gain her strength back, or a week of recuperation; rather, the cure happened immediately. One of Mark's favorite words in his account of the gospel was *straightway*, i.e., immediately, right then and there on the spot the miracle and its results happened. In this instance, he reminds us “immediately the fever left her” (Mark 1:31). Third, this genuine, instantaneous miracle was complete. This in-law did not have to return to the Lord for “follow up” visits, nor did Jesus have to come back to rebuke the fever again:

Full health came into her wasted frame. She was not left in a condition of extreme weakness and exhaustion which such a fever as she had had ordinarily left a person, and from which they slowly recovered (Lockyer 171).

Luke, a physician himself, had no doubt stood over many a patient, but as a doctor, he had never done anything like the Lord had just done!

A Grateful Servant

So He touched her hand, and the fever left her.
And she arose and served them (Matt. 8:15).

Peter's mother-in-law arose—not as a celebrity, but as a thankful servant. She did not clamor for the attention of others, and she did not seek publicity or the limelight; instead, she simply did what she obviously loved doing – she served. “Though she was thus dignified by a peculiar favor, yet she does not assume importance, but is as ready to wait at table, if there be occasion, as any servant” (Henry 107). She clearly regarded herself as “saved to serve.”

Again, what motivated her serving? It was gratitude for the blessing of being healed. What should prompt us to serve the Lord and live a life that glorifies Him? Yes, fear of what will happen if we do not, and yes, hope of a reward in heaven if we do. But another major—and one of the best—reasons for faithfulness on our part should be because of what love prompted Jesus to do for us and undying thankfulness on our part in return!

Gratitude—do we say enough about it? Gratitude—are we as thankful as we should be? Thanksgiving is not an optional matter for those who would please the Lord. The word *thank* and its derivatives occur some 139 times in God's Word—an important subject indeed! Consider:

O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever (Psa. 107:1, KJV).

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Col. 3:15, KJV).

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:20, KJV).

Paul says it is the will of God for us to give thanks: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). Jesus says we must do the will of God if we want to go to heaven: “Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21, KJV).

Numerous are the examples of those in Scripture who demonstrated gratitude in their lives. Consider the example of Jesus Christ; He, the Son of God, was a man of thanksgiving. As He fed the 4,000, as He instituted the Lord's Supper, and as He raised Lazarus from the tomb, He gave thanks (Matt. 15:36; Matt. 26:27; John 11:41).

Consider the example of David. The “man after God's own heart” was thankful for victory over his enemies and deliverance from his enemies; he was likewise grateful when the Ark of the Covenant was returned to the city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). Also, there is Daniel's tremendous courage, as he continued to give thanks unto God as he had always done—even at the threat of death for so doing (Dan. 6:10)!

Dare we leave the apostle Paul out of our list? Here was a man haunted by his past and hounded by Jews and other enemies in his present. Here was a man stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, arrested, and imprisoned unjustly on more than one occasion. What a marvelous attitude by this servant of Jesus, when he wrote to the Colossians and said, “Be ye thankful” (Col. 3:15), and when he told the Philippians that in all things and in every situation he had learned to be content (Phil. 4:11). He summed up his spirit of gratitude by telling the Corinthians, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable [indescribable] gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

Peter's mother-in-law is yet another example of displayed gratitude—she did not simply say “Thanks,” —she demonstrated it by service.

If I am to emulate her example, I too will live a life of gratitude. I will demonstrate my thankfulness in serving in such areas as benevolence. How often has it been said, and how true, “Nobody cares how much you know—until they know how much you care” (Moody 76). How imperative that we demonstrate to an often cold and cruel world compassionate Christianity! In fact, ministering to people who are in need, such as those that are sick or imprisoned, is a service rendered to the Lord Himself: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). The Bible tells us that our religion must be “pure and undefiled before God,” and that we are to “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (Jas. 1:27). We are to be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14). On the Day of Judgment we will give an account of every work whether it be good or bad (Eccl. 12:14). “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). We should also encourage others to do good works (Heb. 10:24). Involving others in the work of the church can and will at times help all of us remain faithful, steadfast, humble servants of the Lord.

I can demonstrate a thankful servant's heart by evangelism. The Great Commission was given by our Lord to go and teach all nations about salvation (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, evangelizing the world is an imperative work! The gospel is God's power to save, so it must be shared with everyone (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16).

Edification—building up the body of Christ—is also an integral part of the grateful servant's life. We are to “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Christians are to “Comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11). We are to “Comfort

the fainthearted, and uphold the weak” (1 Thess. 5:14). There is no doubt that Peter’s mother-in-law—by what the world would label “menial” tasks—rendered a valuable service to Jesus and His workers simply by feeding them, caring for their needs, and encouraging them in the process.

A Blessed Community

It turned out that Christ’s healing Peter’s mother-in-law would have a great impact on the Capernaum community as well.

The Healing of Others

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick (Matt. 8:16).

Good news travels fast, too, so as word spread about the miracles Jesus performed in this area this day, that evening brought even more patients for the Great Physician to heal. All of a sudden, Peter’s house has become a hospital!

This seems like a ‘minor miracle,’ but the results were major; for after sundown... the whole city gathered at the door that the Lord might meet their needs (Mark 1:32–34). Blessing in the home ought to lead to blessing in the community. The change in one woman’s life led to miracles in the lives of many people (Weirsbe 33).

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses’ (Matt. 8:17).

The gospel record reveals this event was fulfillment of an ancient prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 53:4). Later, Peter himself would apply this same Scripture to the forgiving of sins which Jesus bore on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). In our text, Christ pitied the hurting, entering into their sorrows. But, with far greater significance, He heals the spiritually sick by His death on the cross.

Conclusion

The poet said:

The lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time
(Longfellow)

While the lives of great men like the apostle Peter do remind us, it is equally true that the lives of those not so renowned also teach us valuable lessons. While we do not even know the name of Peter's mother-in-law, we do know something far more valuable regarding her character: she was a thankful and faithful servant of the Lord. May we emulate her example by likewise living a life of service driven by gratitude!

Notes

1. To this day, under a Catholic Church building in Capernaum, Israel, there are what are alleged to be the ruins of "St. Peter's" house.

2. Butler makes this observation: "What this tells us is that Christ 'rebuked' the devil in both the synagogue and the home, for the devil was working in both places." However, one would be hard pressed to prove that this fever was a direct result of Satan's working as had been the case of demon possession.

