Peter

John G. Butler

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PETER
The Illustrious Disciple
Bible Biography Series
Number Eight
John G. Butler

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible Biography Series is a series of twenty books written about Bible characters. These books are expository studies of the Scripture. They are extensively organized and outlined, filled with Gospel lessons and practical applications of Scripture to every day life, written in easy to understand laymen's language, and theologically and morally they take a strong, old-fashioned, fundamentalist position which is increasingly unpopular but greatly needed in our day.

These books are very helpful to preachers in providing material for sermons and lessons on these Bible characters and texts. They will also be found to provide much instruction for the individual in his or her personal Bible study; and because of their organized structure, they are very adaptable to Sunday School classes and Bible study groups.

The twenty books of the Bible Biography Series consist of books on *Joseph, Jonah, Elijah, Elisha, Gideon, Samson, John the Baptist, Peter, Abraham, Lot, Paul, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, Jacob, Hezekiah, Mordecai,* and *Ruth*.

The author, John G. Butler, is a native of Iowa. He has been a Baptist minister for nearly half a century and pastored for over thirty-five years with pastorates in Williamsburg, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Clinton, Iowa. He is a veteran of the United States Navy, attended Tennessee Temple University and is a graduate of Cedarville University. He is also the author of the *Studies of the Savior*, a series of books about Jesus Christ.

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[Seite 9] PREFACE

Peter was the most colorful of the twelve disciples. A man of action, he did nothing by halves. He was a take-charge person, a born leader, and a man who spoke up quickly and frankly on matters thus leaving no doubt as to where he stood, even when he stood on the wrong side of the issue. Very outgoing, Peter would never get lost in the crowd. You would always know where he was and what he was thinking and doing. To be with Peter would never be a dull and drab life.

Such is the exciting, dynamic, and sometimes troublesome personality of the man whom Jesus Christ changed from a sinner to a saint and from a fisherman to an apostle, and who became the outspoken leader of the twelve disciples and the mighty man of God who so ably led the church in its crucial early days. He makes for a most instructive, inspiring, and interesting study. And much is said of him in the New Testament to study; for he left a large imprint upon the Scriptures—the four Gospels mention him more than any other person except our Lord, he is the most prominent character in the first twelve chapters of the

book of Acts, and later on in the New Testament we have his two excellent epistles.

In our biography of Peter, we will limit our study to just the four Gospels and Acts. We will not examine his epistles in this biography, for they are a study in themselves. But this will not handicap our learning about Peter; for from the four Gospels and Acts, we will be able to cover his life from his conversion through a number of years of his leadership in the early church. From the four Gospels and Acts we will be able to observe his life from his early days as a believer, when he was long on zeal and short on knowledge, to the time when he was the firm and faithful rock spiritually that Christ, at Peter's conversion, predicted he would be.

[Seite 11] I

THE CONVERSION

JOHN 1:40–42

MANY BIOGRAPHIES BEGIN with the record of the physical birth of the person being written about. But in our study of the life of Peter, we begin with the record of his spiritual birth. We cannot begin sooner in his life, for Scripture is silent about Peter's early life. When Scripture brings Peter on the scene in his conversion experience, he is already a married adult (Matthew 8:14), a fisherman by trade (Matthew 4:18), and living near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44). But to begin Peter's biography with his conversion is not a bad place to start, for real life does not begin until one is saved.

Peter's conversion experience was not a spectacular event which would turn the heads of those who might witness it. It was simply a quiet encounter with Jesus Christ. But though a quiet encounter, it was still an event of tremendous magnitude because of what happened to him. As is the case in every conversion, that which happens to the person is the greatest thing that can happen to any person—a sin corrupted soul is saved from the damnation of hell and given eternal life in heaven. No event is greater for man to experience.

To examine the conversion of Peter, we will consider three things which the Scripture specifically reports were involved in his conversion. They are the concern by his brother (vv. 40, 41), the communication about his Messiah (v. 41), and c (v. 42).

[Seite 12] A. THE CONCERN BY HIS BROTHER

Peter was brought to Christ by his brother Andrew. Andrew and John (the writer of the Gospel of John) were pointed to Christ by John the Baptist (John 1:35–39). After the two had spent some time with Christ and had become acquainted with Him, Andrew set out to find Peter to tell him about the Lord. "He …

findeth his own brother Simon … And he brought him to Jesus" (vv. 41, 42). It is a simple, yet inspiring and instructive, account of a brother bringing a brother to Christ.

Dr. Plummer says, "In Church history St. Peter is everything, and St. Andrew is nothing: but would there have been an Apostle Peter but for Andrew?" Andrew did not write any books of the Bible, and he was not one of the main leaders of the early church, but a tremendous work occurred because Andrew went after his brother Peter and brought him to the Lord, for he brought to Christ a man who became one of the greatest of the Apostles. The same can be said about those who have won a Moody or other great man of God to the Lord. These folk are unknown for the most part, but their faithful testimony to Moody and others resulted in a great work of God. It is not necessary to be a great and famous preacher conducting city-wide campaigns to accomplish much for the Lord. Andrew did a tremendous work by just bringing his brother to the Lord.

In noting that Peter was not the first of the twelve disciples to be saved (he was actually the third of the disciples to be saved), Matthew Henry says, "If Peter had been the first-born of Christ's disciples, the papists would have made a noise with it; he did indeed afterwards come to be more eminent in gifts, but Andrew [and John] had the honor first to be acquainted with Christ, and to be the instrument of bringing Peter to him."

To examine the concern Andrew had for his brother Peter to come to Christ, we will note the reason for the concern, the responsibility for the concern, and the resoluteness of the concern.

1. The Reason for the Concern

That which inspired Andrew's concern for Peter was his **[Seite 13]** personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ. Once Andrew came to know Christ, he set out to bring Peter to Christ. Andrew had come to know the One Who was above all others. He had become acquainted with the Messiah. It was such a great experience that he had to tell others, and the first he sought out to tell was his brother Peter.

The first prerequisite for telling others about Christ is to know Christ yourself. Andrew was able to bring Peter to Christ because Andrew had first of all come to Christ himself. As another said, "To get other people as far as Peter, we must first of all have got as far as Andrew ourselves" (D. Young). All the training in the world will not make up for the lack of personal experience in knowing Christ. And, on the other hand, a great deal of training is not necessary for one to bring another to Christ. Andrew had not been to any special school; nor had he been given special instruction and authority by some synagogue to engage in evangelism. He had simply come to know Christ himself, and that

moved him to tell others of Christ. Training is often very necessary for other areas of service, and we do not negate the value of training for the Lord's service. But the lesson here is that a genuine salvation experience is the one essential requirement for encouraging others to come to Christ. When a person is saved, no matter what his gifts or abilities, he can at least do as Andrew and go to others and simply tell them that he is saved (or as Andrew said, "We have found the Messiah") and then take them where they can learn more about Christ. But he cannot do this if he is not saved himself. The motivation, the inspiration, the desire will simply not be there.

In view of this primary requirement for evangelism, it is no accident that apostate churches do not preach the Gospel and do not evidence concern about evangelizing the souls of men. They have never tasted of salvation themselves and, therefore, lack the primary ingredient to motivate them to tell others of Christ. Many in our fundamental churches give evidence that they, too, have never been saved; for they seem very disinterested in the work of getting out the Gospel message. Church to them is **[Seite 14]** merely a social center—a place for suppers, games, parties, and get-togethers. They are very interested in that part of the church; but when it comes to proclaiming the good news that Jesus Christ is the sinner's great need and hope, they fade away. Such folk may have been on the church membership rolls for decades, but they obviously are not born again.

However, when a man comes to know Christ, he will have a built-in interest in seeing others come to Christ. Yes, he may backslide and have his zeal diminished by disobedience; but the desire for others to know Christ will never be taken completely away. Salvation brings a built-in concern to spread the Gospel. Some may manifest the concern more than others, but all the redeemed will have the concern. It comes with salvation. Lacking it says one just may not saved.

2. The Responsibility for the Concern

Andrew was wise to be concerned about Peter. In fact, that is where his concern for the salvation of others should properly begin. To be concerned about the salvation of one's own brother—which in principle is to be concerned about those closest to you—is our first responsibility in proclaiming the Gospel. Missions begin at home. It does not stop at home, of course; and we remind our readers of that fact lest some conclude that foreign missions are not our responsibility. But what we are saying here is that our first mission is to those right around us. Christ emphasized this truth when He told the disciples after His resurrection that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached … among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). First it is Jerusalem; then it is

Judea and Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). The maniac of Gerasenes was also taught this truth by Christ. He who roamed the tombs of Gerasenes met Christ and was dramatically changed. He then wanted, quite understandably, to travel with Christ; but Christ told him to rather "Return to thine own house, and show what great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8:39).

There are some who are always talking about evangelism **[Seite 15]** overseas and in far off places of the world who never seem very interested in evangelism at home. For these folk distance seems to lend enchantment for proclaiming the Gospel to others. Many pastors have struggled with congregations like this to get them burdened to reach their own community. Such a church talks much about missions, nearly idolizes missionaries, and views the mission budget as sacred ground. But try getting those folk to spend money on reaching the folk around them—such as in a local radio ministry or visitation program or articles in the local newspaper or a distribution of Gospel literature to homes in the area of the church or other local efforts—and they suddenly grow indifferent and tighten their purse strings. We commend their interest in reaching distant lands with the Gospel, but to fail to have the same zeal for reaching the local area really condemns them. The same condemnation exists for those people who claim they are called to be missionaries in foreign lands who evidence little evangelistic interest and activity in their own church. They seem enchanted with the idea of going overseas to tell others the Gospel; but if you ask them to teach a Sunday School class or give their testimony in a jail service, they are full of excuses. But Andrew was a different story, he had his priorities right—he started with his own brother in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. The Resoluteness of the Concern

Andrew's concern for Peter was very strong. Two words in our text demonstrate the resoluteness of his concern for Peter's conversion. They are "findeth" (v. 41) and "brought" (v. 42).

"Findeth" indicated that Andrew had to look for Peter. He had to put forth considerable effort to find Peter. And he looked for Peter until he did find him. He was so resolute in his pursuit of Peter that he would not stop until he had succeeded in finding his brother. Therefore, Andrew's zeal was not a temporary, spur-of-the-moment thing. It would endure time and effort. Unlike some people who get all excited in a church service about spreading the Gospel but whose zeal diminishes as soon as they **[Seite 16]** walk out the church doors, Andrew's desire was lasting.

"Brought" indicates that Andrew did not stop at just the telling of Peter about the fact that he and John ("We" [v. 41]) had found the Messiah. He pursued his

objective of bringing Peter to Christ until he was able to get Peter to come with him to see Christ. The word "brought" comes from a Greek word which according to Thayer means "to drive, lead … to lead by laying hold of … to lead by accompanying." A. T. Robertson says the use of the word could indicate that "Andrew had to overcome some resistance on Simon's part." Whether Peter resisted a great deal or just a little bit, the word "brought" shows the resoluteness of Andrew in wanting to see Peter come to Christ. To put it in today's language, he did not just tell him to go to church and hear the Gospel—he took him to church himself to make sure he got there and heard about Christ.

Andrew's resoluteness reminds us that in proclaiming the Gospel we must have dedication to keep at it steadfastly if we are going to succeed in telling others of Christ. Not only do we need resoluteness in a case like Peter where the person comes to the Lord, but we also especially need it when folk do not respond well to the Gospel. Today, most people that we tell of Christ will not be like Peter; for most people are totally disinterested in the Gospel. In fact, they are so disinterested in the Gospel that faithful witnesses feel much like Noah who only got eight souls in the ark and one of the eight was himself. With that sort of response, one can become discouraged quickly in proclaiming the Gospel and, therefore, will need much dedication in proclaiming Christ if he is going to be a faithful witness for Him. Of course, we have those who tell us that folk on every hand are ready to accept the Gospel message if we just present it to them properly. But those who proclaim the true message of salvation and who understand the Biblical description of the day we are living in know such an idea is not valid.

B. THE COMMUNICATION ABOUT HIS MESSIAH

When Andrew found Peter, he announced to him, "We have **[Seite 17]** found the Messiah" (v. 41). It was a simple and short message, but it was a message which communicated to Peter the most important news possible.

In looking at this communication to Peter about Christ, we will note the greatness of the communication, the enthusiasm of the communication, the knowledge in the communication, and the dogmatism in the communication.

1. The Greatness of the Communication

To find the Messiah, to find the Savior of our souls, is the greatest discovery of all. Man gets all excited when he discovers gold or silver or other precious metals in the earth's soil. He also gets very excited when he discovers oil, especially in our day when oil is so needful in society. But these discoveries, as important as they may seem to be to mankind, all pale into insignificance in comparison to the great discovery of Andrew and John in finding the Messiah. After all, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and

lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37). Nothing matters so much as our soul salvation.

The word "found" in our text (John 1:41) comes from the Greek word "eureka." Because of the significant repetition of the words "findeth" and "found" (vv. 41, 43, 45) in this first chapter of John, this chapter "has been called the chapter of the Eurekas" (Marvin Vincent). The eureka statement and use of the word in our text reminds us of Archimedes' famous "eureka" when he discovered how to find the weight of gold in the king's crown. But as H. R. Reynolds said, it is a "more wonderful Eureka than that of Archimedes." Indeed, there is no comparison.

2. The Enthusiasm of the Communication

The original text of Scripture does not have punctuation, for the Greek language did not use it. In our English translations, we wisely insert punctuation to help us better read the text. Here, an exclamation point needs to be inserted after the great **[Seite 18]** statement by Andrew. It should read, "We have found the Messiah!" Andrew did not yawn through this statement. He (along with John) had spent much of one day in the presence of Jesus Christ, and the experience so inspired him that he immediately sought out Peter to relate the great news.

The great hope of the Jews was wrapped up in the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, to say that one had found the Messiah could only be said with great enthusiasm. It was exclamatory news! For millenniums Israel had looked and waited for the Messiah. Now He is here.

While we decry artificial and fleshly emotionalism in our services, it needs to be said, on the other hand, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ ought to be proclaimed enthusiastically. Can we expect the unsaved to get interested in that which is not presented with enthusiasm? An insurance salesman or car salesman or clothes salesman, as an example, will demonstrate great enthusiasm when trying to sell you his product. If he doesn't, we will not be encouraged to buy. Furthermore, he dishonors his product if he does not show enthusiasm for it. In like manner, a dull and indifferent proclaiming of the Gospel not only can disinterest the listener; but it will also dishonor the message. Of course, the world and carnal Christians will criticize when the preacher gets excited and preaches with enthusiasm. But that is the only way to proclaim the Biblical message. It is "we have found the Messiah!" with an exclamation point.

3. The Knowledge in the Communication

To be able to say that you had found the Messiah meant that you knew what the identifying marks of the Messiah were. Andrew had to know Scripture to know the facts about the Messiah and, therefore, to know if a person was truly

the Messiah or not. To his credit he was well versed in the Old Testament. He had to have meditated and pondered well the Scripture regarding the Messiah.

Andrew's knowledge of the Word of God rebukes the experts. Though he was just a fisherman, yet he was able to recognize **[Seite 19]** Christ when he met Him. How often it is that the commoner, the ordinary citizen, such as a fisherman or farmer or carpenter or plumber, is much better versed in the Word of God than the one in high position and the one viewed as the expert. Even the religious leaders of Andrew's day evidenced considerable ignorance regarding the Messiah which the common folk did not. Christ was right in their midst, and they did not recognize Him. They could have examined the Scriptures and confirmed Christ's claims; but they chose to remain in self-imposed spiritual ignorance, a condition that really curses the soul.

Many folk complain that they cannot know Scripture, for they have not been privileged to attend Bible college or seminary. But all such complaining is simply not valid. Especially so is it not valid in our day, for we have so many opportunities right close at hand to learn the Word of God no matter who we are. In Andrew's day the people did not have nearly the advantages to learn the Word as we do today. They did not have copies of the Scripture laying around their houses plus access to all sorts of commentaries and sermon books as we do. Scripture portions were scarce; books were nil. Yet Andrew, the fisherman, knew about the Messiah. So you do not have to attend Bible college or seminary to be well versed in the Scripture. College and seminary are fine opportunities, but they are not requirements for knowing well the Word of God. We have seen ordinary laymen in our churches excel far above their peers in Biblical wisdom and knowledge even though they had never attended a Bible college or a seminary. What they had done, however, was apply themselves diligently and regularly to the study of the Scriptures; and it paid off in great spiritual dividends for them. Spiritual ignorance is definitely not a result of a lack of formal training; rather it is generally a lack of spiritual interest and dedication.

4. The Dogmatism in the Communication

Andrew gave no uncertain communication to Peter about the Messiah. He was very dogmatic. There was absolutely no **[Seite 20]** doubt whatsoever in his statement. It was not "We think we have found the Messiah," or "We hope we have found the Messiah," or "We may have found the Messiah." No, it was an emphatic "We have found the Messiah!"

We have just noted that enthusiasm and knowledge are very important in proclaiming the Gospel message. Here we note that dogmatism is also very essential in speaking about Christ. No one will proclaim well the message about Jesus Christ who is not dogmatic about the Gospel. You will not help anyone to

be convinced that Christ is the answer if you do not evidence you are convinced. If ever a message needs to ring with certainty, it is the message of salvation. However, those who are dogmatic in proclaiming the Gospel message will encounter many critics. The critics will insist one cannot be certain about the matter of salvation and that, therefore, those who proclaim the Gospel dogmatically are presumptuous, arrogant, and overbearing. But these critics want dogmatism in other areas—they want the banker to be dogmatic about their finances, the doctor to be dogmatic about his diagnosis, and the pilot to be dogmatic about the destiny of the plane. They justifiably do not want any uncertainty in these and other areas, that's for sure. But in the area of salvation, the area where we need certainty more than in any other area, they criticize dogmatism. But we must not so criticize great certainty in the Gospel. Paul said, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12) and the Apostle John said, "These things have I written unto you … that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13) to inform us that we can know in the area of salvation with great assurance; and, therefore, we can and should testify with dogmatism. The idea we cannot be sure of our salvation or of how to be saved is simply a lie from Satan who does not want certainty in this area at all. Satan majors on doubt. But the Gospel majors on dogmatism.

C. THE CHANGE IN HIS NAME

When Peter came to Jesus Christ in his conversion experience, he was given a name change. Heretofore, he was known as **[Seite 21]** Simon, the name his parents gave him. But now he is going to also be known as Peter (or Cephas in the Aramaic); for when he came to Christ, Christ said to him, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, (which is by interpretation, a stone)" (v. 42).

The last statement of this verse which we have put in parenthesis (which is not part of the statement of Christ but an explanatory statement by the writer of the Gospel) should be translated in our English versions as "which is, by interpretation, Peter." This rendering would make it much clearer that the name Peter is involved in the change; and that the change is from Simon to Peter, not from Simon to "A stone." No less a respected authority than Henry Alford insists the translation should be rendered "Peter" instead of "A stone." He says, "The rendering of Petros in this verse should be as in the margin [of the original KJV], Peter, not.… a stone." Elsewhere in Scripture, such as in Acts 9:36, this form of translation is wisely used in regard to names. If the text in Acts 9:36 was translated as the John text is, it would be rendered, "which by interpretation is called a gazelle" instead of what it is rendered, "which by interpretation is called Dorcas." This illustration alone should show the need of using "Peter" instead of

“A stone” in our text. Furthermore, the Greek text does not have an article before the word “petros” as the translation “a stone” does. So what Jesus is saying here is that Simon’s name is being changed to Peter. A correction in the translation would make this much clearer and would put it in conformity with other texts in Scripture, such as, Luke 6:14 which says, “Simon (whom he also named Peter),” and Matthew 16:18 in which Christ says to Peter, “Thou art Peter,” not “Thou art a stone.”

The change from Simon to Peter will not occur overnight but will take time. In the Gospels, it will still be Simon many times. Christ, as an example, never addressed Peter personally as Peter but always as Simon. Sometimes, however, you will see in the Gospels the name Peter used before he was regularly called Peter. The reason for that practice is that the Gospels **[Seite 22]** were written a number of years after all of these things took place. Hence, when the writers referred to Simon in the writing of the Gospels, he was referred to as Peter; for by then he was generally known best as Peter.

This changing of names had great significance. At least two very important truths were indicated by this change. They are the authority of Christ and the alteration of character.

1. The Authority of Christ

Naming someone indicates the authority of the one doing the naming over the one being named. The authority of God is seen in His changing the names of others. He changed the name of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and Jacob to Israel. The authority of Pharaoh is seen in his changing the name of Joseph to Zaphnath-paaneah, and a later king of Egypt demonstrated his authority in changing the name of Eliakim to Jehoiakim when he made him a vassal ruler of Judah (2 Chronicles 36:4). Babylonian kings also showed their authority when they changed the names of those they appointed vassal rulers of nations they had conquered. As an example, Nebuchadnezzar changed the name of Mattaniah to Zedekiah when he appointed him the vassal king of Judah (2 Kings 24:17). The authority of the husband is also seen in the fact that the wife has her last name changed to that of her husband. Of course, this authority is not esteemed well today, especially among the women’s lib movements; and this disesteem is demonstrated by women who though married continue to go by their pre-marriage last names.

This truth about authority being involved in changing names indicated that in changing Simon’s name to Peter, Christ declared to Simon the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because of Simon’s nature, he especially needed the authority of Christ impressed upon him. Headstrong and hesitating not to later rebuke the Lord (Matthew 16:22) and to argue with the Lord (John 13:6–10), Peter needed to be

instructed from the very beginning as to Who was going to be Boss in this relationship. The name change drove the point home.

[Seite 23] The authority of Jesus Christ needs more emphasis today. Too often Christ is presented as nothing more than a fire escape from hell without the fact that He is also Lord of our lives. But "ye are not your own … ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20); and, therefore, you belong to Christ; and that makes Him your Lord. He paid a tremendous price to redeem your soul. Dare we think that we are our own master and that He is not the Master? Our life must instead be lived as He wants it lived. This, however, is something not many professing believers are doing.

Failure to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ will cause one to have trouble submitting to authority elsewhere. The rebellion that characterizes the world today is rooted and grounded in failure to recognize and respect the authority of God, His Word, and His Son. The lack of respect for authority in the church, especially for the authority of the pastor, is caused by the failure of the church people to be properly submitted to Christ in their lives. But let one bow down to the authority of Christ, and that one will have no trouble demonstrating proper respect for legitimate authority.

2. The Alteration of Character

The most obvious lesson from this name change is the change in character that Peter would experience through coming to Jesus Christ. Names in the Bible reflect character. They are not just some cosmetic tag of identity stuck on a person by the whim and fancy of some parent or other person. Therefore, we are justified in seeing this name change in terms of Peter's coming character change. Bishop Ryle said, "If it be asked why our Lord gave Simon this new name, the best answer appears to be that it was given with a special reference to the change which grace was to work in Simon's heart." Simon was most deficient in many areas of his character when he came to Christ. He was rash, headstrong, proud, impulsive, unstable, and had trouble with his mouth. But the name Peter, which meant rock, spoke of firmness, stability, strength, faithfulness—all a contrast to his **[Seite 24]** character deficiencies. In the New Testament we see both the Simon character and the Peter character in this man. Especially after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ does the Peter character begin to stand out prominently. Prior to that, Peter was seen frequently as rash, headstrong, proud, impulsive, unstable, and often saying the wrong things. But once we get to the book of Acts, we see a different man. There he is seen as a strong saint with a vibrant testimony for Christ, a courageous leader of the early church who stood firm and faithful regardless of the circumstances. W. Herschel Ford sums it up when he says, "When Christ finished with him, he was like Gibraltar. The

night before His crucifixion he was afraid to tell a servant girl that he knew Jesus. After the resurrection, he could stand before thousands of people and say, 'You crucified the Lord of glory.' "

This change in Peter's name not only speaks of the change which came to Peter because he came to Christ, but it also speaks of the change that occurs to every soul that comes to Christ. Maclaren says that in this change of name is "preached to him … and to us this great truth, that if you will go to Jesus Christ He will make a new man of you. No man's character is so obstinately rooted in evil but that Christ can change its set and direction. No man's natural dispositions are so faulty and low but that Christ can develop counter balancing virtues, and out of the evil and weakness make strength."

Many folk mistakenly feel they must clean up their act before they come to Christ. But they have it all wrong—they need to come to Christ to let Him clean up their act. He alone can do it. He made dramatic changes in Peter and in Paul, as an example; and multitudes of others have also been changed by Christ as by no other. Men try in countless ways to change themselves for the better, but it is all a vain attempt at lifting one up by his own boot straps. It simply cannot be done. Only Christ can bring to man the changes he needs. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). "In Christ" is the key. Leave that out and it is the same old person.

[Seite 25]

II

The Call

Luke 5:1–11

Peter's call to full time service was the climax of a day's experience with his boat and Christ on the Sea of Galilee (called the "lake of Gennesaret" in verse 1 of our text). This experience with Christ served to test and to prove Peter in some important areas of his life. God does not call one into service until that person has demonstrated some essential qualifications for service. In this experience on Galilee, we will see Peter demonstrating a number of spiritual traits which are vital if one is going to be of much service for Jesus Christ. He passed well the tests for service given him that day and was, therefore, called to serve Christ in a high position.

The call of Peter to full time service came a few months after his conversion —F. B. Meyer estimates nine months had elapsed since that memorable occasion when Peter first came to Christ. Prior to his call to full time service, Peter, along with several other future disciples, had accompanied Christ for a short time as Christ ministered in various parts of Palestine. But this was a temporary situation, and eventually Peter returned to his business of fishing where we find

him in our text.

In considering Peter's call and the experience with his boat and Jesus Christ which led up to it, we will note the loaning of his boat (vv. 1–3), the launching of his boat (vv. 4–9), and the leaving of his boat (vv. 10, 11).

A. THE LOANING OF HIS BOAT

The crowds seeking to hear Christ were increasing. He had **[Seite 26]** "preached in the synagogues of Galilee" (Luke 4:44); but because the people pursued Him wherever He went, He resorted to preaching in the open air, too. One day "the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God" (Luke 5:1) as He was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This situation presented a problem in His addressing all the multitude, for He was being crowded to the water's edge, and thus the crowd was too close to Him for Him to adequately speak to them all. So He "entered into one of the ships [fishing boats pushed up on shore at the time], which was Simon's, and prayed [asked] him that he would thrust out a little from the land" (v. 3). This gave Him a better location to address the entire multitude; and so "he sat down [teachers nearly always sat down to teach in those days], and taught the people out of the ship [fishing boat]" (Ibid.).

This request by Christ to borrow Peter's boat for a floating rostrum and Peter's response to it teach us some important lessons about service which we must learn if we are ever going to be used much by God in His service. To help us learn these lessons, we will note here the inconvenience of the request, the investment in the request, and the importance of the request.

1. The Inconvenience of the Request

Serving Christ will seldom come under the heading of convenience. Anyone who has had much experience in Christian service will testify that service often conflicts with many things in life. This was true with Peter in this incident. When Christ requested the service of Peter and his boat, it was a most inconvenient time for Peter. We can see this in at least three ways.

First, *he was busy*. Peter along with other fishermen on the shore "were washing their nets" (v. 2) at the time Christ asked for Peter's services. Peter and these other fishermen had been fishing all night (v. 5). After such a fishing excursion, it was important that the nets be washed to clean them of "sand and pebbles accumulated during the night's work" (Vincent).

Second, *he was tired*. Peter had to be bone weary at the time Christ asked for his services; for he had been up all night working **[Seite 27]** hard ("toiled all the night" [v. 5]—"toiled" means "exhausting toil" says Vincent) instead of sleeping.

Third, *he was dejected*. It had been an unsuccessful night of fishing. They had "taken nothing" (v. 5) for all their efforts. This does not make any fisherman

happy. Thus Peter would not be in a very amiable mood when Christ requested his service.

So when Christ requested the service of Peter and his boat, it was definitely not a convenient time for Peter at all. Busy, tired, and dejected, the request was a real test for Peter about helping in the business of proclaiming the Word of God. But Peter did not let the inconvenience of the situation stop his service! He immediately obliged the Lord's request. He passed the test with flying colors, and it would result in enlargement of his blessings and service shortly thereafter.

Before Christ calls us to do much service for Him, He will check out our priorities. How important to us is serving Christ? Is it important enough that we will readily set aside other things, though they are legitimate and necessary, in order to give Christ's service first place? Is it important enough that we will serve even though we are busy, tired in body, and maybe not in the best of spirits because we have just experienced some disappointments and trials? Many professing Christians never do much or advance much in the service of our Lord because they simply will not serve unless it is convenient. They will not serve unless everything is just right. They are so busy with many washings of the nets, such as, their jobs, working on their house, fixing their cars, and visiting friends and families that they will miss many church services and hence be unavailable for much service at church. Furthermore, if they are the least bit tired or under the weather, you can forget about them being in their place of service at church. And if they are having any trials, they expect to be immediately exempted of any responsibilities in service. Therefore, such folk will never be given much position in Christ's service. The Lord has little use for these people; for they, because of their poor priorities, are of little use to Him. Of course, these people often wonder why they are not used more; **[Seite 28]** and they are the first to complain that they are frequently left on the sideline in God's work. But until they learn to give God's service a high priority in their lives, they will continue to stand on the sidelines uncalled to high and holy service for the Master.

2. The Investment in the Request

The request of Christ for Peter's services involved the use of some of Peter's possessions for the service of the Lord. Peter was a fisherman, and so part of his possessions included a fishing boat. The Lord wanted to borrow the boat to preach the Word of God. So to oblige Christ and to be of service for Christ, Peter must be willing to make his possessions available for the work of Christ. To Peter's credit, he was most willing to provide his boat for Christ's use. As soon as the request was made, it was granted.

In giving his boat for Christ to preach the Word, Peter passed another test that one must pass in order to be involved in service for God. It is the test of

surrendering our possessions for the work of God. God wants to use our possessions for His work. Giving of our possessions to the work of God is very essential if we are going to be involved to any extent in service for the Lord. The reason many are not serving Christ much is that they look at their possessions as the world does—they see them only in terms of personal use, not in terms of being used to serve the Lord.

Giving of our possessions for the Lord's work not only helps to get us involved in service, but it also helps the work of God. Peter's lending of his boat not only got him involved in serving Christ, but it made it possible for Christ to preach the Word to a multitude of people as well. Many in our churches could make it possible for their pastor and others to reach more with the Word of God if they only gave of their possessions to God's work. Some in our churches have done this, thankfully. We have at times seen the sacrificial gift of a single member result in a large work being accomplished which the entire church together was not able to do nor willing to do. Radio, literature, **[Seite 29]** and missionary works have been encouraged and enabled oftentimes because just one person heard Christ's request and gave liberally of his possessions to advance the work of Christ. Through their possessions, these liberal souls have done much to advance the cause of Christ and have become very involved in service for Christ; while others sit on the sidelines unused of God and a hindrance to God's work because they will not use their possessions for Him.

The difficulty of giving our possessions for God's service (or even loaning them as Peter did the boat) is demonstrated by the rich young ruler who was prevented from following and serving Christ because he would not give up his possessions for Him. When this man came to inquire of Christ, Christ told the man to "sell that thou hast, and give to the poor … and come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). But the rich young ruler "went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions" (Matthew 19:22) and was unwilling to yield them to Christ's use and, therefore, was not able to "follow me" in service.

Moses' attitude about using our possessions to serve God certainly contrasts to the rich young ruler. This attitude was evidenced when Pharaoh told Moses the people could go and worship God, but they must "let your flocks and your herds be stayed [left behind]" (Exodus 10:24). Moses said, "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God" (Exodus 10:26). What a noble attitude Moses had about one's possessions—not a hoof was to be left behind. That is the language of full surrender. All their possessions, said Moses, were to be used to serve God. The same should be true of our possessions. And when it is, we will be much involved in the Lord's work. Peter demonstrated that what he had was readily

available for the Lord's use. No wonder the passage of Scripture before us climaxes in Peter's call to high service for Christ.

3. The Importance of the Request

The request of Christ for the services of Peter and his boat **[Seite 30]** and the "thrust out a little" does not to the natural eye seem to have the importance as some later assignments of Peter, such as, the performing of the special and spectacular work of preaching the great sermon at Pentecost. But what we must learn in this first request made by Christ is that the seemingly little requests are just as important as those bigger requests, and that obedience to the little requests is necessary if one is going to experience bigger requests with their greater opportunity for blessing. Had Peter not obliged Christ in the request to simply loan the boat and to "thrust out a little," he would not have received the future and bigger request to "Launch out into the deep" which led to the experience of the miraculous catch of fish later on that day. Nor would he have received his call to be one of the great apostles of Christ, which call occurred after he had launched out into the deep as commanded by Christ.

The principle of the lesson here was plainly stated by Christ when He said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). We oftentimes think that it does not matter in the "least" requests and duties, but where it matters is in the "much." But Christ's statement indicates that the "least" is very important, too. The request of Peter to "thrust out [his boat] a little from land" (v. 3) was just the beginning. It was the "least." Later, after Christ finished teaching, would come the order to a "much" in regards to the boat with the "Launch out into the deep" (v. 4). If Peter had not been faithful in the "least," he would not have experienced the "much."

Christ tests us first in small things; then if we pass that test, He will give us bigger things to do. Before we serve in large matters, we must prove our willingness and faithfulness to serve in small matters. Therefore, the small matters are very important. They must not be depreciated. They are the key to larger matters. But some folk are too big to do the small tasks, and so they never really get to the big tasks. Many like to perform in a nice cathedral before several thousand but are not interested in performing before a class of a few children in a small Sunday School room (and in decorating up that Sunday School room to **[Seite 31]** make it a better looking classroom for their class). Many want to preach and sing in nice church auditoriums but are unavailable for rescue mission services and jail services. But if you want a call from God to "much" in Christian service, you will have to prove, as did Peter, that you will serve faithfully in the "least."

B. THE LAUNCHING OF HIS BOAT

Peter learned that no service for the Lord will go unrewarded by the Lord. He had given of his time and boat so Christ could preach the Word to a multitude. Christ returned the favor by telling Peter to "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught [catch of fish]" (v. 4).

The giving of this reward by Christ for Peter's service, just as the request by Christ for the services of Peter and his boat, involved some tests of faith and character for Peter which would show whether or not a person is qualified to serve Christ on a much larger basis. As we will see in our study of this launching out of the boat and the catch of fish, Peter passed these tests well and continued on his way to a high calling which came at the end of the great fish catch.

In studying the launching out of the boat for Peter's reward, we will note the command of Christ, the commitment of Peter, and the catch of fish.

1. The Command of Christ

Peter's reward was given him in the form of a command. The "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (v. 4) was not a suggestion from Christ; but it was a command from Christ. This command teaches us several important things about God's commands. We especially note here the compensation in the command and the challenge in the command.

The compensation in the command. This command given Peter was to bring a great blessing to Peter. God's commands **[Seite 32]** are always that way. They are given us to help us on the way of life. Knowing that fact will help us to think better of God's commands. The commands of God are not minuses in life; they are pluses. They do not subtract from our joys but add to our joys. They are not given us to make life miserable but to make life pleasant. They are not given for our peril but for our safety. They may require much time, effort, and sacrifice; but the results of obeying the command, as promised here, will more than compensate the cost. Peter's command had the compensation stated with the command. Not all commands are that way. They do not all tell us immediately what the compensation is, but all commands will have blessed compensations for obeying them.

The world and the devil, of course, are certainly not telling us that commands are blessings from God. To hear the world and the devil talk, you would think that God's commands have no blessed compensations, that they are a curse in life, a real drudgery, an inhibitor to fulfillment in life, and something that is a heavy burden. But Scripture says, "His commandments are not grievous [burdensome]" (1 John 5:3). They are blessings not burdens, and our obedience to them will realize the blessings.

The challenge in the command. While the commands of God are for our great blessing, it is often a real test of faith to perceive the command that way. This

command given Peter went cross-grained to much that he, a very experienced fisherman, knew and practiced. The day time was not the right time to fish because, for one thing, the fish would see the net in the water. Furthermore, it was shallow water not deep water where the fishing was done. If he was to go out into the deep part of the lake at this time of day and drop his nets, people would think he was crazy. And there was an audience on shore—those Christ had been teaching—which would be observing his actions.

How often the commands of God challenge our faith. They seem to go against circumstances, against the wisdom of men; **[Seite 33]** and they definitely do not help our pride; for they often require much humility to obey. But we must remember that behind these commands is the wisdom, power, and love of God. He knows best; He is all powerful so that no circumstance is too much for Him; and His love gives us these commands for our great blessing. The world may laugh and despise God's commands, but those who obey them will sooner or later have the blessing which will silence the critics. Peter's obedience to Christ's command would be scorned by the worldly experts, but they would not laugh when he came in with his boat full of fish!

2. The Commitment of Peter

When Christ gave Peter the command to "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught," Peter responded with a great statement to Christ. He said, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (v. 5). This wonderful response showed that Peter was committed to the Word of God no matter what the circumstances or situations around him were.

Peter began his answer to Christ by showing great respect to Christ in calling Him, "Master." The Greek word which is translated "Master" in our text is used only in the Gospel of Luke. It has a number of meanings, such as, superintendent, overseer, etc.; and all the meanings speak of authority. Hence, Peter, in saying, "Master," was indicating that he esteemed Christ as authority. That is absolutely necessary if one is going to be used much in God's service.

We must note here, however, that just calling Christ by the term "Master" is not enough. What really drove home the fact that Peter esteemed Christ as Lord of his life was the fact that Peter would obey Christ's Word regardless. Many people call Christ "Lord" or other titles of respect and authority in their prayers and public talk, but they do not submit well to the Word of God in their daily lives. If Christ is your Lord, you will do more than just call Christ "Lord" or a similar title of respect. You will live a life described by Peter's statement: "Nevertheless **[Seite 34]** [regardless of my situation] at thy word" I will act. You will make the Word of God the supreme authority in your life. Hence, you will

obey it regardless of what others may do (fishermen did not fish in the deep or in the daytime as Peter was ordered to do); you will obey it promptly (Peter immediately launched out into the deep and let down the nets for fish); and you will obey it even when you do not feel like it (Peter was very tired, for he had "toiled all the night").

Peter's strong commitment to the Word of God is one of the important qualifications for service for Christ. In fact, it is such an important qualification that we question the call of anyone to full time service who does not demonstrate a dedicated interest in the Word of God. A person may be all enthused and involved in church activities; but when the Bible is seldom read and the passion for it is lacking, that person is a poor candidate for service for God. How can one serve the Lord well if the Word of the Lord is so unimportant to them? After all, serving the Lord is doing what His Word says to do.

Many of our churches today do not help the matter here; for they, too, show little interest in the Word. These churches often times have a very busy program with something going everyday of the week. But much of the activity is wasted time, for the Word of God is put on the back burner. Peter's whole response in launching out the boat was based on his great commitment to the Word. Had the Word of God not been front and center in his life, he would never have launched his boat into the deep for the catch of fish. And if the Word of God is not prominent in your life, you will not do much in terms of service for God either.

3. The Catch of Fish

When Peter and those helping him (fishing boats required more than one man) let down his net as instructed by Christ, they "enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net broke" (v. 6). Here was a miraculous catch of fish. It was the first of three miracles involving fish with which Peter was associated. The other two were the catching of the fish with the coin in its **[Seite 35]** mouth (Matthew 17:24–27) and another great catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee, similar to this one in our text, which occurred after the resurrection of Christ (John 21:6–11).

We want to note four things about this great catch of fish: the size of the catch, the cooperation in the catch, the testimony about the catch, and the humbling in the catch.

The size of the catch. The size of the catch was very great. This is emphasized by two things. First, the catch was so great that it caused the net to break (actually the Greek indicates the net was simply starting to break or tear). This would indicate an unusually great number of fish. Second, the number of fish was so great that it filled two boats so full that "they began to sink" (v. 7). What a tremendous catch of fish! When Christ blesses He does it in style. As Paul said, He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think"

(Ephesians 3:20). Sin does not bless like Christ does. It promises much for those who will stain their garments in the muck and mire of iniquity. But it does not deliver. Yet, the world ever pursues the promises of evil. Examples will not only include individuals who seek the promise of abundance of pleasure in such things as immoral conduct but also governments who seek the promise of an abundance of income in legalized gambling. But these pursuits are all in vain. They do not reward, but rather they curse. Not so the pursuits of Christ's commands. They will in due time produce "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Obedience to God will one day—either here on earth or later in heaven—fill our nets and boats to the breaking point.

The cooperation in the catch. When Peter and his crew saw they had a huge catch, they knew they needed help to gather in the catch. So "they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship [boat], that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships [boats]" (v. 7).

Here is an important lesson about cooperation in Christian service. Had Peter and his crew not invited others to help, how **[Seite 36]** much would have been lost? And had the men in the other boat not have helped, how much would have been lost? Unfortunately, cooperation is not always seen in God's work, and as a result, much is lost for lack of cooperation amongst God's people. Within our churches we have so many cantankerous souls who cannot get along with anybody and who are not about to help anyone or work with anyone to do anything. Churches also have difficulty working with other churches. Instead of cooperation in the Lord's work, there is competition. Churches become rivals of each other seeing who can outwit the other to gain some prospect. J. Marshall Lang, in speaking of this cooperation of the fishermen in our text and applying it to cooperation amongst our churches, said, "Is not this a hint as to the evangelical alliance which should distinguish all in the various boats that fish the sea? Why should they ply their task as rivals? Why should they envy the good estate, the success of any boat? Where Christ can be clearly seen, where the power is manifestly his, forbid that narrow jealousies hinder the recognition of the work … If only the aim were simply to catch men, not for the boat, but through the boat for the Lord, how different would be the aspect [character] of Churches and ministries!"

We would add here a word of caution. Urging churches to cooperate in the Lord's work does not mean we are to ignore important doctrinal differences and go along with ecumenical evangelism. We have plenty of that today, and those unwilling to join hands with ecumenical evangelism are accused of being most uncooperative. But we have no command in Scripture to cooperate with modernists and apostates. To the contrary, we are commanded to separate from

them. But that does not nullify the lesson of our text urging God's people to work better together in doing His work, and that this cooperation is necessary if they are going to do much serving of God. Peter demonstrated he had this valuable asset for Christian service.

The testimony about the catch. When Christ worked a miracle, He did not do like the fake miracle workers of our day do—He **[Seite 37]** did not resort to craft, deceit, slight of hand, and other means to keep folk from seeing the facts or from examining the miracle to prove its validity. Christ did not have to do that, for His miracles were genuine. Therefore, the miracles of Christ were done in such a way that the genuineness of the miracle could be easily seen and by the most competent of witnesses. This fact is seen very prominently in this fish-catching miracle. Scripture says Peter was "astonished, and all [the other fishermen] that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken" (v. 9). The fact that the men who were astonished were men whose very business was fishing underscores the validity of the greatness of the miracle. If the astonished were those inexperienced in fishing, the testimony would not be near as weighty regarding the miracle's genuineness. Critics who question if there was a miracle here need to read the text and ponder well the response of these veteran fishermen, for the astonishment expressed in our text came from men who knew without a shadow of a doubt if a fish catch was unusual or not.

