

POWER

... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ... (Romans 1:16)

SIMON PETER'S SHADOW: AN OVERVIEW OF PETER'S LIFE (PART 3) *Wade L. Webster*

Although Peter's shadow does not exert a miraculous power over us today, as it evidently did over men at one time (Acts 5:15), it does move us to rise up and walk with the Lord.

In the first two installments of this study, we examined six roles that Peter filled during his lifetime. We saw Peter the prodigal, the preacher, the presbyter, the pupil, the porter, and the partner. In this final part of our study, we will notice four additional roles that are often assigned to Peter.

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:

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 Matthew 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

- 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

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).

Another detail recorded by inspiration regarding Peter's life that stands in direct opposition to the teachings of Catholicism relative to the pope is the fact 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. This matter 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." 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). 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." 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

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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).

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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.

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros. **The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament.** Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, Inc., 1992, #1252.

² *Ibid.*, #2092.

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