3. Deists take the view that God set the universe in motion and then withdrew.

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CHAPTER 35

Dorcas: Raised By Peter To Continue Serving

Rose Crayton

“But my sister is alive. My sister is alive!” Carly Cerak shouted in disbelief. The story of Whitney Cerak and Laura Van Ryn began on April 26, 2006. In a shocking string of events, Whitney Cerak was proclaimed dead at the scene of a van accident in Upland, Indiana. Five days later her funeral was attended by 1400 people. It wasn’t until five weeks after her funeral that the mix-up was revealed. It wasn’t Whitney Cerak who died and was buried, it was Laura Van Ryn. **“Mistaken Identity: Two Families, One Survivor, Unwavering Hope”** *recounts the true story of two college students, Laura Van Ryn and Whitney Cerak—one buried under the wrong name, one in a coma being cared for by the wrong family—and the heart-wrenching discovery five weeks later that their identities had been mistakenly reversed (Van Ryn et al.).*

Just reading the details of this story makes one think of both the utter despair and grief each of these families must have experienced upon hearing their daughter was dead,

and the unspeakable joy and relief felt upon learning their daughter was alive.

One can not help but draw a parallel to the grief and joy those in Joppa must have felt upon Dorcas' death and her subsequent resurrection by the Apostle Peter. While we know that the "raising of the dead" of Whitney Cerak is not a miracle (but is an incredible circumstance for the Cerak family and a tragic one for the Van Ryn family), the resurrection of Dorcas was in fact a dramatic miracle that impacted many and caused the early Church to grow. Dorcas was raised from the dead to be returned to her friends, raised to resume her life, and raised to continue to do good works in service to God. This miraculous event contains many important lessons New Testament Christians can learn from today. This study will address the works of Dorcas and the characteristics that made her loved by many; the service she rendered in the Lord's name and how New Testament Christians are to be raised like Dorcas, to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4, KJV) and to "serve in newness of the Spirit" (Rom. 7:6).

Many Christians are walking around dead (Jas. 2:20). Having received the most precious gift imaginable—the gift of salvation—many still drift through daily tasks and undertakings with lackluster efforts (Prov. 18:9; Prov. 21:25), uncommitted hearts (Matt. 15:8), and less than acceptable fervency in carrying out the Lord's commands (Rom. 12:11). In essence, they have either forgotten or have never fully accepted, that being plunged into the watery grave of baptism for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:3-4), necessitates a life of willing service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Christian's life is a life of service that includes doing good works (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:21) for we know faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). The events of Dorcas' life shared by the physician Luke provide a wonderful backdrop for Christians to gain encouragement to continue in "good works."

Who Was This Woman Of Good Works?

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner (Acts 9:36-43).

There are several people of the Bible one might mention that immediately bring specific traits, characteristics, and Biblical accounts to mind. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is one such person; Peter, Paul, Stephen, and Barnabas are others. Tabitha, or Dorcas, can definitely be included in the list. Dorcas stands out in the Scriptures as a woman of good

works and charitable deeds. We do not know much about her genealogy or parentage, or whether she was married or had children. While the record of her in the Scripture is limited to a few verses in the ninth chapter of Acts, her name, even today, brings forth an immediate image. She was known for her “good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). Her name alone stands for the charitable use of the needle and evokes the epitome of a self-sacrificing servant. Her example has encouraged many to serve unselfishly and from the heart—in the first century and today.

Dorcas was probably a Hellenistic Jewess called Tabitha by the Jews and Dorcas by the Greeks (Easton). Both names mean “a gazelle.” She was a disciple who lived in the seaport city of Joppa. Joppa (meaning “beautiful”) was located on the Mediterranean seacoast between Caesarea and Gaza, about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joppa was known throughout the Bible as Japho, Jaffe, or Yafo. Today, the ancient city of Joppa is annexed to the modern city of Tel Aviv, Israel’s largest city.

Dorcas lived during the first century AD and was associated with a small band of Christians in Joppa, most of whom were poor. It would appear that Dorcas was a woman of some means for her charitable deeds were numerous.

It is fitting that Dorcas’ deeds are so easily called to mind when one hears her name because, like Peter and Paul, she was a disciple of Christ. “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas” (Acts 9:36). There is great significance in this scripture, as this is the only place in the New Testament where the feminine form of *disciple* (*mathetria*) is used (Hunter). Dorcas was a “learner, a scholar; a follower who has learned to believe in the truth of the doctrine of his teacher” (“Disciple”). As a disciple, she would have no doubt been taught the necessity of serving and helping others just as Jesus did and taught (John 13:4-15; John 12:26; John 4:34).

Dorcas proved herself to be a real “doer” of the Word of God, not just a mere “hearer” (Jas. 1:23). Jesus said that “ye have the poor always with you” (Matt. 26:11; John 12:8) and Paul wrote, “that we should remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10). *Remembrance* here is present tense in Greek and means “to keep on remembering.” It was not to be just a one-time occurrence but a continuing obligation. Dorcas not only found ways of relieving the suffering of the needy, but she continued to meet those needs. Among her charitable deeds were making clothes and garments for widows and those in need, which she did with her own hands and from her own means (Acts 9:39). She was not only willing to give of her monetary resources, but she was willing to give of herself in the works of kindness she performed (2 Cor. 8:5). God’s love obviously dwelled in her because she saw her brethren in need and did not shut up her bowels of compassion (1 John 3:17). It is apparent that Dorcas was “well reported of for good works” and that she “relieved the afflicted” and “diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim. 5:10). As a result of her kindness and generosity, she was beloved by many.

Yet, in spite of her good works and charitable deeds, Dorcas became “sick and died” (Acts. 9:37). From the few brief words Luke shared of this account in Acts 9:36-42, the events surrounding her death appear to have happened quickly. There was no mistaken identity to those who knew and adored her; their beloved Dorcas had died. Her body was lovingly prepared for burial by the widows and laid in an upper room of the house.

The brethren in Joppa were saddened and grief-stricken by this tragic turn of events. Dorcas had died and all who had been helped by her, or had known her, were deeply grieved. Having heard that the apostle Peter was nearby in Lydda, they sent for him to come to them. It is not known why two men were sent unto Peter to plead for him to come to Joppa, but it is clear that Dorcas’ friends were willing to do all they

could for her. Perhaps word of Peter healing Aeneas (Acts 9:34) prompted their sending for Peter, or they may have just wanted the comfort of a fellow disciple. Regardless of the reason, they acted immediately and sent for Peter who came without delay to Joppa. Then, in a miraculous feat, Peter was used by God to raise Dorcas from the dead (the first time Peter had ever done such a miracle). What a day of rejoicing that must have been. Their friend and benefactress was no longer dead, but alive once again. Their sister was alive. Like the Cerak family mentioned earlier, the family and friends of Dorcas must have been overjoyed to receive their loved one alive again.