We can be thankful that our faith is built on such solid evidences. We do not have to apologize for the claims of our faith. Embracing our faith is not a "whistling in the dark" and a psychological convincing of our mind that something has happened or is going to happen even though the evidences do not substantiate it. When it comes to our faith, we can say what Luke said about Christ in the introduction of the book of Acts, "He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). Our faith rests on "many infallible proofs." False religions, unbelief, critics, etc. cannot say that about their philosophies and claims. And the fact that our faith does rest on great evidence ought to really encourage our service for the Lord. These great signs that Peter saw with his own two eyes encouraged him down through the years to faithfully serve Christ. He said in one of his epistles, "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" (2 Peter 1:16).

[Seite 38] *The humbling in the catch*. This great catch of fish had a very humbling effect upon Peter which we want to especially note here. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8). The great evident power of Christ in bringing about this tremendous catch of fish so overwhelmed Peter that he suddenly

became very acutely aware of his own sinfulness and unworthiness. The sense of unworthiness and self-loathing is ever the effect of the Divine power and presence upon the earnest soul. When we comprehend even just a little of the greatness of God, it will and it should humble us exceedingly.

We need to qualify Peter's statement here lest it be misunderstood in a negative way. Though he told Christ to depart from him, it is not the language of the unbeliever who wants nothing to do with Christ. Rather it is the exaggerated language of a humbled soul, who, though he loves Christ and desires His companionship greatly, sees himself wholly unworthy of fellowship with Divinity. Peter would have been crushed had Christ left him. His statement was only meant to express his recognition of his great unworthiness of Christ's presence. We all could say the same thing, for none of us are worthy of His presence in our lives.

This response of Peter to the miracle fish catch revealed some great spiritual character in him which makes for a good servant of God. No one will serve Christ well who does not in heart prostrate himself before God as a great sinner unworthy of Divine benevolence. Of course, the world and carnal Christians do not perceive this humble attitude as a qualification for service—they only see it as weakness. They do not understand or value the sense of unworthiness before God nor the kindred attitude expressed in the beatitude which says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). But contrary to their faulty ideas, Peter's humble attitude here is very essential to serving Christ properly.

Peter is not alone in making a humble confession of unworthiness. Great servants of God in the past have also evidenced **[Seite 39]** this attitude. Just prior to his call from God, Isaiah, after seeing a vision of the thrice holy God said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Job expressed the same sentiments of Peter and Isaiah when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). And John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, is quoted by F. B. Meyer as saying, "I was more loathsome in mine own eyes than was a toad; and I thought I was so in God's eyes also. I could have changed my heart with anyone. I thought none but the devil himself could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind. I was both a burden and a terror to myself. How gladly would I have been anything but myself." These humility-filled statements, along with the one Peter made, demonstrate that those who serve God the best, bow the lowest before Him.

Peter's prostrating himself before Christ, as a result of a great blessing, was a most noble way to respond to blessing. The way one responds to success reveals the character of a person. But with character so lacking in society, it should not surprise us that when success comes to most people, they go out and celebrate wickedly. As an example, when sports teams win a championship, they often celebrate with booze and carry on vilely. But Peter met success far differently. The greatest catch of fish he had ever achieved was met by falling at the feet of Christ and confessing his unworthiness. Paul said that "the goodness of God" was to lead men "to repentance" (Romans 2:4). But for so many it leads instead to more guile. Check your response to success, and you will discover much about your spiritual health and well being.

C. THE LEAVING OF HIS BOAT

Following the miraculous catch of fish, Christ extended to Peter the call to full time service. In this experience on the Sea of **[Seite 40]** Galilee with his boat and Christ, Peter had demonstrated, as we have seen, a number of noble attributes essential for service for Christ. When a person possesses these attributes, God will use him. He will not lack for an important calling in God's service. Therefore, if you lack in opportunity to serve the Lord, the reason will be found in the fact that you lack qualification in your spiritual life and character to serve the Lord. The qualified do not sit on the sidelines in God's work. So Christ called Peter into full time service, and Peter left his boat "and followed him" (vv. 10, 11).

In this call of Peter to full time service, we will notice the precept for service, the promise for service, the price of service, and the position in service. The call of Peter (along with that of Andrew, James, and John who were called at the same time) to full time service is amplified in Matthew 4:18–22 and in Mark 1:16–20. Not all Bible scholars agree that the passages in Matthew and Mark refer to the same event which is recorded in our text in Luke. But whether they do or do not refer to the same events, these passages do refer to the same call; and it is the details of the call that we are concerned about here. So in viewing this call, we will also be referring on occasion to those texts in Matthew and Mark to help us see better the instructive details of the call.

1. The Precept for Service

All calls to service will come with commands, and it is significant that the primary and first command in the call of Peter was a command to simply "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and Peter "followed him" (Luke 5:11). Mark says, "Come ye after me" (Mark 1:17), but it is a translation of the same Greek words that are in Matthew. Not translating the words the same way in the two passages lacks justification, but thankfully it does not alter the message.

We believe that “Follow me” is the basic, fundamental, primary command for anyone when called by God to His service. “Follow me” is so essential in one’s calling; for if Peter, or any **[Seite 41]** of us, ceases to follow Christ, we will no longer be serving Him. On the other hand, if we faithfully follow Him, we will indeed be in the place where we can fulfill our calling. So “Follow me” is where service begins. It is where a call begins. What our specific tasks are within the call will indeed be spelled out—in Peter’s case he was told he was going to be a fisher of men. But it is all prefaced with “Follow me.”

“Follow me” shows the importance of devotion to Jesus Christ if we are going to fulfill any kind of calling in His service. The greatness or smallness of our devotion to Christ will determine whether our service will be great or small. Much devotion will do much for Christ; small devotion will do little for Christ. Knowledge, training, and experience all have their part in service; but far exceeding these things in importance is devotion to Christ. “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21) is an essential attribute for service.

2. The Promise for Service

All three Synoptic Gospels tell us of the promise for service. Matthew and Mark tell us that Christ promised Peter, along with the three others, that He would “make” them “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17). Luke records Christ telling Peter, “thou shalt catch men” (v. 10) which addresses the same subject. The term “fishers of men” was not a new term. Historians tell us that the Greek and Roman philosophers had used the term for centuries to describe the work of those who sought to persuade other men through their teaching.

The promise Christ gave here is encouraging. Peter and his other fishermen partners knew how to fish for fish, but the idea of fishing for men was a different story. Christ, however, in calling them, assured them He would give them the ability they needed to fulfill His calling. This is true for everyone called into God’s service. Only arrogant fools enter service thinking they are in themselves sufficient to do God’s work. But wise men think much differently. As an example, Paul, with all his natural talents and gifts, still said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves … **[Seite 42]** but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament” (2 Corinthians 3:5, 6). The honest soul does not serve long before he realizes that apart from God’s enabling grace, he cannot serve well at all. God must give us the gifts, the desire, the opportunity, and so many other helps if we are ever to succeed in His service. With God’s help we can walk on water as did Peter, but without His help we will sink quickly like a rock. “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1). So the promise that Christ will “make” them fishers of men had

to be a great encouragement to them in the call. It is also a great encouragement to us about our callings.

3. The Price of Service

Peter paid a great price to accept Christ's call to full time service. We see this in what he left and when he left to go into Christ's service.

What he left. When called by Christ to full time service, Peter "forsook all, and followed him" (v. 11). Matthew and Mark make it clear that this forsaking meant the leaving of his boat which meant leaving his occupation of fishing. It was no small forsaking to say the least. Peter paid a big price to accept the call of God. There was much sacrifice involved in surrendering to his Divine call.

This great sacrifice reflected a great dedication to God's service. Where sacrifice is lacking, dedication is lacking. Where dedication is lacking, true service will be lacking. Those who serve the best will be those who are not afraid of paying a great price to serve.

When he left. It is significant and instructive that the call came when Peter and his partners had just prospered in business in a great way. They had just had their greatest fish catch ever. Yet, right after that great success came the call. There was, of **[Seite 43]** course, a test in that situation. If the call had come after days of utter failure and they were near bankruptcy, then their willingness to quit fishing and do something else would have been very strong. What did they have to lose in such a situation? But God does not want that kind of surrender to His service; for it does not give evidence of much dedication and commitment to serving Him. There is no sacrifice there; it only speaks of convenience, not consecration. God wants us to show a more obvious dedication to His call, and so He often gives the call when other things would also be very attractive.

There are some in the ministry today who will tell you—and with surprising unashamedness—that they went into the ministry because nothing else was going very well for them. They figured they had nothing to lose by trying the ministry, for they were not profiting anywhere else. But the genuineness of their call is justifiably suspect. And when things go badly in the ministry, this kind often leaves the ministry, too.

4. The Position in Service

We close this section by noting the position which Peter obtained in his calling. Peter's calling, which began by his accompanying Christ in His earthly ministry, led to a very high position in the Lord's service. It resulted in his being selected by Christ to that elite group of twelve apostles and in his being the leader of that group.

The leadership of Peter amongst the twelve is evident both in the lists given of the apostles in the Scripture and in his actions recorded in the Gospels and

Acts.

First, it is evident in the lists. Four times in the Bible we are given a list of twelve apostles (once each in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts). In each of the lists, Peter's name is always the first name listed. Sometimes the lists vary a bit from one another in the order of the other names, but they all begin with Peter. Matthew particularly emphasizes the primacy of Peter in the list when he says, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter" (Matthew 10:2).

[Seite 44] Second, it is evident in his actions. "The first" not only accurately describes Peter's position in the lists, but it also describes his leadership amongst the twelve in his actions recorded in Scripture. One cannot read the Scripture earnestly about Peter's actions without perceiving that he was indeed the leader among the twelve. This is seen in the Gospels when he was with the twelve accompanying Christ and also in Acts where his leadership in the early church is most conspicuous.

The high position to which Peter was called reminds us that one does not have to be an important somebody in the world to be of great service for God. Peter was simply a fisherman. He had not been to the religious schools of the day; he was not of high position in life; he had neither great fame nor great fortune. But he did have important attributes in the area of spiritual character which he demonstrated superbly in our text. And what Peter had in the area of spiritual character was absolutely vital for service. The other things, things which mean so much to the world, seldom do much of anything to qualify one for serving the Savior. In fact, they will never qualify one for service if one lacks those basic spiritual qualifications which Peter demonstrated in his experience with his boat and Christ on the Sea of Galilee.

[Seite 45] III

The Curing

Luke 4:38, 39

Peter's home was touched by a wonderful miracle of healing not long after he began following Christ. Our text from Luke on this healing in Peter's home, unlike the record of the same event in Matthew and Mark, is placed in the Gospel account before the record of Peter's call (which Luke reports in his next chapter). But the Gospel writers did not always follow strict chronological order in reporting events. Their chief purpose in reporting the events was not primarily to show the chronological order in which they occurred but to show the validity of the Gospel message. Therefore, at times they did not record events in strict chronological order. This we believe (as do A. T. Robertson, Henry Alford, and

Matthew Henry, to name a few) is the case with our text in Luke. Hence, we believe that this wonderful healing experience in Peter's home came after his call to full time service.

The miracle of healing in Peter's home, which we will examine in this chapter, involved Peter's mother-in-law who lived with Peter (Andrew, Peter's brother, also lived in the same house, see Mark 1:29). The fact that Peter had a mother-in-law reminds us that you cannot read far in Scripture without exposing the errors of Roman Catholic teaching. Rome claims that Peter was the first pope and insists that their popes (and priests) be unmarried. But Scripture gives Peter a mother-in-law which means Peter was married—so much for Roman Catholic dogma. Regarding Peter's wife, who is not named in Scripture, Bickersteth, in *The Pulpit Commentary*, says, "According to the testimony **[Seite 46]** of Clement of Alexandria, and of Eusebius … she suffered martyrdom, and was led away to death in the sight of her husband, whose last words to her were, 'Remember thou the Lord.' " Peter's wife had accompanied him during some of his ministry in the days of the early church (1 Corinthians 9:5).

In examining this miracle of healing in Peter's home, we will note the malady in the home, the Master in the home, and the ministry in the home.

A. THE MALADY IN THE HOME

"And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever" (v. 38). We will consider the details and the difficulty about this malady.

1. The Details About This Malady

Three things can be said about this sickness which came upon Peter's mother-in-law. It was severe, seasonal, and sudden.

It was severe. Fittingly, it is Luke, the physician, who gives us the best description of the sickness which Peter's mother-in-law had. Matthew and Mark simply say she had a "fever." But Luke says it was a "great fever" (v. 38). In those days, physicians "distinguished fevers into great and small" (Vincent). Luke, being a physician, was careful to make the distinction regarding this fever as to what kind of fever it was—whether it was serious or not serious. Therefore, in telling us that the fever was "great," Luke informs us that Peter's mother-in-law was a very sick woman. Her sickness was life threatening. It was not a trivial headache or upset stomach; but she had a severe sickness; her condition was, therefore, very serious.

It was seasonal. Scholars tell us that this particular severe fever was reportedly common to the area by Capernaum and especially at the time of year in which our text is believed to have taken place. Bickersteth says, "There were marshes in that **[Seite 47]** district; hence the prevalence of fevers of a malignant

character." Herbert Lockyer adds that "Fevers, generated at the marshy land of Tabiga [the area of Capernaum], were common at the spring time of the year when this miracle took place."

It was sudden. The sickness seems to have come upon Peter's mother-in-law quite suddenly, for our text gives no indication that Peter was cognizant of the sickness until he discovered it when he came home after the synagogue service. Maclaren said, "One can scarcely imagine hospitality proffered [to Christ, James, and John] under such circumstances, or with a knowledge of them." It is evident that Christ was not brought home by Peter because of sickness in the home. He was brought home for rest and food. But when they got home, severe trouble greeted them.

It was a good thing Peter continually practiced the presence of Christ. It helped him to meet the sudden crisis victoriously. We do not know what we will meet at the next turn in the road, but we can meet the unknown much more successfully when we faithfully practice the presence of Christ than when we do not. If Christ is not on board when sudden problems arise, we can find ourselves in a real bad situation. But if He is always in our lives, we need not worry about sudden trial.

2. The Difficulty About This Malady

The advent of this sickness meant that trial came to the home of a man who had just recently given up his business to go into full time service for God. On the surface, this does not sound fair; and often it makes such trials very difficult for folk to accept or understand. Some would say it looked like God was playing nasty tricks on Peter. The devil especially tries to capitalize on such an argument. But Scripture teaches us to think better of God and gives us better explanations for our troubles.

From this trial in Peter's home, we will note three important truths about trials which should help take away some of the difficulty in accepting and understanding our trials and, therefore, **[Seite 48]** encourage every saint. These three truths concern the exemption fallacy, the enmity factor, and the enlargement feature.

The exemption fallacy. The idea that God's people are exempt from trials is not taught in Scripture. Human nature likes to think that when we live right we should escape trials. True, we escape some trials—those which are the product of wickedness. But all trials are not the product of one's personal disobedience. There are some trials which come to one simply because he is a believer—and many indeed are these trials. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19) emphasizes the lack of immunity for the godly from troubles in this life. So "However much we may be beloved of God, we are not to expect an

exemption from troubles. Peter was one of the peculiar favorites of our Lord, and privileged to have more intimate access to him than almost any of the Apostles. Yet we find severe affliction in his family" (Charles Simeon).

Since God's people are not immune from trial, let them not jump into the "slough of despond" and think that God has forsaken them when trial comes. They are not being singled out by a capricious God for extra suffering. Every godly soul will be well acquainted with trials, and the longer he lives the more he will be acquainted with them. Experiencing trial does not make one a lesser saint. But it can make one a better saint.

The enmity factor. Many of the troubles that come to the righteous are rooted and grounded in the animosity of Satan. When a person determines to live for Christ, Satan will not be happy and will, therefore, endeavor to make life miserable for that person. We should not have difficulty understanding that fact. We are in a spiritual war—it is not a picnic but a war; check Ephesians 6 for proof of that fact. So it was with Peter. He had recently sacrificed much to go into full time service for God. Such dedication will not go unnoticed by the old serpent. Therefore, we should not be surprised that the trial in our text which came to Peter's home had some obvious indications that **[Seite 49]** it was instigated by the devil. We especially note two indications of this fact in our text: the timing of the trial and the talk of Christ in ending the trial.

First, the *timing of the trial* pointed to Satan as the source of the trial. Peter came face-to-face with the trial on the Sabbath day just after coming home from a stirring synagogue service in which Christ had cast out a demon. It was a spiritual high for him and the other disciples with him. What a blessing to see their Master demonstrate His great power. Fresh from the inspiring service in the synagogue, Peter, Christ, and the others came home expecting to find some tranquility; but instead they find trouble.

The moment of the trouble here is typical of Satan's antics. Those who would serve the Master will testify that their troubles seem to be much more frequent and forceful at times of special involvement and blessing in service. So the preacher can expect to find Sunday an especially troublesome day at times. The devil will see to that. Many pastors will tell you that before the service a number of annoying distractions often occur which do not help put one in a good frame of mind for the service. And then after the service, when they leave the rostrum and walk to the back of the church to greet the people, instead of rest and rejoicing in the blessings of the service, they often meet up with some severe trials—for if Satan cannot keep you from the blessing, he will then endeavor to keep you from the joy of the blessing. Sometimes these trials after the service come in the form of cantankerous members who can by their caustic remarks

nearly undo in thirty seconds all the great spiritual blessing of the last sixty minutes. Sometimes these trials come in the form of a report of some serious trouble in the church or, as in the case of Peter, a discovery upon arriving at home after the service of some serious problem that brings great disturbance of soul and of mind which causes one to quickly forget the blessings of the service.

That these trials are obviously instigated by the old master of evil himself is not difficult to understand. After all, a good **[Seite 50]** service will fire rounds of ammunition into his territory, and he will not take that sitting down. Therefore, he tries to counter the attack by causing a host of disturbances after the service.

Second, the *talk of Christ* when healing Peter's mother-in-law indicated very plainly that the source of the trial was Satanic. When curing the disease, Christ "rebuked the fever" (v. 39). How significant and instructive it is that the word "rebuked" here in curing the fever is the same word translated "rebuked" in Luke 4:35 which speaks of Christ casting out the demon in the man at the synagogue shortly before this healing. 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.

The enlargement feature. One of the greatest encouragements in time of trouble is to know that God allows trial to come into our life in order to enlarge our blessings. "The love of our wise Father is too great to deprive us of the sacred benefits of affliction" (Spurgeon). There are many blessings we cannot possess unless there is suffering. As an example, we could not be saved unless Christ suffered terribly on the cross. But we, too, must personally suffer if we are to experience a number of other blessings. Even the trials we experience because of chastisement include the enlargement feature. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous [this is the suffering part of the trial]; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness [the excellent enlargement part] unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11). Yes, trials are a source of many blessings. "[Peter's] wife's mother could never have been so distinguished a subject of the Redeemer's power if she had not been prostrated with fever … the worst of ills are often the black horses upon which the very best blessings ride to us" (Spurgeon).

Satan intends to destroy us with the trials he sends us. But God takes those trials and spites Satan and uses them instead to increase our blessing. This greatly honors Christ as well as **[Seite 51]** greatly blesses us. Satan thought he would bring great discouragement and defeat to Peter's home that day, but instead Christ turned the trial into a glorious testimony of His power and a tremendous blessing for that family. It certainly had to encourage their faith and their admiration of Christ.

B. THE MASTER IN THE HOME

When the synagogue service was over, Peter invited Christ home with him; so "he [Christ] arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house" (v. 38). Though Scripture does not specifically say that Peter invited Christ home with him, the text implies with obviousness that he did—for Christ is not in the habit of entering a home in this manner without being invited. While having Christ in his life did not keep Peter from experiencing trials in his life, it did give him the blessing of victory in those trials. Absence of trials is not as important as victory in trials. Absence of trials can spoil and make us soft, but victory in trials only increases our spiritual strength.

As we noted earlier, Christ was not invited home because there was trouble in the home. Christ was invited home because Peter valued His fellowship and wished to minister to His needs of food and rest. How admirable of Peter is this interest in Christ. Too many folk only seek God's presence in time of trouble. When things are going smoothly, they have little time for God. They do not value constant fellowship with Him or faithful service and honor for Him. Such folk will find they will often be left high and dry during times of crisis; for unless Christ is kept on board at all times, His services will be limited. Those who continually practice the presence of God in their lives will find Him ever near to help in time of need. Those who do not practice the presence of God in their lives will experience a far different situation.

With the Master in the home, the malady in the home was met with victory. Peter's mother-in-law was gloriously healed of her "great fever." To further examine this fact, we will note the petitions for the healing and the particulars of the healing.

[Seite 52] 1. The Petitions for the Healing

As soon as the group arrived at Peter's house after the synagogue service, they became aware of the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law; and as a result, "they besought him [Christ] for her" (v. 38). Their petitioning of Christ was both sagacious and spontaneous action.

Sagacious action. It is always wise to seek the Lord in time of trouble. He is the first One and the most important One to seek in our troubles. No matter what our problems, we need to take them to the Lord. Sometimes we limit the blessing of prayer by limiting what we pray about. But Scripture encourages us to pray about everything. Here prayer was made concerning sickness in the home. That which goes on in the home needs to be the subject of prayer, whether it is sickness or some other situation in the home.

Comparing this account with the one in Mark, it is apparent that Christ was in another room in the house than where the sick mother-in-law was; for Mark

says, “they tell him of her” (Mark 1:30). Christ knows our problems, but our telling Him expresses our faith in Him and thus honors the Master.

Spontaneous action. As soon as the problem was discovered, the Lord was sought out for help. This is not the usual practice of mankind. Most people do not come to the Lord quickly in prayer when confronted with problems. A spontaneous prayer life is not common and neither is it accidental. It is the result of cultivating the presence of the Lord. When we do that, prayer is as natural as breathing. When problems arrive in the lives of those who, like Peter, have sought the presence of God, they will not have difficulty nor will they delay in lifting up their voice in prayer.

2. The Particulars of the Healing

The petition for the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law did not fall on deaf ears. Those who are earnest in following Christ and **[Seite 53]** ministering to Christ will have a much more fruitful prayer life than those who lack this dedication to Christ. As soon as Christ was sought, “he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her” (v. 39).

Comparing this account in Luke with the accounts of this incident in Matthew and Mark, we are informed of five things which Christ did in the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law. He saw the sick woman, stood over her, touched her hand, rebuked her fever, and lifted her up by her hand. These five things done here by Christ indicate that He is cognizant of our troubles (He saw the sick woman), has compassion for us in our troubles (stood over her), will comfort us when we are troubled (touched her hand), will condemn our troublers (rebuked her fever), and will conquer our troubles (lifted her up). Let us look at these five actions of Christ in more detail.

First, He is *cognizant of our troubles*. Matthew reports that “when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever” (Matthew 8:14). Sometimes in our troubles we wonder if Christ knows about them. It is a foolish thought, of course; for He is omniscient and knows all the goings on with man. But the flesh thinks these foolish thoughts anyway. Therefore, it is encouraging to be reminded in Scripture that Christ is aware of our troubles. He is cognizant of all our troubles. He who is aware of every sparrow falling to the ground (Matthew 10:29) is certainly aware of every fall we have into trouble; for we “are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7).

Second, He has *compassion for us in our troubles*. Luke, the physician, makes a note that Christ “stood over her” (v. 39). 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. So Christ not only knows of our troubles, but He also is greatly concerned about us in our troubles. In times of suffering, we are prone to question God's concern **[Seite 54]** for us; but eternity will reveal that no one had more compassion for us in our troubles than Jesus Christ.

Third, He will *comfort us when we are troubled*. Matthew reports that Christ "touched her hand" (Matthew 8:15). This speaks of the tenderness, and hence, the comfort which Christ gives to His own in their suffering. The gentleness of the Savior was also spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said of Christ, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11). The cruelty and hardheartedness of our day is because Christ is rejected.

Fourth, He will *condemn our troublers*. As we noted earlier in this chapter, Christ "rebuked" the fever (Luke 4:39). This was indicative of an evil troubler in this case. God's people have enemies, and in due time Christ will deal with those enemies. Woe be to those who cause trouble for God's people. The rebuke of Christ will bring judgment upon them.

Fifth, He will *conquer our troubles*. Mark says that Christ "took her by the hand, and lifted her up" (Mark 1:31). The problems we encounter in life are often so overwhelming that they are more than we can solve in our own strength. But that need not put us in despair. God's people are not limited to just their own strength in life. We have the strength of God to lift us up from those problems which have left us prostrate and powerless. Peter's mother-in-law could not lift herself up, but Christ did it for her. So it is in salvation, and so it is in delivering us from many of our troubles. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13) expresses well the principle of Christ's help.

How good it was that Peter invited the Master into his home. It transformed his home from a place of despair into a place of delight. Today we behold a terrible scene in the homes of our lands. They are for the most part shattered by sin and shame. Lacking Christ in the home, troubles overwhelm and destroy it. Therefore, how we need to be diligent about cultivating the presence of Christ in our home as did Peter. It is the difference **[Seite 55]** between having a good home or a bad home.

C. THE MINISTRY IN THE HOME

The malady in Peter's home was cured because the Master was in the home. This led to a ministry in the home. "The fever … left her; and immediately she arose and ministered unto them" (v. 39). We will look at three aspects of this ministry of Peter's mother-in-law which occurred right after she was cured of her malady:

the evidence from her ministry, the enabling for her ministry, and the extent of her ministry.

1. The Evidence From Her Ministry

The ministry of Peter's mother-in-law gave great evidence that Christ had indeed worked a miracle in her life. As we can note again and again in the study of the Scriptures, the work of God can be attested by the best of evidences. The excellence of the evidence here that Christ really worked a miracle in Peter's mother-in-law is in the change in her conduct and in the witnesses of her conduct.

The change in her conduct. The ministry of Peter's mother-in-law manifested a great change in her conduct. One moment there is a lady laying in bed, very sick with a "great fever." Then the next moment the same lady is up and around busy with the duties of providing for those in the house. "Great fevers" are not overcome by the body so quickly. They leave an enfeebling effect upon the energies of a person which takes much time to recover from—unless a miracle of God occurs. Hence, uncontestable evidence that Christ had worked miraculously in her life was in the fact that her conduct evidenced a wonderful change as a result of His working. She "immediately … arose and ministered unto them" after Christ worked in her life.

The best, most convincing, and valid way to evidence the work of God in your life is to show it in your conduct. As Spurgeon said, "There are no better ways of proving the thoroughness of our conversion than by conduct similar to hers." The **[Seite 56]** Bible says, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). We may profess that we have had a change spiritually, but talk does not convince like walk (unless, of course, it is a change in a person's habit from a profane tongue to a pure tongue—that will indicate plenty). John the Baptist demanded a change in conduct to evidence a change in heart. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for [befitting] repentance" (Matthew 3:8) was his instruction to the hypocrites who, when lacking genuineness in their profession, came to John for baptism.

The witnesses of her conduct. The tremendous change in the conduct of Peter's mother-in-law was seen by those who could best attest to the genuineness of the change in her conduct. In this case it was the home which saw first and best the change in her life. Those in the home knew her best and knew her condition of sickness best. Showing the evidence of change best in the home is often true regarding salvation. Spurgeon said, "If your own household cannot see that you are godly, depend upon it, nobody else can."

The miracle being attested by those who best knew the situation is a truth we saw in our last chapter. It was experienced fishermen who were "astonished" and

thus gave great evidence of the miraculous catch of fish which came as a result of Christ's power. Experienced fisherman would be much better testimony to the miraculous nature of the catch than those unacquainted with fishing. And those in Peter's home would be much better testimony than anyone else to verify the validity of the miracle in Peter's mother-in-law. All of this simply underscores the fact that when God does a work, it will have the best of evidence. The Gospel and the Word of God come with the best of evidences. So does a genuine work done by men. If we have to exaggerate and fabricate to try to convince people that a work has been done—the work was not of God.

2. The Enabling for Her Ministry

When Peter's mother-in-law was cured of her malady, she **[Seite 57]** used her restored strength to serve "them" (v. 39) which was Christ and the others in the home which included at least Peter, Andrew, James, and John. She did not use the blessing selfishly for her own carnal interests and pursuits. She saw her healing as an enabling to serve better. And you can believe she especially gave Christ, the One Who healed her, the best service she could.

The basis for all our healings is so that we might serve the better. However, not very many folk view their situations in that way. They want to be healed so they can enjoy their pleasures again; so they can satisfy their own personal interests again. We often pray very selfishly for help. It is not a prayer for help so we can serve better, but a prayer for help so we can pamper our own selfish pleasures.

Just thankfulness alone ought to motivate us to use our blessings to serve Christ. Alexander Maclaren emphasizes this truth in a striking way. He said, "She arose, yes, of course she did when Christ grasped her. How could she help it? And she ministered to them—how could she help that either, if she had any thankfulness in her heart." Thankfulness certainly was motivating the Psalmist to serve when he said, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12).

Many of our churches are filled with gimmicks to get the people in the church to do things. It is a disgusting and degrading practice (regardless of how it may increase the Sunday School attendance so the pastor can boast at the next preacher's meeting "how many" he has in Sunday School now compared to last year, etc.), and it flies right in the face of the truth of our text. People have something seriously wrong with them spiritually who will not serve the Lord unless bribed by gimmicks—and our churches are filled with that kind. Instead of offering gimmicks, let the preacher exhort the people that the blessings they enjoy—chiefly their salvation—ought to inspire them to really get busy and serve Christ. If they cannot be inspired by the greatness of the blessing of

salvation and even by daily blessings but will only serve if gimmicks are offered, they need to be condemned and rebuked with the fervency that Christ **[Seite 58]** demonstrated when He cleaned out the Temple! What would we have thought of Peter's mother-in-law if she would not minister after her healing unless she was offered some gimmicks that many of our fundamental churches offer? Some day —and we think many are realizing it already—these gimmick churches will be exposed as simply building a crowd through their gimmicks, not a church. There is a huge difference, although many pastors do not seem to evidence they know the difference between building a crowd and a church.

3. The Extent of Her Ministry

She "ministered unto them" (v. 39) which says she ministered in the home, in the household duties incumbent upon her. These would include here the helping in the preparation of the meal for the men folk and other services especially peculiar to those days. The important thing here is that "She attended to suitable duties, duties consistent with her sex and condition [situation]. She did not try to be what God had not made her, but did what she could. She attended to natural duties, duties which suggested themselves in a moment, and were not far fetched and fanciful" (Spurgeon).

And "Her duties were humble ones … Many persons who profess to be converted aspire at once to preaching; a pulpit for them is the main thing, and a large congregation is their ambition. They must needs do some great thing, and occupy the chief seat in the synagogue. But this good woman did not think of preaching; women are always best when they don't; but she thought of washing Christ's feet and preparing Him necessary food, which was her proper business. To these kind but simple actions she devoted herself. Attention to humble duties is a better sign of grace than an ambition for lofty and elevated works. There is probably far more grace in the loving service of a mother towards Christ in bringing up her children in the fear of God, than there might be if she were well known as taking a leading part in great public movements" (Spurgeon).

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law by Jesus Christ was **[Seite 59]** another great learning experience in Peter's life. But those who follow Christ will discover that He is ever teaching them important truths. Christ sees to it that when we follow Him we will learn much about Him in our everyday experiences. But failure to follow Him will only promote spiritual ignorance. Peter had his faults; and he failed miserably at times; but the fact that he followed Christ with uncommon dedication was the key to his great spiritual growth—a spiritual growth that was most evident in his preaching and performance in the book of Acts and in his outstanding epistles.

[Seite 60]

IV

The Cruise

Matthew 14:22–33

Peter made countless trips in a boat on the Sea of Galilee during his lifetime. Before becoming a disciple of Christ, he had, as we noted earlier, been a fisherman by trade which would account for much of his cruising around in a boat on the sea. But even after he became a disciple of Jesus Christ, he still made some excursions on the Sea of Galilee. One of those trips which would be especially memorable to Peter was the trip across the sea which included his walking on the water during part of the cruise. This incident happened right after the disciples had been part of the miracle in which Christ had, with only five loaves and two fish, fed five thousand men plus uncounted women and children on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. After the miracle the disciples headed by boat for the other side of the sea where most of them lived.

To study this very unusual cruise on the Sea of Galilee, we will consider the sending to the sea (vv. 22, 23), the storm on the sea (vv. 24–27), the supplicating on the sea (v. 28), the stepping on the sea (v. 29), the sinking in the sea (v. 30), the saving from the sea (vv. 30, 31), the scolding on the sea (v. 31), and the serenity of the sea (vv. 32, 33).

A. THE SENDING TO THE SEA

After Christ worked the great miracle of feeding the five thousand, He "constrained [ordered] his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side" (v. 22) of the Sea of Galilee. We note the problem that prompted the sending of the **[Seite 61]** disciples to the sea, the parting of the disciples to the sea, and the praying by Christ after the disciples' departure to the sea.

1. The Problem

The account in John's Gospel of this experience reports that after Christ had miraculously fed the multitude on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, He "perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king" (John 6:15). This desire of the crowd sounds noble, but it definitely was not. It was, in fact, a big problem for Christ. They wanted to crown Christ as King only because Christ had put food in their mouths. They were not interested in Christ as King for spiritual reasons but only for material reasons.

Christ could not accept such a materialistic motive for being selected as King. He wants to be accepted as King because of spiritual reasons, not material reasons. Crowning Christ as King because He could satisfy their need for bread was not the will of God at all. Therefore, when Christ perceived that the crowd wanted to make Him King, He set about to leave the area at once. It is not good

to stay around those who would try to persuade you to depart from the will of God.

Times haven't changed much, for people still put priority on material needs. This is why politicians, who lack the character of Christ, try to appeal for people's votes on the basis of what they, the politician, will do for the people's material needs. Politicians do not talk about meeting the moral and spiritual needs of the people. That will get no votes. But tell the people you will put food in their mouths, money in their pockets, and clothes on their backs; and you will not lack for votes.

2. The Parting

"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side" (v. 22). The first thing Christ did in regards to leaving the area was to order His disciples to go by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The other side was the west side of Galilee. John tells **[Seite 62]** us they headed "toward Capernaum" (John 6:17) which was on the northern edge of the western side of Galilee. The disciples needed to get out of the area just as much if not more than Christ. Because of the attitude of the people, it was not good for their own spiritual health to stay in the area; hence, they needed to depart promptly.

The ordering of the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee is how Peter ended up on another cruise on the Galilee. Little did he realize that before this cruise was over, he would have a most astounding and instructive experience on the sea.

3. The Praying

"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray" (v. 23). After sending the disciples to sea, Christ then headed for the nearby mountains to get away from the crowd so He could do some praying. How important it is to resort to prayer when the crowd wants us to do things contrary to the will of God. And doing things contrary to the will of God is what the crowd usually wants us to do. Listen to and go along with the crowd and you will be out of the will of God in short order.

B. THE STORM ON THE SEA

After the disciples had been at sea awhile, a bad storm came upon them. We will note the trial, the trying, and the tranquility in the storm.

1. The Trial in the Storm

In experiencing this storm at sea, the disciples discovered that obedience to the Lord is no immunity from the storms of life. Though they obeyed Christ's orders, still a great wind descended upon the sea; and, as a result, the boat was "tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary" (v. 24). Many winds in this world are contrary to doing the will of God. No one who sets out to do the will

of God will be long without experiencing the trials of "contrary" circumstances that will hinder and oppose **[Seite 63]** one's obedience to the Lord. The devil will see to that.

2. The Trying in the Storm

Though plagued with contrary winds, the disciples did not quit, as many do. They were a dedicated bunch in doing the will of God, and so they rowed earnestly ("toiling in rowing," Mark 6:48) to get to the other side of the sea. But all of their earnest efforts resulted in little progress; for by the "fourth watch of the night [3 A.M. to 6 A.M.]" (v. 25), they had only made three to four miles ("five and twenty or thirty furlongs," John 6:19). They had started out in the early evening (vv. 22, 23), and yet that was as far as they had progressed. They were battling a very strong storm. Their situation was very serious.

3. The Tranquility in the Storm

The path of obedience may be rough at times, but it will not lack the help of Christ. Hence, He "went unto them, walking on the sea" (v. 25). Christ is the One Who can bring real tranquility in the time of trial. We note the assurance, apprehension, and articulation of the tranquility help He gave the disciples on the stormy sea.

The assurance of His help. Christ is always cognizant of our situation. He is aware of the storms that we face. Especially is He going to manifest His help when we are facing storms because of obedience to His orders. The Lord is gracious and comes to our help even when we have gotten ourselves into trouble by our own rebellious ways. If He helps us in those situations, think how much more He can be counted upon to help us when we face troubles on the path of obedience.

The apprehension of His help. Though Christ came to help, the disciples did not see help when they first saw Him. Rather, they were "troubled" (v. 26), thought He was a ghost ("spirit," Ibid.), and were filled with "fear" (Ibid.). One can understand why the disciples were afraid. After all, when Jesus came to **[Seite 64]** them, He was walking on the water. They had never seen anyone walk on water before. Furthermore, they saw this phenomenon during a severe storm on the sea and at night, too, which would only add to their terror. This could cause anyone to be afraid especially if veteran men of the sea (some of the disciples had been fishermen) were filled with fear. Some of our trials test our faith to the limit. For many, however, it doesn't take much of a trial to test their faith to the limit, for their faith is so small.

The articulation of His help. Christ does not leave His own in such fear for long; so He quickly spoke out and said to them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (v. 27). Note it was the word of Christ that brought comfort to the

disciples in the midst of their trial. It is still so today. If we want tranquility in the time of our trials, we need to get into the Word of God. But unfortunately, many folk try the remedies of the world before they try the Word, and that only aggravates their troubles.

C. THE SUPPLICATING ON THE SEA

Upon hearing Christ speak and identify Himself, immediately "Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (v. 28). Peter's request is most unusual and is often criticized. He is accused of trying to be a show-off before the other disciples, of being irrational, and of requesting the unnecessary. But significantly our text will not criticize the request. To the contrary, when we study the text, we will see that this supplication of Peter on the Sea of Galilee was an honorable request. We will see this fact in studying the causes for the request, the compliance in the request, and the commending (by Christ) of the request.

1. The Causes for the Request

"If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (v. 28). Why did Peter make this request of Christ? We cite three causes for the request: the proof of Christ's identity, the passion for Christ's person, and the protection in Christ's presence.

[Seite 65] *The proof of Christ's identity*. One important reason for this request was Peter's desire to know if the voice he and the other disciples had heard was indeed the voice of Christ. Peter did not doubt the power of Christ—his request reflected that fact. What he was uncertain about was if that voice out there in the sea was the voice of the Master or not. If it was the Lord, then Peter requests that the identity be confirmed and proven by having Peter walk on the water. This request was not like those made by the Christ rejecters who demanded Christ pass their tests to prove His claims even though He had already given more than ample proof of His claims. Peter believed in Christ. He sought no sign to prove that Christ was what He claimed to be. He only sought a sign to confirm that the voice in the darkness was indeed Christ Himself. As such, his request honored Christ by the greatness of it, for it revealed that Peter believed Christ could do great things.

The way some of us pray, you would think God was a weakling unable to do much about anything. Our prayers make circumstances, nature, and people more powerful than God. God must be insulted by the littleness of our requests. It is said that once when a man requested some great thing of Alexander the Great that the request was instantly granted. When questioned as to why the request was so quickly granted, Alexander said the request honored him because it was such a great request. So it is with God. The greatness of Peter's request honored

Christ. May our prayers do likewise.

The passion for Christ's person. Peter had many faults, but lack of affection for Jesus Christ was not one of them. Peter greatly loved the Lord and really craved fellowship with Him. In his request here he asked to "come unto thee" (v. 28). He did not ask to walk on the water so he could show the other disciples what a sensational feat he could perform. He did not ask to walk on the water so he could enjoy an unusual experience. No, he wanted to walk on the water so he could be with Christ. The goal of the request was the presence of Christ. Would that all **[Seite 66]** our requests had as their aim a closer walk with Jesus Christ. Requests that have as their objective a closer walk with Him are requests that are indeed honorable. But too often our requests are to satisfy some whim or fancy of our fleshly desires.

The protection in Christ's presence. It had been a rough night on the boat in the Sea of Galilee. For hours the disciples had fought the storm but to no avail. The severity of the storm threatened their very lives. Now that Peter sees Christ is near, he would like to be with Christ; for there is safety with Christ.

The situation reminds us of the experience of many parents when a loud thunderstorm comes in the middle of the night. Small children suddenly jump out of their beds and head for their parents' bedroom and crawl in bed with them. Why? Because they feel a lot safer with their parents. God wants us to feel the same way about Him. Therefore, we are wise to seek Him in time of trouble. We will find a great refuge in Christ. He is where real safety is, and Peter knew that, so he wanted to be with Him.

2. The Compliance in the Request

Those who criticize Peter's request need to take a good look at the submissive attitude in Peter in the request. "Bid me come unto thee on the water" (v. 28) is not headstrong self-will. We could indeed charge Peter with wrong had he impulsively jumped out of the boat and yelled at Christ to help him walk on water. But Peter's request left the walking on the water entirely up to the Lord. He would comply to Christ's wishes. He would not leave the boat unless Christ told him to leave the boat. You cannot fault that attitude.

The submissive heart is a good heart. It will keep us from much evil. We all make unwise requests at times, but making an unwise request is not going to be a problem if the requests are always made subservient to the will of God. Peter made an unusual request here, and many cannot accept it. But he did not pray in rebellion. He prayed in submission to the will of God. **[Seite 67]** Such a request should not be criticized, but rather commended.

3. The Commending of the Request

The validity of Peter's request is best attested by the fact that Christ approved

it. His approval is plainly seen in two ways. First, it is seen in His inviting Peter to walk on the water; and, second, it is seen in His indicting Peter for his failure to walk more successfully on the water.

The inviting. "Come" was Christ's invitation to Peter to walk on the water. Christ's "Come" plainly confirmed the request as acceptable. It is true that sometimes God does indeed grant a bad request in order to bring judgment upon those making the request. As an example, God did this to Israel when they were in the wilderness and lusted after the wrong food. "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). But at such times it will be easily perceived that there is a rebellious stubbornness on the part of those making the request. They kept asking for that which God had indicated they should not have. They would not accept His answer but continually insisted in the request. To such folk, God will indeed sometimes grant their request in order to chasten them. But Peter's request was an entirely different request. He had not whined and pouted and insisted upon doing something Christ had plainly forbidden. He had only asked once, and it was completely submitted to the will of Christ. When Christ granted that request, prayed as it was, it only said that Peter's request was justified and noble. Those who criticize Peter's request must argue with Christ's permission.

The indicting. After Peter walked a short ways on the water, he began to sink and had to be rescued by Christ. After the rescue, Christ rebuked Peter. He said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (v. 31). Those who are critical of Peter wanting to walk on water need to note closely this rebuke, for it did not rebuke Peter for walking on the water but for failing in **[Seite 68]** his walking on the water. Peter was rebuked not for stepping on the sea but for sinking in the sea. Had Peter's faith not failed, he would not have sunk; and his venture would have been very successful. Therefore, to desire to walk on the water as Peter did was a work of faith, not folly. If he had been wrong in attempting this walk, he would have been thoroughly rebuked for the attempt. But he is only rebuked for lack of faith to make the walk successful. Hence, the indicting as well as the inviting gives strong support for the acceptableness of his request to walk on the water.

D. THE STEPPING ON THE SEA

We are told that "The Egyptians, in their hieroglyphics, were wont to represent an impossibility by painting the figure of a man with his feet walking upon the sea" (R. Tuck). This figure certainly fits Peter because he did the impossible; for when Christ bid him, "Come" (v. 29), Peter "walked on the water, to go to Jesus" (Ibid.). Peter's performance demonstrates that we, too, can do the impossible. But there are two conditions present in Peter's situation which we must respect if

we are going to do the impossible. First, we must have orders from God for the task. Second, we must render obedience to God about the task.