The raising of Dorcas from the dead occurred early in the history of the Church, sometime shortly after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. This miracle had great impact on the people of the city, and it became "known throughout Joppa, and many believed on the Lord" (Acts 9:42). This miracle was vitally important to the early Church. People could see Dorcas and speak with her after her return to physical life. She was a walking proclamation of the truth and power of God. It is reasonable to conclude that Dorcas' faith was further strengthened following her resurrection. Dorcas was raised to continue to serve while her resurrection was used by God to increase the borders of the kingdom.

Example For Christians Today

The Bible record of Dorcas stands as a memorial to her and as testimony to the power of God. Her resurrection back to physical life greatly strengthened the faith of many and caused many to believe in Jesus Christ. However, it is the example she set in her daily life more than this miraculous event that may hold greater significance for Christians today. Dorcas is an example of a truly charitable woman in daily living and for pursuing a lifestyle consistent with strong Christian values. The following are traits of Dorcas that all

should strive to emulate (2 Thess. 3:9) for greater service to God and mankind.

One must become a disciple.

While this may seem obvious, one must stop and take inventory of where he is in his walk with God. Paul said, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13:5). Dorcas’ love for Christ is evident as she was called a disciple (“a learner, a follower of Christ”). Keith A. Mosher, Sr., has written, “The disciple had a close relationship with and a dependence upon the teacher. A disciple of Christ, then, must maintain a close relationship with Christ and follow His orders” (270-71). Jesus’ disciples knew that to follow him meant to forsake all others. “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-27). Luke further encourages those considering becoming a disciple to “count the cost” of following Christ (Luke 14:28). Dorcas apparently counted the cost and took up her cross daily, followed, and served.

At some point in her life, Dorcas learned and embraced the scriptures that taught about true religion—“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27)—and love of the brethren—“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

A disciple follows the teachings of his Master without reservation and with all deliberateness (John 14:15; John 15:10). He must submit every aspect of his life to Christ (Matt.

16:24-25). Christians are admonished to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10) and to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye were called” (Eph. 4:1; cf. 1 Thess. 2:12). To follow Jesus, one must become his disciple and learn to teach and do the Master’s teachings.

One must embody the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Dorcas possessed many characteristics that made her good works and charitable deeds far more impactful than just simple acts of benevolence. She embodied the fruit of the spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
meekness, temperance: against such there is
no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

When Peter arrived at Dorcas’ house, the widows surrounded him and began to show him the coats and garments Dorcas had made for them. This tells us something about Dorcas as a Christian. She was known for putting her beliefs into practice to help those around her. She showed her faith by her works (Jas. 2:18). Look more closely at Dorcas’ example. It was the widows who came to Peter, showing him the things Dorcas had made. Widows require special consideration, and Dorcas recognized this doing “charitable deeds.” Without question, she showed her love for Christ and her neighbor. She exhibited the fruit of love by giving of herself tirelessly and unselfishly with no expectations in return. What love she had for her fellowman (Luke 10:27)! **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** has the following to say about love:

Love to both God and man is fundamental to true religion, whether as expressed in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Jesus Himself declared that all the law and the

prophets hang upon love (Matt. 22:40; Mark 12:28-34) (Evans).

[The definition of] love, whether used of God or man, is an earnest and anxious desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well-being of the one loved. . . . Whatever love there is in man, whether it be toward God or toward his fellowman, has its source in God—“Love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:7-ff); “We love, because he first loved us” (1John 4:19) (sec. 1, 3.1).

She gave of herself to help others because she embodied the fruit of love, which undergirds the foundation of all that motivates Christians to serve. Christians today must be motivated to serve from a heart of love.

Additionally, Dorcas embodied the fruit of goodness. The Easton Bible Dictionary defines goodness this way:

In man [goodness] is not a mere passive quality, but the deliberate preference of right to wrong, the firm and persistent resistance of all moral evil, and the choosing and following of all moral good (“Goodness”).

Dorcas chose to deliberately live a life filled with integrity, kindness, and upstanding Biblical morality. Her acts of kindness were bountiful and abundant, but mostly she consistently lived and displayed them. Her life was molded by God’s standard for moral living (Rom. 12:1-2) and consequently brought “forth good things” (Matt. 12:35). It is inconceivable for this writer to think that Dorcas’ friends would have grieved as they did if they had not consistently witnessed goodness in Dorcas’ daily living. Garland Elkins

summed it up beautifully in the following from a lesson entitled “*Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit*” (208):

Every Christian should so live that what Paul said of the Romans could be truthfully said of each one of us. “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). Never for one moment should we entertain the thought of ceasing to strive to be good and to do good unto all men. “So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

The “good and faithful servant” was one who had accomplished his Master’s will (Matt. 25:21). Like Dorcas, the Christian’s desire should be that “our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess.1:11).

Considering how much time Dorcas must have spent helping others, she would have been longsuffering to continue to give of her self as she did. Thayer defines longsuffering as:

To be of a long spirit, not to lose heart, to persevere patiently and bravely and enduring misfortunes and troubles; to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging; to be longsuffering, slow to anger, slow to punish.

Making clothes in the first century had to have been time-consuming and would have required Dorcas to “persevere patiently.” She did not have a modern day Singer Professional Heavy Duty Sewing Machine to make her task easier. A garment had to be cut and sewn by hand, that is,

if one could buy the material (another opportunity for patience). She did not have electric lights by which to see as she labored over garments she fashioned with needle and thread. We are not given any details of how Dorcas made the many garments and coats attributed to her. It is possible she wove the material herself and spun the threads or yarns. Whatever her starting point, Dorcas gave of her time and her energy to those for whom she made clothing. She understood what it meant to be a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) by giving something valuable and precious: her time. Surely her sacrifice required great faith to keep working diligently and to keep believing her labors were pleasing to God and would bring others to Christ. Like Dorcas, Christians today should practice patience and longsuffering while leading others to Christ through diligent efforts.

Dorcas also possessed the fruit of meekness and self-control. Elkins said it this way:

Meekness is defined as “mildness, forbearance, gentleness, kindness. An attitude of meekness, then, is one of mild forbearance and gentle kindness. It is an attitude devoid of harsh intolerance and bitterness” (210).