1. Orders From God

Peter wisely did not attempt this walk on water without an order from Christ to do it. He recognized that without a Divine command his attempt to walk on water would be vain. God certainly is not going to aid what He does not approve. But when God gives the command, we can be confident of God's help; for God's commands are God's enablings. Therefore, whatever God commands us to do, we can indeed do! When the commands are given, it may look impossible. But it is possible, for God never gives us a command we cannot do.

This enabling in the command gives much hope to many souls. It gives hope to those who have lived a wicked life and have not the strength and power to overcome evil temptations **[Seite 69]** and habits in their lives. When they come to Christ and He commands them to clean up their lives, they will be able to do so. It may seem like walking on water to them, but the same One Who enabled Peter to walk on water can enable others to overcome evil habits. It also gives hope to those who are called to serve, who feel powerless to do the tasks assigned them by Christ. For it tells them that what Christ calls them to do, they will be able to do. He will provide the circumstances and the abilities to do as commanded. It may seem an impossible task. But when Christ says, "Come," get out of the boat and begin walking. He will enable you to do the seemingly impossible.

2. Obedience to God

If we do not do what God commands, we obviously are not going to do much for Him. God does not enable the disobedient to do the impossible. But Peter was not disobedient. Once he received the "Come," he got out of the boat and began walking towards Christ. Obedience was absolutely essential to his doing the impossible, and we need to note that promptness in obedience is also a must here. Delayed obedience would have cost Peter an opportunity to do the impossible. If he had waited for a couple of days, the opportunity to walk on water would have vanished. But he did not wait. As soon as the command was given, he immediately got out of the boat and started to walk on water. Not only must we obey if we want to do the impossible, but we must also obey promptly if we are going to secure God's help in doing the impossible.

Obedience reflects the genuineness of the heart—the only kind of heart God gives the ability to do the impossible. Peter had indicated in his request to the Lord that he wanted to be asked to walk on the water to come to Him. That was a noble request. But the test that would reveal the genuineness of the heart in making the request was when the command came to do just that. Some folk talk

big about wanting to serve the Lord; but when the command is given, they back out. Especially in this situation on the sea would men of lesser courage back out. **[Seite 70]** But Peter did not. Matthew Henry said, "It was very bold in Peter that he should venture to come to Christ upon the water." It takes boldness to obey many of God's commands. Peter had expressed a big desire; now he will prove that it was not just talk. His quick response to the "Come" indicated he meant what he said.

E. THE SINKING IN THE SEA

Peter started out well walking on water; but after a short way, he began to sink. Dr. W. Herschel Ford humorously suggested that maybe Thomas, the doubting disciple, saw a big wave coming towards Peter and shouted, "Look out, Peter, there comes a big wave!" and his comment was that which unnerved Peter and caused him to fail. Many people are like that; they do not encourage us in our walk of faith or in our attempts to do great things for God. They are full of negative remarks, see nothing but obstacles in our way, and belittle our ability to do anything. However, Scripture does not say that this was the case with Peter's failure. Peter got distracted on his own. He began to sink because he got his eyes on the circumstances instead of on Christ; and he let fear instead of faith control his actions.

1. Circumstances Instead of Christ

Peter did just fine walking on the water until "he saw the wind boisterous" (v. 30). Of course, it was not the actual wind itself which he saw; but it was the effects of the wind. The language here simply accommodates a figure of speech. Peter got his eyes off of Christ and instead got them on the circumstances. Circumstances seldom encourage us to do much for God. Most of the time circumstances oppose our even thinking about doing great things for God or about living a Christ-like life. If we concentrate on circumstances rather than on the commands of the Lord, we will be in big trouble every time.

Abraham, like Peter, certainly had opposing circumstances in regards to God's promises. God had promised Abraham a son though physically neither he nor Sarah were any longer capable **[Seite 71]** of having children. But Scripture tells us that Abraham did not focus on the circumstances but instead focused on the promise of God. "He considered not his own body now dead [in its natural ability to produce children], when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Romans 4:19). Abraham's circumstances would master most of us. But victory came to Abraham, for he put more weight in the promise of God than in the problem of the circumstances. "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:21) regardless of the age of him and Sarah.

It is not easy to keep from letting circumstances master our thinking. Often they seem so real while the power and commands of Christ seem so unreal and far away. However, victory comes when we focus upon Christ, when we consider His commands and His power. But once we let Him out of our vision, we are doomed to much failure in life. We will not walk well, for we will let the circumstances around us influence our walk more than Christ.

2. Fear Instead of Faith

Peter began his walk on water by faith in the word of Christ. His great walk ceased when he started walking by fear of the wind and waves instead of faith in Christ. When he saw the effects of the strong wind upon the sea, "he was afraid; and beginning to sink" (v. 30).

Fear is another crippling influence upon a victorious walk for Christ. In Peter's case, it was the fear of the storm that hindered his victorious walk. With others it is sometimes the fear of being embarrassed or humiliated that causes them to stop walking by faith. The fear of losing one's job or position or popularity has also caused many folk to cease walking Christ-like. Abraham feared what men would do to him if he told the truth about Sarah being his wife, and so he sunk in the sea of lying. Isaac, his son, did the same thing some years later. There are a myriad of fears out there which will beset the saint and end his Christ-like walk if he lets them instead of faith grip the heart.

[Seite 72] F. THE SAVING FROM THE SEA

Peter's sinking in the sea did not lead to disaster. When he began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand" (vv. 30, 31) and saved him. Peter's rescue gives us a good primer on prayer and a good picture of the Gospel.

1. A Primer on Prayer

Peter's prayer, "Lord, save me," was a short prayer; but a good one. We will note the prudence, promptness, passion, pointedness, and place of Peter's prayer which will give us some good instructions about prayer.

The prudence of his prayer. Charles Spurgeon said, "To walk [on] the water is not an essential characteristic of faith, but to pray when you begin to sink is." Peter did not drown in his troubles. He did not give up in his troubles. While he is to be faulted in his failure to keep his eyes on Christ more than on the circumstances and to walk by faith instead of fear, he is to be complimented in that when troubles began to drive him down, he turned to Christ in prayer. Turning to Christ in prayer resulted in Peter's rescue.

When Peter went to the Lord in prayer, he got his eyes back on Christ instead of the circumstances. We may take our eyes off of Christ at times and thus cease to walk triumphantly. But the moment we realize our failure, the wisest thing we

can do is turn back to Christ and seek His help. Some are hesitant to turn to Christ for help when they have failed; for they feel that because they have failed, they are rejected of Christ and there is no use turning to Him for help. Such folk misunderstand Christ. He wants to be sought in time of trouble. “Call upon me in the day of trouble” (Psalm 50:15) the Lord commands. Of course, we do not deserve God’s help; but then we have never deserved God’s help. We are not to go to God for help because we deserve it; we are to go to God for help because of His great mercy’s sake and because He commanded us to come to Him in **[Seite 73]** time of trouble. The worst thing we can do in our troubles is to fail to go to the Lord for help. Peter surely was ashamed of his failure, but wisely he still went to the Lord for help anyway. It is always prudent to pray in time of trouble.

The promptness of his prayer. The quickness with which Peter resorted to prayer in time of trouble is most complimentary of Peter. As soon as he began to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me” (v. 30). Peter did not wait until he had tried a host of other remedies and until things got really bad before he prayed. As soon as trouble came, he lifted up his voice in prayer. Promptness to pray in time of trouble honors the Lord and speeds up the solving of our problems. Those who are delinquent in prayer only multiply their problems.

The passion of his prayer. Peter “cried” (v. 30) out his prayer. He was urgent and well he should be. Our prayers ought be fervent prayers. So often in Scripture we are given this characteristic of prayer in the example of others. But too much of our praying is ho-hum praying, and such praying has little value. It is the “fervent” (James 5:17) prayer that is commended in Scripture. Going through the motions reciting some prayer book or memorized prayer is not impressive. We do not act that way in dealing with people. How absurd to think we can pray effectually to God without passion in our praying.

The pointedness of his prayer. Peter did not waste words. Short prayers are not necessarily inferior prayers, and you do not have to have a seminarian’s vocabulary to pray effectively either. A lot of praying, especially in public, is filled with verbosity and high-sounding words. It is unnecessary and does nothing to help the effectiveness of the prayer—though it may impress the gullible. Jesus exhorted men not to pray as the pagans pray whose prayers were wordy and full of worthless repetition and who mistakenly “think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7).

[Seite 74] *The place of his prayer*. Peter prayed right there in the sea when he was sinking. We can pray anywhere and at anytime. We need to be ever in the spirit of prayer so that at any moment we can lift up our heart to the Lord in prayer. Such a readiness to pray, as is demonstrated by Peter, will be of

immeasurable help to our walk.

2. A Picture of the Gospel

Even to the casual reader, Peter's prayer, "Lord, save me," (v. 30), surely suggests, because of Peter's dire circumstances, some important Gospel truths. We will note five truths here from Peter's prayer and its situation which relate to man and the Gospel message.

First, the *need of salvation*. Peter was sinking and desperately needed saving. Mankind is likewise sinking in sin and desperately needs saving. But many men are not so sure they are sinking. They think they are rising. It is an idea fostered by evolutionary thinking which says we started at the bottom and are working our way to the top. Such an idea does not square with Scripture. Neither does it square with experience. Peter like Adam started out on top, but because of sin he went down. It is the history of mankind and is why all men need to be saved.

Second, the *source of salvation*. It was Christ Who saved Peter from his dire condition. Jesus Christ was the only One Who could save Peter that night on the sea. And He is the only One Who can save any sinner on the sea of life.

Third, the *grace of salvation*. Peter was not saved by his works. He could not save himself. It was grace which wrought his salvation. So it is with soul salvation. "For by grace are ye saved … Not of works" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). How foolish to think we can save ourselves. Many churches and denominations have added a host of unscriptural things to "Lord, save me." But nothing needs to be added.

Fourth, the *immediacy of salvation*. When Peter cried out to be saved, "immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand" (v. 31) and saved him. The moment one calls upon Christ for salvation, **[Seite 75]** he will be saved. Salvation is not a long drawn out process. It is instantaneous. It is interesting to note that Peter's prayer was for instant salvation, too. A. T. Robertson says that "Lord, save me" is in the aorist tense which means to "do it quickly."

Fifth, the *security of the salvation*. Once saved, always saved. Peter was delivered from the water and taken by Christ back to the boat (vv. 31, 32). There was no more sinking in the water. Christ had Peter by the hand (v. 31) and "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

G. THE SCOLDING ON THE SEA

After Peter was rescued from sinking in the sea, the Lord rebuked him by saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (v. 31). A compassionate Christ, "saves first then rebukes afterward" (A. Lukyn Williams). Christ rebuked Peter for the littleness of his faith and for the inexcusableness of his doubting.

1. The Littleness of His Faith

Christ did not say that Peter had no faith; He simply said that Peter had

“little” faith. Peter’s faith was small, but it was not nonexistent. It took some faith to walk as far as he did on the water. But he needed more faith to complete the walk. His failure was not in attempting the walk (we noted that earlier), but it was in doing poorly in the walk.

The rebuke of Christ said that Peter ought to be doing more than he was. Such a rebuke could also be justifiably directed to us today. As an example, the average church congregation does not do much for the Lord. They are so afraid of getting out on a limb that they never get close to the tree. Churches sit and practice status quo, for no one wants to venture much in a progressive work for the Lord. We should not venture out upon the water without His command, but most churches never seek God for such a venture. They do not pray, as Peter did, to do great things. They have so little enthusiasm for Christ and His work that they are content to stay snug in their boat of doing nothing. **[Seite 76]** If Peter got rebuked, think what a rebuke they will get. He at least tried; they don’t even try.

Christ calling Peter’s faith “little” tells us how much higher His standards are than ours. We have a tendency to rate performance in spiritual matters a lot higher than God rates them. If we, like Peter, walked a short ways on water, we would not call it little faith even if we began to sink after a few steps. But God called it “little.” We think that when we attend church twice on Sundays and maybe once during the week, we are doing much for the Lord. But His comment will generally put that performance in the “little” category. We think that when we give a tithe of our income, we are really doing a great deal; but God’s evaluation will very likely be “little.” We think that when we read the Bible through in a year, we are doing something special; but that, too, will doubtless be put in the “little” category by the Lord. A lot of boasting and bragging by churches and pastors and individuals about their spiritual accomplishments would be eliminated if they evaluated their accomplishments (which they boast so much about) in the light of the rebuke God gave Peter.

2. The Inexcusableness of His Doubting

Peter’s doubting, which was a result of his little faith, was inexcusable. Christ asked, “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” (v. 31). The question simply tells Peter that Peter had no reason to doubt. Rather, he had a host of reasons to trust Christ for great things. After all, he had the previous day seen Christ feed five thousand men plus women and children with just five loaves and two fishes. Furthermore, he had witnessed other miracles of Christ, such as, the turning of water into wine at Cana, the miraculous catch of fish in this same sea, the healing of his mother-in-law, plus many more marvelous miracles.

Peter had no excuse, and neither do we. We too have great spiritual

advantages which should result in our having much greater faith than we do. We have the Bible readily at hand from which we can read of many great accomplishments of faith. We **[Seite 77]** also have many other books readily at hand which give the testimony of some of the saints over the years who have attempted and accomplished great things by faith. Yet, in spite of all these great encouragements, our doubt is inexcusably large; and our faith is inexcusably little. And indeed our faith is little. For Christ said if our faith were just the size of a grain of mustard seed, we could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). The grain of mustard seed is very small; but to see the faith most of us have, one would probably have to use a microscope. And the pitiful thing is that none of us have any excuse for such tiny faith. Christ's rebuke was doubtless very humbling to Peter, but it is even more humbling to us. However, let this humbling rebuke inspire us to get busy in developing our faith so that we can glorify God more by our performance.

H. THE SERENITY OF THE SEA

After Christ had scolded Peter, He and Peter went back to the boat. "And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased" (v. 32) and serenity came upon the sea. We want to note the cause and consequences of this serenity.

1. The Cause of this Serenity

When Christ and Peter got into the boat, serenity came upon the sea—not because Peter was back in the boat, but because Christ was in the boat. Christ, not Peter, is the great Prince of peace; and He manifested it by stopping the storm.

When we let Christ come into our lives, He will indeed bring peace. But if Christ is rejected, the storms will only get worse. What awful chaos would have occurred for the disciples on the sea that night had Christ not been received in the boat. But the disciples were not like most of the world. They received Christ; they did not reject Him. The enthusiasm of their reception is emphasized in another account of the experience. In John's Gospel we are told that the disciples "willingly received him into the ship" (John 6:21). They were glad to have Christ with them. They wanted Him with them. In fact, Peter, as we **[Seite 78]** noted earlier, was so anxious to be with Him that he asked to walk on the water to meet Him. When folk are that interested in the person and presence of Christ, they will experience peace that the world knows nothing about. Troubles may and do come to God's own, but in due time Christ is there to soothe the troubled waters and give peace.

2. The Consequences of the Serenity

We need to note that when peace came to the situation, "they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth, thou art the Son of God" (v.

33). When Christ brings peace it will cause men to honor Him; it will promote true worship of Him (note it was not Peter they worshipped; but it was Christ they worshipped; the church of Rome has no ground for the veneration of the pope, which office they claim began with Peter). So when folk get saved, which is when Christ brings peace between them and God, they will worship Christ. Failure to worship makes their confession of salvation suspect. Furthermore, when true peace comes to society, men will also worship Christ. Many governments and organizations today are trying to bring peace to the world; but it is peace that leaves out Christ and does not honor Him. Therefore, it will not be a good peace. You can discern if peace is real or false by what it causes men to do. If it causes men to celebrate in debauched ways, it is not the peace that we need. If it promotes the true worship of Christ, it is true peace. This is why the millennium will be such a great time of peace on earth, for Christ will be the honored and worshipped One during that period.

[Seite 79]

V

THE CONFESSIONS

JOHN 6:66–69; MATTHEW 16:13–19

TWO GREAT CONFESSIONS of faith regarding Jesus Christ were made by Peter during the earthly ministry of Christ. Peter will later amplify these confessions of faith in his preaching in the early days of the church (which we will note in later studies in this book) and in his epistles. But here we want to especially look at his two confessions about Jesus Christ made while Christ was on earth. They are not lengthy statements, but they are most informative and significant statements of faith. They declared in plain and earnest terms who Jesus Christ really was, and they said plenty about the character of Peter's faith. True, Peter still had a lot of learning and growing to do in spiritual knowledge when he made these confessions of faith concerning Christ, but they evidence that he caught on early as to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The two confessions of faith about Christ, which were both prompted by questions from Christ, were given in two different places. The first confession was made in Capernaum (John 6:66–69), and the second confession was made in Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13–19).

A. THE CONFESSION IN CAPERNAUM

The longer of the two confessions of faith was made in Capernaum. This was the well known town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee where Christ dwelt for a time during His earthly ministry and did a number of miracles. This confession occurred after Christ had a trying session teaching the multitude **[Seite 80]** about Himself as the bread of life (John 6:27–65). Most of the crowd

was interested in having Christ provide bread for their stomachs (John 6:26), as He had done the day before this teaching took place (John 6:1–14). But they, like many church members, were not interested in spiritual bread. They were more interested in the bread from the kitchen than the bread from the pulpit. They liked suppers but not sermons. Such an audience never reacts well to an emphasis on spiritual things. So when Christ put the emphasis on spiritual bread, the audience "murmured" (John 6:41), "strove [argued] among themselves" (John 6:52), complained that Christ's teaching was "an hard saying" (John 6:60), and then left Him—"From that time many of his disciples [general followers, not to be confused with the twelve] went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66).

This loss of followers and audience resulted in Christ asking the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67). It was this question which prompted one of the great confessions of faith from Peter. "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68, 69). To further study this great confession of faith in Christ to see what it says about Christ and how it also reveals Peter's heart and faith, we will note from it the devotion, doctrine, dogmatism, and delight of Peter.

1. The Devotion of Peter

Peter's confession of faith plainly showed where his heart was. We note this in the person, persistency, and practice of his devotion.

The person of his devotion. Peter was wrapped up in Jesus Christ. He was interested in following no one else. "To whom shall we go?" (John 6:68) says that fact plainly. As we have noted in previous studies, Peter had his faults; but one of them was not his lack of affection for Jesus Christ. His heart was set on Christ.

[Seite 81] Devotion to Jesus Christ is a hallmark of true faith. Apostates and cultists are not devoted to Christ. They are interested in other people and things. Catholics want to center on Mary, Mormons want to focus on Joseph Smith, Muslims want to emphasize Mohammed, charismatics want to feature the Holy Spirit, and modern Protestants want to give themselves the main attention. But true faith is devoted to the person of Jesus Christ. Its faith, its doctrine, and its worship will be Christocentric.

The persistency of his devotion. Peter did not leave Christ as "many" did that day. As soon as Christ asked if they were leaving as the others had done, Peter quickly responded in the negative. Though only twelve were left and one of those (Judas Iscariot) was phony, Peter was still going to stick with Christ.

Our professed devotion to Christ is often tested by unpopularity. To be

enthusiastic about Christ when the crowd is cheering is one thing. To be enthusiastic about Christ when you are the only one cheering is another thing. Showing devotion to Christ when He is unpopular shows the integrity of your devotion much better than when the crowd is with you. Peter plainly demonstrated where his devotion was and that it was persistent. He would follow Christ whether anyone else did or not.

The practice of his devotion. When Peter answered Christ's question, the first word he said was "Lord." The practice of those who are devoted to Christ is to make Him Lord of their lives. We hear a lot about Christ as a friend, example, teacher, and leader; but we hear very little about Him being Lord. True devotion to Christ, however, bows readily to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It will be characterized by obedience to Jesus Christ. Those who say they are devoted to Christ but live a disobedient life betray their talk by their walk.

2. The Doctrine of Peter

Peter's confession of faith is a great statement about some very important facts concerning Jesus Christ. He declares some **[Seite 82]** of the greatest truths that have ever been proclaimed about our Savior. We especially note here three important truths about Jesus Christ which are stated in Peter's confession. These truths declare Jesus as God, Jesus as Messiah, and Jesus as Savior.

Jesus as God. The phrase "the Son of the living God" (John 6:69) plainly declares the Deity of Christ. This truth, however, was not well accepted by the religious leaders of that day. They rejected it vehemently. Times have not changed, for this truth about Christ's Deity is not well accepted today either. Mainline Protestants reject it nearly universally; and some folk, like the Jehovah Witnesses, are obsessed in fighting this truth. But the Bible plainly teaches that Jesus claimed Deity. Some folk, in rejecting the truth about Christ's Deity, foolishly tell us the Bible does not teach that Jesus claimed Deity. But the people of His day knew better. They did not accept His teaching about His Deity, but they knew He taught it (cp. John 10:30–33).

Jesus as Messiah. Most Bible students know that "Christ" in "thou art that Christ" (John 6:69) means the "anointed one" and is a reference to the office of the Messiah. Peter believed, and correctly, that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. He believed that Jesus was the One whom the Old Testament prophets predicted would come and sit on the throne of David as King and bring to Israel the most glorious days the nation would ever experience. Peter, like many of the believers at that time, did not comprehend well the time when Jesus would be the literal earthly King of Israel; nor did Peter see well the fact that the cross must precede the crown. But he did see that Christ was the One to wear the crown. In that understanding he is to be greatly commended, for not many in that

day recognized Jesus as the Messiah. As we will see in the next confession situation, people believed quite a few things about the identity of Christ—except the Messiah identity. But their failure to believe He was the Messiah was inexcusable; for the Scripture was plain in its prediction; and Jesus fit the prediction perfectly.

[Seite 83] *Jesus as Savior*. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68) speaks of Christ as the Redeemer of mankind. “Thou hast the words of eternal life” speaks of Christ’s power to give eternal life to those He saves. And “to whom shall we go?” not only reveals Peter’s devotion to Christ, which we noted a bit earlier; but it also alludes to the fact that only Christ is the Savior of man. Peter said there was no one else to go to Who could save, Who had the words of eternal life. Peter preached the same truth shortly after Pentecost when he said, “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).

One may be ignorant of a lot of things in life but still survive. However, you cannot be ignorant of these great truths about Jesus Christ and end up with anything but great disaster. Ignorance of these truths will send a soul to eternal hell fire. Our trouble today is that we are learning about a lot of things that do not matter, but we are learning very little about things which are the most important matters in life. Peter knew the important things in life. He knew what really mattered. He knew the important truths about Jesus Christ.

3. The Dogmatism of Peter

Peter's confession was not a tongue-in-the-cheek statement. It was not made in uncertainty. He said, "We believe and are sure" (John 6:69). True faith can speak with certainty, for it is based on facts—not mere wistful thinking. It is unbelief that lacks certainty. Unbelief is never sure about anything. When it speaks it only talks of doubts and uncertainties. Listen to apostate preachers speak today and pay attention to the continual uncertainty that permeates everything they say. They are not certain about the Bible, about Christ, about God, about heaven and hell, about salvation, and about a number of other important spiritual truths. And to make matters worse, they honor their doubts. As an example, we read in a newspaper a comment by a Unitarian minister (woman minister, as you would expect) who **[Seite 84]** said regarding the Unitarians, "We banded together because we don't believe we have the answer." What a pathetic statement! Quite a contrast to Peter's statement. Can you imagine any other profession in life banding together because they do not believe they have the answers. Try that on doctors, mechanics, bookkeepers, or other jobs. It will never fly. But in spiritual matters doubt is dignified and ignorance is glorified.

However, if there is anyplace we need to be dogmatically certain in life, it is in spiritual matters. You need to know for sure where you are headed when you die. How foolish to not be sure. And how insulting to God to say we cannot be sure when God tells us that the most important thing in life is to be certain of our salvation. A God Who would tell us we need to be certain about salvation and then makes it impossible for us to be certain about salvation is not a God to honor. Of course, that is what unbelief does to the character of God. They dishonor it in the extreme.

Note the order of Peter's dogmatic statement "We believe and are sure." It was "believe" before "sure." First it is faith; then it is assurance. Furthermore, it was faith before knowledge, too; for "we believe" (the faith part) comes before "thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (the knowledge part). Without faith in God's Word, we make no spiritual progress. Faith is essential to having so many things. As an example, we note three things from the first few verses of

Hebrews 11 which amplify this truth. First, as we noted in our text in John, faith produces assurance. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [assurance] of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Second, faith produces understanding. “Through faith we understand” (Hebrews 11:3). Third, faith produces acceptance with God. “But without faith it is impossible to please [be accepted by] him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Peter’s faith was great faith. His confession of faith about Jesus Christ plainly says so. Great faith makes great statements about Christ. Unbelief never makes great statements like that and never will.

[Seite 85] 4. The Delight of Peter

Peter delighted in the Word of God. “Lord, to whom shall we go? [for] Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). We noted a little earlier that the statement “Thou hast the words of eternal life” speaks of Christ’s redemptive work. Here we note that the statement being made by Peter tells us that Peter delighted in the Word, and it was the Word which attracted him to Christ. It was not wonders that primarily attracted Peter to Christ. He did not say, “To whom shall we go? Thou art the great miracle worker”; but he said, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Here is one of the distinctive and obvious characteristics of true disciples. They will have a great love for the Word of God. They will regularly and earnestly pursue the Scriptures. They will want to hear the Word preached and taught. The Word will be very prominent in their lives. The best members in a church are those who come to the church because of the Word. People who come only because there is a special of some sort are carnal. People who choose a church because the Word is preached there with excellence are the best kind of people.

The modernist never places an emphasis on the Word of God (and many of them are not even sure we need the sermon anymore in their church services). If they do speak of the Word of God, it is often to criticize it or to give some perverted interpretation of it. Faith delights in the Word, but unbelief disdains the Word.

B. THE CONFESSION IN CAESAREA PHILIPPI

The second confession of faith by Peter took place in Caesarea Philippi not many months after his first confession in Capernaum. Caesarea Philippi was located in the northern part of Palestine about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It was situated on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon, the Mount where the transfiguration would take place shortly after the event before us. The Philippi name (Philippi came from Herod Philip who renamed the town Caesarea Philippi from its **[Seite 86]** previous name of Paneion) of this town was

to distinguish it from the other Caesarea of Palestine which was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea just south of Mount Carmel. Caesarea Philippi was full of paganism. It had been a stronghold of Baalism in Old Testament days and later was named Paneion by the Greeks in Alexander's time in honor of the pagan god Pan. But in spite of the predominance of heathenism in this place, it was there that Peter made a great confession of faith regarding Jesus Christ. As in the first confession of faith, this confession was made in spite of its great unpopularity with the people of the land.

Peter's second confession of faith, which we will study from the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, was a very short statement of only ten words (in the English translation). This confession was included in the latter part of the previous confession which we just studied. But because of what preceded and prompted this confession and because of what followed as a result of it, we have a very instructive situation to study about Peter's life. In examining this confession of faith and the situation which accompanied it, we will note the inquiry by Christ which prompted the confession and the instructions from Christ which resulted from the confession.

1. The Inquiry by Christ

After one has been instructed a while in school, examinations will be given. So it was for the disciples at Caesarea Philippi. They had been accompanying Christ for some time and had, as a result, received much teaching from Him. Christ now gives them an exam. He asks them several questions regarding His identity. First, as an introduction, He asked them who others thought He was. Then He asked them who they thought He was—this was the key question, and it would reveal how well they had listened in class to His teaching. It also was the question which solicited from Peter the second great confession of faith we are considering in this chapter. We will look at both questions and their answers here, for the first question and **[Seite 87]** answer helps us to better appreciate the answer which Peter gave to the second question.

Whom do others say that I am? "When Jesus came into the coasts [borders] of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias [Elijah]; and others, Jeremias [Jeremiah], or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:13, 14). Four popular opinions were mentioned in the disciples' answer to Christ's first question. First, some thought Christ was John the Baptist. This was Herod's view, for he thought Christ was John the Baptist come back to life (Matthew 14:2). Second, some thought Christ was Elijah who had been prophesied by Malachi to return in advance of the Messiah. Third, some thought Christ was Jeremiah. Legend (as recorded in several of the books of the

Apocrypha) said Jeremiah was coming back to prepare the way for the Messiah. Fourth, others thought He was some other prophet who had come back to life.

These opinions indicated Christ was viewed quite highly among the general populace. But, in spite of that, they were very faulty views just the same; for none of these views recognized Christ's Deity or His Messiah office. Perceiving Christ as another person, even though an outstanding person, is very dishonoring of Christ; for it greatly demotes Him. He is accepted as to His rightful high identity, or the anathema of God comes upon those who reject His proper identity. One may esteem Christ as a good man, a great man, a great teacher, a prophet, and other honorable identities; but if the prime identity, which is of much higher office, is rejected, it is condemning unbelief and a great dishonor to Christ. Many churches today speak of Christ as a great man. They talk about how great an example He was, how great a teacher He was, and of other great features; but they conspicuously leave out His higher identity—the fact that He is God incarnated and that He is the only Savior of man from their sins. Therefore, all their accolades are vain and will be held **[Seite 88]** against them; for they do not recognize the primary identity of Christ and, hence, do not honor Him properly.

This is not strange thinking as some might conclude. We can illustrate this from the military. A person in the military may view another military man as a good man, a man of considerable achievements, a good teacher, leader, hero, and so forth. But if the man is a four star general and is not recognized and honored as such, one will get in very serious trouble even though he praises him for other good things. So it is with Jesus Christ. Compliments are actually derogatory statements when those making the compliments refuse to recognize His highest offices.

Whom do you say that I am? After the disciples had answered Christ's first question, "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). The disciples had expressed themselves at times regarding their faith in Christ and their belief in Who He was. But this is the first time in which Scripture records Christ pointedly and plainly asking them who they thought He was. Christ's second question becomes very personal for the disciples. It examines their own hearts. In terms of one's relationship with Christ, it reminds us that it matters not what others think of Christ; but what really matters is what we ourselves think of Christ.

The answer to this second question was given solely by Peter. He said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Here was another great confession about Christ. Though shorter than the one made in Capernaum, it still attested to two vital truths about Jesus Christ—His Messiahship and His

Divinity—two truths which were also seen in his confession at Capernaum. And, as we have noted repeatedly in this chapter, few believed these truths about Christ. But Peter had no questions about them. It mattered not to him whether these truths were popular or not—he believed them and said so with an earnestness that inspires.

The earnestness of Peter's answer here is especially emphasized **[Seite 89]** by the use of four Greek articles (the). Unfortunately, in the English translations, only three articles are used. "Thou art THE Christ, THE Son of THE Living God." In the Greek it is "Thou art THE Christ, THE Son of THE God, THE Living." The additional article (the) in the Greek comes before "God."

Also adding to the emphatic character of the declaration regarding Christ is the position of the pronoun "Thou." It is significantly first in the sentence, and as such it really emphasizes that it is the Jesus right in their presence Who is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Peter made it very clear Who he thought was the Son of the Living God. He was very dogmatic and unashamed in his statement of Christ's identity. He passed his examination with flying colors. He had paid attention in class. He had learned his lessons well.

2. The Instructions From Christ

While this particular confession by Peter is recorded in the other two Synoptic Gospels, only Matthew records the significant response of Christ to it. This response, given in verses 17–19 of Matthew 16, spoke of two things. It spoke of the revelation about Christ and of the revelation about the church.

The revelation about Christ. After Peter made his confession regarding Christ's identity, Christ said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona [Bar-jona means the son of Jonah or as it is in the Gospel of John, the son of Jonas]; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Christ said two things here about the truth of Christ being revealed to man. He spoke of the favor in possessing the revelation and of the Father in giving the revelation.

First, Christ spoke of *the favor in possessing the revelation*. "Blessed art thou" speaks of the great blessing it is to possess this spiritual knowledge of Christ. Most men count their blessings in terms of money and other material things. We need to count them instead in terms of spiritual knowledge. To know the truth about Christ is more important than to possess all the **[Seite 90]** money in the world. The knowledge Peter possessed about Christ, which was expressed in his confession of Him, would bless him eternally.

Not many folk today indicate they esteem the possession of spiritual knowledge a thing of much value. This is evidenced by their poor interest in the Word of God and their poor attendance at church where the Word is taught. It

would be of immeasurable benefit to many people if they got a better sense of values, a sense of values that would greatly esteem the possession of spiritual truth.

Second, Christ spoke of *the Father in giving the revelation*. “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). No natural wisdom or genius or ability had obtained this truth about Christ, but it was a truth revealed by God Almighty. Paul amplifies this fact when he says, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit … the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:9, 10, 14). The Psalmist also spoke of this truth when he prayed, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18).

Spiritual learning depends on something more than school and our intellectual powers and abilities. It depends on illumination from God. We need more than seminary training and a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, as good as these things may be, in order to discern the truths of Scripture. We need Divine illumination. And that will not come to an unbelieving heart! This explains why professors with many degrees are often woefully ignorant of basic spiritual truths while, on the other hand, a man who may never have had much formal schooling may know a great deal about the things of God. Peter was just a fisherman, but he knew more important spiritual truth than did all the learned religious leaders of his day; for he believed Christ. **[Seite 91]** Do not blame your spiritual ignorance on lack of schooling opportunity or lack of intellectual ability. Blame it on your own unbelief.

The revelation about the church. Christ next spoke to Peter about the church. This is the first time Scripture records Christ speaking about the church. This revelation about the church was inseparably connected to Peter’s confession, for it was given to Peter as a reward for his having honorably received the revelation about Christ. God had revealed unto him one truth—the truth about Jesus Christ—and Peter had believed it and unashamedly declared it. “And [now] I say also unto thee [I reveal to you another truth], That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church …” (v. 18). “The emphasis is not on ‘Thou art Peter’ over against ‘Thou art the Christ,’ but … The Father hath revealed to thee one truth, and I also tell you another” (A. T. Robertson quoting McNeile). Here is an important key to learning which Peter was experiencing. This key is that when we believe—hence, embrace, practice, and declare—a truth we are taught, God will reveal more truth to us. Unbelief stops the learning process; believing

promotes it. As we have just noted, much spiritual ignorance lies in the fact of unbelief.

Christ taught Peter three important truths about the church. He taught him about the foundation of the church, the endurance of the church, and the authority of the church.

First, *the foundation of the church*. “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (v. 18) is a statement that has been greatly abused by the Roman Catholic church. From it they teach the primacy of Peter in the church (that he was the first pope). But this text does not teach that, nor does any other Scripture teach it. Peter never demonstrated any awareness of his primacy in the church, and there is no evidence in Scripture that others recognized that position in him either. He was indeed a leader in the early church but not the primate of the church as Rome insists.

Help, in correctly understanding the statement about Peter **[Seite 92]** and the church here, will be found in the meaning of the Greek words for “Peter” and “rock” in our text. Both words mean rock but not in the same way. The word translated “Peter” means a small rock or a fragment of a rock; but the word translated “rock” means a huge, massive rock. “In classical Greek, the distinction between [these two words both meaning rock] … is well known” (A. Lukyn Williams). Christ is not building His church upon a small fragment of a rock but upon a big rock, a great stone. And who is that great rock? It is none other than Jesus Christ, the One Whom Peter had just declared THE Christ, THE Son of THE Living God. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11, cp. Peter’s statement in Acts 4:10–12). It is most fitting that after Peter makes such a great declaration of Christ, it is then revealed that Christ is the foundation of the church. With Christ being the Great Person Peter said He was, it is only right that He be the foundation. To make Peter the foundation does not make sense.

Second, *the endurance of the church*. Christ revealed to Peter that the church would endure through the ages when He said, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (v. 18). The word “hell” here is a translation of the Greek word “hades” which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “sheol” of the Old Testament. It is not the final abode of the lost but is the temporary abode of the souls of the dead. Before the resurrection of Christ, it was the abode of both the saved and unsaved (Luke 16:19–31). Now it is only the abode of the unsaved—and the conditions for the unsaved there are a good prelude of hell making the “hell” rendering understandable though it is incorrect. Hades here simply means the place of the dead. Therefore, it is the power of death that is referred to here. It will not prevail against the church. The church will endure death.

Some make the reference to hades in our text to be a reference to the attacks of Satan on the church and that they shall not prevail. It is true that Satan does attack the church but will not prevail. However, unless Satan is specifically mentioned, the use **[Seite 93]** of hades refers primarily to death. W. H. Griffith Thomas makes a good statement in this regard. “The usual interpretation of ‘gates of Hades shall not prevail,’ as indicating the futility of all active opposition to the Church [Satanic opposition], while true as a fact, seems scarcely possible as an explanation of the text. Gates do not fight. They open and shut, and our Lord here promises that not one of His followers shall be kept back from Him by the power of the grave.”

Christ arose victorious over the grave in His resurrection which is the promise to us of victory over the grave. Therefore, we can say with Paul, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave [the same word translated ‘hell’ in the Matthew text], where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). The blessing of our salvation is not affected by death. Earthly kingdoms cease with death; but the church—the body of Christ which all believers become a member of once they are saved—is an eternal living body, unaffected by death. Salvation brings us eternal blessing. What a glorious truth this is to mankind.

Third, *the authority of the church*. Jesus concluded His revelation to Peter about the church when He said, “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” (v. 19). Keys spoke of authority. The person with the keys has the authority to open or lock, bind or loose.

Some who would insist on the primacy of Peter in the church want to also see it in the statement about the giving of the keys as well as in the “rock” statement. But giving of the keys was not limited to Peter; for in the next chapter of Matthew (18:18), all the Apostles were included in this authority. Later, after the resurrection, even more than the twelve were included in this authority (compare John 20:23, which speaks of the giving of the authority, with Luke 24:33 which tells of the composition of the group). This indicates that “The same power here given to Peter belongs to every disciple of Jesus in all ages” (A. T. Robertson).

[Seite 94] Bind or loose meant to the Jews to “forbid, [i.e.] to pronounce unlawful … [and] to allow, [i.e.] to declare lawful” (A. Lukyn Williams). The thought here is not that we in ourselves decide what we want to be lawful or unlawful and then declare it, but we declare what the Word of God says is lawful and unlawful. We are guided by the Word of God in our declarations. With the Word of God as our guide, we can declare with dogmatic authority what is right and what is wrong. We can declare who has their sins forgiven and who does not

—those who trust in Christ are forgiven, and those who do not are not forgiven. The authority of the church is in the Word. Take away the Scriptures, and the church loses its Divine authority. The church may issue decrees and make all sorts of laws; but unless it has the backing of the Word of God, it lacks Divine authority.

Peter had quite a learning experience at Caesarea Philippi as a result of his great confession about Jesus Christ. He learned truth that he would not quickly digest but truth which he would later expound with excellence in his preaching and in his epistles. Peter spoke and wrote the truth well. Churches are ever writing up doctrinal statements and confessions of faith. But though they may say the truth in many different ways, they will never improve on the truth in Peter's great confessions.

[Seite 95] VI

THE COMMENTS

NUMEROUS TEXTS

PETER WAS THE most outspoken of the twelve disciples. Not one of the twelve is recorded in the Gospels as speaking out as much as Peter. Some of the time he spoke out because he was the leader of the twelve; and, therefore, it was incumbent upon him to speak out on behalf of the twelve. But other times he spoke out simply because it was his nature to do so. You always knew what Peter was thinking, for he told you quickly. He did not keep much inside but expressed himself freely. This is not necessarily a bad trait. Though he did at times speak when it would have been better to have kept silent, at other times his speaking out reflected both wisdom and courage.

In this chapter we are going to look at some comments of Peter which come from events that do not, for the most part, focus primarily upon Peter and which, therefore, are not covered in separate studies in this book. These comments show us interesting and instructive characteristics of Peter. We will consider eight of these comments in this chapter. They will deal with the cognizance of Christ (Luke 8:45), the clarification of teaching (Matthew 15:15), the criticism of Calvary (Matthew 16:22), the construction of booths (Luke 9:33), the compassion of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21), the confusion of application (Luke 12:41), the compensations of service (Matthew 19:27), and the curse of hypocrisy (Mark 11:21).

A. THE COGNIZANCE OF CHRIST

The first comment of Peter which we will consider in this study **[Seite 96]** was made when the woman who had "an issue of blood twelve years" (Luke 8:43) was healed by Christ. A great crowd of people were thronging around Christ,

and He had just been asked by Jairus to come and heal Jairus' twelve year old daughter (Luke 8:41, 42). In the midst of this crowd and the commotion, the woman with the issue of blood had worked her way up behind Christ and "touched the border of his garment; and immediately her issue of blood stanched [stopped]" (Luke 8:44). Christ then said, "Who touched me?" (Luke 8:45). This question did not indicate that Christ was ignorant of who touched Him; rather, as the sequel shows, the question was to solicit a confession from the woman so her faith and healing could be acknowledged and substantiated as being from Christ.

When Christ asked who touched Him, "all denied" (Luke 8:45) which was condemning to many; for many folk were touching Him as He was being thronged by the crowd. After "all denied," Peter spoke up with the comment we will study here. He said, "Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" (Ibid.). Luke is the only writer of the three Synoptics to report that Peter made this comment. Matthew does not record Christ's question or the comment by Peter though he records the healing. Mark mentioned the disciples collectively as making the statement. Luke does add that others besides Peter also made the same comment. But from Luke we learn that Peter was the leader in responding to Christ's question. Once Peter made the comment, the others would speak likewise to show their agreement with Peter's sentiments.

Peter's comment was not a good one. There was both insolence and ignorance in the comment.

1. The Insolence in the Comment

Peter's response to Christ's question was very disrespectful of Christ. It questioned the wisdom of Christ's question. "It was as though they [Peter and others] would reprove Him because of His apparently unreasonable question" (Ironside). What an insult this is to Christ to be reproved of man! Here is man **[Seite 97]** reproving God, the creation reproving the Creator, and ignorance reproving wisdom.

Peter implies that Christ was not paying attention to His situation of being thronged about by many people, or He would never have asked the question. The words Peter uses about the crowd describe a real press of people upon Christ. The word translated "throng" means to constrain, "stifling" (Vincent), and "to choke" (Vine). It is rendered "choke" in Luke 8:8 and 33. The word translated "press" means to squeeze. It is "a verb used of pressing out grapes" (A. T. Robertson). Anyone who has ever been caught in a large crowd leaving a sporting event or some other public event knows what this situation is. One can get caught in such a crowd and get nearly squeezed to death. This was Christ's situation; and, therefore, Peter thought it strange and senseless that Christ should

ask the question He did. Could not He see that many people were pushing up against Him? A lot of people were touching Him.

Peter is not alone in making comments which subtly insult God. Many, sometimes even the best of saints, do the same when they by their comments and complaints question God's actions about various situations. If they do not see a purpose for the situation (or as here the question) then they are critical of God. Their remarks insinuate that God does not know as much as they do. This really insults God, for it deprecates His wisdom and character and makes Him inferior to man. But Christ, unlike man, does not ask dumb questions or do dumb things; and just because man does not discern a purpose in Divine action does not mean there is no purpose.

2. The Ignorance in the Comment

When Peter opened his mouth here, he not only insulted Christ; but he also evidenced that he did not know what was going on at all. A woman had touched Christ in faith and had been gloriously healed after years of suffering, but Peter did not know it. Christ had demonstrated great discernment, but Peter was totally unaware of it. Surely he must have been embarrassed **[Seite 98]** when the truth of the situation came out, and he must have wished he had kept his mouth shut until he could fill it with wisdom.