While there is no record that any of the widows receiving her charity ever complained, one can only fathom a guess what issues Dorcas faced each day as she stitched until her fingers were sore and interacted with those in need. If first century people were anything like their twenty-first century counterparts, then human nature dictates that **someone** in the city of Joppa complained about **something** she did for them. It is probable that Dorcas would have had a “no good deed goes unpunished” kind of day occasionally. This is exactly the type of situation that requires one to draw on his reserve of self-control or the ability to master self (1 Cor. 9:25-27) and demonstrate meekness. Solomon wrote, “He that is

slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32). Finally, Elkins wrote:

Christians must ‘Put on therefore, as God’s elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering’ (Col. 3:12). Christians are to ‘follow after ... love, patience, meekness.’ And, in our teaching, meekness must be very prevalent and prominent. All people, both within and without the church, should be able to examine our lives and to take note that we possess meekness” (211).

One should leave a legacy of service.

One may ask how. The answer is by living a life so that others will miss us when we are gone. Dorcas’ deeds were so well known that the widows at Dorcas’ bedside were weeping and overcome with grief; she was truly missed. Harold J. Ockenga in the book **Women Who Made Bible History** put it this way:

The works of Dorcas were recognized in the feeling which the Christian community experienced when Dorcas was gone. They remembered her self-consuming service, her compassion, her faithfulness, her charity. They knew that they had lost their dearest friend. The picture of these people gathered about her in her room weeping does not describe people who are sorry for the things and service they have lost but because they had lost one whom they love (224-25).

Dorcas left a legacy that is still reaping rewards until this day. While Dorcas went about carrying out her duties

as a disciple and reaching out to the poor and the widows, her work was having a lasting affect on those she served. She did not strive to be a leader but was content to stay in her own home and do all she could to serve God in her sphere of influence, in her own community, where she lived. Yet, because of her faithful service, she did indeed leave a legacy for women in every generation, all over the world. Many women throughout history have formed “Dorcas Societies,” holding humanitarian ideals and engaging in various relief activities because Dorcas has been **the ultimate example** of charitable giving and benevolence. Christian women today who are striving to be a “Dorcas” would do well to expand her ability to influence others through her charitable deeds. Because of her legacy of “good works” and benevolence, Dorcas’ resurrection “caused many to believe in the Lord.” There is no better legacy than leading the lost to Christ. How Dorcas’ friends must have rejoiced that their “sister was alive!”

Raised To Serve

Dorcas was raised from the dead to continue to serve and to bring glory to God. Before obeying the gospel, every person walked “according to the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2). But upon obeying the gospel, New Testament Christians have been raised to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Paul stated that Christians were “buried with him in baptism” but have been “risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). Christians have been raised for a specific purpose: to do good works.

The Purpose Of Good Works

It is important to understand that Christians are not saved “by good works” but are saved to “do good works.” Good works can not be done to earn one’s way into heaven as some believe. The Bible teaches that God saves us by

His mercy and grace, not our works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:4-7). Christians are saved to do good works because we have been created in Christ Jesus to do so (Eph. 2:10). Likewise, Christians have been redeemed and purified to be zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

Thus, Christians are to be ready for every good work (Tit. 3:1); careful to maintain good works (Tit. 3:8); and learn to maintain good works (Tit. 3:14). As a child of God, it is not optional whether one does good works. We are to do good works because they bring glory to God (Matt. 5:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:12) and they are necessary to be like Jesus (Luke 6:40; Acts 10:38). Furthermore, good works demonstrate our faith (Jas. 2:14-17, 20, 26) and they meet urgent needs (Tit. 3:14).

Good Works Christians Should Do

Often, this writer has heard Christians say, “There’s just nothing for me to do in this congregation; all the jobs are being done by someone who has always done them.” This, of course, is not usually the case, but it is an excuse given for not being actively engaged in the Lord’s work without someone telling them what to do specifically. While so-called perceived “organized works” (preparing communion, maintaining the baptistery linens, attending the nursery, etc.) of the congregation may appear to be fully manned, Jesus never commanded that a Christian’s work be limited to those within the confines of duties that facilitate worship services. Christians are commanded to be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). There is never a time when a Christian should not be working for Lord and serving others this side of heaven. No one in the kingdom should be limited in his service to God because he was not told what to do. There is a work which every Christian can perform to serve others. They need not be as complicated as making clothing; they can be as simple as telephoning an elderly shut-in, providing a few food items to a local charity

or writing a note of encouragement. Every faithful child of God should let the work of our hands “appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children and let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands” (Psa. 90:16-17). Mark A. Copeland said the following:

Remember how Jesus impressed on his disciples the importance of doing good in Matt. 25:34-40:

1. When we feed the hungry, we feed Christ!
2. When we give drink to the thirsty, we give drink to Christ!
3. When we take in the stranger, we take in Christ!
4. When we clothe the naked, we clothe Christ!
5. When we visit the sick and the imprisoned, we visit Christ!

Conclusion

The world is a busy place and everyone’s life can become complicated at times. It often seems to take all of one’s energy just to get through the day. But that is the exact time to remember the example of Dorcas. Many things can be done for others that will help the Christian stay focused on the goal. Proverbs 31:20 says that the virtuous woman “extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hand to the needy” (NKJV). Often, a simple extension of one’s hand is just the attention a person may need.

The times and physical circumstances in which we live are far different than those of Dorcas’ day, but people still need each Christian’s time, talent, and tender care in whatever form it can be given to them. Learn from the example of Dorcas and be “doers” who are “full of good works and almsdeeds.” Christians are to do good to all men, especially our brethren (Gal. 6:10) and not grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:13).

Dorcas was raised to continue to serve. Christians likewise have been raised from former lives of sin to

serve God and do good works. “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Tit. 3:8). Until that day Jesus returns to this earth, may all meditate on these inspired words of Paul in Colossians 3:1, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.”

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CHAPTER 36

Rhoda: The Girl Who Forgot To Open The Gate

Tish Clarke

It is an honor to be asked to speak on this great lectureship which has meant so much to my family throughout the years. The Southaven church has been my extended family for nearly twenty years, and I will always cherish the memories of those who have passed on to their reward, and to the countless lovely dear friends who are still enriching many areas of my life. I believe the church is in capable and caring hands with Con, Larry, Wade, and Robert. May they be blessed to continue to work with her for numerous years to come.

Introduction

Acts 12 contains an accounting of Peter's miraculous escape from prison in Jerusalem. Nestled in the middle of this pivotal chapter we find the damsel Rhoda as a courageous faithful example to Christians through the ages. However, before we jump right into the text we are first going to peer into 1st century history in order to truly understand the culture, the people, and the political climate of the day. Once we realize the depth of persecution and the reason behind it, we will better appreciate the courage of Peter, the correct response of the Jerusalem Christians to his imprisonment, and the need for their faith to grow in regards to God's power to answer their prayers, and we will witness the deep faith

and courage of a mere servant girl. It is my hope that we will become more like Rhoda and believe that God indeed has the power to answer our prayers no matter how dire the circumstances may seem to us.