Many folk, like Peter was that day, are ignorant in matters relating to God. Christ can be working in hearts, but they are not spiritual enough to discern it. God can be working in events of the day, but they never see God in anything. Christ discerns between the real and artificial, but they act as though He could not. So they play church and think it will pass muster with God. But He knows they are not really touching Him with genuine interest, devotion, and worship and will judge them accordingly. Others, who are of better attitude, would really like to touch Christ; but they fear He will not notice. They are ignorant of the fact that Christ can discern our touch, that we will not be lost in the crowd, and that though there be a babble of noise all around, Christ will still hear our prayer no matter how feeble it is. Christ is omniscient. Be not ignorant of this truth, for it can be a great comfort to every distressed soul.

B. THE CLARIFICATION OF TEACHING

The disciples did not always understand what Christ was teaching them. This was the situation when Peter made the second comment we will examine, which was, "Declare unto us this parable" (Matthew 15:15). To examine this comment, we will look at the reason for the comment, the rebuke for the comment, and the review for the comment.

1. The Reason for the Comment

Peter's comment came because he did not understand Christ's response to

some criticism by the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees were ever trying to find fault with Christ and His disciples. In the incident which led to Peter's comment, they asked Christ critically, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (Matthew 15:2).

This was not a question of hygiene. This was a question that **[Seite 99]** had to do with the observance of one of the many and burdensome rules and regulations passed down to the Jews by tradition, and which were in practice esteemed more than Scripture. These observances had only to do with the external, not the internal. Hence, one could be a real reprobate and yet keep these external laws and thus perceive himself and be perceived by others as very pious. Since the disciples did not follow all these regulations, it gave opportunity for these hypocrites to criticize the disciples and in so doing to imply that they (the critics) were holier than the followers of Jesus Christ—a status they craved, but definitely not a condition they craved.

Christ answered the criticism from the scribes and Pharisees by pointing out some greater failures on the part of these hypocrites. He met their charge with a greater charge which silenced them. He said, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3), and then He gave them an illustration of how they perverted the Divine commandment about honoring their father and mother—their tradition made acceptable some devious ways to keep from obeying this particular command of God. But Christ emphasized that it is the commands of God, not the traditions of man, that need most to be obeyed.

After speaking directly to the scribes and Pharisees, Christ then "called the multitude, and said unto them [to counter the evil comments of the scribes and Pharisees], Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth [which reveals the heart], this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:10, 11). Christ was "not here abrogating the Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean meats … He merely distinguishes between ceremonial and moral defilement, and, without setting aside the former, points out that the true pollution is in the latter alone" (F. C. Cook).

Peter and the other disciples (cp. Mark 7:17) did not catch on to what Christ was saying here to the multitude about the criticism and attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. So since they did not understand the teaching, Peter said, "Declare unto us **[Seite 100]** this parable" (Matthew 15:15). The word translated "declare" means "to explain." The word "parable" is used here in the sense of "any hard, enigmatical saying or figurative expression" (A. Lukyn Williams).

2. The Rebuke for the Comment

Peter's comment provoked a rebuke from Christ. "Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand …?" (Matthew 15:16, 17). A rebuke here is not what many would expect. When first reading Peter's comment, most folk would think it was a good comment. After all, it is wise to ask the Lord to explain His Word to us. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18) is a noble prayer. But there are exceptions; for when one should already know the truth, it is not a noble prayer. Such was the case here. Hence, Peter got a justified rebuke.

The rebuke was justified in two ways: in the "ye" and in the "yet." First, the "ye" says the rebuke is justified because Peter was His disciple. "Ye" of all people are without understanding. Others might be ignorant, but His disciples should not be. Second, the "yet" says the rebuke is justified because Peter had been well taught by Christ. Peter and the other disciples had been taught much by Christ over a period of a couple years and should by now have caught on quickly to His teaching about the scribes and Pharisees. But they were "*yet* without understanding," and they did not "*yet* understand."

About all Peter and the disciples perceived here was that Christ offended these hypocrites. "Knowest thou that the Pharisees [scribes would be included] were offended, after they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:12). This response of Peter (and the other disciples, too) to Christ's teaching is so much like the response of many church members to their pastor's sermons. These people are too dull spiritually to get what the pastor is saying (or they would never make such critical remarks), but they only see and are concerned that some (the hypocrites like the scribes and Pharisees) in the congregation are offended by **[Seite 101]** the sermon. So they duly inform the pastor that he should not so offend folk in his preaching. Hence, not only are they inexcusably dull of heart, but they are also more concerned about offending hypocrites than about offending God. Christ did not offend God, but He did offend hypocrites. We need to be very concerned about offending God but not about offending sin. After all, truth offends lies, purity offends corruption, hard work offends sloth, and honesty offends dishonesty. We reveal our heart by whom we get concerned about offending.

3. The Review for the Comment

Because Peter's comment evidenced that the disciples had a serious lack of understanding about some important matters, Christ graciously reviewed for Peter and the other disciples the important truth that it is not the externals but the internals that we need to be concerned about (Matthew 15:17–20). It is not the punctilious washing of the hands before eating anything that makes a man acceptable to God. But it is the clean heart that makes a man acceptable to God.

It matters not if some ceremonial practice is observed; what matters is if holiness is practiced.

Unregenerate man, however, loves to major on the externals instead of the internals in his religion; for one does not have to be right with God to observe the externals. It does not require pureness of heart to wash the hands before eating or to join a church or to perform some other outward religious act. But faithfully observing in the heart the holy commands of God is another story.

C. THE CRITICISM OF CALVARY

Peter received the sharpest rebuke ever given by Christ to any of His disciples. And he deserved it! The rebuke came after Peter's comment criticizing Christ's words about the necessity of the cross. After several years of His earthly ministry, Christ began "to show 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 **[Seite 102]** Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he [Christ] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:21–23).

We will look at the pride, philosophy, and peril in this comment which Peter made to Christ. This will make very plain why Peter received such a very strong rebuke from Christ.

1. The Pride in the Comment

There is no humility in this comment by Peter. It is filled with much pride. We can see this in at least three ways in our text: in taking Christ aside, in rebuking Christ, and in contradicting Christ.

First, he shows his pride *in taking Christ aside*. "Peter took him" (Matthew 16:22) is better translated "Peter took him aside." Peter did not like what Christ had said and so, in an authoritative way, takes Christ aside for a private chat to instruct Him. Peter acts as though he is the one in charge, the overseer, the leader; and, therefore, he must keep those under him in line. It does not honor Christ at all. It is a shameful belittling of Him.

Second, he shows his pride *in rebuking Christ*. "Peter … began to rebuke him" (Matthew 16:22). Incredible! The disciple rebuking his Master; but worse, man rebuking God. What awful pride! The word translated "rebuke" means to "censure or admonish" (Strong). Morgan says of the word, "We must not soften that word. Indeed, if we would have the real meaning of it, we must make it a little harsher. He [Peter] chided Him, he was angry with Him."

Third, he shows his pride *in contradicting Christ*. Christ had stated that He "must" (Matthew 16:21) experience the cross. But Peter rejected the idea of the

cross even though Christ put a “must” before it. “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22). Again, what awful pride to contradict the One he had just previously called the Messiah and Deity (Matthew 16:16) and was now, in this comment, calling “Lord.”

[Seite 103] It is always wicked presumption which thinks it knows more than the Word of God. Unfortunately, there are a lot of folk in every age who think they know more than the Word. They reject the revelation of the Word about God, heaven, hell, salvation, creation, and morals; and they advance their own thinking in its place. But it is presumptive folly all the way and will meet with the anathema of the Almighty.

2. The Philosophy in the Comment

The philosophy in Peter’s comment is the philosophy of unregenerate man. Christ characterized it as “thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23). Peter had no taste (savorest) for God’s way here; he preferred man’s taste. Many are like that. Their taste is only for the things of the flesh. They have no taste for spiritual matters. Peter’s worldly taste is demonstrated in his rejection of the cross and in his rejection of suffering.

He rejected the cross. “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22) is a very forceful rejection of the cross. “Be it far from thee” is translated by some as “God forbid” (A. Lukyn Williams). 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.” That is the philosophy of man. It wants nothing to do with the cross. The cross speaks of the seriousness of sin, of man’s inability to save himself by his own deeds, and of Christ being the only Way of salvation. None of this appeals to the flesh.

He rejected suffering. The flesh does not like to suffer—especially for spiritual things. Give us a religion that does not cost is the attitude of the flesh and the language of Peter here. “Be it far from thee” (Matthew 16:22) can also be rendered “Pity thyself” (Griffith Thomas), “spare thyself” (Matthew Henry), or “may God be gracious to thee [and hence spare You **[Seite 104]** the suffering]” (Vincent). Peter does not want Christ to experience suffering and tells Him so. But in telling Him so, Peter is saying Christ should sacrifice duty for comfort. The “must” is the language of duty, and that duty includes great suffering. But Peter admonishes Christ to avoid the suffering anyway. But what a bad philosophy that is! Christ corrects this wretched thinking later when He instructs the disciples to “deny” self and “take up his cross [suffering], and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Christ spoke exactly opposite of Peter.

3. The Peril in the Comment

Jesus did not treat Peter's ill-advised comment lightly. "But he turned [away from Peter], and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offense unto me" (Matthew 16:23). The action of Christ in turning away from Peter and the language He used in rebuking Peter show us that Peter was indeed a great peril in making this comment. He was a theological and a temptation peril.

A theological peril. A crossless theology is a great peril for the soul of man. "There is no doctrine of Scripture so deeply important as the doctrine of Christ's atoning death. We cannot have clearer proof of this, than the language used by our Lord in rebuking Peter … Stronger words than these never fell from our Lord's lips. The error that drew from so loving a Savior such a stern rebuke to such a true disciple, must have been a mighty one indeed" (Ryle). If Christ takes such a stand against Peter for opposing the necessity of the cross, then ought not we to take just as strong a stand against any like-minded theology, churches, ministers, and groups which do not preach and teach the cross as a "must" for man's soul salvation? We must turn our back on such a theology and denounce it vigorously, for it will send souls to an eternity in hell fire.

A temptation peril. When Christ said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23), He used the same language **[Seite 105]** against Peter as He did against Satan when Satan tempted Him (Luke 4:8). Peter did indeed take the form of the tempter in his comment to Christ. This fact is further amplified in Christ's saying Peter was an "offense unto me" (Matthew 16:23). The word from which "offense" is translated means "stumbling-block" (Vincent). The word originally meant that part of an animal trap on which the bait was placed. Hence, temptation and its ultimate goal of destruction is involved in the word. Peter would try to allure Christ away from His duty. But getting away from His duty would destroy Him. Hence, Peter is acting as a tempter here.

Peter, being one of Christ's best disciples, and yet at the same time being a temptation and a stumbling-block to the will of God for Christ, reminds us that "None are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends", who care more for our comfort than for our character (Bruce, as quoted by A. T. Robertson). Temptation does not lose its evil just because it comes from a respectable source at times. Hence, we must take a firm stand against every temptation no matter the source. If we do not, we will be led astray from the will of God to our destruction.

D. THE CONSTRUCTION OF BOOTHS

The transfiguration of Christ is the scene for the next comment made by Peter which we will consider. The transfiguration occurred when "Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain [Mount Hermon] apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them"

(Mark 9:2). While Christ was in this state, Moses and Elijah appeared unto Him and talked with Him "of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). When Peter awoke from sleep (Luke 9:32)—Peter and the other two disciples had gone to sleep while Christ was praying; something they would do again in the Garden—and saw the two with the transfigured Christ, he blurted out, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles [booths]; one for thee, **[Seite 106]** and one for Moses, and one for Elias [Elijah]" (Luke 9:33). We will note the blessing and the babbling in this comment.

1. The Blessing in the Comment

The only thing Peter said here that has any merit to it is the first sentence of his comment. He said, "Master, it is good for us to be here." Indeed, it was a great blessing for Peter and the other two disciples to be present at this event. It is always good to be in the company of Christ and of His people. What better company could one have than was on the mount that day—Christ, Moses, and Elijah. Furthermore, it is also a blessing to be instructed and made wiser in spiritual matters. The transfiguration surely did that for the apostles. It reminded the disciples that though Christ was headed for the cross, yet He was still Divine. Peter never forgot this, and later in one of his epistles he said that he and the other two disciples "were eyewitnesses of his majesty … when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:16, 18).

A good many church members do not seem to be of the same mind as Peter was here in this "good for us to be here" conclusion. If they thought it was "good for us to be here" in the presence of Christ and of the saints and in being instructed in spiritual matters, they would not miss so many church services. Their absenteeism indicates they do not always think it is good to "be here" in church with God's people to receive instruction from the Word of God. They think it is good to be elsewhere doing other things and being with other people. But what blessings they miss as a result of this very unwise thinking.

2. The Babbling in the Comment

Peter's comment on the mount during the transfiguration went quickly from good to bad. After rejoicing in the blessing of being present at this event, Peter then proposed that they make "three tabernacles [booths]; one for thee [Christ], one for Moses, and one for Elias [Elijah]" (Luke 9:33). The idea of making booths at this time would be encouraged by the fact that **[Seite 107]** the Feast of Tabernacles was near (cp. John 7). This celebration was a major feast in Jewish religious observances. During this feast the people were to take "boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook" (Leviticus 23:40) and make booths to dwell in during the feast. This was to commemorate the time when Israel dwelt in tents during their forty

years in the wilderness.

But Peter's proposal "was a preposterous suggestion" (F. B. Meyer). Scripture makes that very clear, for Scripture comments on Peter's comment, and what Scripture says is not very complimentary. In Mark, Peter's proposal is discredited by "he wist [knew] not what to say" (Mark 9:6). Luke said, "Peter said … not knowing what he said" (Luke 9:33). Much talk which we hear today, even though it is esteemed by much of the world, is like Peter's comment. Folks speak even though they do not know either what to say or what they are saying.

Peter's comment had at least two major problems with it. First, it dishonored Christ. It dishonored Christ in that it put Christ on the same level with Moses and Elijah. Christ is not to be put on the equal of any man. He is above all men. God made that very clear moments later when He spoke out of a cloud which had come upon them and said of Christ, "Hear him" (Luke 9:35). He, Christ, is the One to Whom they were to give the top honor. Second, it was impractical. There was no practical value whatever in building these booths on the mountain. To celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles in the Mount was senseless. But the booth building program was even more senseless in that it would keep Moses and Elijah from their better abode and would keep Christ from His work. It was a totally worthless suggestion in which the mind was certainly not connected to the mouth. It was just the babbling of nonsense.

Peter's proposal sounds like some proposals made in church business meetings by church members who have been in a deep sleep spiritually and do not know what is going on at all. But they speak up anyway and make outlandish proposals as to what the church should do. And if the church does not go along with **[Seite 108]** the proposal, they (unlike Peter, however) act very indignant and cannot understand why their wise (only they think it is wise) proposal is not immediately followed. Oh, let this foolish proposal of Peter inspire us to keep our mouth shut unless we have some wisdom in it.

E. THE COMPASSION OF FORGIVENESS

The teaching of Christ would give evidence to even the casual listener that His view of forgiveness was much more compassionate than the common attitude of that day. So one day Peter inquired of the Lord about forgiveness. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21, 22). This inquiry of Peter provides us with the next comment of Peter which we will examine in this chapter. We will look at the character of the comment and the contrast to the comment.

1. The Character of the Comment

Peter's inquiry reflected the attitude of forgiveness taught by the rabbis. Some rabbis taught that "an erring brother should be forgiven three times" (B. C. Caffin). Other rabbis fixed the limit at seven "from an erroneous interpretation of Amos 1:3 and 2:1" (A. Lukyn Williams). But whether three or seven, the attitude was one of legalistic hardness. One finds very little compassion in this restricted form of forgiveness and in this setting of a definite number in regards to how often you will forgive after which there will be no more mercy.

This attitude of forgiveness seems more concerned about forgiving too much than about forgiving enough. It is of the same sick spirit which prompts people to seek the minimum requirement to satisfy God in regards to their duty. Such people are forever asking how little they have to do to satisfy God. They do not want to do any more than is absolutely necessary. They rejoice if they only have to forgive seven times. They figure **[Seite 109]** their tithe to the penny so they do not give more than a tenth. And they adopt as their life verse the perverted exhorting of natural man as reported by Solomon in Ecclesiastes, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Such a spirit is certainly not motivated by love for God or anyone else; nor does it exhibit much of a desire to excel in living for God. It is instead a selfish spirit that lacks compassion for anyone but self. Furthermore, this attitude of forgiveness indicates that one does not see his own need of forgiveness from God. It plays down one's own sin in God's sight. If God were only to forgive us seven times and then call it quits, no one would ever be saved; for the anathema of God would strike all of us down before we had seen the light of many days.

2. The Contrast to the Comment

The answer Christ gave to Peter's inquiry must have astounded Peter. Peter's inquiry suggested he suspected that "seven times" may not be enough, but seventy times seven certainly was not the alternative he expected. Christ's position was so different from the common attitudes of that day that it was an entirely new concept about forgiveness. It said we should forgive an indefinite number of times. The number four hundred ninety was obviously not to be taken as an exact figure on how many times to forgive a person. Rather it was a number so large that it simply says we are to be always willing to forgive. It filled forgiveness with the unmeasured mercy of God. It was a tremendous contrast to the attitude which limited forgiveness to three or seven times.

Christ's answer, however, must not be construed to encourage sinning. In His answer to Peter, Christ does not exclude the work of rebuking sin or the prerequisite of repentance for forgiveness of sin. A parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke assures us of this fact. In the Luke passage Jesus said, "Take heed to

yourselves. If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). Sin is to be rebuked. Forgiveness **[Seite 110]** comes only when the sinner repents, not before.

But some would still pervert Christ's answer to Peter about forgiveness to mean we should tolerate all sin, rebuke no one about sin (such folk would especially like preachers to not preach against sin), not discipline any sinning church member, and go easy on punishing criminals. But J. C. Ryle correctly says, "The rule here laid down must of course be interpreted with sober-minded qualification. Our Lord does not mean that offenses against the law of the land and the good order of society are to be passed over in silence. He does not mean that we are to allow people to commit thefts and assaults with impunity. All that He means is that we are to study a general spirit of mercy and forgiveness towards our brethren … We are to lay aside everything like malice, strife, revenge, and retaliation."

F. THE CONFUSION OF APPLICATION

Once when Christ was giving a parable on the subject of being ready for His return, Peter asked Him, "Lord, speakest thou this parable [only] unto us, or even to all?" (Luke 12:41). Christ had ended the parable with a great exhortation —"Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40). Peter was not certain about the extent of the application. Therefore, he inquired of the Lord. This inquiry gives us another of Peter's comments which we want to examine in this chapter. We will note two things about this inquiring comment: the responsibility and the reminder in the comment.

1. The Responsibility in the Comment

This inquiring comment certainly was most noble in that it indicated that Peter was not going to shirk his responsibilities by pushing it off onto others. He saw that the teaching of Christ applied to him, but he was not certain if it applied to others. Many in our churches are just the opposite. When they hear the sermon, they see it applying to everyone else but themselves. They refuse to see any application for themselves, but they see plenty for others. Peter, however, was not like that; he was not **[Seite 111]** going to throw the sermon over his shoulder to someone else.

Jesus did not answer Peter's question directly; but in the teaching of Christ which immediately followed Peter's inquiring comment, the inescapable conclusion is that the parable did indeed apply to others as well as Peter and the disciples. And later, towards the end of Christ's ministry, Christ made it very plain as to the universal application of the warning on watchfulness regarding His return. He said, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37).

2. The Reminder in the Comment

Peter's comment reminds us that a lot more Scripture is applicable to us than what we think. Of course, much of mankind does not like this fact. They want very little of the Scripture to be applicable to their everyday living so they can escape as much spiritual responsibility as possible and so they will not be condemned in their fleshly ways. These folk will have little trouble finding many preachers and teachers who will oblige their attitudes, for such perverters of God's Word abound. These preachers and teachers have many clever explanations for why this passage and that passage does not apply to our lives, and they can go on and on in their sermons and lessons without ever making an application to anyone's conduct. Hence, no sinner gets rebuked and no sinner is offended by these preachers and teachers. This understandably makes these preachers and teachers very popular with such listeners. But beware of these perverters of God's Word. They are unfaithful to the Word of God, hurt people more than they help them, and are obviously endeavoring to gain popularity with men rather than do a good work for God. Such preachers and teachers need to be exposed and condemned, even if they do hold down prominent positions in fundamental, Bible-believing churches.

G. THE COMPENSATIONS OF SERVICE

After the rich young ruler had turned down the invitation to follow Christ because he valued his riches more than the reward of **[Seite 112]** "treasure in heaven" (Matthew 19:21) which Christ had offered him, Peter said to Christ, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matthew 19:27). In studying this inquiring comment made by Peter about the compensation for serving Christ, we will note the commitment in the comment, the concern in the comment, and the communication because of the comment.

1. The Commitment in the Comment

Peter's comment here indicates that his commitment to following Christ was very great. Unlike the rich young ruler, Peter had "left all" to follow Christ. We noted in an earlier study the great sacrifice Peter made to be a disciple of Christ —such as, giving up his fishing business, the comforts of his house and home, and many friends, etc. Surprisingly, however, some commentators, in comparing Peter's wealth to that of the rich young ruler, play down Peter's sacrifice by saying that what Peter left to follow Christ was not much. We disagree. These commentators have made a major blunder by their playing down Peter's sacrifice. Christ taught us in the incident of the widow and the two mites (Mark 12:41–44) that it is not how much you give that constitutes sacrifice. Rather, it is how much you have left. Peter had nothing left, for he had "left all" to follow

Christ. Peter was not a millionaire; and he obviously did not possess nearly the wealth that the rich young ruler possessed; for he was only a fisherman. But he did give “all” to follow Christ, and that is always sacrificing much.

Present day Christianity, especially in our country, knows precious little about sacrificing to follow Christ. What does the average church member know about sacrifice when he drives to church in a modern air conditioned car in the summer time and rushes from a paved parking lot to an air conditioned church to sit on a cushioned pew to give a tenth of his income to the offering which still leaves him with more money to live on in comfort and style than most people in other parts of the world will ever see? Peter’s language has to be a foreign tongue to most of **[Seite 113]** us. To forsake all is seldom done. But to be a disciple like Peter, you will have to sacrifice like Peter. Many would like the rewarding benefits of living like Peter but do not want to commit themselves like Peter did. However, the benefits relate inseparably to the commitment.

2. The Concern in the Comment

This inquiry about the reward for service was not made by Peter until after he had been following Christ for several years. That fact says a great deal about where Peter’s heart was. It says his first interest and concern was Christ, not the reward.

Peter’s slowness to inquire about the reward is an attitude which certainly contrasts to that of the rich young ruler. When we view the story of the rich young ruler, it is obvious where his heart was. It was on the things of this world, not on Christ. The difference in the call Christ gave Peter and the one He gave the rich young ruler emphasizes this difference in a very pronounced way. The rich young ruler was told before he even made his decision to follow Christ what the reward would be. Christ promised him “treasure in heaven.” But when you read about the call of Peter, it was, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Peter’s call promised ability to serve Christ but did not say anything about the reward. However, ability to serve Christ really appeals to those who, like Peter, love Christ and want to serve Him. Therefore, several years had passed before Peter inquired here in our text about the reward.

It is not wrong to be interested in the reward, but Peter was more interested in serving Christ than in the reward. The rich young ruler, however, was just the opposite. He was more concerned about his pay than his performance. Christ could not, therefore, appeal to him on the high basis of serving Christ for Christ’s sake; but He appealed to him on the basis of reward. But even though Christ offered great pay (“treasure in heaven”) right at the beginning of the call to the rich young ruler, the rich young ruler still refused it; for self does not value eternal things well. The rich young ruler was so poor in character that the only

[Seite 114] reward he was interested in was in what this world could give him. He had no interest in eternal reward or in serving Christ for Christ's sake.

Isaiah contrasts these two attitudes right at the beginning of his book. He said, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass, his master's crib" (Isaiah 1:3). There is a big difference between the ox and the ass here. The ox, a great worker, is primarily interested in his master. The ass, stubborn and slothful, is primarily interested in himself—his own personal reward, namely, the crib where his food is. The ox served the master; the ass served his stomach. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish the difference in Christian workers; but put pressure on them in terms of sacrifice and you will quickly see who is serving self and who is serving the Savior. Peter was primarily interested in serving the Savior—so he readily forsook all. The rich young ruler was primarily interested in serving self—so he would not sacrifice his all or even at all.

3. The Communication Because of the Comment

Peter's inquiring comment concerning the compensation for following Christ was immediately answered by Christ. Christ said, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:28, 29).

Peter's inquiry resulted in his learning—and our learning, too—that there is indeed a great reward for serving Christ. Any question as to whether or not it pays to serve Christ should be forever silenced by the wonderful truth about reward which Christ communicated to Peter. What tremendous reward Christ promised! No one forsakes all to follow Jesus Christ without great compensation.

Notice the details of the reward. The reward is not only **[Seite 115]** future ("shall inherit") but also present ("shall receive … in this time," cp. Mark 10:30). It includes position ("thrones"), possessions ("houses … lands"), friends, family, choice fellowship ("brethren … sisters … father … mother … wife … children"), and eternal life ("life everlasting," cp. Luke 18:30). Mark adds "persecutions" (Mark 10:30) to the reward, too. It will take a lot of faith to see persecution as a reward. But persecution for Christ's sake will add to the great rewards of serving Christ; for Christ said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you … for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:11, 12).

Nothing the world has to offer compares to the reward for serving Christ. The world thinks the multimillionaire athletes (who go on strike because of

grievances), those who win huge lottery prizes, big businessmen, and other wealthy people are sitting pretty. But following Christ makes them look like paupers; and besides that, following Christ gives character—something of which the wealthy people of the world seem woefully short. The world gives their rewards, but it is so much trash compared to what God gives. Paul realized this when he said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). “Dung” is simply manure in farmer’s language. That was how Paul depicted all the rewards of the world in comparison to the rewards for serving Christ. It would immeasurably help our service for Christ if we viewed things likewise. But, alas, so many professing saints have only an eye for the cheap trinkets which the world offers; and so they sacrifice much spiritually to gain them instead of sacrificing them to gain Christ’s rewards.

H. THE CURSE OF HYPOCRISY

The last comment made by Peter which we will consider in this study comes from the incident towards the end of Christ’s earthly ministry in which Christ cursed a barren fig tree. A day **[Seite 116]** after (cp. Mark 11:12–19 with 11:20) the cursing of the tree, the disciples and Christ passed by the tree which had by then “dried up from the roots” (Mark 11:20). This prompted Peter to say, “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away” (Mark 11:21).

We will note the emphasis in Peter’s comment and the exhortation from Christ because of Peter’s comment.

1. The Emphasis in the Comment

Peter’s comment expresses surprise. He is amazed that the tree should so completely wither in just a day’s time (so were all the disciples as Matthew 21:20 reports). He had heard the curse the day before, but he was unprepared to see the amazing effect of the curse. For the tree to wither so fast and so completely was most unusual and unexpected.

Unfortunately, this emphasis in the comment indicates that Peter missed the primary lesson of the curse. Peter was amazed at the power of Christ in withering the tree. The main lesson, however, in the withering of the fig tree was not the power of Christ but the condemnation of religious hypocrisy. A fig tree which had leaves but no fruit, as was the condition of the tree Christ cursed, was a hypocritical tree; for “the nature of the Eastern fig is such that *as soon as leaves come, figs should be there also*” (W. H. Griffith Thomas). The fig tree Christ cursed gave an appearance of fruit; but when it was examined there was no fruit, just leaves.

The condition of the fig tree pictured the condition of Israel at the time of Christ. They had a profession of faith in God, but they did not have the fruit to validate it. The religious leaders evidenced this problem when they came to John the Baptist for baptism. John rejected them because they did not have the fruit of repentance (Luke 3:7–9). All their religion was just show. It was not real. It was leaves but no fruit.

Israel is not alone in this hypocrisy. Every age sees an abundance of this kind of religion. We have a lot of it in our fundamental churches today, too. These folk have plenty of leaves—outwardly **[Seite 117]** they seem to be Christian. But when you look for fruit, it is conspicuously absent. They are just talk, not walk. Their faith is nothing but cosmetics; it is not their real self.

Peter, however, missed this lesson. He saw only the amazing speed at which the tree withered. He was like people who are impressed with the eloquence of some preacher but miss the truth he spoke.

2. The Exhortation Because of the Comment

Christ's response to Peter's comment was not what we might expect. In view of Peter missing the main lesson of the cursing of the fig tree, we would expect Christ to inform and explain what the real lesson was. But Christ did not do that; rather He used Peter's amazement to teach a needed lesson on faith. "And Jesus answering saith unto them [Christ spoke to all the disciples, for the other disciples were amazed too, cp. Matthew 21:20], Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain [Mount of Olives], Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he saith" (Mark 11:22, 23). Christ repeated in this exhortation what He had previously said about faith right after His transfiguration when the disciples had a problem healing a boy. Christ said then, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain [Mount Hermon], Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20).

Though we may be surprised at Christ's response to Peter's comment, it was the best response in this situation. Lack of understanding, though a problem here, was not the main problem evidenced here. The main problem here was the lack of faith (as shown by the surprise of Peter and the other disciples at the speed the tree withered after Christ cursed it). The main problem here was not hypocrisy (Judas Iscariot being an exception) which the cursing of the fig tree spoke about, but the main **[Seite 118]** problem was smallness of faith. So it was first things first. Christ would build up the disciples' faith first, for when faith is strong all the other things will fall in line. Faith is a prime essential. "Without

faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Hebrews 11:6) and "Through faith we understand" (Hebrews 11:3). So it was faith that needed first attention here.

This exhortation Christ gave to Peter and the other disciples certainly reminds us rather acutely how small our faith is. An awareness of this fact should stop all spiritual pride and boasting. Even if we have accomplished much in the eyes of man and, as a result, think we really have great faith to have done so much, the Scripture will surely humble us by such statements as Christ made here to Peter and as Christ made to the disciples right after the transfiguration. Hence, with this great need of faith, we should be inspired to be more earnest in the study and mediation of the Word of God through which faith comes. We should pray more earnestly for an increase in faith instead of praying mostly for an increase in material things. To our condemnation the increase in material things is generally the theme of most of our prayers. Though faith is so important in our lives, few pray for it.

[Seite 119] VII

The Coin

Matthew 17:24–27

At least six miracles of Jesus Christ were performed for Peter or were directly related to him. These seven miracles included the two great catches of fish (Luke 5:4–10; John 21:5–11); the curing of his mother-in-law (Luke 4:38, 39); the walking on water (Matthew 14:22–33); the healing of the man's ear that Peter in foolish zeal cut off with a sword in the Garden Gethsemane (John 18:10, 11; Luke 22:50, 51); the deliverance from prison in the days of the early church (Acts 12:1–11); and the coin in the fish's mouth which is the miracle in our text.

This miracle involving the coin and the fish, which is the middle miracle of the seven, is the least dramatic of the seven miracles; but it certainly is not lacking in important instruction. The miracle had to do with the paying of "tribute money" (v. 24). Fittingly, Matthew, the former tax collector for Rome, is the only one of the Gospel writers to report this incident. It obviously would have special interest to him though it was not the particular tax he collected.

To study this coin miracle which was associated with the tribute money, we will consider the pursuit of the tribute money (vv. 24, 25), the perspective of the tribute money (vv. 25–27), and the providing of the tribute money (v. 27).

A. THE PURSUIT OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY

During the last visit which Christ and His disciples made to Capernaum before the crucifixion, "they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? **[Seite 120]** He saith, Yes" (vv. 24, 25). The tribute money in question here was not a Roman tax. It was a tax for the support of the

Temple in Jerusalem and was only paid by Jews. It was a religious tax, not a civil tax. This tax commenced in the Wilderness when God instructed Moses to take a half shekel from every male twenty years and older (Exodus 30:11–16). The tribute was first used for the Tabernacle, and later it was used for the work of the Temple (cp. Nehemiah 10:32—the amount then was only one-third of a shekel). The practice was still being observed during the time of Christ. It was not an evil tax per se but had to do with the legitimate upkeep of the worship of God at the Temple. However, as is the case with most taxation, the money was often misused. The corrupt leaders in charge of the Temple had little or no compunction about using the money wrongfully to advance their own selfish interests and causes.

In this pursuit of the tribute by the collectors, we will note the asking of Peter and the answering by Peter.

1. The Asking of Peter

"Doth not your master pay tribute?" was not an innocent question. The question may appear to ask innocently if Christ was exempted or not from paying the tribute (religious teachers, as Christ would be considered by the populace, were often exempted). But knowing the character of these religious leaders and their great dislike of Christ, one can only conclude that the asking of the question was a backhanded way of telling Peter that Christ was expected to pay in due time. So the question was a good deal more than a simple inquiry of Peter regarding whether or not Christ paid this tribute money. Those pursuing the tribute money via the question were obviously of the mind that Christ should pay; otherwise they would not have asked the question. Hence, it was not an innocent question.

Few innocent questions were ever asked Christ or His disciples by officials of the Jewish religion. They may have sounded innocent and benign on the surface, but underneath was the venom of the serpent who was ready to use any unsatisfactory **[Seite 121]** (to them) answer as ammunition to further attack Christ. There are always people like that in church. They are forever asking the pastor or some member of the board a provocative question of some sort. It may appear to be a simple and legitimate quest for information, and the interrogators will mask their true feelings with a tone of genuine concern in asking the question. But underneath they are only asking the question to get more ammunition to oppose the work. It is easy to spot trouble makers in church by noting who asks these questions.

The fact that Christ was only now, after several years of ministry, being confronted by the solicitors was indicative of the changing attitude of the populace towards Christ. F. B. Meyer says in regards to this situation, "Religious

teachers, such as Rabbis, were exempted from the payment of the Temple tax by general consent; and the universal respect which was paid our Lord in the earlier days of His ministry gave Him complete immunity from any question as to His liability to pay it. But now that He had lost caste and was being hunted down by Herod and the rulers [religious], Peter, as His representative, was accosted with a challenge which proved that the cordon of respect and reverence which had formerly surrounded Him was broken down." The situation, though the tax at issue here was a religious tax, still reminds us that when respect for Christ diminishes, the work of Christ often loses its exemptions. Churches in our country may face some hard days ahead because of that fact.

2. The Answering by Peter

Peter answered the question hastily and in the affirmative. Marcus Dods said, "Peter, as usual, does not stop to think, but promptly assures them that his Master certainly considered himself taxable." While Peter often did speak without thinking and in this case did evidence there were some things he did not think through about Christ and the tribute money, yet his haste here to answer the question in the affirmative should not be criticized too harshly. One can see at least two good reasons why he would answer quickly and in the affirmative—he did not want **[Seite 122]** to dishonor Christ by his answer, and he did not want to endanger Christ by his answer.

First, Peter did not want to *dishonor Christ* by his answer. The tax was not an objectionable tax in itself; and to oppose it would put one in opposition to the work of the Temple, which though administered by many corrupt priests, nevertheless, represented worship to God. The Temple was not to be forsaken (cp. Zacharias' work as priest in Luke 1), but it was to be supported because of what it represented. Peter knew Christ did not oppose that which was of God and so would readily answer in the affirmative. He would be anxious to honor Christ by showing Christ's enthusiasm for what the Temple represented.

Second, Peter did not want to *endanger Christ*. Fear for Christ's safety was doubtless another factor in causing Peter to answer quickly and in the affirmative. As A. Lukyn Williams says, "Was there not another feeling that dictated the quick reply, and made him pledge Jesus to the payment? He had a fear at his heart, caused by Christ's late warning and prophecy [about Christ's death], that made him morbidly anxious to live at peace with all men at this conjuncture. As far as in him lay he would shield his beloved Master from the dread result which he anticipated; at any rate, he would endeavor to postpone the fatal day; no offense that he could obviate should be given. So, thinking only of present safety, forgetting or willfully ignoring Christ's true position, he answered hastily, 'Yes.' "

While Peter did indeed have some things to learn about Christ and the tribute money, which we will note next, it is commendable here that Peter was concerned about the honor and welfare of Christ. Would that all saints of God were as devotedly concerned as Peter was about not saying anything that would cause others to esteem and treat Christ poorly.

B. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY

After speaking with the tribute collectors, Peter was confronted with Christ about the tribute money. "And when he [Peter] was come into the house, Jesus prevented him [spoke first to him], **[Seite 123]** 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 … give unto them for me and thee" (vv. 25–27).

The omniscience of Christ is plainly evident here. Before Peter says a word, Christ speaks to him about the tribute money issue. Christ knows all our doings, our words, and our thoughts. Nothing escapes Him. We can conceal nothing from Him. This omniscient nature of Christ is both an encouragement to the faithful and a warning to the disobedient.

In speaking with Peter about the tribute money, Christ put true perspective on the tribute money and His paying of it. He spoke of the exemption from paying the tribute and the expediency in paying the tribute.

1. The Exemption From Paying the Tribute

The first thing which Christ did was to point out to Peter that Christ surely should not have to pay the tribute. Christ gave as an illustration the fact that kings do not tax their family ("children") but their subjects ("strangers"). The Temple was "my Father's house" (John 2:16); and, therefore, Christ as THE Son of God should not be taxed to take care of His Father's house. How absurd to tax Christ to help pay for the ceremony, sacrifices, etc. which were all types of Christ, the Son of God Who came to give His life a ransom for sinful man. The Temple should be honoring Christ with its resources. To tax Christ to pay for His own honoring as God's Son is ludicrous.

Of course, those collecting the tribute money did not perceive or recognize the identity of Christ as the Son of God. But Peter did, for he had confessed Him as the Son of God several times earlier (John 6:69 and Matthew 16:16). But even though Peter confessed this great truth, he did not relate it properly to this situation. He may have thought Christ should be exempt on the same basis as the Rabbis were exempt. But it is evident he did not think through the fact that Christ should be exempt **[Seite 124]** because of His relationship to God the Father. He recognized Christ as the Son of God, but it was not easy for him to

see the ramification of the truth in every situation in life.

Peter is not alone in having difficulty applying spiritual truth properly to every area of life. We all have this trouble. Too often we limit application of a spiritual truth to just a few areas. One prominent area in which we see this problem today is in the area of separation from the world. The Bible commands this quite plainly. Most fundamentalists are very quick to see the application of this separation command in regards to ecclesiastical situations. But when it comes to separation from other evils of the world, a good many fundamentalists evidence considerable trouble in application. As an example, some of our Christian colleges will not have a minister speak in chapel who has the slightest taint of association with modernists or even neo-evangelicals. Yet, they will have as a guest speaker in chapel some famous "Christian" professional athlete who skips church to play ball on Sunday, who is not a member of any fundamentalist church, and whose lifestyle leaves much to be desired in regards to Christian convictions. Also, some churches that are extremely sensitive about having any minister in their pulpit except a strict fundamentalist will, on the other hand, bring in a politician to speak who is popular with the church people though he is a member of a modernistic church. All of this exhorts us to be more diligent to apply spiritual truths more faithfully and more fully to every area of our lives.

2. The Expediency in Paying the Tribute

"Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them" (v. 27), the tribute will be paid even though Christ is actually exempt. Christ had no intentions on insisting on His right of exemption here. Since the paying of the tax was not an evil thing and in principle went for a noble cause, Christ would not argue the case lest He unnecessarily offend others. "A profound principle is involved here, which calls for our careful heed. When questions arise in life, which do not involve principle and conscience, **[Seite 125]** we should be prepared to make concessions to the conscientious scruples of those whom we may be able to influence for good" (F. B. Meyer). This is the principle Paul spoke of to the Corinthians when he said, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient" (1 Corinthians 10:23). It is a principle that requires much humility to practice and a principle which does not put first priority in life on one's rights. In our day of "rights" emphasis, we know very little about practicing this principle; for all we seem to be concerned about is our rights, not others. But A. B. Bruce said, "It is not a mark of greatness in the kingdom to bluster about rights."

We need to be careful that we do not interpret Christ's action here as an excuse to compromise with evil. There is a great deal of difference between what Christ did here and what many do when they give in to the pressure of others to do evil and then try to justify it by saying they did not want to hurt anyone's

feelings. Christ was not compromising by doing evil here in order to keep from offending folk. He was instead waving the exercise of His legitimate rights in order that He might not offend others unnecessarily. But to break God's laws to keep from offending others is indeed wrong. We are to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) when the laws of man conflict with the laws of God. So there are times, when for the sake of being faithful to righteousness, we will have to greatly offend people. Keeping God's laws often causes us to offend people, but we must not hesitate to offend others when it involves obeying God's laws. Christ certainly did not hesitate to offend evil. As an example, Christ often made it a point to break the unjust, unmerciful, and unnecessary laws made by the Pharisees and other religious leaders. These laws were often revered even more than Scripture, but they were only burdens to the people. In breaking these laws, Christ greatly offended the religious leaders of the day; but that bothered Him not. Furthermore, when He taught, He did not water down His message to keep from offending His listeners. Even the disciples were aware of the fact that Christ offended people by His messages as is seen **[Seite 126]** in their comment, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:12). But when right and wrong was not involved, Christ readily gave up His rights in order that He might not upset others needlessly. "It would have caused grave offense if the people of Capernaum, who knew the Lord so well, had heard that he refused to contribute for the purpose so sacred. They would not understand the deep reasons which he gave to Peter. They would simply suppose that a great Rabbi, a famous Teacher, declined to pay the Temple dues. The example would be evil; it would be seized as an excuse by the avaricious; it would cause idle and malicious talk" (B. C. Caffin).

Too often people are more concerned about their rights than they are about living righteously. So they will greatly offend others to get their rights; but on the other hand, they seem very hesitant to offend folk for the sake of righteousness. They forget that doing evil greatly offends God and that we need to be more concerned about offending God than others.

C. THE PROVIDING OF THE TRIBUTE MONEY

When Christ instructed Peter that the tribute would be paid even though Christ was exempt, Christ also told Peter how he, Peter, would get the money to pay for the tax for both Christ and himself. He told Peter to "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" (v. 27). We will note the poverty of Christ, the power of Christ, and the precept of Christ in this very unique way of providing the tribute money.

1. The Poverty of Christ

Christ did not live in affluent circumstances in His earthly ministry. If Christ were to live in our day and it could be observed first hand what poverty He experienced to do His Father's will, it would astound the average church member. They could not comprehend it in spirit or in practice because **[Seite 127]** they are so far from the mind of Christ in their lives. But though the poverty of Christ cannot be observed in actual life today, it can be observed oftentimes in the Scripture. A case in point is our text. It shows plainly the general poverty that Christ experienced. He did not have the amount of the half-shekel (which according to some was the wages for two days' work for the average person) to pay the Temple dues. He must provide it through a miracle.

How different Christ was from many religious leaders today. "He had not fifteen pence [half-shekel] at command to pay his tax with; though he cured so many that were diseased, it seems he did all gratis; 'for our sakes he became poor,' (2 Corinthians 8:9) … [Furthermore] He did not order Judas to pay this out of the bag which he carried; that was for subsistence; and he would not order that for his [own] particular use which was intended for the benefit of the community" (Matthew Henry). Christ did not have much; nor did He misuse what money was given in alms to Him (which Judas kept in the bag). But, in contrast, many famous religious leaders today seem quite willing to amass a tidy sum for themselves. They do not go without as Christ did but insist on living in a much better (and even an elaborate) style than most. Furthermore, they often misappropriate funds and handle gifts to their ministry very deceitfully. Their greed and guile puts them in stark contrast to the One they profess to serve. Their amassing of fortunes shows the fraudulent character of their professed faith in Christ. They profess faith in Christ simply as a means to accumulate millions.

To emphasize the lack of avarice on the part of Christ, we need to note that Christ provided through the miracle only enough money to pay the tribute. "Christ could as easily have commanded a bag of money as a piece of money; but he would teach us not to covet superfluities, but, having enough for our present occasions, therewith to be content, and not to distrust God, though we live but from hand to mouth" (Matthew Henry).

This attitude of Christ's, as amplified so well by Matthew Henry, certainly is foreign to the thinking of our society. With **[Seite 128]** the legalizing of gambling, the huge salaries for athletes, the strikes by workers who earn nice incomes, and the multitude of crime in financial institutions, the attitude of man today regarding money and possessions is to gain more and more and more whether they need it or not. They are never satisfied with what they have. They know nothing about "be content with such things as ye have" (Hebrews 13:5).

About the only time they are content with little is in the matter of spiritual things. There they could be totally without and still be content, for they are so deficient in values. Unfortunately, professing Christians often exhibit these materialistic attitudes, too. But J. A. MacDonald said, “It is Christ-like to forego opportunities of wealth for the kingdom of heavens sake.” Then he adds a pungent question. “When will men discern it practically, that there are better things than money?” All of this, of course, does not sanction the poor salaries many stingy churches give their pastor—but that is another story.

2. The Power of Christ

The miracle working of Christ in providing the coin for the tribute money demonstrated the Divine power of Christ. As such, the miracle working of Christ in this incident would strengthen His claim that He was exempt from the tribute and that His paying the tribute was done voluntarily for the purpose of avoiding the needless offending of others. It would encourage Peter to see that though Christ was humbling Himself to pay the tax, it did not mean that Christ was not all that He claimed to be. Paying the tax could give the impression that maybe Christ was not the Son of God after all but was on the same level as everyone else. However, working the miracle to provide for the payment would attack any doubts Peter might have about Christ’s identity as the Son of God. Here was the obvious supernatural. Here we have a string of impossibilities which could only be predicted by Divine knowledge—promptly catching the particular fish with the coin in his mouth, the fish having the coin in his mouth and not losing it, the fish having the coin in **[Seite 129]** his mouth that is the exact value needed, and the fish biting on the hook even though it had a coin in its mouth. The miracle would indeed attest to the Divinity of Jesus Christ and would oppose any thought to the contrary created by His paying the Temple tax.

This miracle is one of those miracles of Christ in which the Deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ are closely associated. The Deity in this miracle is seen in the power to bring about the unique providing of the coin to pay the tribute; the humanity is seen in His paying tribute (as others have said, “Is there anything more human than paying taxes?”). Another miracle in which the two natures of Christ are closely associated also occurred on the Sea of Galilee. It is the miracle in which He awoke from sleeping (His humanity) on a boat and then stopped the storm (His Deity) which threatened the disciples in the boat (Luke 8:22–25). Christ was both God and man. To deny that fact is to deny the truth of the Scripture.

3. The Precept of Christ

It is most interesting and instructive to note the economy of Christ’s miracles. He did not do supernaturally that which could be done humanly. The human part

in the miracle before us was Peter's fishing. Christ would provide in a miraculous way for the payment of the tribute money, but it would not be apart from Peter's fishing. So Peter was told to "go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up [on the hook]" (v. 27). The fish did not jump out of the water onto the shore and spit up the coin. That was unnecessary, for Peter could cast a line. Christ would do miraculously what Peter could not do; but everything Peter could do, he was given the responsibility of doing. Several lessons can be learned from this habit of God.

First, God never works miracles in a way that would discourage industry. The miracles of God are not going to contribute to laziness nor diminish initiative. God does not work miracles so men can sit around and do nothing.

Second, God will work miracles in conjunction with His **[Seite 130]** commands. His commands will be followed or the miracle will not take place. Therefore, if we expect to have the power of God working on our behalf, we had better give due attention to the precepts of God. If we lack the wonderful working of God in our life, the reason will often be right here—we have not given proper honor to the precepts of God. Obedience brings about the miracle. Obedience will experience the blessedness of Divine power on its behalf. So because Peter obeyed, he was soon in possession of the coin by which he paid both his and the Master's tribute money.

[Seite 131] VIII

The Collapse

Numerous texts

The Night Before the crucifixion was a very bad night for Peter. It gave him the darkest hours of his life, for during that night occurred his great spiritual collapse. He said things and did things of which he would forever be ashamed. If there was one segment in his life Peter would like to blot out of his record, it would be that night.

Peter's great spiritual collapse, which climaxed in his threefold denial of Jesus Christ, was like the collapse of a great building. First one part gives way, then another part gives way, and then another and another part gives way until at last the whole building lies in a heap. Heretofore, Peter had at times not performed well; but these times were only momentary; and Peter had always bounced back quickly to excellence in following Jesus Christ. But on this night, the darkest night in Peter's life, his decline spiritually was not a momentary passing incident. Rather as the night progressed, his conduct worsened. Step by step, in incident after incident, he went down in his behavior until he hit his all time low as a disciple of Jesus Christ by denying Christ three times.

In this chapter we are going to study the various incidences in Peter's experiences and conduct that fateful night which led up to and were a significant part of his spiritual collapse. They include the disputing about foot washing, the declarations of loyalty, the drowsiness in Gethsemane, the demonstration of swordplay, the drifting from fellowship, and the denials of Christ (the consummation and climax of his collapse).

[Seite 132] A. THE DISPUTING ABOUT FOOT WASHING

This dark night in Peter's life began with the observance of the Passover with Christ and the other eleven disciples. This observance took place in the Upper Room which Peter, along with John, had earlier in the day prepared for the occasion (Luke 22:8–13). As an ominous prelude to the rest of the night, the Passover observance in the Upper Room did not start off well. The very first thing which should have occurred when the disciples and Christ came into the Upper Room was the washing of their feet. But though the basin and towel and water were present, no one volunteered to do the washing of the feet. It was common in every home to have the feet washed after spending the day out on the dusty paths. Normally a servant tended to this lowly task. However, that night in the Upper Room there were only Christ and the twelve. Hence, if the feet were to be washed, one of disciples would have to do it; for Christ would certainly be exempted from such a task.

But not one of the disciples volunteered to do this lowly task of foot washing. Though the most devoted of Christ's followers belonged to this group, none of them were in a humble mood that night. One reason for this lack of humility was in the fact that petty jealousies about position and greatness did unfortunately exist between them. Scripture records periodic occasions when this problem flared up amongst the disciples. As an example, on a trip to Capernaum they argued among themselves as to who among them was the greatest (Mark 9:33, 34). And right in the Upper Room "there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24). Disputing over who was the greatest certainly reflected an attitude that would not readily do the lowly and humbling task of foot washing.

Since none of the disciples volunteered to do the task, Christ "riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 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 13:4, 5). This **[Seite 133]** work of Christ in cleansing the disciples' feet led to some earnest exchanges between Peter and Christ (John 13:6–10) which gave the initial evidence that night of Peter's spiritual decline, a decline which would culminate in his denials of Christ. From these exchanges between Peter and Christ about

Christ washing Peter's feet, we will note the perplexity of Peter, the protest of Peter, and the plea of Peter.

1. The Perplexity of Peter

When Christ came to Peter to wash his feet, "Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" (John 13:6). Peter did not understand the situation at all. We will look at the reason for his perplexity and the relief for his perplexity.

The reason for his perplexity. Peter was perplexed as to why Christ should be doing the foot washing. It did not make sense to him that Christ, their Lord and Master, should be doing the servant's task of washing the feet. This was not a task fitting for Christ to be doing. It was much too lowly a task. In fact, some report that the Jews would not even let a Jewish servant wash their feet but had Gentile slaves doing it; for they perceived the task too lowly for a Jew. But whether Jews did the task or not, for Christ to take upon Himself the task of washing feet was extremely unacceptable to custom, to honor, and respect. It was all backward. Christ should be having His feet washed, not washing others' feet. If we had lived in those days with the practice of foot washing, we would doubtless appreciate much better the great incongruity which Peter saw in Christ washing the disciples' feet. We would probably be astonished at the scene.

Perplexity over God's action is not necessarily a sin. Even the best of men often do not understand the dealings of God in their personal lives. To us at times God does not seem to act wisely, properly, fairly, punctually, or recognize the peril of some circumstances in our lives. In such puzzling times we often, like Peter, ask God questions which are not the most respectful of questions. With a complaining and critical spirit, **[Seite 134]** we often ask "Why?" and "Where are you God?" And as the disciples did during a storm, we also sometimes ask in our trials, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38). But while it is not necessarily a sin to be perplexed about the dealings of God in our lives, we do sin when we react poorly to the perplexities. We cannot stop the perplexities from coming, but we certainly can and need to stop a poor reaction to these perplexities. Therefore, when we do not understand God's actions, we must never charge God with folly or with being unfaithful or with lacking care for our lives. We will note shortly that Peter's chief problem here was not in his being puzzled at Christ's action but in how he responded to it. Perplexity need not cause you trouble, but a poor reaction to it will always cause trouble.

The relief for his perplexity. Christ gave Peter some relief for his perplexity by saying, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). Christ's answer to Peter's perplexity is a great promise which should help anyone of us through the dark experiences in life in which the pain

of perplexity nearly overwhelms. The promise is that some day we shall indeed know why God has acted as He did. Some day we will see the wisdom of God's actions which at the time of their occurrence did not seem wise. Some day we will see that God really did care though it seemed in our troubles He sometimes had little concern for us. We will some day learn that our Lord was never late and never too early, and that "He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37).

Man in his arrogance, however, often feels that if he does not see a good reason for God's action at the time of its occurrence then there must be something wrong with the action. But we must not so charge God. We must instead let God be God. If God is the Almighty, as we proclaim He is, then surely we must allow that He will do things that our little finite minds cannot fathom or understand at the time. Rather than get upset over the perplexity, we need to dwell on the great promise Christ gave Peter and encourage ourselves that God does have good reasons **[Seite 135]** for His actions and has promised that we shall someday be acquainted with the reasons. When that day comes, we can be sure it will be a day that Christ will be glorified. It will also be a day of shame for all who have doubted or criticized Christ for His actions.

The fact that Christ does not explain everything the instant He does it reminds us that He wants us to grow in faith. God wants us to trust Him more and more. Letting us walk in the dark for awhile certainly provides us with much opportunity to walk by faith. It gives us the opportunity to put our trust in His Word regarding the promises that we shall someday know the good reasons why God has directed providence as He has. Taking this view of the perplexities of providence will certainly do much to quiet the turbulence and agitation of spirit that perplexity often causes. Walking by faith always promotes a settled spirit; it is unbelief that upsets things.

2. The Protest of Peter

Christ had no sooner given Peter the gracious promise about his perplexity than Peter protested, "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13:8). We could wish that Peter had accepted Christ's gracious answer about the perplexity and then kept silent. But as we said at the beginning of this chapter, this night was going to be the darkest of times in Peter's life and behavior. His conduct was going to go from bad to worse before it was all over.

In Peter's protest we see his flagrant harshness, his faulty hearing, and his false humility.

His flagrant harshness. The harsh manner in which Peter responded here to Christ is alarming and is a forewarning of more evil things to come in Peter's conduct that night. There was no courtesy, kindness, or respect in his "Thou shalt never wash my feet." This response to Christ was rude in its abruptness (it was

abrasively blunt), in its contradictory nature (he was opposing Christ's desire), and in its finality ("never" is translated **[Seite 136]** from a Greek double negative which means "never, no never"). There are times when a short, terse, adamant statement is needed, such as, when we are dealing with evil. But this was not the case here in the Upper Room. Peter is speaking to the Lord. He is responding to the revealed Word of God. What a terrible reaction!

One of the symptoms of a heart out of sorts with God is an ungracious spirit. Sometimes we see this kind of spirit in church business meetings where dissidents speak out in such sharp and snarling ways. Rather than promote peace, they provoke problems. Their talk evidences little or no respect for God's man, God's Word, or God's work. They snap and crackle like static on a radio during an electrical storm. They argue against reason, good sense, and the plain meaning of Scripture. And like Peter, they are heading for more disgraceful behavior in their lives, too. We need to guard against the intrusion of this ungracious spirit. At the first indication of it, we need to head for the mourners' bench and get things straightened out with God quickly before we get ourselves in serious trouble and disgrace the name of God.

His faulty hearing. Peter did not pay much attention to what Christ had said about the perplexity, or else he would not have responded the way he did. Christ told Peter he would someday understand what He was doing. That should have silenced Peter; but not listening well, he kept talking; and what he said was not good at all.

Anytime we do not listen well to what Christ has to say, we will not behave well. The Word of God has given enough explanations about things to forever keep us from complaining and acting improperly. But if we, like Peter, pay no attention to what the Word of God says, we will prolong and intensify our ignorance, act poorly, and make a mess of things.

Peter's faulty hearing problem is a problem of many, and it is caused by a stubborn heart. Such hearing hears only what it wants to hear. It has made up its mind about some situation, and **[Seite 137]** no amount of explanation will ever get through. You can reason with these people for hours, but they never perceive the truth. They simply do not listen well. Furthermore, like Peter in the Upper Room, they also have another problem which generally accompanies this hearing problem—they talk too much. Folk who talk too much will have trouble listening well, for they are so busy talking they do not have time to listen. You can mark it down that a person who has trouble talking too much will also have a hearing problem. They will never get things straight, will frequently have trouble with Divine providence, will never make much sense when they speak, and, in general, will not conduct themselves in a wise manner.

His false humility. In his protest, Peter tried to give the appearance of humility. By insisting that Christ should not wash his feet, Peter would try to demonstrate that he was much lower in position than Christ; and that, therefore, it was inappropriate for Christ to wash Peter's feet. Peter would endeavor to look so humble here; but his humility was a false humility; for in refusing to let Christ wash his feet, Peter rebelled against the desire of Christ and told Christ, the Almighty Son of God, in no uncertain terms, what He could not do. That is not humility by any stretch of the imagination!

False humility is not an unusual thing in the matter of religion. It, in fact, is quite popular. It is a crafty attitude that endeavors to disguise rebellion. As an example, the Roman Catholic Church says that they are too sinful to come to Christ directly; so they would show this humble (?) attitude by coming through Mary instead of Christ. They have also used this same argument to justify their veneration of the saints. But all of this is simply false humility which is full of rebellion to God's Word. God has commanded us to come to Him through Jesus Christ, and any deviation from that command is nothing but plain rebellion against God! To put Mary or any bygone saint in the place of Christ is wicked disobedience. It is not humility at all, but rebellious pride.

[Seite 138] False humility also shows up at times in the matter of service. When people are asked to serve in some capacity in church, they often decline the offer by saying they feel they simply do not have the ability or the qualifications to do the job. Confessing one's inabilities and lack of qualifications sounds so humble. But it is not humility at all. The people asked to serve do not want to serve. They do not want to give their time and energy to the work of God, and so they cleverly use this false humility excuse to exempt themselves from duty. But God sees through this hypocrisy and He will judge. Therefore, let us beware of false humility in our lives. It is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

3. The Plea of Peter

Peter does nothing by halves. From arrogantly telling Christ that He was never going to wash Peter's feet, Peter now goes to the other extreme and pleads with Christ to wash all his body. "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:9). We will note the cause of the plea, the character of the plea, and the correcting of the plea.

The cause of the plea. Peter is learning that one never gets into an argument with Christ without quickly losing. Peter's protest about Christ washing his feet was met with a short but pungent response from Christ. Christ said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8). Christ's response sent Peter reeling. Faulty as Peter was, he still had great affection for Jesus Christ; and the

idea of having “no part with me [Christ]” caused Peter to instantly reverse field. Would that all of us were as concerned about being with Christ as Peter was; so that when something came up which threatened that fellowship, we instantly turned away from it.

In His response, Christ spoke with finality. This is not the kind of speech the world likes, however. It was either or, and man does not like that sort of language. But with God it is either yes or no, right or wrong, true or false, good or evil, heaven or **[Seite 139]** hell, and saved or lost. There is no vast middle ground which all the uncommitted compromising folk love. Peter either submits to the washing of Christ or there was “no part” with Christ.

We would like to hear more pulpits in our churches speak with this kind of finality. Of course when they do, the congregation cries loudly in complaint and accuses the preacher of a lack of love, tact, and a host of other things. But the message of God will never be articulated well to mankind unless the message is spoken with finality.

The character of the plea. What Peter said in response to Christ’s statement was very defective. True, as we noted above, it did indicate his interest in being with Christ—and that is good. But in telling Christ to wash all of him, he still was rebelling against the will of God. Peter appears on the surface to be capitulating to Christ’s desire to wash his feet, but in truth he is not submitting to Christ at all. He is still very much rebelling. The rebellion is in the subtle amendment feature of the plea. He is altering Christ’s command and that is not submission. Christ wanted to wash his feet. But neither of Peter’s responses were acceptable. The first one flatly refused Christ; the second one added to Christ’s wish. He subtracted from Christ’s Word in the first response and added to Christ’s Word in the second response. Neither action is ever acceptable with God.

Many like to give the appearance of submission, but they betray themselves by the amendments they make to the orders. They will do what He says providing they can change part of the orders to suit themselves. But it is not for us to amend God’s orders. We either accept them as they are, or we are in rebellion to them. His orders are not up for negotiation. It is not like union leaders and company officials sitting down at a table and exchanging proposals, and then each side compromising here and there until both sides come to an agreement. If this were the case with God’s commandments, it would make rebellion only the unwillingness to negotiate. But this is definitely not the situation with God’s commandments. We do not negotiate with **[Seite 140]** God. We either obey or disobey, and obedience is to obey Him exactly as He has commanded.

The correcting of the plea. Again Christ endeavors to explain things to Peter. What grace Christ demonstrated that night in the Upper Room. Within hours He would be arrested, and then the awful ordeal of the trial and crucifixion would begin. Yet, in spite of the imminence of all of that, Christ still patiently dealt with Peter.

What Christ told Peter corrected Peter's erroneous idea that he needed to be entirely washed. Christ said, "He that is washed needeth not save [except] to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all [of you]" (John 13:10). To help us better understand Christ's statement here, we need to understand that "washed" and "wash" are translations of two different Greek words. The word "washed" comes from a word which means to bathe, "to apply water to the whole body" (Vincent). The word "wash" means to wash "a part of the body" (Ibid.). In the time of Christ, people wore sandals instead of the type of shoes we wear. Hence, when they walked anywhere, they got their feet dirty. So foot washing was a common practice. They did not need an entire bath ("washed") after every walk, but they did need their feet cleaned ("wash").

This is also true spiritually, and it is this lesson Christ would teach Peter here. The bathing of the entire body corresponds to our salvation, and the washing of the feet corresponds to our sanctification. The first speaks of union, the second of communion. One speaks of redemption through Christ, the other of fellowship with Christ. Peter did not need to be saved again—"He that is washed needeth not except to wash his feet"—but he did need frequent cleansing for fellowship. When we walk in the world, the dust of the pollution of sin gets on us. We need to frequently come to Christ for this cleansing—not a cleansing for salvation but a cleansing for communion and fellowship and service. Sin defiles our conscience and dulls our spiritual affections. This limits our fellowship with Christ and makes us feel **[Seite 141]** distant from Him. The failure of Peter to have his feet washed would result in having "no part with me [Christ]" (John 13:8). Note it is not no part "in" Christ but no part "with" Christ. "In" speaks of salvation, "with" of fellowship and its related service.

Here is a great truth which some need to get a hold of who are fearful of losing their salvation through sin. They feel that if they sin at all, they need to be saved again. But Christ refutes that idea in His answer to Peter. You do not need the entire bath but just cleansing of part of the body. "Ye are clean" Christ told Peter; that is, Peter was saved; but he still needed frequent cleansing to promote fellowship with Christ. Those who fear the loss of salvation have a problem in that they do not seem to perceive that even a foolish thought is sin (Proverbs 24:9). This being the case, none of us could stay saved many minutes; and we would need to be continually asking the Lord to save us. That is not the case,

however. We do not need the entire bathing but the partial cleansing.

We learn from other texts in the Scripture that the water speaks of the Word of God. “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3) amplifies this truth as well as “the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). The Psalmist also speaks the same when he says, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). The person who consistently gets into the Word of God will discover that it cleans up his life. The Christian who has gotten away from the Word of God will be a defiled Christian. A dusty Bible promotes a dirty life.

Christ’s answer to Peter had an ominous note to it in “but not all of you.” In that statement He spoke of Judas Iscariot who would betray Him. Judas needed more than the foot washing. He needed an entire bath spiritually. Judas is an illustration of those who can be in close company physically with true religion but be miles away spiritually. Few tragedies are worse than the spiritual tragedy of living under the sound of the Word of God but never letting it enter the soul. Like water running off a **[Seite 142]** duck’s back, the Judas-type never gets wet though spiritual instruction rains all around them.

After correcting Peter and washing the rest of the disciples’ feet, Jesus then spoke to all the disciples about the problem of who did the foot washing. His answer to Peter addressed the spiritual meaning of the foot washing which Peter particularly needed to get straight. But all the disciples still had a problem regarding who did the foot washing. Their pride needed rebuking, and it was sharply rebuked by Christ in a few to-the-point statements.

B. THE DECLARATIONS OF LOYALTY

Scripture records that Peter made four emphatic declarations of loyalty to Jesus Christ on the night before the crucifixion. These declarations said Peter would be faithful to Jesus Christ no matter what. None of the disciples were so outspoken about loyalty to Christ as Peter was. But instead of loyalty that night, Peter was disloyal—as is seen in his denials of Christ. The very thing he insisted he would not do, he did.

Peter’s declarations of loyalty remind us that it is the habit of men, when at the time they are experiencing serious decline in their spiritual health, to be extra outspoken in insisting that they are standing true and will stand true to the faith. As an example, when a college or church denomination is declining spiritually, it is not uncommon to hear a lot of noise from the leaders of these groups insisting they are standing where they have always stood and will continue to stand faithfully in the years to come. But all this rhetoric about standing true and faithful would be unnecessary if they were still standing true. For when one is

standing true and faithful, he does not need to continually remind folk of his loyalty; for it will be more than evident in his performance. But when one seems quite anxious to let you know he is and will continue to be faithful in his stand for the faith—it is a telltale indication that he is having trouble standing faithful.

The first two declarations of loyalty to Christ by Peter **[Seite 143]** occurred in the Upper Room. The third and fourth declarations occurred on or near the Mount of Olives. Each declaration was made as a result of and in response to a statement made by Christ. One declaration in the Upper Room came after Christ had informed Peter that He was praying that Peter's faith would not fail (Luke 22:31–33). The other declaration in the Upper Room came when Christ was telling the disciples that He was going to leave them (He was going back to heaven) and they could not go with Him now but would join Him later (John 13:33, 36, 37). The third declaration was made on or near the Mount of Olives when Christ told the disciples that when the Shepherd was smitten the sheep would be scattered (Matthew 26:31, 33; Mark 14:27, 29). The fourth declaration, which was also made on or near the Mount of Olives, came after Christ had informed Peter he would deny Christ three times (Matthew 26:34, 35, Mark 14:30, 31). Some view these different declarations of Peter as being one and the same. But it requires some unusual harmonizing and explaining of Scripture to come up with that conclusion, and such harmonizing and explaining is totally unnecessary. But whether one believes Peter made only one declaration or several declarations really makes little difference in regards to the major lessons which can be learned from Peter's claim of absolute loyalty.

To examine these declarations to see how they reflect decline in Peter's spiritual life and also to learn lessons for our own spiritual benefit, we will note the disrespectfulness in the declarations, the arrogance in the declarations, and the influence of the declarations.

1. The Disrespectfulness in the Declarations

Each of the four declarations of loyalty to Christ made by Peter that night evidenced considerable disrespect for the words of Christ. The words which Christ spoke were simply cast aside by Peter. He gave them no weight or consideration in his thinking. These words of Christ dealt with the praying of Christ, the pathway of Christ, and the prediction of Christ.

[Seite 144] *The praying of Christ*. Only the Gospel of Luke reports the words of Christ regarding His praying for Peter. Luke reported that in the Upper Room "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). Here was a warning given Peter that he had an enemy who was desirous of destroying his

testimony. But Peter, instead of paying attention to the warning, demonstrated disrespect for the words of Christ by insisting that he, Peter, would always be loyal. He said, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death” (Luke 22:33).

The warning Christ gave Peter was not only needed by Peter, but it is also needed by all of us. We all need to take to heart what Christ said about Satan and his evil work against the saints of God. Do not disregard the truth of Satan working against us, as Peter did, but take this warning very seriously. When you take this warning seriously, you will be very careful regarding the places you go, the people you fellowship with, and the practices you pursue; and you will daily pray for spiritual strength that your faith “fail not.”

The words “fail not,” which Christ used here, come from one Greek word from which we get the English word “eclipse.” It gives us a great picture of the evil Satan would do to us. Instead of our faith shining brightly for others to see, he would eclipse it through causing us to sin so that it sheds forth no light and no testimony.

The pathway of Christ. Another statement Christ made in the Upper Room which Peter disrespected spoke of Christ’s departure from the earth. Christ said, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (John 13:36). Peter did not accept nor understand that statement well at all and argued with Christ about it. He said, “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake” (John 13:37).

[Seite 145] In arguing subtly here with Christ by declaring his loyalty to follow Him, Peter evidenced a problem which is quite common with mankind. He did not like the not-now-but-later message from the Lord. He did not like the fact he could not go with Christ now but had to wait till afterwards. On every hand we see folk protesting this not-now-but-later principle from God. Morally people reject the not-now-but-later principle in regards to sex. They do not want to wait till marriage for sex; so they live immorally now—which causes relationships to go bad, pleasures to turn into problems, and venereal diseases to plague society. Others cannot accept the not-now-but-later practice in marriage. They must be married quickly; so they marry anything that comes along—which is a sure way to an unhappy marriage. This attitude often shows up in Christian service, too. Many do not like the not-now-but-later exhortation which says we need to prepare, train, study, and pray if we are going to serve well. So they venture forth to serve before they are ready. This, however, inevitably results in their soon dropping out of service; for without proper preparation, their venture of service soon becomes very dissatisfying.

Had Peter’s wish to go with Christ been granted, and he, therefore, had been

exempted from the not-now-but-later experience in his life, the best part of his discipleship would not have occurred. He would have missed all those glorious and victorious experiences recorded in the book of Acts. He would not have written any epistles. His life would been shorn of his greatest works for Christ. Do not argue with this principle. It is for your good and His glory.

The prediction of Christ. On or near the Mount of Olives, Christ made two predictions which Peter disrespectfully rejected by making declarations of loyalty.

In the *first prediction*, Christ said, "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" (Matthew 26:31). Peter showed his disrespect for that statement **[Seite 146]** by contradicting Christ in saying, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matthew 26:33). Peter missed a warning in this prediction. Had he heeded the warning, he might have wisely pleaded with Christ for help to avoid being offended. But instead of respecting the prediction, he disrespected it and showed this disrespect by arguing with it with his declaration of loyalty.

This prediction made by Christ reminds us that when Christ is dishonored and unaccepted by society, many professing followers are offended and turn away from Christ. Many folk want a popular Christ; and when He ceases to be popular and His ways cease to be accepted, they turn in their resignation. Few tests of discipleship are more severe than having the Shepherd smitten and rejected by society. Though Peter and the other disciples all failed during the crucifixion, they, however, later did an about-face and stood true to the Lord even though the way of Christ was fiercely rejected by those around them.

The *second prediction* Christ made on or near the Mount of Olives was directed at Peter himself. Christ told Peter, "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crows, thou shall deny me thrice" (Matthew 26:34). The declaration of loyalty Peter made in response to this prediction showed more disrespect for the words of Christ than any of his previous declarations. This we learn from Mark who tells us that in Peter's response to the prediction he said, "the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise" (Mark 14:31). "The more vehemently" is certainly a statement that represents increased disrespect for the words of Christ. When we get this way about the Word of God, we are headed for trouble. No person can argue this fervently with the Word and come away a winner. Such a person will sooner or later be made to eat his words in shame and disgrace.

2. The Arrogance in the Declarations

Peter's declarations of loyalty exuded much pride. We can see this in a

threefold way: his declarations indicated that he **[Seite 147]** thought he knew more than Christ, that he thought he was too strong to fail, and that he thought he was superior to others. Let's look at each of these proud assumptions in more detail.

He thought he knew more than Christ. In making each of his declarations of loyalty, Peter was arguing with Christ. When Christ said He was praying for Peter, Peter's declaration of loyalty argued that Peter did not need Christ's prayers and that the warning Christ gave was not needed. When Christ told him he could not go with Him, Peter argued by his declaration that he could. When Christ made the two predictions on or near the Mount of Olives, Peter's declarations of loyalty argued that the predictions would not come true in his particular case.

It is gross pride to argue with the Word of the Divine. It exalts man's wisdom above God's wisdom. It says we know more than God and better than God. Though grossly arrogant, this arguing with the Word of God is a practice that is very common, however. Few commands of God go unchallenged today. They are viewed as impractical, antiquated, unreasonable, and unsound. But the day will come, as it did with Peter, when man's boasted wisdom will be humbled in the dust by God. We do not know more than God. The Creator knows more than the creation, and it behooves the creation to practice this fact.

He thought he was too strong to fail. After each of the statements made by Christ, Peter unhesitantly declared that he would not falter. He insisted he would be loyal to the very end. That he felt he would never fail is emphasized by his use of the double negative in one of his declarations ("not" as in "yet will I not deny thee" in Matthew 26:35, and "in any way" in "I will not deny thee in any way" in the parallel passage in Mark 14:31) and in "the more vehemently" statement of Mark 14:31. He trusted himself implicitly.

Peter is not alone in this overconfident assumption of infallibleness. A good many folk often view themselves so strong that they think they will never fail in temptation and trial. Matthew **[Seite 148]** Henry said, "There is a proneness in good men to be overconfident of their own strength and stability. We are ready to think ourselves able to grapple with the strongest temptations, to go through the hardest and most hazardous services, and to bear the greatest afflictions for Christ; but it is because we do not know ourselves." Just about the time we think we are no longer going to fail, along comes a trial or temptation of some sort that exposes how very weak we are. As the Psalmist, we often say, "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved" (Psalm 30:6). But let adversity come and then it is a different story.

One of the great perils of this overconfident attitude is that the person

thinking this way is not as cautious as he needs to be regarding temptation. Paul said, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). A true recognition of our weakness is our strength, for it will cause us to cast ourselves upon the Lord for help—and that is the only way we will ever stand in trying times.

He thought he was superior to others. Peter made it clear in the third of his four declarations that he esteemed himself better than the others. “Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended” (Matthew 26:33) was Peter’s response to Christ’s prediction that when the Shepherd is smitten the sheep will be scattered. Peter thought he was the strongest and most faithful of Christ’s followers; but in the hour of trial that night, he was going to come off worse than all the other followers except Judas Iscariot. His pride, however, allowed for no humble recognition that others may have more spiritual strength than he.

When folk get to the place where they esteem themselves one of the superior saints, they will soon evidence that they are one of the inferior saints. It is not a mark of spiritual growth to view oneself as the chief of saints. Spiritual growth is more likely to be evidenced when one views himself as “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

[Seite 149] 3. The Influence of the Declarations

Backsliders do not backslide alone. Gossips cause others to gossip; complainers cause others to complain; and dissidents in the church cause others to be dissidents. Sin is contagious. So it was with Peter’s fleshly declarations of loyalty. After he had made his presumptive statements of absolute devotion to Christ, the other disciples chimed in with similar statements. “Likewise also said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:35).

Peter could have been a great help to the other disciples that night if when he heard Christ’s warnings and exhortations about failure, he had then pleaded with Christ for help to keep from failing. He was the leader of the group, and that gave him even more opportunity to effectively influence the other disciples in the right direction. But instead his actions encouraged the other disciples to also ignore the warnings of Christ and to fail to seek Christ’s help to exercise due caution and care in the hours ahead.

We are influencing people all the time. It is our responsibility to influence them in the right direction. Not all will follow our example, of course; but let us so live that when others do follow us, we will lead them in the right way.

C. THE DROWSINESS IN GETHSEMANE

Though Peter had protested vehemently that he would remain loyal to Christ at all times, it did not take long after these declarations to discover that Peter was

more talk than walk on that night before the crucifixion. The first outward manifestation of failure in his loyalty came in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–45). There he failed to perform a simple duty asked of him by Christ. Christ asked Peter (and James and John who were with Peter) to "tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). Peter slept instead.

In his declarations of loyalty, Peter had insisted he would be faithful even unto death; but in the Garden, he was not faithful when the problem was only drowsiness. He needed Jeremiah's exhortation, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have **[Seite 150]** wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5). If Peter could not be faithful in the face of drowsiness, he certainly will not be faithful in the face of death. If you cannot lift the lighter weights, you certainly will not lift the heavier ones. As we noted earlier in this book, God tests us in small matters first. If we fail in these areas, we indicate that we obviously will not be faithful in bigger matters. Peter's terrible failure later on that night, when he denied the Lord three times, was no surprise; for he evidenced many hours before it happened that he was having trouble being faithful in smaller matters.

In observing Peter's sleeping in the Garden, we will note the charge given by Christ (which was the work Peter should have been doing instead of sleeping) and the censures given by Christ for sleeping instead of fulfilling the charge.

1. The Charge Given by Christ

After leaving the Upper Room, Jesus took the eleven disciples (Judas had already left the group to pursue his traitorous activities) to the Garden of Gethsemane where He "ofttimes resorted … with his disciples" (John 18:2). Upon arriving at Gethsemane, He "saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee [James and John]" (Matthew 26:36, 37) and went farther into the Garden to pray.

To Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, Christ gave additional instructions. Before He left to pray the first time (He had a total of three prayer sessions), He charged these privileged three to "tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). After His first session of prayer, He enlarged the charge by saying, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

The three disciples were to basically do two things: watch and pray. To watch means to be alert to any sign of danger and to take action accordingly. To pray here is to petition God for **[Seite 151]** help. There was plenty of danger that night to be alert for and to seek God's help to survive. Soon the group coming to arrest Christ would invade the Garden. Soon circumstances would tempt the

disciples to forsake their Master in both word and deed. They needed to be alert to their situation and to pray earnestly for Divine help in view of the coming events. They, of course, did not at that time realize all that was going to happen; but when Christ exhorts us to watch and pray, we can certainly assume there is good reason for so doing. Christ does not give commands we do not need. Every command of God is needed if our good is to be obtained. Someday we will see fully how much we needed every command God gave us. Do not despise and ridicule God's commands. To do so is to bring much trouble into your life.

Christ, in His second exhortation of their duties, gave the three disciples some extra incentive for earnest watching and praying. He said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). That should have inspired them to pray if nothing else did. But Peter, along with James and John, did not take the exhortation seriously and instead slept. Being overconfident (they had all boasted of their loyalty, especially Peter) they did not take seriously their weaknesses. Ignoring our spiritual weaknesses predicts spiritual disaster. It makes us easy prey for Satan.

2. The Censures Given by Christ

After an hour of praying, Christ came back to check on Peter and the other two disciples. What He found was not good, and it brought forth a needed rebuke. "And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep; and he saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40). Note that He directed the rebuke at Peter. This was fitting, for Peter was the one who had been so outspoken in declaring his loyalty to Christ and was the leader of the twelve, too.

Though this rebuke was sharp and should have shamed them into performing their task, Peter and the other two did not **[Seite 152]** improve. After a second session in prayer, Christ came back to them and "found them asleep again" (Matthew 26:43). Mark adds that when they were caught the second time, "neither wist [knew] they what to answer him" (Mark 14:40). That is not surprising. Their delinquency was great, and they had no excuse. They were caught red-handed in their sin. They remind us of the many who will have nothing to say when they stand before God in judgment of their sins in the last day. Excuses will have all expired then, and they will stand utterly silent when they are condemned for their failure to obey.

After the third and final session of prayer, Christ gave them over to sleep when He said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest" (Matthew 26:45). There was a good deal of sanctified sarcasm in that statement. The disciples had blown their opportunity to get ready for the crisis ahead, and it was now too late to watch and pray. They are now being given over to the folly of their ways. It all reminds

us of the ominous statements of Romans 1: “God also gave them up to uncleanness” (v. 24), “God gave them up unto vile affections” (v. 26), and “God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (v. 28). Persist in your sin, and the day will come when God will give you up to your sin and its terrible consequences. Peter and the other two had failed to obey Christ; they had persisted in pampering the flesh instead. Now they will suffer the consequences. It makes no difference who you are; this practice of God will meet every disobedient soul who does not heed the warnings of God. God is gracious and warns and warns us before He gives us over to our sin. Let us heed His gracious warnings, so that we do not dishonor His name and bring shameful blots and wounds and scars into our life.

D. THE DEMONSTRATION OF SWORDPLAY

When the group came to the Garden to arrest Christ, Peter pulled out his sword and took action. But what he did was foolish and futile. “Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and [but only] cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus” (John 18:10). Noting Peter’s poor **[Seite 153]** aim, someone said humorously that Peter was much better at fishing than at fencing.

Peter’s action was quickly rebuked by Christ Who said, “Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). A further rebuke of Peter’s action was in the fact that Christ quickly healed the ear that had been cut off. Christ “touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:51). Not only would this rebuke Peter, but it would also further shame the arresters; who, in spite of this obvious demonstration of supernatural power by Christ, still arrested Him. Sin is so extremely blind.

All four Gospels mention this incident about Peter and the sword. But John alone mentions the names, for John knew the high priest (John 18:15) and would therefore know the high priest’s servant’s name. And only Luke mentions the healing of the ear by Christ. Luke being a physician makes this mention especially fitting for him. These features of John and Luke emphasize that Divine inspiration does not obliterate the personality of the writers involved but only uses them to enhance the literary excellence of the Scriptures.

This deed was simply more evidence of Peter’s spiritual decline that night before the crucifixion. To further examine it, we note the impulsiveness, vaingloriousness, and unscripturalness of it.

1. The Impulsiveness of the Deed

Many do not realize that Peter started swinging his sword before Christ answered a question regarding the use of the sword. Luke reports that “When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?” (Luke 22:49). Peter did not wait for an answer

to the question but started swinging his sword right away because he was moved by the emotions and the situation of the hour rather than by the command of Christ.

Peter's conduct here is not unique. So many act without taking due regard as to what Scripture says. They allow circumstances, **[Seite 154]** their moods, and emotions to dictate their conduct. It is not easy to make these things subservient to the Word of God; but if we do not, we will only cause more trouble.

The philosophies championed today certainly do not help here. "If it feels good do it" is one of the slogans of the world which gives priority to our feelings, emotions, and moods in what dictates our conduct. But principle, not our fleshly passions, needs to rule. And we learn principle through the Word of God. Christ had given Peter plenty of principle in what He had instructed and exhorted Peter and the other disciples that night in the Upper Room and on the way to the Mount of Olives and in the Garden. But Peter's lack of attention to Christ's words left him with only his fleshly passions to guide his conduct.

This problem of letting our fleshly passions guide us instead of principle is often practiced at invitation time in our churches. Many pastors and evangelists simply play on people's emotions to get them to come down the aisle to make some sort of decision. They do not appeal to the principle of the Word of God as they ought. They must have decisions to report in their magazines or at the next preachers' meetings, so they resort to the old ploy of appealing to the emotions. And this works for getting people down the aisle, too. It does not work for making good solid decisions; but it gets folks down the aisle; and many preachers evidence they are more interested in getting folk down the aisle than in making good solid decisions. One of the reasons it works so well is that many of the folk in the church services today are so shallow in character and spiritual make-up that the only response they recognize is the emotional appeal. So tear-jerking stories and other like antics are employed to get decisions at invitation time. It is a shameful practice, however, and breeds weak churches.

2. The Vaingloriousness of the Deed

One cannot help but see pride behind this deed. Peter had boasted he would remain faithful though all the other disciples denied Christ. One who does this kind of boasting will want to **[Seite 155]** show that he is superior to others. So, unlike the other disciples in the Garden, he wields the sword.

To the human eye Peter's sword-swinging act may have indeed looked courageous, loyal, and superior. To face some five hundred men ("band of men …" in John 18:3 is viewed by scholars as being upwards to five hundred or more) as a lone swordsman is like playing David against Goliath. This would seem to evidence superior loyalty and faithfulness to Christ, but in truth it only

manifested the flesh.

Much so-called Christian service today is inspired by the motivation of outshining others rather than by the motivation of obeying Christ. People who will only get busy and invite others to church when there is a contest going on are like that. The fact of Calvary and Christ's shed blood does not move them. But a contest will, for in the contest they can beat brother so-and-so and look like they are more spiritual than he is.

3. The Unscripturalness of the Deed

The deed was contrary to God's wishes. Christ made that plain when He told Peter to "Put up thy sword into the sheath" (John 18:11). There is a great principle here we need to learn. The Gospel will conquer men not by the sword of steel but by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). Catholicism, Mohammedanism, Communism, Nazism, and other creeds and philosophies over the ages of history have conquered by the sword of steel. But Christianity does not conquer that way at all. Unlike the other philosophies, it does not need to employ the sword of steel to conquer. It has a much more effective sword in the Word of God.

Some church promotional practices evidence that this message about the swords has not been learned very well in some of our fundamental churches. We have seen advertisements by fundamental churches (generally to help bring in a record breaking attendance) which feature a man who is an expert with swords. One advertisement said the man was skilled in swords of Japan, Vietnam, Turkey, and the Philippines. Then some of these **[Seite 156]** swordsmen brag that they, while blindfolded, will slice a watermelon in two that is placed on the Sunday School Superintendent's stomach (while he lays on the communion table in front of the church). All of that is absolutely abhorrent to the reverent mind! It has nothing to do with worship but is simply entertainment. It is time the church became interested not in the man who is skilled in metal swords but the man who is skilled in the spiritual sword—the Word of God.

E. THE DRIFTING FROM FELLOWSHIP

After the sword incident, the continual decline in Peter's spiritual condition shows up in his drifting from fellowship with Christ. The problem of Peter's drifting is summed up in a notation by Matthew about Peter after Christ was taken from Gethsemane to Jerusalem to be tried. Matthew said, "But Peter followed him afar off" (Matthew 26:58). That statement certainly represents well the increasing distance in spirit coming between Christ and Peter. Peter had previously followed Christ so closely that he practically stepped on Him at times, but now he lets the distance get farther and farther between him and Christ. Some may argue that Peter was staying clear of the arresters so he would

not also get arrested or interfere with their work. It is true that he needed to keep out of the way of the arresters, but that does not adequately explain the “afar off” following. The “afar off” following simply represents the declining spiritual condition of Peter in regards to his relationship with Christ at the time.

This statement also represents the condition of many church members today. Though these folks may be members of good churches, they are not enthusiastic members. They lag behind and slump in the back seats of the church just as the service begins (if they are even in attendance). When the battle rages, they are far from the front lines. They are never of much help; they never give much support; for they are too far away in devotion (and sometimes distance) to be of help.