Setting

During the time of Christ's birth, Herod the Great was in power. After the wise men came from the east looking for "he that is born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2, KJV), he realized he had to do something quickly to secure his throne. With deceit in his heart and murder on his mind, he issued the command to slaughter thousands of Jewish baby boys in order to kill the one child who was a threat to his kingdom. Due to God's providence and plan from the beginning of time, this Herod's plan was thwarted, and Christ lived to be the Savior of mankind. Fast forward about thirty years to Herod Antipas, who murdered John the Baptist because of a rash promise made to his adulterous wife's daughter, and we are getting closer to the time period of Acts 12. The Herod we read of in our text was the nephew of Herod Antipas and the grandson of Herod the Great; his name was Herod Agrippa I. The year was approximately A.D. 48.

Herod Agrippa I, known as Agrippa from henceforth, grew up in Rome and was a contemporary of the imperial family. McGarvey wrote of Agrippa in his commentary on Acts,

He grew up in Rome, where he wasted what fortune he had inherited in princely extravagance, but while doing so he acquired an intimacy with Caius Caesar, afterward the famous Caligula of history. When the latter ascended the throne, at the death of Tiberius, he elevated his friend, Agrippa, as this Herod was most usually called, to a kingdom, which was subsequently enlarged by Claudius until

it embraced all the territory ruled by his grandfather, Herod the Great. He was now in the zenith of his power, and living in the utmost magnificence (151-152).

By the time we reach Acts 12, Agrippa had come a long way from the young man who at the age of 33 had to flee Rome in order to escape his creditors. He was no longer penniless and in great debt; he was king and ruler over vast territories and great riches! With this newfound power, a ruthlessness to succeed at any cost was born; innocent men, faithful Christians, and even those of his guard suffered greatly because of his arrogance and pride. Furthermore, his conceited godlike image of himself consequently led to his own painful and horrifying death.

The early church faced much persecution from within the Jewish community; however, it now faced persecution from the civilian government in the form of Agrippa. Acts 11 details Peter's accounting of the Gentile conversions, the growth of the church, and the wonderful success which Barnabas and Paul were having in Antioch. As the pages turn, we leave this joyful accounting of the many triumphs of Paul's journey and turn to some of the darkest hours which ever faced Christianity—Jerusalem was to witness the first apostolic martyr. Agrippa, always on the hunt for admiration and honor from any he came in contact with, desperately wanted to gain the approval and admiration of the Jews. He realized that their animosity towards the Christians worked to his advantage.

Agrippa came from mixed ancestry. His grandmother was a Hasmonean princess and Herod the Great, his grandfather, was Jewish—both of which appealed to the Jews. However, Agrippa was part Idumean and the Jews despised and mistrusted him for it. The Bible Exposition Commentary notes the following about the Herods, "All of the Herods had

Edomite blood in them, and, like their ancestor Esau, they were hostile to the Jews (Gen. 25:19ff). They practiced the Jewish religion when it helped fulfill their plans for gaining more power and wealth” (Wiersbe). We know from the Bible and historical accounts from the first century that none of the Herods had any problem committing murder when it suited their selfish interests.

Obadiah gave us a quick reminder in Hebrew history as he detailed why the Jews harbored such bitterness against Edom (later known as Idumea): (1) the Edomites displayed arrogance and cruelty to Judah (Obad. 1-5); (2) their major crime was gloating when Jerusalem was invaded (Obad. 10-14); and (3) they rejoiced at Jerusalem’s downfall when they were carried away into captivity and did not help their brothers as allies, but united with Judah’s enemy to help carry them away (Obad. 14). Agrippa knew that with his Edomite blood he would never be able to reign in complete authority if he did not gain the Jews approval. He very craftily designed a plan that brought immediate, positive results for him. He aided the Jews in defeating this new Christian heresy, as the Jews viewed it, and persecuted the church’s prominent leaders by having James killed.

According to Keener, Agrippa did whatever was necessary to gain the approval of the people as he was “pro-Pharisee and frequented the temple.” Even though the Pharisees did not have political power, they were instrumental in influencing the multitudes of Jews; consequently, Agrippa aligned himself with these hypocritical men to further his selfish ambition. He took James, brother of John and son of Zebedee, and casually ordered him beheaded (Acts 12:1-2), and then he seized Peter. Suddenly, the Jerusalem Christians were thrown into turmoil and despair as one beloved apostle was instantly killed and the other awaited his own death.

Jesus had foretold of this persecution in Matthew 20:20-23, when He declared that James and John would both

partake of the same suffering He would. It is interesting to note that the martyrdom of James is the only apostolic death to be documented explicitly in the New Testament. The **KJV Bible Commentary** recorded the 1st century writing of Eusebius about James's martyrdom, "In his *Ecclesiastical History* (ii. 9) Eusebius preserves a tradition, which was first found in Clement of Alexandria, that the officer who was attached to James and commissioned with guarding him, was so impressed with the apostle...that before James was martyred, this officer...was beheaded with the apostle" (2157). If this historian's accounting was accurate, we gain valuable knowledge about James, a true man of God, as he took every advantage to evangelize and seek the lost—no matter the circumstance! What a tremendous example for us today!

Agrippa was overcome with the success of James's death and, in order to gain even more power with the Jews, did not stop at the death of one apostle—no, the Bible simply states "because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also" (Acts 12:3). Whereas James was immediately convicted of his "guilt," and his execution was carried out without a trial, Peter was taken during Passover. Even Agrippa realized he had to wait for the ending of the feast days to kill Peter in order to continue to have the Jews' approval. This gives us insight into the prominence of James and Peter in the kingdom of Christ during the 1st Century. Agrippa thought that by killing those in leadership positions, he was cutting off the head of the church. Of course, he was far from the truth. Even after the miraculous escape of the apostles from prison in Acts 5, he did not grasp the fact that he was working against the Almighty God. Ironically, it was after James's death and Peter's imprisonment that the Gospel grew and multiplied (Acts 12:24).