Peter’s drifting from Christ eventually led to his drifting **[Seite 157]** from the company of his fellow Christians to be in company with the world. Any time your fellowship with the Lord and His people begins to wane, you will sooner or later move into the company of the ungodly. All four Gospels, in reporting the trials of Christ, significantly insert notations about Peter’s conduct during the time of the trials which shows these results which occur when one drifts from fellowship with Christ. After reporting that Peter followed afar off, the Gospels report that he “stood at the door without [outside]” (John 18:16) the court of the high priest where the trial of Christ was going on and had to be brought in by the action of John (Ibid.). Peter, who boasted that he would be faithful though all others would not, now has to be urged by another disciple to come into the court where Christ is being tried. In the court, Peter, instead of getting closer to Christ and being with John, “sat with the servants [guards], and warmed himself at the fire” (Mark 14:54). “Peter sat down among them [the world]” (Luke 22:55) rather than with better company (particularly John). And warming himself at the fire says that Peter at this point in time was more concerned about his physical coldness than his spiritual coldness. More indications of distance in fellowship with God’s people show up in such statements as “sat without [outside] in the palace [court]” (Matthew 26:69) and “he was gone out into the porch” (Matthew 26:71). It is a sad picture of Peter. And it is a picture of many professing saints in every age. They drift from Christ, then from God’s people to be in company with the ungodly, and then comes the denials.

We need to note here that some do not believe that Peter and the other disciples should have been following Christ at all after the arrest. They believe that Peter disobeyed Christ in following Him and that this following of Christ (even though it was “afar off”) is what caused his denying of Christ that night. Therefore, they see no lessons about delinquency in fellowship from the “afar off” text. But we think these ideas of some are totally unsupported by Scripture.

The texts they give to support their thinking here have to be twisted beyond all recognition to give **[Seite 158]** even the slightest of support to their ideas. As an example, one well known and respected Bible teacher gives John 13:33, Matthew 26:31, and John 18:8 as proof texts for this position. But a check of these texts will make one scratch his head as to how in the world they convey the idea that the disciples were forbidden by Christ to follow Him when He was put on trial. John 13:33 is speaking about Christ's departing from the earth as the context plainly shows. Matthew 26:31 is speaking about what happens to the sheep when the Shepherd is smitten—which has no relationship to Christ forbidding His disciples from following Him during His trials. And John 18:8 speaks of Christ's successful effort of keeping the disciples from being arrested. Peter's problems did not begin that night because of his disobeying a command to not follow Christ. His problems began long before he followed Christ "afar off" as we have already noted earlier in this chapter.

F. THE DENIALS OF CHRIST

Peter's spiritual collapse climaxed in his terrible three denials of Jesus Christ. To think that Peter, with all his past performance, would deny Christ emphatically and repeatedly is a shocker. Yet, when we look at his performance before the denial, we are not surprised that he eventually denied Christ. When a man will argue with the Word (his arguing with Christ regarding the foot washing business and regarding other statements Christ made that night before the crucifixion), is full of pride (he implied by his declarations of loyalty that he knew more than Christ and he boasted in one of his declarations that he was more loyal than others), will not listen to the Word (his inattentiveness to what Christ had to say, especially Christ's warnings about his denials), does not pray when he should (he slept in Gethsemane), keeps company with enemies of Christ (as he did during the trial of Christ) and is more interested in physical needs than spiritual needs (his warming by the fire during the trial), he will eventually have little trouble doing some terrible sinful deed. We do not do some terrible deed all at once. We first prepare **[Seite 159]** ourselves to do the deed by a series of delinquent thoughts, words, and deeds which weaken us for yielding to some great temptation.

The fact that Peter, though one of the best disciples, denied the Lord should warn us that we, too, can be guilty of great unfaithfulness to Christ. If we do not stop spiritual delinquency in the bud, it will blossom into a full grown act that we would earlier have been shocked to think we would do. But when unchecked, sin always gets worse. Unstopped, sin will lead us to untold depths of depraved behavior.

In examining the denials of Christ by Peter, we will note the warnings about

the denials, the wickedness of the denials, and the weeping after the denials.

1. The Warning About the Denials

Peter's declarations of loyalty were accompanied by warnings from Christ that he would deny Christ that very night (John 13:38, Luke 22:34, Matthew 26:34 [cp. Mark 14:30]). In the Upper Room and on or near the Mount of Olives, Christ warned Peter. He told Peter when he would deny Christ (at cock crowing time) and how many times he would deny Christ (three times).

The time of the denial is spelled out the best in Mark's Gospel. Mark reports Christ as saying, "This day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Mark 14:30). In noting the record of the three denials in Mark 14:66–72, we learn that the cock crowed after Peter made his first denial (Mark 14:68) and after he made his third denial (Mark 14:72). Mark is the only one who reports the cock crowing twice during the denials and that Christ predicted the two crowings. Matthew, Luke, and John only mention one crowing, but that is not difficult to harmonize with Mark. Scholars tell us that the cock-crowing in Palestine was not only heard in the early morning hours, which is the main crowing time, but also during certain periods at night (around midnight to one or two in the morning). Normally when one speaks of cock-crowing time, **[Seite 160]** they refer to the early morning crowing. This is obviously the cock-crowing that Matthew, Luke, and John wrote about.

The fact that the cock crowed twice, before Peter became convicted of his sin of denying Christ, aggravated his sin as did the fact that he denied Christ three times times before he became convicted of his evil (Mark 14:72). But when we are bent to sinning, the heart becomes insensitive to what we are doing; and we, therefore, continue to sin even though reminders are all around us of our wrong.

How gracious that Christ warned Peter. Christ is still warning folk today. Many times we have learned that messages we have preached have included, though unknown to us, timely warnings to our listeners; which had they heeded, they could have avoided failures a short period of time afterward. Christ graciously saw to it that the warning was given in the message. The Lord can impress us from a sermon, a Scripture text we are reading, a word from a friend, or from a host of other things to be cautious and take heed lest we fall. We cannot blame God for our failures. He has warned us long before our failures, but we simply did not heed the warnings.

2. The Wickedness of the Denials

The evils in the denial are many. We note four prominent evils here in Peter's words denying Christ. They were deceiving words, dishonoring words, deserting words, and defiling words.

Deceiving words. The first thing that was obvious about Peter's denial of

Christ was that Peter was lying. Four distinct lies were told by Peter in the denial. First, he denied being with Christ (Matthew 26:69, 70; John 18:26, 27); second, he denied being one of Christ's disciples (John 18:17, 25); third, he denied knowing Christ (Matthew 26:72, 74); and fourth, he denied even understanding the accusation ("neither understand I what thou sayest" [Mark 14:68]). He really tried to play dumb on that one.

Liars do not do well in standing true for Christ. He Who is the personification of truth is best defended by truth. Those who **[Seite 161]** would stand for Christ must stand for truth in word and deed, or they will be a poor testimony for Him.

Dishonoring words. Peter's denial of Christ included his dishonoring of Christ by what he called Christ. Peter, who had in his great confessions called Christ by the rightful and noble name of "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) and on other occasions by such respectful titles as "Master" and "Lord," refers to Christ in his denials as simply "the man" (Matthew 26:72, 74) or "this man of whom ye speak" (Mark 14:71). Peter's denial speech gave no honor whatever to Jesus Christ. We can see the same situation with apostate ministers. They profess to honor Christ, but they give away the spiritually sick condition of their heart by the names and titles they do not call Christ as well as by the ones they prefer to call Him.

Deserting words. Peter deserted Christ by his denials, and he deserted Christ when Christ needed him the most. Peter's denials occurred during the trials being conducted before Annas (a former High Priest) and later Caiaphas (the current High Priest) when false accusations were flying left and right. Oh, for someone to stand up and speak the truth. But instead of being available and ready to give a truthful word for Christ, Peter was off denying Christ and speaking falsely himself.

Defiling words. Matthew and Mark report that Peter tried to enforce his denials with a defiled tongue. "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man" (Matthew 26:74, cp. Mark 14:71). We need to understand the nature of this defiled speech. "Curse" and "swear" does not mean Peter used a string of vulgarities to emphasize the point as so many foul mouths do today. However, what he said was very bad. The words mean to call a curse down upon himself if what he says is not true and to take an oath that what he says is true. Now some would take that meaning of the words and use it to water down the seriousness of Peter's evil talk. We must not do that, however. **[Seite 162]** What he said was in the same category as those who today in profane speech ask for the damnation of God upon this and that. They use the abbreviated form of damnation, of course, as the reader knows and which we do not intend to use here. Such language is repulsive and vile; the "began he to curse and to swear" is

not complimentary. It does not mean that Peter took a solemn oath that he was telling the truth; and that if he was not, he should be cursed. It means what it sounds like it means—he filled his mouth with profane talk.

People are always in trouble when they must resort to defiled speech to enforce what they are saying. Truth does not need such unsavory help. Facts are all that are necessary. Foul talk only proves the foul talker has a lack of character. It is not smart but extremely foolish. It is not the mark of a he-man; rather it is a mark of a weak man, a coward, and one who is out of sorts with God.

3. The Weeping After the Denials

Right after the third denial, Peter came under conviction of his sin and went out and "wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). The season of sin is short; but the fruits of bitterness and broken hearts is very, very long. A. T. Robertson says, "One of the tragedies of the Cross is the bleeding heart of Peter." Sin is the great provoker of tears. Oh, the tears that flood society today that can all be blamed on sin. Tears betray sin and tell us that it is a great deceiver, and that it does not deliver the promised goods but delivers much trouble and sorrow instead.

What brought Peter under conviction and to tears? Luke tells us that it was not only the cock crowing that woke Peter up. It was also the Lord looking at Peter. "And immediately, while he yet spake [his last denial], 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. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:60–62). Peter was at a distance from Christ during the trials, but he was still where he could see Christ. Hence, **[Seite 163]** the Lord could penetrate Peter's vision with a look; and this, along with the conscience-waking cock-crow, brought Peter to himself and to tears ("wept" in Luke 22:61 means "to burst into tears" [A. T. Robertson]).

While Peter's denials are terrible, we must credit Peter with the fact that he became extremely convicted about his sin when he was confronted about them by the cock crowing and the Lord's looking at him. This is a contrast to many today. So many sinners are so hardened they never come under conviction no matter what confronts them. They could hear the cock crow every day and have the Lord stare them down for hours; and all they would do is stop their ears, stare right back at the Lord with unholy defiance, and keep on sinning. But Peter had the root of the matter in him. He broke when confronted about his sin; and as a result, he "went out and wept bitterly."

[Seite 164]

IX

The Confirmations

NUMEROUS TEXTS

THE MOROSENESS WHICH gripped the hearts of the eleven disciples during the three days and nights Christ was in the grave was extremely great (note "mourned and wept" of Mark 16:10 as an example). But of the eleven disciples, none would be as morose as Peter. It was bad enough that the very One in Whom Peter and the other disciples had put all their hopes was now dead. But for Peter, the bitterness of the hour was greatly increased by the fact of his terrible denials of Christ in that awful night before the crucifixion. How he had shamed the One Who meant more than life to him. What a failure he had been. His talk had been big, brash, and bold early in the night; but later on he had wilted under pressure, become cowardly, and made those terrible denials of His Master.

With such burdens on his heart, Peter would find life very difficult to live in those three days Christ was in the grave. He would be ashamed to show his face in public, for his denial was no secret. Sleep would be fitful at best. His appetite would be gone. Nothing would bring the slightest comfort to his troubled heart. Guilt would weigh heavily upon him. Also, if he was like many of us, he would be filled with vain regrets and at times have wished he had never met Christ rather than have met Him and then have it all end in the worst sorrow and heart-rending experience of his life. "Was this the end? Could he ever be happy again? Even if God forgave him, could he forgive himself?" (F. B. Meyer).

But then came the first Easter Sunday. That day on which **[Seite 165]** the whole Gospel message is dependent was also the day that lifted the veil of horrible darkness from Peter's soul and brought light he thought he would never see again. Before he would lay his head down to sleep that night, he would have the heavy burden of his heart lifted; and life for him would be rejuvenated far beyond his wildest imaginations. The experiences of Peter on that first Easter Sunday would ever fill his soul with joy and inspiration. It was a day of confirmations. It confirmed that Jesus Christ was alive and that Peter was still one of His disciples. Nothing would mean more to Peter than these two facts.

These glorious confirmations for Peter came in three different ways: they came in the announcement from the women who had visited the grave of Christ earlier that Sunday morning, they came in the apparel in the tomb which Peter and John discovered when visiting the tomb, and they came in the appearances of Christ—first to Peter and then to the other disciples. For Peter, these confirmations made Easter Sunday the antithesis of the night before the crucifixion. The night before the crucifixion wounded, made the heart bitter, and killed hopes. But Easter Sunday brought healing, made the heart joyous, and brought to life again the greatest hopes man can possess.

A. THE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE WOMEN

Women were the first ones to come to the tomb that first Easter Sunday (which ought to make the women's lib people happy). But what the women found at the tomb was not what they expected. Christ was not in the tomb! An angel informed them that He was risen from the dead. The women were filled with many and great emotions at what they found at the tomb. They went all the way from "fear … [to] great joy" (Matthew 28:8).

After telling the women that Christ was risen, the angel gave them a message to announce to the disciples. Illumination begets obligation, and privilege begets responsibility. These women were privileged to be illuminated about some great truths at the tomb. Therefore, they are given the responsibility and obligation of spreading the news. So the angel told them to **[Seite 166]** "go your way, tell his disciples and Peter.…" (Mark 16:7).

When we compare the Gospel accounts, we discover that the announcement the women gave Peter and the disciples had at least four parts. It included the news of the resurrection of Christ, the reviewing about Christ, the rendezvous with Christ, and the reassurance from Christ.

1. The Resurrection of Christ

We note three things about the message concerning the resurrection of Christ: the importance of this truth, the attack on this truth, and the unbelief of this truth.

The importance of this truth. The most important thing the women told Peter and the other disciples on that first Easter Sunday was that Christ "is risen from the dead" (Matthew 28:7). Without this part of the message, the other parts of the message would be worthless and meaningless. It is always so with the resurrection message. On this truth hangs all our doctrine, all our hopes, all our salvation. Remove the resurrection from our creed, and everything falls apart. As the Apostle Paul said, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The attack on this truth. With the resurrection of Christ being so vital to our faith, it should be no surprise that Satan especially attacks this great truth. If he can destroy our confidence in this fact, then he will destroy our faith. If he can get religion to take this truth out of its theology, then he has made religion utterly useless for the soul of man. So Satan wasted no time that first Easter Sunday morning countering the message of the resurrection; for while the message of the resurrection was going forth with the women, Satan saw to it that the message denying the resurrection was also going forth at the same time. "Now when they [the women] were going [to tell the disciples], behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they **[Seite 167]** were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large [much] money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples

came by night, and stole him away while we slept.… So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matthew 28:11, 12, 13, 15). A. Lukyn Williams says, "In the passage of Justin Martyr … we are told that the Jews sent emissaries in all directions to spread this false report." Satan is indeed earnest in fighting the great truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The unbelief of this truth. Error is generally accepted much quicker than the truth. And it was so on that first Easter Sunday, for the message of the resurrection was not received as readily as the message denying the resurrection. This great and glorious message of the women was at first met with a great deal of skepticism. "Their [the women's] words seemed to them [the disciples] as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11). But the unfounded and unsupported story of the disciples stealing the body of Christ "is commonly reported among the Jews until this day [the time of Matthew's writing]" (Matthew 28:15). The fact that error is generally received quicker than truth does not invalidate the truth, however; but it only exposes the gross unbelief in the heart of man.

2. The Reviewing About Christ

Luke tells us that what the women told the disciples included a reviewing of what Christ had said previously to the disciples about the crucifixion and resurrection. The angel told the women, "Remember how he spake unto you ['you' includes the disciples and other followers of Christ besides these women] when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again … And [the women] returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven" (Luke 24:6–9). So in the women's announcement, the disciples were given a **[Seite 168]** short review of the teaching of Christ about His crucifixion and resurrection. Therefore, the fact of the resurrection was going to be confirmed by the Words of Christ. Also, the Divine plan and purpose of the crucifixion was going to be confirmed and hence better understood by their considering the Words of Christ. The disciples' perspective of the crucifixion was one of defeat. Considering Christ's words would put a different view on the crucifixion entirely. It would encourage and strengthen their faith to see the plan and purpose of Christ in it all.

Exhorting the disciples to review the Words of Christ about the crucifixion and the resurrection emphasizes the fact that the Word of God is a great confirmer of our faith. Peter and the disciples would experience this great truth on the first Easter Sunday. Christ would have them support their faith on His Word. Yes, they will see Christ Himself before that Sunday is over; but still He

would fix their faith on the Word. Peter later expressed this truth well when he said in his first epistle, “But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). And in his second epistle, he underscores the value of the Word regarding our faith when he says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed” (2 Peter 1:19). In the previous verses to this text in II Peter, Peter had been citing his own experiences as a testimony regarding the truth about Christ (“we … were eyewitnesses of his majesty” [2 Peter 1:16]). But after citing his own experience, he appeals to the Scripture as a “more sure” proof of the Gospel. Yes, the Word of God is a great confirmer of our faith, and Peter and his fellow disciples experienced that blessing on the first Easter Sunday.

3. The Rendezvous With Christ

Another part of the announcement the women gave the disciples involved the disciples having a meeting with Christ in Galilee. They were to “tell his disciples … that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7). “As he said unto you” informs us that Christ had **[Seite 169]** earlier told the disciples of this meeting—Scripture tells us it was the night before the crucifixion when He first told them of the meeting. “But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee” (Matthew 26:32).

That the disciples should be reminded of the meeting in Galilee would be an important confirmation that Christ actually had risen from the grave. Christ was careful to give the disciples a good deal of evidence of the resurrection. As an example, in His first appearance to them as a group (which we will note shortly), He showed them His hands and side to prove that He Who stood before them was indeed the Christ Who had been crucified (John 20:20). Announcing the meeting in Galilee would also give proof of the resurrection. Others would not know about Christ scheduling the meeting with the disciples. Only Christ and the disciples would know (and, of course, the angel who was given Divine revelation of the fact so he could make the announcement). Therefore, reminding the disciples of the meeting in the announcement would be all that much more confirmation for His resurrection. All of this underscores the fact that the resurrection of Christ was indeed filled with much proof. As A. Lukyn Williams said, “There never was, indeed, any historical fact the authenticity of which was more remarkably and irrefragably [incapable of being refuted] certified than the resurrection of Christ.”

This meeting with Christ did not occur for at least several weeks after that first Easter Sunday; and it was not going to be the first time the disciples had seen Christ since the resurrection; for Christ saw Peter alone and then the disciples together in Jerusalem that very day, as we will note later. But the

meeting in Galilee was a special meeting, and the disciples did indeed keep the appointment. “Then [several weeks after the first Easter Sunday] the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them” (Matthew 28:16). What made this meeting with Christ so special was that at this meeting the Great Commission was given to the disciples (Matthew 28:16–20).

[Seite 170] This meeting must not be confused with the meeting Christ had in Galilee with seven of the disciples which is recorded in John 21. That meeting which was at the Sea of Galilee was particularly important for Peter, for it was at that meeting Peter had his own private commission. We will note more about that meeting in our next chapter.

4. The Reassurance From Christ

Mark alone tells of the personal aspect the women’s announcement was for Peter. It is bound up in “and Peter.” The angel said to the women, “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter.…” (Mark 16:7). What a thrill “and Peter” would send through Peter’s heart. What reassurance it would give him that he was still one of Christ’s disciples. Lest some have misunderstood the meaning of “and Peter” in a negative way, we hasten to add that “We are not to infer, because the angel said, ‘Tell his disciples and Peter,’ that Peter was not still a disciple. The meaning is, ‘Tell his disciples, and especially Peter’ ” (Barnes). The special mention of Peter reinforced Peter’s inclusion in the special group of eleven disciples.

F. B. Meyer makes a most helpful comment on these two words “and Peter.” In his book on Peter he says, “An ancient tradition closely associates Peter with the authorship of the Second Gospel, which, whilst bearing the name of Mark, was probably written beneath the prompting and supervision of the Apostle. There are not a few internal corroborations of this view, both in the omissions and additions of the narrative as compared with that of Matthew or Luke. Graphic touches also abound which were clearly reminiscences of one who had been an eye witness of that wondrous life. In the forefront of these, these two words may be cited. Matthew records the angel’s words to the women thus: ‘Go quickly and tell His disciples,’ but Mark makes the significant addition, ‘*and Peter*.’ With the others, those words might be obliterated by tides of time and change, but they were engraven on the rock of Peter’s character and inlet [inlaid] with gold.”

[Seite 171] These two words of reassurance spoke volumes to Peter. They spoke of forgiveness, and of the great grace and mercy and love of Christ. They said that though Peter had forsaken Christ in the dark hours that night before the crucifixion, yet Christ had not forsaken Peter. Peter was still His disciple. Christ

could justifiably have excluded him. Peter had performed terribly during those dark hours the night before the crucifixion. He was indeed not worthy to be a disciple. He had proven false under pressure. But the wonderful grace, mercy, and love of the Savior prevailed; and "and Peter" was the blessed message Peter received.

"And Peter" should give great hope to all who have miserably failed. It reminds us and reassures us that God "delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18) and is "ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 86:5). None of us deserve anything from God, and so Peter has nothing on us. We have all failed miserably. But a gracious Savior stands ready to forgive us.

Of course, the fact that God is gracious and desires to forgive us does not mean we are free to live as wickedly as we want. To use the grace of God as an excuse to enjoy the pleasures of sin is grossly perverted thinking. It ignores the fact that repentance is always involved in forgiveness. And repentance looks at sin as terrible and desires to be free from it and to not do it again. That Peter repented is without question. When Christ gave him that look after the third denial, the heart of Peter broke; and "he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75) which reflected a heart attitude that goes with repentance.

B. THE APPAREL IN THE TOMB

What the women had to say to Peter and the disciples (who were evidently gathered together at the time—with Peter doubtless being in a very subdued attitude amongst the eleven), was not accepted well by the disciples as we have noted above. But to the credit of Peter and John, they at least decided they ought to go to the tomb to investigate the report that Christ was no longer there. Luke and John report the visit of Peter and John to the grave. Luke is the shorter of the two reports (Luke gives just **[Seite 172]** one verse to the investigation) and only reports about Peter going to the grave (Luke 24:12). But John reports that he also went with Peter, and John gives a more detailed report of the investigation—doubtless because John was personally involved. He says, "Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple [John], and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together; and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie [lying there], And the napkin [cloth], that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed" (John 20:3–8). John beating Peter in the run was not because Peter lacked zeal but more likely because John was the younger of the two and perhaps also the slimmer of the two. Peter, however, was the first to go

into the grave (John 20:6, 8). This was typical of the nature of Peter.

Peter and John found the grave empty of the body of Christ as reported. But they discovered that the grave clothes which were worn by Christ for three days and three nights were still in the tomb, and these grave clothes provided very significant confirmation of the fact that Christ had risen from the grave. We will note the particulars of this proof of the resurrection and the perception of this proof of the resurrection.

1. The Particulars of the Proof

Both the presence and the condition of the apparel in the tomb gave great confirmation of Christ's resurrection. This helps us understand why the angel told the women who came early to the tomb, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). It was important for them to see the place where the body of Christ had lain, for there they would see the grave clothes which would give much proof of the fact of the resurrection. And no one had a better view of the grave clothes than Peter.

[Seite 173] *The presence of the apparel*. There were two main conclusions being reported that first Easter Sunday morning as to why the tomb was empty. One report said the body of Christ had been stolen; the other report said that Christ had risen from the grave. The presence of the grave clothes made it very plain that His body had not been stolen. It refuted the idea that His body was stolen either by Christ's friends or His foes. The Jews had sent out a story that the disciples had stolen the body (Matthew 28:13), and Mary Magdalene thought some of His enemies had taken the body (John 20:1, 2). But the presence of the grave clothes said that neither of these reports were true; and, therefore, Christ must have risen from the grave. We will look here in more detail at how the presence of the grave clothes in the tomb refuted both the idea that Christ's friends stole the body and the idea that Christ's enemies stole the body.

First, the presence of the grave clothes in the tomb said *His friends did not steal the body*. It was the custom of the Jews in those days to wrap up the corpse in yards of linen mixed with spices (cp. John 19:39, 40). It would, therefore, be a very time consuming job to remove the grave clothes. Thieves would never take the time do something like that. Such action would assure that they would not be successful in stealing the body. Furthermore, friends would treat the corpse with great respect; therefore, they would not do such an unseemly thing as unwrapping all the grave clothes which would be a most sticky, slimy, smelly experience as well as a time consuming task. So the presence of the grave clothes said his friends certainly did not steal the body.

Second, the presence of the grave clothes in the tomb said *His foes did not steal the body* either. They, too, would not want to take the time to remove the

wrappings or experience the sticky, slimy, smelly mess of removing them. Furthermore, the enemy did not want the idea of the resurrection of Christ to be accepted (Matthew 27:64), and leaving the grave clothes would only help to propagate the idea. Hence, the presence of the grave clothes refute any thought that the enemy stole the body.

[Seite 174] There are other proofs as to why the body was not stolen—such as the disciples' fear, their inability to get by the guards, their disbelief in the resurrection (which means they would not try to steal the body to help spread the false idea of His resurrection), and the enemy being so afraid of the body being stolen that they had the tomb sealed. But we are only looking here at the fact that the presence of the grave clothes indicates emphatically the body was not stolen by either friend or foe; and, therefore, the only other conclusion from the presence of the grave clothes is that Christ rose from the grave.

The condition of the apparel. Peter and John found the grave clothes in a very neat and tidy order. "The linen clothes [were] laid by themselves" (Luke 24:12); and "the napkin, that was about his head, [was] not lying with the linen clothes, but [was] wrapped together in a place by itself" (John 20:7). The word "wrapped" is the same as the word "wrapped" in Luke 23:53—"And he took it [the body of Christ] down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher." The word "wrapped" means to be rolled up or wound up. The linen, as we previously noted, was wound around Christ's body as John 19:40 says, "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices."

Comparing these Scriptures, we learn that what Peter and John found in the tomb was that the grave clothes were still in the same condition and arrangement they were when on Christ. The condition of the grave clothes in the tomb after the resurrection was like something wrapped around a balloon and then the air let out of the balloon. In rising from the dead, Christ simply went through His grave clothes like He did the shut doors (cp. John 20:19–26). Then the grave clothes, without the body supporting them any more, settled in place. It would be impossible to arrange sticky, slimy grave clothes like that without a resurrection. And no thief would have the time nor inclination to attempt such a task either. Therefore, the resurrection was the only explanation for the condition of the apparel in the tomb.

[Seite 175] 2. The Perception of the Proof

Peter and John did not perceive the grave clothes in the same way. This comes out in the meaning of the words rendered "seeth" and "saw" in our English version of the Scripture. The "saw" in John 20:5 ("And he [John] stooping down, and looking in, *saw* the linen clothes lying") means to see something in a casual or common way. The word "seeth" in John 20:6 ("Then

cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and *seeth* the linen clothes lying") means to see or look at something in an investigating or scrutinizing way. The "saw" of John 20:8 ("Then went in also that other disciple [John], which came first to the sepulcher, and he *saw*, and believed") means to comprehend, to understand.

The first view (John) of the grave clothes ("saw" of John 20:5) was nothing more than just seeing scenery. The second view (Peter) of the grave clothes ("seeth" of John 20:6) was to scrutinize them, look them over carefully for clues of what had happened. The third view (John) of the grave clothes ("saw" of John 20:8) was a comprehending of what it all meant. John caught on that the grave clothes proved Christ had risen from the grave. No wonder the next words about John after that viewing of grave clothes was, "and [he] believed" (John 20:8). Peter would later see the truth of the resurrection, but he did not comprehend as quickly as John did the confirmation of the resurrection in the grave clothes that first Easter Sunday morning.

The different perception of the grave clothes reminds us of the various conditions of people in the church regarding the Word of God. Some never get past the casual or common perception of the Scripture. They only see the surface, the facts, the words; but they never see anything significant or applicable. They see only as natural man sees and, therefore, have little appreciation for the Word of God. Others seem more interested and actually do study the Word, ponder it, and inquire regarding it. That encourages pastors and teachers, but it is not enough. What is really needed is for people to have their eyes opened to the truth of the Word, to go to the comprehending and understanding **[Seite 176]** stage in regards to the Word of God. They need to know what it means and to see its application to their own lives.

Most folk in church today are in the first category of seeing. Some have progressed to the inquiry stage, but precious few are in the third stage comprehending and appreciating the Word as they ought. Many decisions which pastors are so quick to boast about are in the first stage of seeing, some are in the second, but few are in the comprehending stage. This means that most of the decisions made at invitation time are generally not real—which time eventually demonstrates. Let us not be satisfied in our own pursuit of the Word with just knowing the words and the facts—let us progress on until we really understand and comprehend the Word of God so that our faith might be strong and God might be greatly glorified by our lives.

C. THE APPEARANCES OF CHRIST

To further confirm that Christ was alive and that Peter was still one of His disciples, Peter was permitted to see Christ twice on that first Easter Sunday. The

first appearance was a private appearance just for Peter. The second appearance was a more public appearance when Christ appeared to the eleven during the evening.

1. The Private Appearance

Only two texts of Scripture tell us of the private appearance of Christ to Peter on that first Easter Sunday. Luke reports it almost as an aside. It comes out in his report of the meeting of Cleopas and the disciples. Cleopas and another person (doubtless his wife) had met Christ on the road to Emmaus, and He had dined with them. After the experience, 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). The other record of this event is reported by Paul. Paul includes Christ's appearing to Peter in a list of Christ's appearances after the resurrection. "And that he was seen of **[Seite 177]** Cephas, then of the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5) which speaks of the two appearances we are focusing on here.

Why did Christ appear to Peter alone and so soon after the resurrection? Obviously because Peter needed special help after his disastrous performance the night before the crucifixion in which he denied Christ three times. Peter was broken up because of his great failure. He, more than the other disciples, needed encouragement from Christ that Christ was alive and that Peter was still one of His disciples.

F. B. Meyer's comments on this meeting are touching and instructive. He said, "What passed in that interview is not recorded, but from our own experience we can fill in the blank page. We know that there must have been bitter tears, broken words, long breaks of silence when speech was over-borne, assurances that the penitent did really love, whatever might be argued to the contrary from word or act. Did he quote Psalm 51, or repeat what he remembered of the confession of the Prodigal Son? But if so, was he not stopped before he had gone far into either? Did he not hear that gentle voice calling for the best robe, the ring, the feast, the music, and song?" And then Meyer adds, "What delicate thoughtfulness there was in the Master's arrangement of this personal interview prior to the later gathering of the day, when He revealed Himself to the entire company. In their presence Peter could never have poured out his soul, or made full confession, or have kissed His feet."

Christ's private appearance to Peter carries the same message as the "and Peter" part of the women's announcement did which we noted earlier. It speaks of the great desire of Christ to rescue the wayward. When a person sins he often goes to one of two extremes. Either he becomes hardened in heart and tries to excuse or justify his sin, or he becomes convicted of his wrong and becomes

overwhelmed by sorrow of heart. If Satan cannot get the sinner to play down the sinfulness of his sin, then he goes to the other extreme and tries to get the sinner to think his sin is too great for God to forgive. Those who experience the latter reaction often become so remorseful that they think God **[Seite 178]** no longer loves them or wants them. They feel so unworthy that they do not think God would ever have anything to do with them again. Their sin seems too awful for God to forgive. To those who are of this terribly remorseful condition, the personal visit of Christ to Peter should encourage their hearts to realize that Christ will indeed accept the truly repentant and that the repenting sinner need not fear his rejection by God when he comes humbly confessing his sin.

2. The Public Appearance

The second appearance of Christ which Peter beheld that first Easter Sunday came in the "evening … when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). This appearance, which was another confirmation of the resurrection of Christ, brought great blessing to Peter and the other disciples. We list five blessings from this post-resurrection appearance of Christ.

First, there was the blessing of *peace*. The first thing Christ said to the group was, "Peace be unto you" (John 20:19); and He repeated this message before He left (John 20:21). Peter and those in the group needed peace for a variety of reasons. They needed peace, for none had performed well for Christ in the hour of trial, and their hearts would lack peace as a result. They needed peace, for all of the disciples were fearful of the Jews (John 20:19). The story was going around that they had stolen the body of Christ (Matthew 28:11–15); and as always is the case in society, there would be people who would like to take matters into their own hands and deal with the disciples about this. And they also needed peace; for that day had been filled with traumatic reports—reports of the empty tomb, of the body being stolen, of some seeing Jesus, and reports of other events which together left their hearts in a state of turmoil. Hence, peace was needed; and only Christ can give real peace.

Second, there was the blessing of *proof*. Christ "showed unto them his hands and his side" (John 20:20) to give them great proof that He was indeed the One Who had been crucified **[Seite 179]** on the cross. As we noted earlier in this chapter, Christ gave the disciples much proof regarding His resurrection. He wanted them to know without doubt that His resurrection had really occurred. So He gave proof after proof—and all the proof, like the hands and feet here, was excellent proof. How encouraged we should be that our faith rests on superb proof; and it is not like the cults whose doctrine is built on fabrications, hearsay, imagination, and ignorance.

Third, there was the blessing of *pleasure*. “Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” (John 20:20). What great delight it was to know that Christ was indeed alive as His appearance and the scars on His hands and His side demonstrated. In fact, nothing could give the disciples greater pleasure and greater joy than to know their beloved Master was alive. As faulty as the disciples were in their performance at times, you must credit them with great affection for Christ that is far superior to the affection most saints have for Him. Today the saints become glad for a host of reasons—but seldom for anything remotely connected to spiritual things.

Fourth, there was the blessing of *position*. Christ told Peter and the other disciples, “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). The greatest position any man can hold is a position in the service of the King of kings. Men struggle, pull strings, do everything they can to get a position in such places as some corporation or in working for some famous politician. But no worldly position equals the position of being in the service of the Lord. Here the disciples were given that position by a call from Christ to serve Him. Their service was spelled out briefly; but though brief, it said some very important things about service for Christ by not only the disciples but by everyone who serves Christ. It said that such service is to be patterned after Christ—this means that service will involve such things as humility, hard labor, submission to the Word of God, and great sacrifice. These things are often lacking in much service one sees at church today which says that much of that which goes on under the heading of service for our Lord is nothing **[Seite 180]** of the sort. More likely it is men serving themselves. True service must always be in accordance with “as my Father has sent me, even so send I you.”

Fifth, there was the blessing of *power*. In this appearance Christ “breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:22, 23). The work they were to do for Christ could not be done in their own strength and power. They needed Divine power and it would come from the Holy Spirit.

There is so much false teaching about the Holy Spirit today because of the charismatics that, as a result, people of sound doctrine tend to avoid saying much about the Holy Spirit. But we must not let error crowd out truth. God’s people must have the power of the Holy Spirit if they are going to serve. We need to pray for His Divine power to help us in every facet of our work for God. Without this power we will only beat the air and go through the motions.

The last part of this enduement blessing repeats what Peter had already heard from Christ when Peter made one of his great confessions about the identity of

Christ (Matthew 16:13–19). In the fifth chapter of this book, we covered this truth and noted how it applied to the authority of the church. We noted that it does not mean the disciples were to decide themselves what was lawful and unlawful and what was righteous and unrighteous, rather they were to declare what the Word of God said was lawful and unlawful and what was righteous and unrighteous. In all of this, they and we, too, certainly need the help of the Holy Spirit to perform this function well.

That first Easter Sunday was certainly a great day for Peter. He still had a long ways to go in spiritual growth and maturity. But on that day he began to come out of the darkness that enveloped him since the night before the crucifixion; for he learned that Christ was alive; and that he, Peter, was still His disciple. Life was now worth living again. He could go on; his spirit was revived.

[Seite 181] X

The Catch

John 21:1–11

During the forty days between Christ's resurrection and ascension, Christ worked another fishing miracle on the Sea of Galilee. This was His third fishing miracle associated with this sea, for He had performed two other fishing miracles there before the crucifixion. Peter was involved in all three of these miracles.

The first fishing miracle was a great catch of fish, and it led to and was followed by the call of Peter (and some of the other fishermen involved in the catch) to be disciples of Jesus Christ (Luke 5:1–11). The second fishing miracle was Peter's catching the fish with the coin in its mouth which provided tribute money for both Peter and Christ (Matthew 17:24–27). Now in this third fishing miracle is another great catch of fish. And this miracle catch of fish resulted in an important and famous dialogue between Peter and Christ—a dialogue we will note in our next chapter.

The account of this fishing miracle constitutes a postscript to the Gospel of John. As most Bible students know, the Gospel of John comes to an obvious conclusion with the end of chapter twenty. But then chapter twenty-one is added by John under Divine inspiration. In regards to our study of the life of Peter, this last chapter of John is very important; for Peter is prominent throughout this chapter. Without this chapter we would lose some important information about Peter. We could almost entitle the chapter "A Postscript about Peter," for Peter is so prominent in the chapter. Because of the amount of information on Peter in **[Seite 182]** this chapter in John, we will focus on it for both this and the next

chapter of our study on Peter.

In studying this miracle catch of fish by Peter and some of the other disciples, we will consider the return to fishing (vv. 1–3) and the results of fishing (vv. 3–11).

A. THE RETURN TO FISHING

The time between the resurrection and the ascension was not spent in the same way by the disciples as the time before the crucifixion. For several years before the crucifixion, they had spent almost all of their time with Christ. After the resurrection till the ascension, they were not with Christ but were in waiting for a meeting with Him. Christ had told them to meet Him on a certain mountain in Galilee. They did this as Matthew reports (Matthew 28:16). But this meeting did not take place for at least several weeks after the resurrection, and it could have been as long as a month or more. During that time the disciples waited in Galilee at their homes for the meeting. It was during this time of waiting that Peter and six other disciples went on the fishing expedition which is recorded in this twenty-first chapter of John.

In examining this fishing expedition of Peter and six other disciples; we will note the place of the fishing, the people doing the fishing, and the perspective about this fishing expedition.

1. The Place of the Fishing

The Sea of Galilee was the scene of this fishing expedition. John calls it the Sea of Tiberias (v. 1) here which was indeed one of its names. This name was given in honor of Claudius Nero Caesar (not the same Nero of Paul's time) who was the Roman emperor from 14 A.D. to 37 A.D. Other names given the sea included the "Lake of Gennesaret" (Luke 5:1) and "the Sea of Chinnereth" (Numbers 34:11).

The Sea of Galilee was made famous by the fact that it was the site of some of Christ's great miracles recorded in the Gospel. Besides the three fishing miracles performed there, Christ also walked on water there (Matthew 14:25, 26), enabled **[Seite 183]** Peter to do likewise (Matthew 14:28, 29), stilled several storms on the sea there (Mark 4:35–41, 6:45–52), and cast demons into a herd of swine who then stampeded into this lake (Luke 8:26–33). If the Sea of Galilee could talk, what a testimony it would bear concerning Christ. But knowing mankind today, many would not listen even though a sea full of facts was given them. Wicked hearts do not respect facts but instead honor the base desires of the flesh. That explains not only why the Gospel is rejected by many but also why such things as gambling, abortion, homosexual conduct, and alcohol are legalized and dignified by society. The facts about these evils are simply ignored.

2. The People Doing the Fishing

The fishing group, of which Peter was the leader, was composed of seven of Christ's twelve disciples. The first two members of the group listed in our text are Peter and Thomas—the denier and the doubter. Nathanael is the third of the seven listed. He is only mentioned twice in the four Gospels, but most Bible scholars believe he is the same as Batholomew. He was brought to Christ by Philip and made the famous statement, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). John (the writer of the Gospel) and James his brother are the fourth and fifth members of the group listed. John lists them simply as "the sons of Zebedee" which is typical of John's humbleness in mentioning himself. The last two members of the group are listed only as "two other of his disciples" (21:2). The late Walter Hughes, the articulate Canadian preacher and friend and mentor of this writer, would say humorously when reading this text in preaching, "I wonder if these two got sore because they did not get their names mentioned?" And then he would go on to rebuke those who get upset when their names are not printed in the Sunday church bulletin. There is indeed a rebuke needed for those who get out of sorts when their names are not printed or otherwise mentioned in public places when they have done some work—be it great or small. They need to be reminded that we should not serve to get public recognition but to please God. **[Seite 184]** It is not important whether our names are given due recognition or not in prominent places, the important thing is to serve the Lord well.

These seven men all lived in the area of the Sea of Galilee and so would congregate together. The other four disciples (there were only eleven now as Judas Iscariot was, of course, dead as a result of his suicide) were not involved in this fishing experience, and Scripture gives no account of their whereabouts at this time. But the crew that went fishing that day was certainly a notable group. Little did the world realize the impact these lowly men would have upon the world; an impact that is still felt nearly two thousand years later. How often it is that God's great ones are seldom esteemed and recognized by their contemporaries.

3. The Perspective About the Fishing

Bible scholars disagree as to whether this fishing endeavor was a wrong action or right action. Those who say it was wrong generally base their conclusion on the fact that Peter, back in Luke 5, is recorded as leaving the fishing business to follow Christ. However, we do not feel that is sufficient evidence to warrant condemnation of this fishing trip. We believe Peter and the others were not wrong in going fishing here, and we will advance three reasons for this conclusion.

First, they were not rebuked by Christ for fishing but indeed were provided with a miracle catch. We believe that if the fishing was wrong that Christ would not only have rebuked them for this fishing but would also have not blessed their endeavor with a miracle catch. Christ is not in the business of sanctioning an evil endeavor by putting His hand of blessing upon it in a very obvious way. Yes, it is true that sometimes God does indeed give us what seems like success in our evil endeavors in order to chastise us. But there is obviously no chastisement in this miracle catch; rather it results in much blessing.

Second, leaving the fishing business to be with Christ did not prohibit Peter or the others from ever fishing again. There **[Seite 185]** was a waiting period during those forty days between the resurrection and ascension, and bills had to be paid and food provided for the family. To spend some time fishing to provide for these needs in the interim is not evil anymore than a pastor or a missionary working a temporary job to provide for his family while in between pastorates or missionary assignments. Apostle Paul made tents to provide for his needs, and that certainly was not considered wrong. This fishing effort was not a forsaking of Peter's calling or of the other disciples' calling to go back into the fishing business; it was a temporary experience which was needful at the time.

Some may view this fishing experience as a legitimate time of rest and relaxation. And if it was, it certainly should not be condemned. It is not wrong for God's preachers to take some time off to go fishing! But the fact that the group fished all night as they did is indicative of a working experience, not a pleasure trip.

Third, the proper posture when waiting for Christ to come is to be busy working. Maclaren said, "Peter thought that the best thing they could do till Jesus chose to come, was to get back to their work, and he was sensible and right. The best preparation for Christ's appearance, and the best attitude to be found in by Him, is doing our daily work, however secular and small it may be." This reminds us of "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). Keep busy in constructive, useful work while waiting the coming of Christ. We have had over the years some groups who have set dates about the second coming of Christ, and then they have quit everything and gone to some hill and sat waiting. That is not what Christ tells us to do. He wants us to keep busy till He comes. Going to work to your usual job is not inconsistent with watching and waiting for the Lord's coming, but rather it is what you should be doing. Bishop Ryle said in regards to this fishing and its value of being busy, "Neither in Peter's proposal, nor in the simple frank consent of his companions, can I detect a jot of proof that anything wrong was done. Idleness does Christians far more injury than work."

[Seite 186] B. THE RESULTS OF FISHING

The fishing endeavor of Peter and the other six disciples began as a great failure but ended in great success. It was a duplicate of the experience Peter and several other disciples had several years earlier which led to their call to follow Christ full time.