As noted earlier, this was not the first time that Peter was imprisoned for his preaching of the Gospel. Remember,

after the mighty miracles which the apostles conducted in and around Jerusalem, the high priest rose up and put them all in the common prison. Acts 5:19-20 simply states, “But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” The rest of chapter 5 is a vivid description of the courage and faith of the apostles as they fulfilled this command and were ultimately beaten for their preaching. Even though they were commanded to “not speak in the name of Jesus” (Acts 5:40), they went away rejoicing and “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Perhaps this earlier miraculous freeing of the apostles caused Agrippa to go to such drastic measures to insure that Peter remained in his prison this time. In Acts 5 it was the Sanhedrin that locked up the apostles and beat them. However, history recorded that Agrippa was very involved with the Pharisees and the temple; therefore, it was quite possible that he knew of this earlier prison break. If something like that were to happen in our day and time, the news would spread far and wide. Acts 12:4 revealed Agrippa’s obvious concern with keeping Peter imprisoned, “And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter (Passover) to bring him forth to the people.”

Larry Richards noted the following about Peter’s apprehension,

Peter was imprisoned in the Fortress Antonia, just beyond the magnificent temple Herod the Great had spent 38 years and enormous sums to enhance. Important prisoners kept under guard were usually chained to one soldier. The political significance that Herod

attached to Peter is seen in the fact that the apostle was “bound with two chains between two soldiers” (v. 5). In addition, guards were posted outside the locked cell door (257).

A quaternion was made up of four Roman soldiers; Peter was assigned four squads, sixteen soldiers to ensure he remained bound! Important prisoners were usually only assigned to be chained to **one** soldier —Peter had **four** for each 3 hour watch, one soldier chained on either side of Peter and two to guard the doors.

The type of prison Peter was likely held in at this time was nothing like our clean, politically correct cells, with the guilty having more rights than the victim, as is so often the case in our day and time. Many commentaries believe that most likely Peter was imprisoned in the fortress Antonia, which Herod the Great had built during his reign, and which was named for a contemporary of his, Mark Antony. M.G. Easton wrote of this “castle”:

Antonia—a fortress in Jerusalem, at the north-west corner of the temple area. It is called “the castle” (Acts 21:34, 37). From the stairs of this castle Paul delivered his famous speech to the multitude in the area below (Acts 22:1–21). It was originally a place in which were kept the vestments of the high priest. Herod fortified it, and called it Antonia in honour of his friend Mark Antony. It was of great size, and commanded [sic] the temple. It was built on a plateau of rock, separated on the north from the hill Bezetha by a ditch about 30 feet deep and 165 feet wide.

Wood and Marshall, writers of **The New Bible Dictionary**, give further insight into prisons of the New Testament,

Four Greek words are translated by 'prison' in the EVV. John the Baptist was imprisoned in a *desmōtērion*, a 'place of bonds'. This was at Herod's fortress at Machaerus in Peraea, E of the Dead Sea (Jos., Ant. 18.119), where two dungeons have been discovered, one still showing traces of fetters. *phylakē*, a 'place of guarding', is the most general and frequently used term. It suggests a place where the prisoners were closely watched. The chief priests imprisoned the apostles (Acts 5:19) in what is also called a *tērēsis dēmosia*, a 'public place of watching' (cf. Acts 4:3).

When Herod put Peter in prison, probably in the fortress of Antonia, where Paul was later lodged (Acts 21:34; 23:30) and referred to here as an *oikēma*, 'house', the apostle was guarded continually by four soldiers, two chained to him and two outside the door (Acts 12:3–6). Beyond this there would appear to have been another guard and then the iron outer gate (Acts 12:10). At Philippi, Paul was in custody in the town jail, under the charge of a keeper, where there was an inner, perhaps underground, chamber containing stocks (Acts 16:24). These would have been several holes, allowing the legs to be forced wide apart to ensure greater security and greater pain. In Caesarea, Paul was imprisoned (Acts 23:35) in Herod's castle, but when a prisoner at Rome he was allowed to stay in his own lodging, with a soldier always chained to him (Acts 28:16, 30) (962).

The prison in which Agrippa had secured Peter does not really matter. It was certainly a dungeon like atmosphere, in which we find Peter sleeping, chained between two guards. James had been beheaded just days before; yet Peter was at peace with his circumstances. This documented his great courage and faith in his God. He was ready to die for his Saviour. What a far cry from the man we saw at the close of our Saviour's life who denounced ever having known Christ!

Recently, I received an article from Tom Wacaster entitled "What Tomorrow May Bring" in which he wisely noted,

I have the opportunity to revisit acquaintances of long ago, and sometimes I am amazed at the spiritual strides that some of my early converts have made in their spiritual growth. Those who measure things with myopic vision focused only on the here and now will rob themselves of the greater satisfaction that comes with keeping everything in proper perspective. Time, when compared with eternity, is only relative. And who knows—in the words of the immortal song—"Take new courage, you cannot tell what the morrow will bring."

Peter's courage and faith is seen time and again throughout the book of Acts; he had come a long way from where he began. After the transfiguration, we find him in a leadership role as he expounded about Christ in front of about 120 men in Acts 1:15-26. He preached the first recorded sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. He was instrumental in many miracles which healed the lame, raised the dead, and through all this brought many of the people to believe in Jesus as their Saviour. We observe his

spiritual growth through the vision he received in Acts 10 and how he subsequently taught the truth to the Gentile nations. He baptized the first Gentile converts, Cornelius and his household, an act which ultimately gave all Gentiles the right for kingdom membership, as was prophesied. Acts 11 documented his conviction about the Gentile conversions as he explained his actions to the Jews who were questioning his authority to preach to Gentiles.

Peter truly grew into a courageous man of God with a deep abiding faith and strength to withstand the persecutions he was to face in the near future. Was it any wonder that we found him peacefully asleep, chained between two guards in prison? His faith had grown to such heights that he now firmly believed in His God to use him in whatever way was necessary for the kingdom to grow—even through his death. He became a man able to stand on his great faith which sustained him through all the many dark hours of his life. He left behind the man whom Jesus addressed in Matthew 14:31, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” In the same manner, we too can experience a growth in our faith if we follow Peter’s example and allow Christ to rule supreme in our lives—no matter the cost.

The Christians Respond

“But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5). This is such a simple statement, but packed with tremendous punch. Imagine how these Christians must have felt when the news radiated throughout the region of Palestine. They knew persecution from their own when Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews. However, this was the first time the civilian government was involved since the death of John the Baptist, and it had devastating results. James, a beloved apostle, was beheaded at the whim of their king, Agrippa. Was it due to wrongs James had committed against the government? No, he was killed because Agrippa

wanted to “vex certain of the church” (Acts 12:1) in order to gain the Jews approval. Did these Christians fall apart and feel all was lost? Did they return to Judaism? We are not told that either of these responses occurred. No, we are told that they were gathered at Mary’s house, the mother of John Mark, fervently in prayer for their beloved Peter.