1. The Failure in Fishing

"That night they caught nothing" (v. 3). The failure of this fishing effort is summed up in "night" and "nothing." As they had done several years earlier, they had "toiled all the night, and have taken nothing" (Luke 5:5). We note two things about this failure: the commonness of it and the confession of it.

The commonness of it. To labor a long time with apparent little result is not an uncommon experience in life. Though some make "night" and "nothing" of our text to apply only to sinful conduct, we must remember that it is not necessarily a mark of evil that one's efforts seem to produce nothing. As we have just noted above, we do not believe the disciples were wrong in fishing; and, therefore, we look for other lessons in "night" and "nothing" than a rebuke for doing wrong.

One lesson that can be learned here is that though results may be poor in our service for the Lord, our labor does not go unnoticed by the Master. Many times in our service for God, it seems like our labor has been in vain. Many times after God's servants have labored earnestly and at length, they feel like reciting the first part of Isaiah 49:4 which says, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." But there is more to that verse and more texts of Scripture which exhort us to keep laboring for the Lord even though results seem poor at the time. The rest of that verse in Isaiah says, "Yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God." To the rest of that verse, we add several texts from Paul which likewise give us great encouragement in our work for the Lord: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as **[Seite 187]** ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58); and "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:8). Today we generally judge people on the basis of outward results. Labor does not enter our judgmental process unfortunately, but with God it is a different matter. Results can vary greatly regardless of the labor involved. Noah, as an example, did not experience many results in spite of his years of labor. But God judged him on the basis of something obviously more than results. The important truth we need to learn here is that we must labor diligently and faithfully for the Lord whether we get results or not. God sees the labor and that is what He judges.

The confession of it. When Christ came on the scene in the morning, He asked the seven, "Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No" (v. 5). Some

would make the abrupt “No” answer to evidence a poor attitude on the part of the disciples, but we should not do that. We need to remember that the disciples were communicating here with Christ at a distance of one hundred yards or more (cp. v. 8). While at that distance “they were not far from land” (v. 8) in terms of boating, they certainly were in terms of speaking. At that distance you do not speak to another in the same way you do when close to them. Speech is much more brief and abrupt from a distance. The “No” here sufficiently and honestly confessed their true experience. They did not exaggerate or pad the figures, like many pastors do, to make their failure look like a success. Neither were they morbid in their answer.

Why did Christ ask this question inasmuch as He is omniscient? The answer is that Christ did not ask the question to obtain information for Himself—for He already knew—but to get the disciples to confess their emptiness so that He might fill them. This is an important principle we must not forget. God cannot fill us if we do not sense our emptiness. This is very important in regards to salvation, as an example. God cannot save us if we do not recognize that we are sinners and hence **[Seite 188]** empty of righteousness. When folk think they are righteous enough, that they are doing enough to get them into heaven, they will not be responsive to Christ’s offer of salvation. So it is in other areas of our life, too. We will not seek or receive the help of God, if we do not think we need it. Here the disciples readily confessed they were empty. They had fished all night with nary a fish to show for it. Their confession opened the way for Christ to work a miracle and provide a great catch for them. Had they not admitted to their lack, there would have been no miracle supply of fish; for that kind of a confession would have said they did not need help in catching fish.

2. The Success in Fishing

After a night of barren fishing, things suddenly changed. They went from an empty net (v. 3) to a net full of 153 fish (v. 11). We will note the reason for success, the recognition in the success, and the request because of the success.

The reason for the success. After admitting to Christ that they had caught nothing, Christ said to Peter and the other six disciples, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes” (v. 6). The reason for the success lies in the orders of Christ and the obedience of the disciples.

First, success involved the *orders of Christ*. How often in Scripture we see Divine blessing inseparably connected with Divine commandments. Yet, man despises the commandments of God. Man is ever trying to discredit God’s commands and show how they no longer relate to our day and our situation. But how foolish all of this reasoning is, for in these commandments lie our blessing.

Many centuries ago God told Israel that the commandments were “for thy good” (Deuteronomy 10:13). They always are. Therefore, when you despise His orders, you delete your blessings.

Sometimes to the human mind, God’s commands seem foolish as they might have seemed here. To human thinking it would **[Seite 189]** not make a whole lot of sense after fishing all night to cast the nets on the other side of the boat. But Peter and the other disciples did not let human reasoning discredit the commands of God, and so they obtained much blessing from God. The commands of God have Divine wisdom behind them, and the fact that the human mind does not see wisdom in them at times only shows how deficient the human mind is in contrast to Divine wisdom.

Second, success involved the *obedience of the disciples*. “They cast” sums up their obedient response to Christ’s orders. And as a result of this obedience, they caught a multitude of fish. If we want to see the power of God in our lives, we must give great respect to the precepts of God; and that respect will only be proper when we obey the commands.

Obeying Christ is not easy—it never was and it never will be. In this command we note two difficulties involved. It was both laborious and humbling. It was *laborious* in that they had fished all night and, therefore, were tired; and casting a fishing net is not easy work at any time. Especially would it be hard work if the nets were still in the water. They would have to drag the wet nets out of the water and over the boat to the other side. Obeying this command would also be *humbling*, for they were experienced fisherman and knew how to fish if anyone did, yet they were submitting to another’s advice. How often obeying God’s commands is humbling to the flesh. Many refuse to obey God because, as some say, it is “so embarrassing” to conform to the ways of the Bible. But obey we must if we want the blessing of God upon our efforts.

The recognition in the success. The disciples did not recognize Christ by sight when He showed up on the shore of Galilee that morning—“when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus” (v. 4). But the great miracle catch of fish removed their ignorance—“Now they were not able to draw it [the net] for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple [John] whom Jesus loved saith **[Seite 190]** unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him (for he was naked [not nude but without his outer garment on]), and did cast himself into the sea” (vv. 6, 7). We will note the report of the recognition and the response to the recognition.

First, the *report of the recognition*. It was John who first recognized in the miracle that it was Christ on the shore. A number of writers tell us that the

reason John was first to discern Christ was because love is the quickest to discern. They tell us that since John loved the most, he discerned the best. But we are not ready to conclude that John loved Christ more than most. Leaning on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper does not prove that conclusion. Peter certainly loved the Lord a great deal, too. He showed it differently than John at times, but his affection was still very great. When John said, "It is the Lord," it was Peter, not John, who hastened to get to Christ. This action certainly showed much affection which we will note more about shortly.

The fact that John was first to recognize the Lord here simply shows that John was the quickest of the disciples to discern. He could put facts together quickly and discern a proper conclusion. As an example, he discerned first what the grave clothes in the tomb said, namely, that Christ was risen from the grave (John 20:8). We covered this discerning act of John in our last chapter. Here, as soon as they began to tug the net, John discerned that it was Christ Who was on the shore. The great catch of fish was so great that the men could not pull the net into the boats but had to drag the net in the water to shore (v. 8) where Peter helped them bring it up on the beach (v. 11). John recognized that only the Lord could cause a catch like that to occur as it did. He did not discern Christ because he recognized the person of Christ on the shore, as some erroneously assume. It was the net being full of fish which told John that it was Christ on the shore.

Would that all of mankind were as quick to discern the Lord in the events of life. "They only see aright who see Christ [working] in everything … No man will understand the world **[Seite 191]** aright, who cannot say about all creation, 'It is the Lord' " (Maclaren). Harvests are great, victory comes quickly in war, and good things happen—yet few people see the hand of the Lord in these blessings and give Him praise. Weather acts up and causes great loss to farmers, earthquakes in numbers never before terrorize the earth, and terrible disease plagues society for its immoral ways—yet few people see the judgment of God upon a disobedient people in these events and repent.

The recognition in the miracle that it was the Lord gave the disciples another proof of the resurrection. We believe one of the purposes for the miracle was to help confirm the resurrection of Christ. We noted in the previous chapter that Christ seemed very concerned that the disciples be given much evidence that the very Christ Whom they had followed and Who had been crucified was indeed the One Who had risen from the grave and was showing Himself to them. Showing the scars in His hands and side and reminding them of the meeting in Galilee were two of these evidences we noted in the previous chapter. Here, the miracle catch would also establish evidence and help them recognize that it was the very Jesus they had followed; for it would remind them of the previous

miracle catch of Luke 5 which Christ did and which none other could do.

Second, the *response to the recognition*. Scripture says that "when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him … and did cast himself into the sea [to go to Christ]" (v. 7). Peter doubtless did not swim, for putting on more clothes would oppose swimming; but the water was obviously shallow enough for him to wade ashore to Christ.

This response by Peter to the recognition that it was Christ on the shore was typical of Peter, and it did indeed demonstrate Peter's fervent love for the Lord. And note that for the moment Peter forgot all about the fish in his great desire to get to Christ. That certainly reflects great affection. Would that all of us would be so interested in Christ that we would lose interest in the things of the world. Generally it is just the other way around, however. We get so interested in our worldly pursuits that we **[Seite 192]** forget about God. Sunday church service attendance evidences this problem.

The request because of the success. When the net was being brought in to the shore, Christ said, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught" (v. 10). Peter and the other disciples had been blessed by Christ with a great catch of fish, and now they are asked by Christ to bring some of the fish to Him for His use. In this request we have an important lesson about giving to the Lord. The lesson is this: when God blesses us, it is primarily so we can serve Him better.

Few, however, recognize their blessings in this way. They seldom recognize an increase in pay, a bonus, good crops, or an inheritance as a means by which they can better help the Lord's work. Mostly they see these things as a means by which they can indulge in more pleasures of the world. But Peter and the other six disciples were much different. They responded well to Christ's request. Especially do we see this good response in Peter's action. When Christ made the request for the fish, "Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three" (v. 11). Peter had begun heading for the shore when he knew Christ was there; but after the request by Christ, Peter went to help the others bring the net full of fish to shore. This was noble action by Peter which reflected his affection for Christ in his willingness to obey Christ in giving to Him. Would that all of us would be as ready as Peter was to consecrate our blessings to the service of Christ. Failure to do so only limits our blessings. As H. C. Trumbull said, "Jesus asks for a share of all the fish you catch, of all the crops you gather, of all the money you get, of all the time and strength you have. If you refuse to render it to Him, the loss is yours. How great that loss may be only eternity can disclose."

The Commission

JOHN 21:15–22

AFTER THE MIRACULOUS catch of fish, Jesus fed the disciples. They had been out fishing all night and needed and got a good breakfast ("dine" in "Come and dine" of John 21:12 means to "break your fast," or as we say today, "breakfast"). After the breakfast of fish and bread (John 21:9), Christ engaged Peter in a conversation which amounted to another commissioning of Peter for service for the Lord. The first Easter Sunday had done much to assure Peter that he was still one of Christ's disciples. This encounter with Christ, on one of the beaches of the Sea of Galilee, went farther and made it plain to Peter that he was to have some important responsibility in Christ's service.

The conversation Christ had with Peter after the great catch of fish furnishes us with some good lessons on service. In this study of the commissioning of Peter, we will note the prerequisite of service (vv. 15–17), the precepts for service (vv. 15–17, 19, 22), the prediction about service (vv. 18, 19), and the problem in service (vv. 20–22).

A. THE PREREQUISITE OF SERVICE

Christ began the commissioning of Peter by asking him three times, "Lovest thou me?" (vv. 15, 16, 17). Asking this question three times would parallel the three times Peter denied the Lord and would furnish a humbling reminder to Peter of his threefold denial of Christ. That the repetition of the question bothered Peter is evident in what Scripture says of him after the third question. "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third **[Seite 194]** time, Lovest thou me?" (v. 17). Regarding the asking of the question three times, Bishop Ryle said, "I cannot for a moment doubt that our Lord asked Peter this remarkable question three times in order to remind him that he had denied Him thrice … The very 'grief' which Peter felt at being thrice asked about his love, was intended to do him good. It was meant to remind him that if he was grieved to be asked thrice, 'Lovest thou me?' how much more must his Master have been grieved when he thrice denied Him."

The questions about Peter's love dealt with the subject of his love and the size of his love.

1. The Subject of His Love

The subject of his love is the Savior. Christ's threefold question focused on Peter's love for Jesus Christ. Christ started with Peter where we all need to start in serving the Lord. He started with love for Him. It is not love for the sheep or for the feeding of the sheep, which Peter's assignment will involve (which we will note later), that is the prerequisite of service; but it is love for Christ which is the vital prerequisite of service. Loving the sheep and loving the work of feeding the sheep are legitimate and important necessities for good service, but

they are not nearly as important as loving the Lord. To serve Christ properly we must first get our affections on Christ. Nothing else will compensate for a lack of love for Christ.

That love for Christ is the primary qualification for Christian service is demonstrated elsewhere in Scripture. As an example, in Revelation we read of the church at Ephesus and what great things they were doing; but the church was going to experience judgment if they did not improve in their love for Christ. Scripture said of Ephesus. “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted” (Revelation 2:2, 3). Can anything be wrong with a **[Seite 195]** church like that? Apart from Scripture, we would hardly think so. But Scripture indicts the church severely; for after it compliments the church, it says, “Nevertheless I have somewhat [‘somewhat’ is added by the translators and unfortunately waters down the indictment] against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick [lampstand] out of its place, except thou repent” (Revelation 2:4, 5). That indictment is strong language! But love for Christ is that important.

Another example in Scripture which shows the vital place of love for Christ in our service is found in one of Paul’s epistles. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul says, “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Our love for Christ ought to be the prime mover for all our service. We should serve primarily because we love Christ. Love has the ability to make difficult things easy and bitter things sweet. As an example, the seven long years of labor Jacob served for Rachel “seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to [for] her” (Genesis 29:20). How much more should love for Christ help our service for Him. Arthur W. Pink says, “Our work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response so discouraging, the criticism so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce that only the love of Christ can constrain to such a work.”

Love for God is where love should begin in life. Man, however, begins with loving man. We were pastoring in Detroit during the riots of 1967. After the riots we noticed a number of church signs and advertisements exhorting people to “love your neighbor” and telling of upcoming sermons on that theme. We ought to love our neighbor, but the primary problem in Detroit and elsewhere was and continues to be a lack of love for God. The Bible says the first and great commandment is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). Scripture adds that “the

second is … Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). We need to keep the commandments in their **[Seite 196]** proper order. One can understand why churches would talk about loving your neighbor after a riot, for the riot certainly demonstrates a lack of love for one's neighbors. But that is not the root of the problem. The reason folk do not love their neighbor is that they do not love God. Man's great problem is that he simply does not love God as he ought. Paul speaks of this problem when he says that men in the last days will be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). That is why sports stadiums are full on Sunday and church auditoriums are not.

When one loves God he will love that which is holy, true, heavenly, pure, good, and right. But most of those talking about love today do not emphasize this practice of true love; for their love talk is generally about sex, immorality, or toleration of evil. Apostate religion talks much about love. But it is not of truth (for doctrine makes no difference to them), or of morals (for they do not emphasize holiness—especially when they ordain homosexuals), or of heavenly things (for they emphasize the here-and-now over the hereafter).

2. The Size of His Love

Christ's questioning of Peter about love not only spoke of the subject of his love but also of the size of his love. The first question of the three questions asked Peter by Christ especially spoke about the amount of love that Peter had for the Lord. This question asked if Peter loved the Lord more than the other disciples did: "Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me more than these?" (v. 15). Some have suggested that "these" might refer to Peter's affection for the other disciples which would mean that Christ was asking Peter if he loved Christ more than he loved the other disciples. Others have thought the "these" referred to his love for the fishing business. Did Peter love Christ more than he loved fishing? It is true that many have much trouble in these areas. They love others more than Christ, and they love things more than Christ. That will certainly hinder service for Christ. Examples of this problem abound in every church.

[Seite 197] But the problem with Peter was not in these two areas. He never manifested a conflict between love for Christ and love for the other disciples or between love for Christ and love for such things as fishing. The problem with Peter was his thinking that he was more devoted to Christ than the other disciples. He had boasted the night before the crucifixion that though all would deny Christ, yet he, Peter, would not. Thus, he set himself up as better than others in his affection for Christ. Christ's first question would deal with Peter about that attitude. Does he still think he loves Christ more than others love Christ?

Peter did not. No longer will he boast about loving Christ "more than these."

Two things in particular in Peter's answers point out his unwillingness to boast about his love for Christ. One regarded the discerning of his love for Christ; the other regarded the declaring of his love for Christ.

First, the *discerning of his love for Christ*. Peter appealed to Christ's omniscience to discern the amount of love he had for Christ. "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (vv. 15, 16); and "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (v. 17). He would let the knowledge of Christ, rather than boasting on his part, settle the question as to how much Peter loved the Lord. That was a decided and noble change in attitude from Peter's attitude on the night before the crucifixion when he argued with Christ about how devoted he was to Christ.

Second, the *declaring of his love for Christ*. Peter did not use the same word for love to declare his love for Christ as Christ used in asking Peter about his love for Christ. As most commentaries and study Bibles' notes indicate, there is a difference in the Greek words for "love" used by the Lord and by Peter in the first two questions. Christ is recorded as using a higher term for love than Peter is recorded as using throughout his answers. Christ used the *aqape* term. Peter used the *phileo* term. The *agape* word for love in the Greek is the highest term for love. *Phileo* is not a weak term, but it is not as strong as *agape*. Peter's use of the lesser term for love was another indication of his unwillingness to boast of his great and superior **[Seite 198]** love for Christ. In the third question, Christ dropped to Peter's *phileo* term as if to accommodate Peter's humble unwillingness to profess a higher love.

It will be a humbling experience for all of us to examine our hearts to see just how much we love Christ. An honest examination will keep us from boasting that we love Christ more than other people do, and it will cause us to confess that we oftentimes love other people and things more than Christ. We need to pray earnestly and daily that we will have a greater love for Christ. It is so essential to service, to life, and to our eternal well-being. Loving Jesus Christ is so important that Paul said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [accursed]" (1 Corinthians 16:22). And so Joshua's exhortation is very needed: "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God" (Joshua 23:11—note that "LORD" is "Jehovah" and is the Old Testament name for the Savior).

B. THE PRECEPTS FOR SERVICE

In this conversation with Peter which commissioned him for service, Christ not only addressed Peter's love for Christ; but He also addressed the details of Peter's service by giving Peter several important precepts regarding his duties.

These precepts have to do with feeding the sheep and following the Savior.

1. Feeding the Sheep

After Peter answered each question about love, Christ commanded Peter to feed His sheep. Peter confessed he loved the Lord, but his love must be more than talk. It must also be walk. If he really loves the Lord then he will obey the Lord. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). This means for Peter that if he loves the Lord then he will serve the Lord by feeding His sheep. A lot of people tell us they love the Lord, but we notice they do not pay much attention to the commands of God and do little in the service of God. Their lack of obedience and lack of service betrays their boasted affections.

We will consider four things about Christ’s orders for Peter **[Seite 199]** to feed the flock: whose flock it is, who is in the flock, when to feed the flock, and what is involved in feeding the flock.

First, *whose flock it is*. Christ told Peter to feed “my” sheep. The flock belongs to Christ. We need to remember that important fact. Pastors sometimes forget the flock is not their flock but is the Master’s flock. It is not their church but Christ’s church. Congregations need to remember that fact, too. Many congregations will be quick to remind the pastor that the church is not the pastor’s church—but it is not the congregation’s church either. Both the pastor and the congregation have to answer to the Lord about how they conduct themselves in regards to the church.

Second, *who is in the flock*. Christ’s orders indicate that the flock is composed of both lambs and sheep. The first command about feeding said, “Feed my *lambs*” (v. 15). The other two commands said, “Feed my *sheep*” (vv. 16, 17). There is a difference in “lambs” and “sheep.” One speaks of babes and the other of adults. Both require feeding. Both need the Word. Sometimes we wonder if pastors remember that fact on prayer meeting nights when the kids are put in the gym while the adults study the Word and pray.

Senior saints need to remember this fact, too. Some who have been saved a long time think they do not need to be fed as often as young babes in Christ. But they are very wrong in that conclusion. Physically an adult eats more than a babe. This ought to be true spiritually. A growing saint should have a growing appetite.

Third, *when to feed the flock*. The command to feed the flock is not a once-only task. Feeding the flock is a continuous task. Like a farmer feeding his livestock, he does not do it a few days; and then his job is over. He must feed them day after day after day. The task of feeding the flock requires much time. Therefore, there will have to be a great commitment to the task or it will not get done.

Fourth, *what is involved in feeding the flock*. The KJV uses the word "Feed" for each of the three commands to feed the flock. However, in the Greek a different word is used for the **[Seite 200]** second "Feed" than what is used for the first and third "Feed." The first and third words translated "Feed" (vv. 15, 17) mean to feed, to pasture, to nourish. The second word translated "Feed" (v. 16) means to rule, to discipline, to guide. A good many congregations need to understand that the pastor has both responsibilities. Many congregations like for their pastor to teach and preach, but they do not like him to have much authority in the affairs of the church. But a shepherd not only sees to it that the sheep have nourishment, he also guides and leads the sheep and rules over them. This does not mean, of course, that the shepherd is to be a self-serving tyrant lording it over the flock. On the other hand, it does not mean that the pastor sits on the church board merely as an observer.

Peter did not forget this command to feed the flock; and he understood it well, too. This comes out in his first epistle when he says to "The elders" (1 Peter 5:1), who were part of the group he was writing to, "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 [examples] to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3). In that statement Peter saw both tasks of the shepherd—feeding and ruling. And he had the ruling ("oversight") in its proper perspective, for he said the elders were not to be "lords" over the flock. His statement also recognized whose flock it was, for he referred to the flock as "God's heritage."

2. Following the Savior

Twice in the latter part of His conversation with Peter, Christ told Peter to follow "me" (vv. 19, 22). This told Peter Whom he was serving and how he was to serve.

First, it told Peter *Whom he was serving*. Peter was primarily to serve the Lord. Sometimes we say a pastor is serving a church, and in a sense that is true. But we must not forget that anyone who is in Christian service—pastor or whoever—is primarily to serve Christ, not a church, not a denomination, not an institution, not a group. A pastor may say to the church that he is **[Seite 201]** "your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5), but "your servants" is subordinate to "for Jesus' sake." There would be a lot less compromising and eyeservice (Ephesians 6:6, Colossians 3:22) in God's servants if they remembered Whom they were primarily to serve.

Second, it told Peter *how he was to serve*. "Follow me" (v. 19) says some important things about service. It says for one thing that servants are to be *submissive* to the will of Christ. No one will serve well if they do not pay

attention to the will of Christ. It is His will that prescribes the servant's work. It says for another thing that servants are to be *steadfast* in their service. Follow is continuous action, not part time. And "Follow me" also says that servants will have to *sacrifice* in order to serve Christ well. They will have to sacrifice time, possessions, esteem, and many other things to serve Christ. When we look at the experience of Christ on earth, we will understand what a great sacrifice it may require in order to serve Him. Not many are doing well in this area today. No wonder we see so little true Christian service.

C. THE PREDICTION ABOUT SERVICE

In this commissioning of Peter, Christ told Peter about Peter's death. He predicted the manner and character of Peter's death. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst where thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he [Christ], signifying by what death he [Peter] should glorify God" (vv. 18, 19). This prediction said several significant things about Peter's service. It said Peter would be a faithful servant and a martyred servant.

1. A Faithful Servant

Christ said that Peter would "glorify God" by his death. That, of course, is the key to understanding that Peter would be a faithful servant unto death; for to glorify God in death you **[Seite 202]** must glorify God in life. Many folk, however, are like Balaam who wanted to die like the righteous but did not want to live like the righteous. He said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10). But Balaam did not die like the righteous. He was slain by the Israelites when they attacked the wicked Midianites (Numbers 31:8) because he was fraternizing with the wicked Midianites.

Let us so live that our death will glorify God. Years ago John Wesley said of the Methodists, "Our people die well." God's faithful do indeed die well. All you have to do to see this truth is to read the death statements of God's faithful saints and compare those statements to the death statements of the ungodly. What a great difference in the statements. The saints' statements are noble, holy, uplifting, and God-honoring. But the statements of the ungodly are cowardly, unholy, depressing, and dishonoring to God.

Telling Peter that his death would glorify God and, therefore, that he would be faithful to the end would be a great encouragement to Peter. Because of his threefold denial, Peter would not be very encouraged about his future faithfulness. After one has failed as greatly as Peter did, he often loses confidence in the prospects of having victory in that area again; and, as a result,

he often becomes so discouraged that he does not even try. But this prediction by Christ about Peter's end would really encourage Peter, for it would let Peter know that he would be faithful unto death. The devil can defeat us and cripple us through defilement; but he can also do the same through discouragement. Christ, however, countered the discouragement problem by assuring Peter he would be faithful to the end.

2. A Martyred Servant

The language Christ used about Peter's death suggests death by crucifixion. Most Bible scholars see it that way, and so do we. Tradition also agrees and says Peter was crucified upside down. The reason it was upside down is that he supposedly felt he was not worthy to die like Christ, so he persuaded the crucifiers **[Seite 203]** to crucify him upside down. Whether this tradition is true or not is not important, however, and does not affect the lesson here. What is important to learn here is that faithful service does not always lead to great honor among men during one's lifetime here on earth. Peter would not finish life retired and living in a nice cottage in some scenic spot writing his memoirs for a tidy sum. His life on earth would end in execution, not in exaltation, for his service for Christ.

This prediction of Peter's death flies into the face of the "prosperity Gospel" we hear so much about today. To listen to some, you would think that if you would confirm your faith several times each day you would become the chief executive of your company early in your career. Others tell us that we should give our way to prosperity. That is, if we want to grow rich then we should give our money to this or that radio broadcaster or evangelist who is telling us this method of becoming rich. It is true that giving will be blessed of God, but many times the blessings wait for eternity. Many who have sacrificed their all for Christ have lost all in this life—they have not become millionaires living in ease and luxury. Piety is no guarantee to worldly success. It is not some good luck charm as some seem to view it. Reading your Bible every day does not exempt you from troubles. Prayer before a game does not guarantee victory.

Faithful service is seldom recognized in this life but will be in the next life. All those who would serve the Lord faithfully need to learn this lesson well, or they will quit the first time their service is met with brickbats rather than bouquets.

D. THE PROBLEM IN SERVICE

After Christ made the prediction about Peter's death and had given Peter the first of the two "Follow me" (v. 19) commands of the commission, Peter evidenced a problem that plagues many in serving Christ. He got his eyes off of Christ and on to others. "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple [John] whom Jesus

loved following … saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till **[Seite 204]** I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (vv. 20–22). In the Greek, the question Peter asked Christ literally says, "Lord: and this man what?" (Ryle).

Christ had informed Peter what Peter was to do ("Follow me," v. 19) and had predicted Peter's future (how he would die, vv. 18, 19); now Peter unwisely gets all concerned about what John is to do and what will happen to John in the future. This concern of Peter about John distracted him from following the Lord. It caused Peter to be guilty of "turning about" from the Lord to look at another. Instead of following Christ as instructed, Peter was turning another way. You cannot do a good job of following Christ if you are always going to be turning about looking at others. To follow Christ well one needs to focus on Christ. But Peter was not focusing on Christ at that moment; for he was focusing on John; and, therefore, he did not do his duty well of following Christ.

To serve the Lord effectively, you will need to concentrate on doing your duty the best you can regardless of what others are doing or how well they are doing their task. Do not let the delinquency of others keep you from performing faithfully. Do not give less because others are not giving as they should. Do not lessen your efforts just because others receive more honor and accolades than you do in service. In serving Christ, be chiefly concerned about what Christ told you to do and leave the care and concern of all these other things to the Lord.

Any parent can know something about Peter's concern here just in observing their own children's reaction to orders. Tell one child to do something, and that the child often wants to know what a brother or sister is going to be told to do. Sometimes they ask that question to make sure they are not asked to do more than the brother or sister. But for whatever reason they ask the question, the problem is that they have too much concern about the duties of others and too little concern about their own duties.

Peter's question about John reminds us it is the habit of carnality to ask questions that do not need to be asked. Peter did **[Seite 205]** not need to ask this question about John, for he did not need to know the answer. Carnal curiosity, not conscience was behind the question about John and his work and future. This problem is seen in many areas today and especially so in regards to the matter of prophecy. Matthew Henry said, "Scripture predictions must be eyed for the directing of our consciences, not the satisfying of our curiosity." Many view prophecy not from a standpoint of its affect on their manner of conduct, but they view it only from the standpoint of curiosity. Who is going to be the Antichrist? What does the number 666 mean? What will happen to the world remaining at the rapture? Where is the United States in prophecy? are just a few of the

questions asked which often only show carnal curiosity. The questions that ought to be asked in view of prophecy concerning the last days is one that this very Peter asked instructively in one of his epistles. “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye [we] to be in all holy conversation [conduct] and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11).

Lest some become confused here regarding the condemnation of Peter’s concern about John, we need to note that there is a concern about other people we can and need to have that is not wrong. We need to be concerned about the souls of others and about the needs of others. That, however, was not Peter’s concern here. His concern was only one of curiosity. It was something he did not need to know—the Lord made that plain when He said, “What is that to thee?” (v. 22).

[Seite 206] XII

THE CHOICE

ACTS 1:13–26

DURING THE TEN days between the ascension of Christ and the Day of Pentecost, when the coming of the Holy Spirit occurred, the eleven disciples along with other believers were gathered together in “an upper room [most Bible teachers will translate ‘an’ as ‘the’ and say it was the same room the disciples and Christ met in the night before the crucifixion]” (v. 13). This group, which included Mary the mother of Jesus, totaled “about an hundred and twenty” people (v. 15); and they spent much of their time together “in prayer and supplication” (v. 14). The reason they were assembled together was to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Before the ascension, Christ had commanded the disciples not to leave Jerusalem after His ascension “but wait for the promise of the Father [the coming of the Holy Spirit]” (Acts 1:4).

It was during “those days [that] Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples” (v. 15) and others gathered together with them and addressed the situation of having only eleven disciples instead of twelve which came about because of the death of Judas Iscariot. Peter believed the group should choose a successor for Judas, and so he led them into making a choice to replace Judas. Taking the leadership of the group here indicates that Peter has recovered from his failure which took place some six weeks earlier. The two words “stood up” (Ibid.) symbolically picture the character that we will see in Peter as we leave the Gospels and come to the book of Acts. The farther we read in Acts the better is Peter’s performance. He will truly exhibit the **[Seite 207]** “rock” character which Christ predicted of Peter when Peter first met Christ (John 1:42).

In studying this incident in the life of Peter, we will note the ruin of Judas

which Peter spoke about to the group (vv. 15–19) and the replacing of Judas which Peter led the group into doing (vv. 20–26).

A. THE RUIN OF JUDAS

Peter spoke to the group about some of the details regarding the ruin of Judas which resulted in the number of disciples being reduced from twelve to eleven. It was not a pretty picture, but it was a true picture of sin, for sin never paints a pretty picture. We need more preachers today like Peter who will tell folk the true work of sin. Peter made it plain that the conduct of Judas led to a tragic end. Unlike many preachers, he did not water down the nature of sin. He did not overlook the terrible outcome of sin. He spoke of evil in a truthful, easy to understand way. But, of course, most people do not like that sort of preaching. They do not want to be warned about evil. They want it approved. So they glamorize the wicked people of our day and make heroes of them. They gloss over the tragic effect of sin in their lives and hardly mention it. They have done this with such people as Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe whose suicides, like the suicide of Judas, only manifested the work of sin in their lives. Yet, these wicked people are idolized and glorified. Such attitudes, however, give a terribly distorted view of sin and will cause more to fall prey to evil. But Peter's account of Judas is a welcomed difference.

We note five details about the ruin of Judas which Peter spoke about to those gathered together waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They include his privilege, his partnership, his prize, his passing, and his publicity.

1. His Privilege

That which aggravated the sin of Judas was the great spiritual privileges he enjoyed. Peter said of Judas, "He was numbered **[Seite 208]** with us, and had obtained part in this ministry" (v. 17). Judas was a member of the select group of twelve disciples chosen by Christ. What a tremendous privilege to be a member of that group. People today boast about and prize their membership in various groups and organizations, but to be a member of this group of twelve would exceed in privilege membership in any group or club or organization of the world.

Adding to the privilege for Judas of membership in this distinct group was the fact that he held high office in this group, for Judas was the group's treasurer. Yet, Judas did not profit from this membership and office as he should have. Instead he used his membership to betray the Lord and his office as treasurer to pad his own pocket (John 12:6).

Judas reminds us that it is possible to be a member and a high ranking officer of a good church or other Christian organization and yet not be saved. Matthew Henry said, "Many are numbered with the saints in this world that will not be

found among them in the day of separation between the precious and the vile. What will it avail us to be added to the number of Christians, if we partake not of the spirit and nature of Christians?" We have known of a number of good churches and Christian organizations who have had men on their boards or in other prominent positions who have given much evidence over the years that they were more of the world than of Christianity. Let none boast of their inclusion in some Christian group or ministry as though that obtains soul security for them. It may only aggravate their failures.

2. His Partnership

In spite of his spiritual advantages, Judas became partners with those who wanted to do away with Christ. Peter said, "Judas … was [a] guide to them that took Jesus" (v. 16). Poor Judas, in leading people to Christ in Gethsemane, he perverted the purpose of leading people to Christ. The disciples were trained to lead people to accept Christ. Judas led people to arrest Christ. The disciples were to lead people to honor Christ; Judas **[Seite 209]** led people to dishonor Him instead. The disciples were to support Christ; Judas, however, in partnership with the ungodly, opposed Christ.

Every church has in their midst members of this kind who are partners with the enemies of Christ. They join hands with those who oppose the work of Christ instead of joining hands with those who support the work of Christ. Instead of inviting and bringing people to the church services to hear the Word of God, they invite and bring dissident members to church business meetings to oppose the work of God. Instead of giving of their time and energy to help the work of the Lord, they give of their time and energy to hinder the work of God. They may (like Judas) be members in good standing and hold offices of high esteem in the church, but it is evident they are partners with the wrong side.

3. His Prize

Peter speaks of "the reward of iniquity" (v. 18) which referred to the thirty pieces of silver that Judas received for his betrayal of Christ. We generally associate reward with that which is positive. But Scripture sometimes speaks of reward in a negative sense, too, when it speaks of the reward for sin. As an example, Scripture says, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Yes, it pays to sin. But what terrible pay. And it is rewarding to sin, as Judas learned, but what terrible rewards. Sin makes many promises, but it never tells the whole story. Judas saw the promise of thirty pieces of silver, but he did not see the promise of all the problems that came with sin—he did not perceive all the reward of iniquity.

A. C. Hervey said, "Let us reckon up his gains and losses. He had gained thirty pieces of silver—the reward of his iniquity. But he had lost his apostleship,

the highest office on earth; his throne, the highest place of man in heaven, under Jesus Christ; his peace of mind, his self-respect, his power of enjoying life, the esteem of all good men; any place among men save that of shame, and ignominy, and disgrace, and abhorrence. He had lost **[Seite 210]** his own soul—his life; all the pleasures of time, all the joys of eternity." The reward of iniquity is very deceiving. The glittering thirty pieces of silver only deceived about the rest of the reward which was devastating to everything that was good.

4. His Passing

Peter adds some details about the death of Judas which we do not learn from the Gospels. Matthew, the only one of the Gospels to report the death of Judas, simply says that Judas "went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5). That says plenty about guilt and other aftereffects of sin. But Peter also describes the gory details of the hanging. He said that Judas "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (v. 18).

What Peter's statement about Judas' death indicates is that Judas bungled his hanging. Either the tree branch on which he hung himself broke, or the rope (or whatever it was) he used to hang himself broke. This caused him to fall to the ground, and the fall tore open his abdomen. If Judas hung himself over a precipice of some kind in order to aid in the effectiveness of the hanging, and if he was an overweight man as he easily could have been, one can easily visualize what happened. Falling some distance, Judas would crash against the rocks, and this would rip open his body. It was a terrible, sick, repulsive mess. But that is the work of sin. Judas' death experience emphasizes the ignominy and shame of his deed.

5. His Publicity

Judas masqueraded as a loyal disciple of Jesus Christ for about three years. But the phoniness of his profession eventually became known to all and was publicized all over. Peter speaks of this when he said of Judas' death, "it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem" (v. 19). They knew of his death by hanging and why it occurred and the awful stomach turning details of the hanging. Judas' deed of betraying Christ became not only well known to the residents of Jerusalem, but for ages it has also **[Seite 211]** been well known to people all over the world. Judas did well for a time in concealing the falseness of his faith—even the eleven disciples were so fooled by Judas and so much so that in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion they did not suspect Judas as being the one to betray Christ. But eventually the real Judas was revealed.

Men are forever thinking they can conceal their sin, but sooner or later it will be uncovered and revealed to all. Some men go to great efforts to try and control what people think of them. They write autobiographies, which give a glowing

but false story of their life; and they hire publicity agents to embellish their reputation. But all these efforts are vain, for the Scripture tells us that "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot" (Proverbs 10:7). Time eventually reveals the wickedness of wicked men. Former President John Kennedy was practically revered right after his death. But time has disclosed what a sordid immoral man he was. Books written (and by his friends) have detailed his vile immoral escapades. Martin Luther King was another one who was practically deified by man right after he died. But not many years after his death, books (and by his friends) revealed what a corrupt, cruel, and immoral man he was. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23), and "it was known unto all" (v. 19) are certainly true.

B. THE REPLACING OF JUDAS

Peter's purpose in speaking about the ruin of Judas was to prepare the way for the replacing of Judas. He felt it was time to replace Judas and led the group in choosing a replacement. We will note the procedure and problem in this replacing of Judas.

1. The Procedure in This Replacing of Judas

To study the procedure for replacing Judas as one of the twelve disciples, we will note five things involved in the procedure. They are exhortation, qualification, nomination, supplication, divination.

[Seite 212] *Exhortation*. Peter's exhortation to replace Judas consisted of telling the group that Scripture said, "His bishopric let another take" (v. 20) and of urging the group that one "must … be ordained to be a witness with us of his [Christ's] resurrection" (v. 22). Being the leader that he was, Peter was able to quickly persuade the group to take action regarding a replacement for Judas even though, as we will note later, valid Scriptural support for the action was lacking. Peter's exhortation was stronger in zeal than in knowledge. His success in leading the group to proceed with the selection of a replacement for Judas was more a result of his own persuasive personality than it was of the weight of his arguments from Scripture.

Many exhortations and sermons are like this unfortunately. The personality of the preacher rather than the truth of the Scripture persuades the people to take action. Personality has its place, but it is no substitute for a correct exposition of the Scripture! Truth is more important in a sermon than the style of the delivery.

Qualification. Peter detailed the qualifications necessary for the one to replace Judas. He said the replacement must "have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us" (vv. 21, 22). These qualifications, whether or not all were necessary to be one of the twelve, would

cover a lot of ground. It would mean that the person had been faithful in following Christ, was not inexperienced in this ministry inasmuch as the person was with Christ during His entire earthly ministry, was acquainted with all the commands Christ had given to the disciples after the resurrection concerning their commission of preaching the Gospel to the world, and could get along well in the company of the disciples—a necessity if he was going to minister with the disciples.

There is great value in reviewing the qualifications of an office before nominations and elections take place. Too many times in nominating and electing folk for church offices, we **[Seite 213]** neglect essential qualifications; and this results in people getting into office who are not qualified for the office—which can and does cause much trouble in church.

Nomination. Two people were nominated for the office vacated by Judas in his apostasy. They were "Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias" (v. 23). These men have not been mentioned before in Scripture and will not be mentioned again. But that does not mean they did not follow Christ well, as the nomination would indicate.

There are many folk who are faithful followers of Jesus Christ whom we do not hear much about in this life, but who will be prominent in eternity. Fame in this life does not necessarily mean faithfulness, nor does lack of fame indicate unfaithfulness. Too many are greatly concerned about getting attention in this life but not about getting attention in the next life. However, it is the next life that matters.

Supplication. "And they prayed" (v. 24). Before the disciples chose one from the two nominated to replace Judas, they prayed. As we will note a bit later, they should have also prayed about who the two should be; but that does not stop us from observing some good points in this prayer.

First, their prayer tells us the essentialness of praying before we make an important choice of any kind. We need to pray for the wisdom from God to help us discern the right choice. Wrong choices abound today in many areas—especially do we see this in marriages—and it is often because folk seldom pray before they make their choice.

Second, their prayer tells us an important need for the one taking the office. "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men" (v. 24) speaks of the need of a good heart for the one who would replace Judas. It is the heart of the man that is really important. Many problems in our churches today are a result of getting people into office who do not have a good heart. They may have ability for the task—and that is not to be played **[Seite 214]** down—but unless their heart is right with God, all their talent and ability will not be enough to do the task

properly.

Third, their prayer tells us the truth about sin. In the course of their praying, they said, “Judas by transgression fell” (v. 25). How true that describes the work of sin—it causes men to fall. Sin never lifts one up to a more nobler life but always lowers the sinner. Adam and Eve transgressed, and we call it the “fall” of man. But though sin always leads downward in conduct and character, many people today think they can overcome that fact. Therefore, laws are passed to legalize all sorts of evil (such as gambling, abortion, homosexuality, booze, and other sins) thinking that in legalizing these things society will be benefited—gambling, as an example, is suppose to benefit the economy. But what sick thinking this is about sin benefiting society, for all sin does is ruin. It only lowers the character and condition of society; it does not lift it. Gambling, abortion, homosexuality, booze, and other sins only curse society; they do not benefit it. Sin brought Judas down from high privilege and blessing to terrible depths, and it still does the same to those who pursue it.

Fourth, their prayer tells us of the eternal abode of Judas. The end of their prayer mentioned that Judas would “go to his own place” (v. 25). That is an ominous statement. It speaks of his destiny and simply says that Judas will go to the place fitting for his conduct. Judas, therefore, will go to hell for all eternity. What a contrast this is to the place which Jesus described as the future place of the other disciples. Christ spoke of this glorious place after Judas had left the disciples in the Upper Room that night before the crucifixion. He said to the eleven disciples remaining in the Upper Room, “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). Judas was not included in that promise, for he was gone and so was not included in the “you.” He had another place to go to when he died. What a difference in places. One is “everlasting fire” which is “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). The other is a glorious place “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

What place is your place? You may not reject Christ with **[Seite 215]** the drama that Judas did; but if you reject Him, you will also end up in the same place where Judas went when he died. One either goes to heaven or hell for eternity, and the destiny of the soul is determined by one’s attitude toward Jesus Christ.

Divination. The selecting of the one to replace Judas was done by the casting of lots. “And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (v. 26). The casting of lots was not unknown to men in determining the will of God. While not used often for this purpose, there are some notable cases in the Old Testament where it was used to determine the will of God—it was used to choose which one of the two goats

would be the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:7–10, 21, 22), it was used to determine the division of the land in Joshua's day (Joshua 14:2, 18:6), and it was used to determine who would perform various duties in the Temple (1 Chronicles 25:7, 8; 26:13ff). When lots were used properly under the sanction of God, the principle in the casting of lots is found in Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing [decision] thereof is of the LORD."

After this incident in Acts, lots were never recorded as being used again to determine the will of God; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit was the guide to follow, not lots. The casting of lots represents a lower spiritual situation than relying upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Throwing dice and like minded ways of determining action is certainly not sanctioned by this or any other occasion of casting of lots in the Bible. This method today is always associated with evil which says something about the improperness of the practice.