Prayer has always been, and will always be an integral part of the Christian’s way of life. During the ministry of Christ on earth, the disciples were so impressed by the prayer life of their Lord that they requested of Him in Luke 11:1 to “teach us to pray,” and He immediately set forth the example of the model prayer in verses 2-4 of that same chapter. He knew the value of prayer in His own life when before He chose His disciples “he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Matthew 21:21-23 recorded His teaching of what an active prayer life can accomplish: “If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” In John 17:21, He prayed for His followers and all the believers that “they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” He cried out with much agonizing and pleading before His impending trial, scourging, and horrifying death on the Cross. There are too many examples to adequately mention them all in this writing. Consider the following verses in your own study of Christ’s example of prayer: Luke 11:9, Matthew 7:11, Matthew 18:19-20, John 14:13, and John 15:7.

The Acts of the Apostles and the epistles were written generally after this episode in Acts 12. We glean much through what they have to say on the subject of prayer. Throughout the book of Acts we read of many different times in which

prayer was an important part of the early Christian's life. A few examples are the following:

- Acts 1:14...after the ascension of Christ, the apostles led by example after they “all continued with one accord in **prayer** and supplication.”
- Acts 2:42....after the great day of Pentecost, the new converts “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in **prayers.**”
- Acts 6:4...the church appointed men to take care of the business of the church so that the apostles could give themselves “continually to **prayer**, and to the ministry of the word.”

Paul continuously prayed for the Christians in his writings (Rom. 1:9) and requested for them to remember him in their prayers. He taught that the Spirit makes intercessions for us in prayer because “we know not what we should **pray** for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). Again, he affirmed the need to continuously be in prayer, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; **continuing instant in prayer**” (Rom. 12:12). Paul needed the prayers of the saints, “I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that **ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me**; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints” (Rom. 15:30-31).

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they would be “**Praying always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the

mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:18-19). He told them that he would “Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my **prayers**” (Eph. 1:16).

To the Philippians Paul continued “**always in every prayer**” (Phil. 1:3-5) and taught them “in every thing by **prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). He told the Thessalonians to “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thess. 5:17), he prayed that they would be “preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23), and he asked for their prayers that the “word of the Lord may have free course” (2 Thess. 3:1).

James, the half brother to our Lord, taught much about prayer in his epistle. James 5:13-16 offers a quick synopsis of when we should pray and what kind of person we should be in order for our prayers to be heard and answered. A key verse in this reading is found in James 5:13, “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.” The **MacArthur New Testament Commentary** provides much insight into these verses:

James wrote his epistle to Jewish believers who had been forced to flee from Palestine by the persecution recorded in Acts 8:1–4. In 1:1 he referred to them as “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” Being both Jewish and Christians, they faced hostility from the pagan culture in which they lived. Knowing that, James opened his epistle with an exhortation to patiently endure trials (1:2ff.). In chapter 5 he returned to that theme. The first six verses described the persecution his poor readers were suffering at the hands of the wicked rich—even to the point of death (v. 6). Verses 7–11 call for patient endurance of trials and persecution (cf. chap. 19 of this volume).

James exhorted those about to collapse under the weight of their afflictions to prop up their hearts and resolutely, determinedly persist.

In view of the overall context of the epistle, particularly chapter 5, it is not surprising that James mentions suffering in 5:13. He calls on those who are suffering the persecution discussed in 5:1–11 to pray, since prayer taps the source of spiritual endurance. It would have been surprising if, in a letter to struggling, persecuted believers, James had neglected to mention prayer. A strong commitment to prayer is a prerequisite to enduring suffering and affliction.

The theme of verses 13–18, then, is prayer, which is mentioned in every one of those verses. James’s exhortation to prayer embraces the prayer life of the entire church. Individual believers are called to pray in verse 13, the elders in verses 14–15, and the congregation in verse 16...

As the context and the content of this section make clear, the subject is not physical illness or healing. Instead, its concern is with healing spiritual weakness, spiritual weariness, spiritual exhaustion, and spiritual depression through prayer, as well as dealing with the suffering and sin that accompanies it. To insert a discussion here on physical healing would be incongruous. Nothing in the preceding or following context would prepare James’s readers for that. But a section on how to help the casualties of persecution through prayer fits perfectly into the flow of James’s thought. Specifically, James discusses the relationship of prayer to comfort, restoration, fellowship, and power (274).

Peter understood the necessity and strength which prayer gives to the believer. He said in 1 Peter 3:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” Peter certainly had witnessed time and again the truth of this statement in his own life. He warned the Christians

that they would suffer persecution like their Savior had (1 Pet. 4:1-2) and told them to rejoice when they did (4:12-14). Peter also taught them to glorify God through their suffering, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (4:16). It is easy for us, as well as the 1st century Christians, to listen to a man who had led by example.

As we think back to the episode in Acts 12, many commentators believe that these Christians were not praying for Peter’s release but that He might be able to endure the death that awaited him. However, it is quite possible they were praying for his release. Remember, they had seen the apostles imprisoned in Acts 5 and then miraculously released by an angel. Whether or not they were praying for his release or his courage, it was clear that while these faithful Christians fervently prayed for their beloved apostle Peter, God was listening. James 5:16b states, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 simply records, “Pray without ceasing.” This is a lifelong commitment to prayer. The Jerusalem Christians turned directly to prayer in their hour of need and for this they need to be commended.

The Miracle

Leaving the faithful Christians, for a time we return to Agrippa and his concerns. Whether or not the king was resting that night, or anticipating a possible jail break, our Lord was indeed answering prayer. Returning back to the text at hand we read in Acts 12:7-11 the following:

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.

And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the LORD hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

What a truly exciting prison break! No one died, no shots were fired, yet Peter was outside the prison walls, unchained from Agrippa's soldiers; no one even knew he was missing! As a freed man, Peter found himself near the house of Mary, and he stood knocking at the door of the gate.

Enter Rhoda

Richards and Richards relate from **Every Woman in the Bible**, the following interesting cultural facts from the first century:

In Jerusalem, houses were set side by side with their outside walls facing the street. The doors in these walls were kept closed, ensuring the family's privacy and safety. The door had no windows or peepholes. Instead the doorkeeper was expected to recognize the voice of family friends and open the door only for friends.

These verses in Acts accurately depict this situation. Rhoda, the servant girl, answered a knock on the door and was stunned to recognize Peter's voice....Even though Rhoda is mentioned only briefly, we know several important things about her. Rhoda was a "girl." The Greek word used suggests that she was probably around twelve years old, but she participated in the prayer gathering. While Rhoda may have been a servant girl, she was deeply involved in the life of the Jerusalem congregation. When she heard Peter's voice, it was "because of her gladness" (v. 14) that she ran back without opening the door. She was excited and thrilled and eager to share the news with those inside (240).

As for Peter, he had escaped a near death experience, and he wanted to be with his beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. We should want to gain strength and encouragement as well from our church family.

Notice what the faithfully, fervently praying Christians said in response to Rhoda as she gladly declared Peter was at the door in Acts 12:14-16:

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, **Thou art mad.** But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, **It is his angel.** But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

I Never Knew That Was in the Bible states that the meaning in the Greek of “constantly affirming” is different than we use in the English language today:

“Constant” is mainly used today as an adjective to describe something that continually occurs or is always there (“a constant reminder”). In the KJV, however, the main emphasis of the word is “with firmness or steadfastness.”

For example, when Rhoda “constantly affirmed” (Acts 12:15, KJV) that Peter was at the door, the Greek does not mean “continually,” but “confidently”: “she insisted” that it was so (NLT, NRSV, RSV); “kept insisting” (NASB, NIV, NKJV); and “kept [NCV, “kept on”] saying” (CEV, NCV) (Manser 91).

We can learn so much from Rhoda, the young servant girl of Acts 12. She was praying with the Christians which would indicate that in Mary’s house there was no distinction in social classes. We also see her spirit of joy as she was so overcome with excitement that she forgot to open the door. Rhoda refused to back down when the people in the household told her that she was mad. Would you lose heart if you were told that you must be insane by Christians who should have exhibited a deeper faith than you? Our Rhoda steadfastly continued to proclaim that it indeed was Peter who still knocked at the door.

Today, it is encouraging to see many young Christians standing fast for their faith and holding to the Word of God in so many areas. They are to be commended for showing such strength and maturity beyond their years. Unfortunately, this cannot always be said about the older supposedly more mature Christians in the church. It deeply concerns me when I see men and women who should know better acting in

such a way as to undermine the faith of a teenager or new Christian. Satan acts in heinous ways to undermine the faith of every Christian; he is not above involving other Christians to get the job done. In his mind he has killed two birds with one stone!

I have had very disturbing conversations with too many fragile teenagers who have seen older, supposedly more mature Christians involved in actions contrary to the Word of God. I have been told by more than one young person of Christians being seen in pictures at the casino; Christians drinking, smoking, and attending places a righteous man would not be seen at; and other events which strike at the heart of these precious souls' faith. Then, these same Christians are seen singing praises, leading in prayer and service in the church, and even teaching Bible classes—in essence, leading a double life! Hypocritical Christians have done much to undermine the faith of all who see their pretense. Children can see through insincerity much easier than adults realize.

Also, some find it very easy to judge a teenager's heart simply because their clothes or style might be a little strange to them, although there is nothing immodest about it. Yes, I will admit—I might not wear that shirt or hairstyle because it is too young or on the cutting edge for me, but does that in itself make it wrong? I would much rather these babes be found in church, and their faith growing, than to see them turned away by judgmental hypocritical Christians. Christ said “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). I am not advocating compromising where the Bible does not, but there is a time and a place to teach and we need to keep our goal in mind—preservation of their souls, not condemnation! I am sure that if we were all honest that there are memories of events in our teen years we wish had not occurred. We need to help our young Christians to grow into maturity through understanding and by example,

not by wholesale disapproval, or expecting them to become miniature adults overnight.

Christ warns with very strong words about offending the little ones in Matthew 18:6-7, “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” In our pride to be seen as “superior Christians” we can find ourselves more like Agrippa, with his self-centered interests, than Rhoda, and that is not a comparison I would want made of me. The Jerusalem Christians should have listened to this faithful girl and believed in the power of God’s ability to act on Peter’s behalf as she did.

Since she was steadfastly determined to stick to her story that Peter was knocking on the door, their next response was that it must be his angel. A number of commentaries note that the Jews held onto a superstition that guardian angels were assigned to each soul and thus suggest that by making this statement they thought it must be Peter’s angel knocking at the door. Whether this was their view or not, the fact is that they still did not realize that God answered their prayers. Today, even the strongest of Christians sometimes have to redirect their thinking and believe that God does answer prayers in His time, His way.

Once again, sometimes it is the youth that can teach by example those who should be wiser in the faith. Rhoda is to be commended for her deep faith in her belief that her prayers were answered as Peter in fact stood on the other side of that door—she was adamant to that reality and would not back down. We should not be too quick to silence the youth when their faith shines so brightly. Instead we should commend and encourage them for their childlike faith which Christ spoke of in Matthew 18:3,

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Rhoda did not have preconceived ideas that we as adults sometimes have in regards to God’s majesty and power. She had fervently prayed for Peter’s release and did not question the reality that her prayers had been answered.

When the door was finally opened, Acts 12:16 says that “they were astonished.” They were completely astounded, beside their senses with amazement! They were so entirely amazed at his presence that Peter had to hold up his hand and request their silence in order to explain what had happened. After declaring how the Lord had released him from prison, he wanted to make sure that they told James and the other brethren the news. Peter was not concerned with himself; he wanted to strengthen the brotherhood and focus them on the One Who answers prayers in times of need.

We need to learn the same lesson today. No matter what we are facing, God is ready and willing to hear our cry and give an answer. The Psalmist declared the following about prayer:

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up (Psa. 5:1-3).

Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips (Psa. 17:1).

The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress

I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears (Psa. 18:5-6).

Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek (Psa. 27:7-8).

Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy (Psa. 61:1-3).

Many other verses could be cited to prove that God will hear the cry of faithful brethren, but these are sufficient to prove the point!

As a side note, John's recording in Revelation 3:20 comes to mind as Jesus declares, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." In our lesson Peter stood at the door and awaited entrance to come into safety. By contrast, Christ is depicted as standing outside our door waiting to come in and fellowship. If Christ is standing on the outside of our door, we are not in safety. We must invite Him in by obeying all His Word teaches on how to gain Kingdom entrance. Once we are in His Kingdom, we are saved and within His walls of protection and all the other benefits He has promised to us.

The rest of the story, as Paul Harvey used to say, involved Agrippa's foolish pride and subsequent horrifying death. This paper is not about that part of the story, but it is exciting

and one you should finish some time on your own. In the book of Acts no more is said of Rhoda and very little of Peter. Paul's missionary journeys became center stage at this point. It seems appropriate to leave you with words from Peter in 1 Peter 5:6-7, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Peter knew this firsthand, and so did Rhoda. Will we learn from their faith?

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