2. The Problem in This Replacing of Judas

There is considerable controversy regarding the choice of Matthias as the one to replace Judas Iscariot. Hence, we believe it will be helpful for us in our study of Peter, who led in this replacing of Judas, to note why this choice is rejected by some, **[Seite 216]** including this writer. Those who reject Matthias as the replacement of Judas believe that Paul was the one who eventually replaced Judas in the official numbering of the twelve disciples. We want to list here some of the problems (some of which we have already briefly addressed) in the view that Matthias, not Paul, was the true replacement of Judas as one of the twelve apostles. These problems include the lack of precept, the lack of precedence, the lack of prayer, the lack of piety, and the lack of persuasion.

The lack of precept. Peter endeavored to build his case for replacing Judas at this time on the basis of Scripture. He said, "For it is written in the book of Psalms … his bishopric let another take" (v. 20, cp. Psalm 109:8) and then insisted that one "must … be ordained" (v. 22) at that time to replace Judas in being a witness of the resurrection of Christ. While that Scripture does show that it was the will of God to replace Judas, there is nothing in Scripture which remotely suggests the replacement should take place at that time under Peter's leadership. Hence, Scripture cannot be construed as giving an order to replace Judas at that particular time.

What is even more notably absent in regards to any kind of precept to replace Judas at that particular time is a command from Christ. If Christ had given orders to replace Judas, Peter would surely have appealed primarily to them. That would be the most justified reason for choosing a successor to Judas then. But there is not the slightest hint in Scripture that Christ, during the forty days

between the resurrection and ascension, ever brought up the subject let alone gave an order to replace Judas. The only conclusion is that Peter acted on his own without a command from Scripture or Christ. It is a bit of the old impulsive nature of Peter that is behind this action.

The lack of precedence. The original twelve apostles had been called directly by Jesus Christ Himself. There had been no election, no casting of lots, no human input into the choice of **[Seite 217]** the twelve. Therefore, what would encourage one to think that the replacement of Judas was going to occur any other way? With Christ making no mention of the replacement, it certainly would seem fitting to conclude that Christ Himself would fill the place of Judas in His own good time. We have no reason to think otherwise; and, in fact, we have a most detailed calling by Christ later on that certainly was of the same character as the calling of the original twelve. It is the calling of Paul. Three times in the book of Acts (9:3–6, 22:6–10, 26:12–18), we read of the account of Paul's conversion and call to service in which Jesus Christ Himself spoke directly to Paul. Later on Paul, in speaking of his calling, makes it clear how he was called. He said he was "an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1); and "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 1:1). His was a Divine call. His calling experience says so and his personal testimony says so. Therefore, if we are looking for a calling that would correspond to the calling of the original twelve, we have it in Paul's calling—not in the casting of lots for Matthias. Paul's calling had a precedence to it; but Matthias' calling did not—his was of man, by the will of man, and as a result of man.

The lack of prayer. They did indeed pray about the choice when they had the choice limited to two men. But the lack of prayer occurred in the choosing of the two. When they went about choosing Joseph and Matthias out of all the brethren, they are not recorded as going to prayer then to seek God's help as to who the two finalists should be. That lack of prayer was dishonoring to God, for it limited His participation in the matter. It also hindered the group from learning and doing the will of God.

Do we not all act this way at times? We only bring God on the scene at the last moment. We do not let Him in on preliminary decisions, just on final decisions. We plot and plan without seeking His wisdom in prayer as to what to do, but then ask God to bless the endeavor we have decided upon doing. We decide **[Seite 218]** how we want something done, and then we ask God to help us do it that way rather than ask God first how He would like things done. We ask Him what path of *several* we should choose rather than first asking Him to

reveal what of *all* paths He wants us to go. If we are going to pray that God will show us which of the two, how much more we ought to pray for God to show us who the two are. This lack of prayer in one's life is why many folk are so confused about God's will and are puzzled as to why God does not plainly show His will to them.

The lack of piety. The original disciples were chosen by Jesus Christ. What a lower method it was to choose a replacement by casting lots! As we noted above, casting of lots was done on some occasions in the Old Testament to determine the will of God. But when we come to the New Testament with Christ and the Holy Spirit, men no longer needed to cast lots. Some have said that the disciples needed to cast lots here because Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit had not occurred yet. But the Lord had already "breathed on them [the disciples], and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). With the presence of the Holy Spirit, casting of lots is an insult! Griffith Thomas said, "It seems strange to read of companions of Jesus using this old-time method. It appears to show a lower plane of spiritual action than we might have expected." Lack of piety in determining the will of God will hinder one from discovering the will of God. It certainly did not help here.

The lack of persuasion. The arguments by those who believe that Matthias, not Paul, took Judas' place are not persuasive in our judgment. We note some of these arguments and why they are not persuasive.

First, one argument says that there was a need to have twelve apostles to witness for Christ on the Day of Pentecost in order to make the witness "official." Therefore, it was necessary to replace Judas quickly. However, there is not one bit of evidence **[Seite 219]** anywhere in Scripture that would hint that twelve were needed to make the witness of Christ's resurrection "official" at Pentecost. In fact, this "official" business seems strange and ridiculous to us.

Second, some argue that instead of replacing Judas, Paul replaced James (the brother of John) who was martyred (Acts 12:1, 2). However, there was no need to replace James. James was a believer. Judas needed to be replaced because he was not a believer. The twelve apostles are in the future to "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). Judas, of course, will not be there; but James will be. So no replacement was needed for James anymore than replacements were needed for the other apostles when they died. This argument about Paul replacing James is an argument which has no logic or Scripture support at all and, in fact, supports the heretical idea of apostolic succession.

Third, others argue that the action of appointing Matthias to take Judas' place should be accepted because Scripture does not specifically condemn the

appointment. That argument will not carry much weight, however, because you can, of course, also argue that the appointment is condemned because Scripture does not specifically approve of the appointment either. There is a lot of action recorded in Scripture that is not specifically approved or condemned. But we are not left in the lurch without any way of knowing whether these actions are good or bad. Comparing Scripture with Scripture we can know the rightness or wrongness of any action. God does not have to specifically tell us whether every incident recorded in Scripture is right or wrong conduct. He has given us principles by which we can judge, and He expects us to use these principles to discern the character of the action. So it is in the appointing of Matthias to take the place of Judas Iscariot.

Fourth, Paul's reference to the "twelve" in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is argued by some to say Paul was not a member of the twelve. But an examination of the text in 1 Corinthians will not support that at all. The number twelve in that text has to be symbolic, **[Seite 220]** not exact. It is like calling the Big Ten Conference the Big Ten even though there are more than ten schools as members. The occasion Paul referred to was the first Easter Sunday night. There were, in fact, only ten of the apostles present at that time—not twelve. Judas was dead and Thomas was absent (cp. John 20:19–24).

Fifth, some opposing Paul's replacing of Judas sometimes try to support their case by arguing that Paul was never associated with the twelve apostles in mention in Scripture; and, therefore, this means he was not the replacement of Judas. However, Paul himself speaks of himself in the group of apostles. "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death" (1 Corinthians 4:9); "Have we not power [right] to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles" (1 Corinthians 9:5); "For I am the least of the apostles [Paul's great statement of humility regarding his office as an apostle], that am not meet [fit] to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9); "I was not a whit behind [in qualification] the very chiefest apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5); and "for in nothing [in qualification] am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (2 Corinthians 12:11). It would be hard, in view of these statements, to say the Scripture does not associate Paul with the other apostles.

Paul also made other statements about his apostleship which give further support to the position that Paul did indeed replace Judas. Paul said, "Am I not an apostle?… have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you [by Paul]" (2 Corinthians 12:12). In nine of the fourteen epistles he wrote, he called himself an apostle. It is true that the word apostle was sometimes used in a generic sense, but Paul's

usage of it in defending his office of an apostle is obviously more than in a generic sense. If it wasn't, all his efforts to defend his apostleship are so pointless and meaningless. But Paul's defense of his apostleship was not pointless and meaningless, for he was defending an important position—his inclusion in the twelve apostles.

[Seite 221] Our conclusion here is that Peter acted in the flesh, not in the spirit in leading the group in the Upper Room to replace Judas. While he evidenced that he was getting back on his feet again after the terrible denials, Peter was still acting impulsively. His action had no support from the Scripture or Christ. However, few of us can throw stones at Peter. We have all acted hastily and impulsively many times instead of waiting patiently on the Lord. The disciples were told to "wait" (Acts 1:4) in the Upper Room. It is very difficult on the flesh to wait; and oftentimes instead of waiting on the Lord, the flesh takes things into its own hands and acts contrary to the will of God. The disciples were not perfect; and even though their conduct in the book of Acts is so much more commendable than it was in the Gospels, they still were human and evidenced it at times. This should not discourage us but should encourage us. For one thing this tells us that Scripture is true, for fraud would never report such weaknesses of its heroes. For another thing it tells us that though we fail at times, God can still use us to do a great work for Him. Scripture does not represent those who did great things for Him as being superhuman. It only represents them as being humans just like us; but who, in contrast to us, simply relied on God and, as a result, accomplished much for Him.

[Seite 222] XIII

THE COMMENCING

ACTS 2:1–41

THE DAY OF Pentecost was a day of beginnings. One of the most important things to commence on the Day of Pentecost was the preaching to the world of the message about the resurrected Christ—and Peter led the way in commencing this preaching. On the day of Pentecost, Peter "standing up … [and] lifted up his voice" (v. 14) before a great multitude in Jerusalem and preached a message whose main theme was the resurrected Christ. This message is recorded in detail in our text and will be the subject of this chapter.

Pentecost (the word means fifty) was one of the seven important religious feasts on the Jewish calendar (see Leviticus 23 for all seven). It was also called "the feast of harvest" (Exodus 23:16) and "the feast of weeks" (Exodus 34:22). It came fifty days after the feast of the Firstfruits. The feast of the Firstfruits came the day after the Sabbath following Passover. In the year of Christ's crucifixion

and resurrection, the feast of Firstfruits occurred on the day of Christ's resurrection. So that year, the Day of Pentecost also occurred fifty days after the resurrection.

When we mention Pentecost today, we do not think of some Jewish feast. We think of Acts 2 and the occasion when the believers were "filled with the Holy Ghost" (v. 4) and given the miraculous ability to speak other languages which they were not previously able to speak. This made it possible for all the different nationalities of people then in Jerusalem (and there were a number of different nationalities—note vv. 8–11) to hear the message about Christ in their own language. If folks would read **[Seite 223]** correctly this account in Acts of Pentecost, it would stop the present day tongues' movement cold. A tongues' movement like Pentecost would mean that missionaries would not have to spend years learning foreign languages. But we note that those in the tongues' movement today have to spend years learning foreign languages like anybody else—which does not say much for the present day tongues' movement.

The unusual events which occurred on the Day of Pentecost "amazed" and perplexed ("in doubt" [v. 12]) the crowds in Jerusalem who observed these miraculous actions. They asked "What meaneth this?" (Ibid.); and "Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine" (v. 13). It was in the midst of this confusion and criticism by the crowds on Pentecost that Peter with great boldness "lifted up his voice" (v. 14) and spoke to the people the message we will study in this chapter. Peter's message that day was a gem. Griffith Thomas said this about Peter's sermon: "The sermon of Peter on the Day of Pentecost is the first instance of Christian preaching, and it introduced a new type of religious ministry. The occasion was without parallel, the substance of the sermon was fresh and startling, and the impression made by it was strange and unprecedented. It is a model of homiletics for all Christ's preachers and of didactics for all Christian teachers."

Peter's message can be divided into three parts: the explaining of the situation (vv. 15–21), the exalting of the Savior (vv. 22–36), and the exhorting for the sinner (vv. 37–40).

A. THE EXPLAINING OF THE SITUATION

Peter of necessity began his great Pentecost Day sermon by giving an explanation of what all the unusual goings on meant. The explanation involved the defending of the disciples and the defining of the day, and it would lead into and serve as an introduction to his preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. The Defending of the Disciples

The accusation which said that those filled with the Spirit **[Seite 224]** were

drunk was a mean, scornful, and unjustified accusation. Peter dealt with that the first thing and for good reason—the character of the messenger is vital in the proclamation of the truth. When the messenger has poor character, the message can lose its validity in the listeners' ears even though the message proclaims the greatest of truths.

We need more emphasis in this area in our churches today. We have so many unsavory characters in the pulpit and in other positions in the church today, and it really hinders the testimony of the church. Churches often spend much in advertising to promote the church not realizing that the best advertisement the church can have is holy character in the congregation. Peter saw the importance of good character in proclaiming the message, and so the first thing he did when he stood up to speak was to clear the speakers of the false charges brought against them. The particular charge here (drunkenness) was not difficult to refute, for in those days people did not get drunk in the morning hours (unlike our day when people get drunk at all hours). Peter reminded the crowds of that fact when he said, "For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day" (v. 15). This statement quickly and effectively refuted the false accusation.

The accusation reminds us that if the devil cannot hinder the servant of God by corruption, he will try to hinder the servant by calumny. He will see to it that God's faithful servants are accused of many bad things. Often the accusations are utterly ridiculous—as was the accusation of the speakers at Pentecost—but that does not stop the devil from making the accusations, nor does it stop people from believing them. Many of God's faithful ones have been viciously attacked by calumny. Joseph in the Old Testament was slanderously accused of attempted adultery when he was the most pure and moral soul around. David was falsely accused by his enemies and by Saul. Mephibosheth was slandered by Ziba; Naboth was terribly slandered by Jezebel which cost him his life; and Paul was ever being misrepresented by his enemies. God's servants must not be surprised **[Seite 225]** when falsely accused, and neither must they let false accusations discourage them and stop their faithful performance. We cannot stop calumny, but we can stop corruption. Calumny will never do the damage in our service for God (even though it may take our life) as corruption will. Personal sin, not slander by others, is what causes the greatest hindrance in service. It may not always be easy to see that fact in this life, but nevertheless it is the truth.

2. The Defining of the Day

The world never understands Divine movements, and they certainly were baffled regarding the situation before them at Pentecost. The reason the world does not understand a Divine work is that the world lacks spiritual discernment.

However, we can obtain spiritual discernment by getting into the Word of God. Perplexities and puzzles of life are best explained by the Scripture. But because man despises the Scripture, he walks in a lot of darkness needlessly.

Because the Word explains God's working, Peter went immediately to the Word to explain the unusual happenings of that day. Peter was a man of the Word. We saw this characteristic of Peter earlier when he said that one of the main reasons he followed Christ was that, "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). So as soon as he refuted the false charges against the saints of God who were speaking in the languages of the many nationalities present, he wisely went straight to the Scripture to explain the meaning of all that was going on—the phenomenon of the filling of the Spirit, the resultant speaking in tongues, and the message God's people spoke. Peter went to the book of Joel (later in his sermon he will also go to Psalms). He said, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (v. 16); and then he quoted a passage from Joel. In quoting from Joel, Peter addressed three important things his audience needed to consider that day. He spoke of the Spirit of God, the signs of the times, and the salvation of man.

[Seite 226] *The Spirit of God*. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (vv. 17, 18; cp. Joel 2:28, 29). Before we look into the details of these verses, we need to remember that prophecy often has a near and far fulfillment. Pentecost did not exhaust Joel's prophecy obviously. But plenty of it was being fulfilled at Pentecost in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers was a tremendous blessing. In the Old Testament this blessing did not exist. There were times when the Spirit of God came temporarily upon some individuals for special tasks. But the filling of the Spirit of God upon the masses of the people was not experienced in the Old Testament. Though not experienced, it was desired, however. A pious person would crave such a blessing. But today so many people have such a poor sense of values that few are interested in any kind of spiritual blessing, but most prefer carnal things to spiritual blessings.

Two great blessings of the Holy Spirit are especially mentioned in this text quoted by Peter from Joel. They are the blessing of Divine power and the blessing of Divine revelation.

First, the blessing of *Divine power*. We need Divine power in order to serve God well. "Prophesy" (v. 17) is the blessing of Divinely empowered service

here. Prophesy does not always mean to predict, but it also means to proclaim the message of God. The prophets of God in the Old Testament were not always predicting the future but spoke much about people's sins and their need of repentance. The pouring out of the Spirit of God upon the believers at Pentecost would enable them to proclaim the truth of God with spiritual power.

Today we still need spiritual power in our preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Without this power we only go through the motions and our messages lose their punch. We may be **[Seite 227]** clever in the choice of our words, skilled in oratorical abilities, have a charming voice, be very entertaining, and able to move people emotionally with our illustrations; but if spiritual power is lacking, our preaching will be useless where it counts the most.

Our churches need to get back to emphasizing and praying for the power of the Holy Spirit in presenting the message of God. Too often churches put the emphasis on promotional gimmicks, humorous or tear jerking illustrations in sermons, and clever invitation tricks to get people down the aisle instead of relying on and seeking the power of God to do the work. So the results are only outward, not inward—and unfortunately the average church member cannot tell the difference so is easily deceived about the character of the boasted results of many famous preachers.

Second, the blessing of *Divine revelation*. The mention of "visions" and "dreams" speaks of Divine revelation. Today we do not need those particular forms of revelation, for we have the Word of God. But we do need the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to open the Word of God to us and show us what it means and how we are to apply it to our lives. Any saint of God who has diligently studied the Word of God knows what a glorious blessing it is to have the Word of God open to him as he studies it. It is a blessing we must have if we are going to understand, appreciate, live, and proclaim the Word in a God-honoring way.

The signs of the times. Peter quoted further in Joel to deal with the subject of the signs of the times. "And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come" (vv. 19, 20; cp. Joel 2:30, 31). This part of Joel's prophesy certainly had more application than just to Peter's time. We can see both a near and far fulfillment of it. The near fulfillment would be some forty years after Pentecost when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus of Rome in a terrible **[Seite 228]** bloody carnage. The far fulfillment will be in the days of the great tribulation which is still future.

The important thing about the signs which we need to note is that they speak

of judgment. The message of the signs is this: reject God's way, and terrible judgment will eventually be your portion. God is a God of grace; but if you continually walk in rebellion to God, as much of the world is doing, you will one day run out of grace and meet judgment head-on. Peter's audience was being made aware of God's ways in a very dramatic and dynamic manner on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter uses this quote from Joel to warn them about judgment. They must not reject God's ways or they will invite the wrath of God to come upon them.

The salvation of man. The last verse quoted from Joel says that Jesus Christ is the way of escape from the judgment portrayed by the signs. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 21; cp. Joel 2:32). The crowd Peter was speaking to did not recognize that "Lord" spoke of Christ, but Peter will make that clear in the theme of his message (which we will note shortly). This quote from Joel by Peter is a wonderful summary of the message of salvation. We note six things about salvation in this verse.

First, the *need for salvation*. Peter's speaking of the judgment of God in the signs' message underscores very pungently the need of salvation. Because man is a sinner, he is under the condemnation of sin and, therefore, desperately needs deliverance, if he is to avoid terrible judgment. We have many needs—physical, material, financial, etc.—but no need compares to the need of salvation.

Second, the *invitation of salvation*. The invitation is to everyone. "Whosoever" means the offer of salvation is not limited to any particular group, tribe, race, location, position, possessions, and the like. The invitation is for all men regardless of how much they have sinned; and it is to all men; for all men have sinned and, hence, need salvation. The limitation is only to **[Seite 229]** those who reject the offer.

Third, the *concern for salvation*. Only those who "call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." And only those who are concerned about their soul's need of salvation will call upon the Lord to be saved. The great tragedy among people is that so few people are concerned about their soul's destiny. They are concerned about a host of other things; but speak to them about their soul's future, about their need of salvation; and they will show no interest whatsoever. Furthermore, few are concerned enough about the soul destiny of others to do anything to help others to come to Christ.

Fourth, the *personalness of salvation*. The person calling on the Lord is the person who gets saved. "*Whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." The calling on the Lord for salvation is a personal act. "Whosoever" means the one needing salvation, not someone who is calling on the Lord for

others. One is not saved by proxy but by personal faith in Jesus Christ. Folk are not saved because they live in America, have believing parents, attend a fundamental church, or are a good friend of some of God's servants. They are saved only when they themselves call upon the Lord. Salvation is a personal matter. One must make the decision personally. Others may and should pray for another person's salvation, but they cannot call on the Lord for that person.

Fifth, the *source of salvation*. One must "call" on the Lord to be saved. Salvation comes from Jesus Christ. It is the Lord Who will save. Take Christ out of this verse on salvation, and you do not have any salvation. One may trust in a million other things or people for salvation and be ever so earnest about it, but they will not be saved. Salvation is exclusively through Jesus Christ. Peter included no other. The Bible includes no others. It is through Christ and Christ alone. Later, in another message, Peter will make it very clear that "Neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12).

It is instructive to note here that in the Joel text which Peter quotes, the "Lord" of Peter's quote is written "LORD" (all caps) **[Seite 230]** in Joel in the KJV. This means the name in Joel refers to Jehovah. Therefore, Peter's reference to the Joel text is a good reference on both the Deity of Christ and on the fact that the Jehovah (generally written "LORD"—all caps) of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New Testament.

Sixth, the *blessings from salvation*. These blessings are all found in the word "saved." We are not only "saved" *from* many terrible things, but we are also "saved" *to* many wonderful things. We are saved *from* the wrath, the judgment, and the condemnation of God which means we are saved from eternal doom in the torment of hell fire. On the other side of salvation, we are saved *to* an eternity in heaven and all the blessedness which that will involve. The human mind cannot fully comprehend the horrors of not being saved, but neither can it fully comprehend the blessings of being saved. The worst thing that can happen to a person is to enter eternity without being saved. The greatest thing that can ever happen to a person is to enter eternity saved.

B. THE EXALTING OF THE SAVIOR

The explanation part of the message ended with the quote from Joel on the subject of salvation. Peter fittingly used this quote to lead into the main theme of his message, namely, Jesus Christ. Here he will really exalt Christ by making it very clear that Jesus Christ is the "Lord" of the Joel text Who does the saving. This Christ exalting message addresses the validation, crucifixion, resurrection, and glorification of Christ.

1. The Validation of Christ

Peter spoke first of the life of Christ on earth. He said, "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" (v. 22). Peter said three things here about the life of Christ on earth which would exalt Christ by showing how valid His claims as Savior and Messiah were. He said Christ's **[Seite 231]** life on earth was approved by God, authenticated by miracles, and attested by many.

Approved by God. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God" was a great way of introducing Jesus Christ. It was obvious that Christ was not approved by many men. But that was not important—what was important was that He was approved of God. Peter, himself, heard God approve of Christ at the transfiguration of Christ when God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5).

Men seem for the most part to be only interested in obtaining the approval of their fellow man. To obtain that approval they will often do just about anything. They will at times go so far as to throw character to the winds in order to secure the approval of man. But obtaining the approval of man should not be our priority in life. Rather, obtaining the approval of God should be our top priority. To have God say of us, "I am well pleased" will top any accolade this world could ever give us.

If we live to obtain the approval of God, as did Jesus Christ, we will discover that like Christ, we will not have much approval of the world. Especially in this wicked and godless age in which we live will one devoted to the Lord find it difficult to gain the world's approval. In fact if one is approved well by the world, we may justifiably suspect that one is not living for God very well.

Authenticated by miracles. Christ, by miracles, gave plenty of proof that He was the Son of God. "By miracles [literally 'powers'—the three words, miracles, wonders, and signs all describe what we generally call miracles] and wonders and signs, which God did by him" underscores the great amount of evidence that proved Christ was all He claimed to be. Note that miracles, wonders, and signs are all in the plural form which emphasizes that the evidence was abundant. John also noted the abundance of evidence when he closed his book by saying, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did [to prove **[Seite 232]** Who He was], the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). Ponder that statement by John for awhile. It says volumes about the amount of evidence Christ gave. The evidence was so great that "even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." Obviously, that is a figure of speech by John; but even then it shows that the proof of Christ's claims was overwhelming.

Unbelief does not have a leg to stand upon. Rejection of Christ is simply willful refusal to consider the facts. No one can reject Christ on the basis that there is not enough proof to believe Him. Peter is showing to the crowd gathered at Pentecost the utter folly of rejecting Christ.

Attested by many. These "miracles and wonders and signs" were done before many, many people. Christ did these works "in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." Multitudes witnessed the life and performance of Christ. The works of Christ were done in full view of the public where all could hear and see. Cults and isms cannot make this boast. False religions operate clandestinely. Their religious relics and claims are not permitted to be examined to see if they are genuine. Their writings, like the book of Mormon, are not able to be substantiated by archeology and other examinations. Their claims of miracles are suspiciously lacking in credible witnesses. But Christianity is a different story. It is glad to open the books, to invite investigation, and to have its claims examined with scrutiny. After all, the more truth is examined, the more accurate and honorable and trustworthy it is found to be. The more Christ is scrutinized, the more His claims are validated. If we are scrutinized, will our claim of being a Christian be validated?

2. The Crucifixion of Christ

After speaking about the life of Christ, Peter goes to the death of Christ and gives true perspective about His death. He says of the death of Christ, "Him, being delivered by the determinate **[Seite 233]** counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (v. 23). Peter cites three things about the crucifixion. They are the character of the crucified, the control of the crucifixion, and the corruption of the crucifiers.

The character of the crucified. Peter made it very plain that the One Who was crucified was of impeccable character. After telling of the great life of Christ and how it was approved of God, authenticated by miracles, and attested by many, he then says it was "Him" Who was crucified. There are two important truths which we can learn from the fact that the One crucified was of impeccable character.

First, it shows that *Christ was qualified to die for our sins*. The lambs sacrificed in Jewish religious ceremonies for the sins of the people were to be without blemish. This pictured the fact that the One to die for the sins of man must be sinless. Christ was indeed absolutely sinless. Thus, He and He alone could die for our sins.

Second, it shows that *character does not exempt from shameful treatment*. One may have great character yet still be treated shamefully by man. In spite of the great character of Christ, in spite of the excellent testimony He had before man, He was crucified by man. We may live impeccably before man, but that

will not stop us from getting brickbats instead of the deserved bouquets. In an ungodly world, the godly will not be treated well. Men treat the godly on the basis of their (the ungodly) hearts not on the basis of the hearts of the godly.

The control of the crucifixion. Peter let the crowd know that the crucifixion of Christ did not occur because God had lost control. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” declares that God was always in control of the whole situation. Though to the human mind the crucifixion would seem a tragedy and the end of a great ministry, yet the crucifixion was, in fact, essential for man’s salvation. The **[Seite 234]** crucifiers may have thought they were winning a round with God; but, in fact, they were accomplishing God’s purpose.

Man may be terribly vile and appear to gain the upper hand over God, but never believe it. God so controls things that He will use the evil of man to bring about His purposes. It was so with the crucifixion; and it is so in the events of our lives, too. As the Psalmist says, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psalm 76:10).

The corruption of the crucifiers. The last thing Peter said about the death of Christ was that those who did the crucifying were wicked people. “Him … ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” God is sovereign and in control of all things, but this does not exonerate evil. Some pervert the fact of the sovereignty of God to the extent that they believe and teach that man is not responsible for his deeds. They conclude that whatever they do has already been planned by God, and there is nothing they can do about it. Hence, they conclude that they are not responsible for their evil. But Peter shows that sort of thinking is without validity. Crucifying Christ was a vile, wicked deed; and men will be judged for such wickedness.

In citing the corruption of the crucifiers, Peter did not hesitate to indict his audience. He said “ye” did the awful deed and have the wicked hands. There was both boldness and wisdom in the indictment.

First, it would take tremendous *boldness* to stand before this crowd of unbelievers and indict them as he did. Peter literally took his life into his hands. They were the ones who crucified Christ—they could do the same to him. This boldness of Peter is certainly a contrast to his cowardliness on the eve of the crucifixion when he denied Christ three times during the grossly unjust trial given Christ. And this boldness of Peter shames those preachers who are afraid to preach unacceptable truths to their congregations for fear of losing their popularity or job.

Second, the indictment reflected *wisdom* in that you will never convict a sinner of his sins if you do not indict him. We **[Seite 235]** have a number of

people today who have the strange idea that all we need to preach to sinners is that God loves them. They think we will insult and chase away sinners by telling them they are sinners. But you will search Peter's sermon in vain for support of such thinking. To convict sinners, the preacher must preach against sin. Preaching the love of God has its place and is not wrong, that's for sure. But never leave out preaching against sin, if you want to truly convict and convert sinners.

3. The Resurrection of Christ

From the crucifixion of Christ, Peter's sermon moved on to the resurrection of Christ. Peter began the subject of the resurrection of Christ by saying, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of [held by] it" (v. 24); and then he presented some excellent proof for the resurrection. We will look in detail at that which Peter presented as proof of Christ's resurrection. The proof was threefold: it involved David—the great king of Israel, the disciples of Christ, and the demonstration the multitudes had just seen prior to Peter's sermon.

It was important to substantiate the fact of the resurrection for two reasons. First, the *denial of it*. Many did not believe it. They knew that Christ lived on earth and that He had been crucified. But the resurrection was a different story. The story that His body had been stolen by the disciples was very current (Matthew 28:11–15), and this story would be most acceptable to the unbelievers of the day. Second, the *dependency upon it*. It was very important to substantiate the resurrection because the entire Gospel message depended upon it. If there is no resurrection, there is no Gospel message.

The testimony of David. Peter gives David the most time of the three witnesses for the resurrection that he cites in his sermon. To establish the credibility of David (a very wise thing to do whenever you bring anyone on the scene to be a witness), Peter reminded the crowd that David was a patriarch, a prophet, **[Seite 236]** and he was present. Being a *patriarch* (v. 29) meant he was a loyal respected leader of the Jews—and the crowd standing before Peter was all Jews. Being a *prophet* (v. 30) meant his words concerning Christ would hold much weight, for as a prophet he spoke under the inspiration of God. Being *present* meant that "his sepulcher is with us unto this day" (v. 29). David was no illusion or invention of the mind—they could go see his grave.

By establishing the credibility of David, Peter makes most acceptable what David says. Actually Peter would not have to persuade the crowd much as to the credibility of David, for most knew about David. But Peter reminded them anyway of what a great man David was in order to refresh their minds and, hence, add further weight to David's testimony. Here is a great man, Peter says;

and this great man said Christ arose from the grave. This would be weighty testimony even to the skeptic in the crowd.

What did David say about the resurrection of Christ? He said of Christ, "Thou [God] wilt not leave my [Christ's] soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer [allow] thine Holy One to see corruption" (v. 27). Peter further elaborates on what David said in "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (v. 31). David gave excellent testimony regarding the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, Peter was very wise in bringing in the witness of David, a witness the crowd would respect, to testify of the resurrection of Christ.

The testimony of the disciples. Peter gives a short but important statement to the crowd that the disciples have seen Christ. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all [refers primarily to the eleven, cp. v. 14; although more than the eleven saw Christ after the resurrection and could indeed be included in the 'all'] are witnesses" (v. 32). Many in the crowd probably thought the disciples stole the body. But Peter insists that the disciples have seen the resurrected body. That the disciples **[Seite 237]** claimed they had seen the resurrected Christ is a very important and valid testimony of the resurrection. One of the chief reasons this is so is that the disciples did not at first believe in the resurrection. Hence, they would not be anxious to perpetuate a story that Christ had risen from the grave. But the fact that they, who formerly did not believe in the resurrection, are now so adamant about seeing the resurrected body gives strong proof of Christ's resurrection. Furthermore, since we know today that the disciples could not and would not have stolen the body, Peter's bold claim that they saw the resurrected Christ is today even a more weighty proof of the resurrection than it was in Peter's time.

The testimony of the demonstration. In giving the witnesses of the resurrection, Peter leads up to the demonstration of the Holy Spirit upon the believers which the crowd has just seen. This, too, says Peter gives witness to the resurrection of Christ. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (v. 33). Peter is masterfully weaving his sermon together. His sermon is not a disjointed bunch of statements spoken "off the top of his head" as many sermons are today. It was well organized. Peter presented his case extremely well. As Griffith Thomas said of this sermon (which quote we noted at the beginning of this chapter), "It is a model" for God's preachers and teachers.

4. The Glorification of Christ

The final point in Peter's message about Christ was the glorification of Christ.

The One Whom the crowd had wickedly crucified is the One Who is and will be greatly glorified in heaven and earth. Four things about the glorification of Christ are stated here in Peter's sermon: the place, person, power, and position of Christ.

His place. The present place of Christ is one of great honor. Peter said the resurrected Christ has ascended into heaven and is **[Seite 238]** "by the right hand of God exalted" (v. 33; cp. Ephesians 1:20). The right hand is a place of honor—and "exalted" emphasizes that fact. Therefore, Christ's place in heaven at the right hand of God must be understood as a place of extreme honor. Let Peter's audience ponder that awhile. Let them ponder the fact that He Who is so esteemed of God as to sit at God's right hand is the One Whom they so rejected that they killed Him. What a difference between Christ's place in heaven and the place He was generally accorded on earth. And faithful followers of Christ will experience the same thing. Their place in the world will be far different than their place before God.

His person. Peter clarifies that it is Christ, not David, Who is the One sitting at the right hand of God. "For David is not ascended into the heavens; but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand" (v. 34). This was an important notation, for the Jews had a habit of attributing the prophecies of Christ to the one who made the prophecy. So Peter is careful to note here that David was not speaking of himself but of Jesus Christ.

This statement by David in the Old Testament reminds us there is more in the Old Testament about Christ than most realize. If we are more careful in our study of the New Testament, we will see this truth more and more about the Old Testament. As an example, it is Christ's words in the New Testament about Jacob's ladder of the Old Testament that show us that the ladder spoke of Christ (John 1:51). After the filling of the Spirit, the apostles were ever quoting from the Old Testament about Christ. Some think we should only preach from the New Testament, for they think only the New Testament gives us the Gospel. But you can preach a lot of Gospel from the Old Testament, too. After all, the early church only had the Old Testament; and they did exceedingly well in preaching the Gospel from it. To say we ought not preach from the Old Testament is to show one's great spiritual ignorance of the Word of God.

[Seite 239] *His power*. The power of Christ is exalted by Peter when he states that the foes of Christ would be Christ's "footstool" (v. 35). Christ was not overcome when crucified. He willingly gave His life. He is all powerful, and the day will come when all those who thought they had power over Him in the crucifixion will realize (and most of them to their horror) that it was not their power at all but simply the power of Christ that permitted the crucifixion. Pilate

was so foolish as to think he had power over Christ and said to Christ, “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10). Jesus set him straight in a hurry when He promptly answered him by saying, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11).

Man is ever assuming that he controls his life and will do what he wants, when he wants, where he wants, and how he wants. Such thinking leaves out the power of God. Folk who think this way need to be duly appraised of the power of Christ, and they will be one day—if not through repentance then through retribution.

His position. Peter said, “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 position Jesus Christ has is that of both “Lord” and “Christ.” “Lord” speaks of His authority over us—He is our Master; we are but servants. “Christ” speaks of the fact that He is the Messiah. Earlier, when speaking about the witness of David to the resurrection of Christ, Peter touched on the fact of Christ being the Messiah. He said of David, he “being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his [David’s] throne” (v. 30). Sitting on David’s throne meant that Christ was indeed the Messiah. The Jews by and large rejected this claim of Christ and still do. But that does not nullify the fact. The throne of Israel belongs to none other than Christ. The fact that He is alive means there are no descendants **[Seite 240]** to claim the throne after Christ. When the king dies, another takes the throne. But Christ is alive and the throne is His. He was born in the royal line. The Jews could have examined the records and discovered that none other than Christ could claim the throne. But, of course, they refused; for they were not interested in facts.

C. THE EXHORTING FOR THE SINNER

Peter saw what all preachers want to see after they have preached their sermons. He saw great conviction come upon the hearts of the listeners. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles [who we would say today were then acting as personal workers], Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37). The word “pricked” means “pierced” and reminds us what Hebrews 4:12 says about the Word of God. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit … and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Peter had preached the Word, and it had penetrated the hearts of men as only the Word can. Would that preachers and churches today would pay attention here and thus give more emphasis to the

Word of God in their ministries.

Peter's response to the inquiry of the convicted crowd was an excellent exhortation that included a precept, a promise, and some pleading.

1. The Precept

The precept in Peter's response to the convicted crowd's inquiry was an exhortation to do two things. He said to "Repent, and be baptized" (v. 38). That is still the message we ought to proclaim to sinners today. This twofold message involves both the inward (repentance) and outward (baptism) acts of man and is both Godward (repentance) and manward (baptism).

Repentance. This involves a good deal more than coming **[Seite 241]** down an aisle and signing a decision card. One does not have to repent in order to do that. Repentance involves at least three things—sorrow, separation, and the Savior. First, it involves *sorrow* of heart over the transgression—not sorrow that one got caught in doing evil, but sorrow that one dishonored and hurt God and others in doing evil. Second, it involves *separation* from sin. True repentance includes turning from sin. Repentance means to turn about, to change direction; hence, it means to turn from sin. We have a popular religion today, that wants to pass itself off as evangelical Christianity, which does not require people to forsake their sin. So our churches are filled with folk who live just like the world. But true repentance forsakes sin. Third, repentance very importantly involves the *Savior*—turning to the Savior to ask Him for salvation. When one repents he not only turns *from* something; but he also turns *to* something. He turns *from* his sin and turns *to* the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Baptism. This comes after—not before—repentance. It does not save but is only a testimony to others that one is taking their stand with Jesus Christ. It is public confession of receiving Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior. While we do not necessarily oppose the public invitation, we do believe that the best and most Scriptural invitation is not to come forward and fill out a decision card, but rather to meet the preacher in the baptistry. In Peter's day, you manifested your decision to receive Christ as Savior by being baptized, not by coming down the aisle and filling out a decision card. We have, unfortunately, put the emphasis on the aisle and the card today. That is a poor substitute for baptism. True, many who come down the church aisle eventually are baptized. But it is baptism, not coming down an aisle and filling out a decision card, that is the way by which we are to indicate our decision to follow Christ.

If we understood this fact about baptism, we would not get confused when Scripture sometimes seems to make baptism essential for salvation. What Scripture is saying is that your claim of following Christ as Savior is worthless until you have **[Seite 242]** publicly been baptized. Hence, if you are not baptized

and do not pursue baptism, it is a strong indication that you are not saved. That is why baptism is so closely associated with salvation in some Scripture passages. It does not save and has nothing to do with making you saved—but it says plenty about whether you are saved or not; so much so that we can say if you do not pursue baptism, you probably are not saved.

2. The Promise

The promise Peter gave them was that when they repented and were baptized, they would "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (v. 38). This promise was for all believers. It was not something they would gain after hours of agonizing prayer and pleading with God (as the some people seem to think is necessary in order to receive the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues); but the moment you receive Christ as Savior, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What a blessing this gift is. The Holy Spirit seals us (Ephesians 1:13); that is, He brands us as belonging to God which is the guarantee of the security of our salvation. He is the down payment of our redemption which assures us that God will indeed fully consummate our salvation (Ephesians 1:14). He teaches us and illuminates us in the things of God (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10). He helps us to pray (Romans 8:26, 27). And He empowers us and enables us with gifts to serve, as we have seen here in this second chapter of Acts.

Natural man has little if any appreciation for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. But the spiritual man will value this blessing above all the material and physical blessings one can have upon this earth. How you view this blessing will evidence where you are spiritually.

3. The Pleading

The precept and promise were followed by pleading with the people to "Save yourselves [by coming to Christ] from this untoward [wicked] generation" (v. 40). Peter earnestly exhorted **[Seite 243]** the crowd to come to Christ in order to be saved from the judgment that would come upon the souls of that wicked generation (and upon the unrepenting souls of every generation). Peter, unlike many ministers in our time, believed in Divine judgment; and so he earnestly warned people to turn to Christ to escape this judgment. People who think it is impolite and unnecessary to preach such messages are a curse to society. Judgment must be part of the message, as we have noted many times; or souls will have no reason to seek salvation.

A great many people heeded Peter's preaching and pleading that day. In fact some "three thousand" were baptized (v. 41). And that day was not the end of the coming of people to the resurrected Christ for salvation. Pentecost was the beginning. Peter would preach more sermons, and more souls would be saved. Opposition would also arise and attack the preaching of Christ, and Peter will be

a target of much of the opposition. Satan knows who is causing him trouble. Peter was a big problem for him. Satan may have thought he had finished off Peter the night before the crucifixion, but Pentecost would vanquish all those ideas. Anyone who would stand up and preach as he did is going to be a great threat to Satan's program but a great help to God's program. Do you bother Satan? Do you help God?

[Seite 244] XIV

THE CRIPPLE

ACTS 3

THE FIRST MIRACLE of healing recorded of the early church in the book of Acts took place when Peter and John had an encounter with a cripple at the Temple in Jerusalem. The miracle occurred significantly when "Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour [3 P.M.]" (v. 1). Prayer and service are inseparable. Those who are faithful in prayer will not be without opportunities to serve and will serve well. To be faithful in prayer, one will need definite times and places for prayer—here it was the "hour of prayer" at the Temple. The times and places may vary with each individual; but unless they are established, one will spend little time in serious prayer—and that will hinder one's service.

As Peter and John came to the "gate of the temple which is called Beautiful" (v. 2), they were confronted by a cripple who "asked … [for] alms" (v. 3). Times have not changed much, for many people still view the place of worship chiefly as a place of material handouts. Such folk are not interested in what they can get spiritually from church but only what they can get materially. Yes, some people come to the church for material help because they deem church people more charitable than the world—and that is generally true—but these beggars still come only for the material and not the spiritual. It has been our observation that if these beggars would come to the church for their spiritual needs, they would probably eliminate the reasons why they come to the church for material needs.

The cripple who met Peter and John got something far better **[Seite 245]** than alms. Instead of giving the man alms, Peter and John through the power of Christ performed a miracle for the man which resulted in his healing. It was an astonishing event to those at the Temple who were witnesses of the miracle, and it provided Peter with an opportunity to give them a message concerning Jesus Christ.

In this study of Peter and the miraculous healing of the cripple at the Temple, we will consider the miracle for the man (vv. 1–10) and the message for the multitude (vv. 11–26).

A. THE MIRACLE FOR THE MAN

The miracle of the cripple's healing is in many ways a wonderful illustration of the Gospel. We will emphasize this fact in our study of the miracle as we will note the condition of the man that needed healing, the cure for the man through Peter and John, and the confirmation of the man's healing.

1. The Condition

The man begging for alms was in a very pathetic condition. He was "lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple" (v. 2). To examine the cripple's condition, we will look at the location of his problem, the duration of his problem, and the limitations from his problem.

Location of his problem. The man's problem was in his legs, for he was lame. This lameness was something more than that which would cause him to limp when he walked; it was a lameness that was so bad he could not walk at all. His legs were so crippled he had to be carried wherever he went.

The lameness of this man pictures the moral condition of mankind. We live in a world of cripples in the area of character. Sin has crippled man so greatly that he cannot walk in the ways of God. God has exhorted mankind to "walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you" (Deuteronomy 5:33). **[Seite 246]** But because of the crippling effects of sin, he is "without strength" (Romans 5:6) to walk in God's ways. Therefore, man needs the miracle of salvation to remedy the situation.

Duration of his problem. This man was "lame from his mother's womb" (v. 2). He was born a cripple. Acts 4:22 tells us the man "was above forty years old" at the time of his healing. So he had been a cripple a long time.

Like the cripple physically, man is born lame spiritually. He is a sinner by birth. Sin has been with us a long time—ever since Adam and Eve. Sin is the problem of the ages. Of course, most people do not want to admit that sin is our main problem; and many do not like the idea that man is born a sinner. Especially do many so-called experts in the field of child behavior dislike the idea that man is born a sinner. This truth exposes as bunk a great deal of philosophy about children and child raising that these self-professed experts are constantly proclaiming. Some of these so-called experts want to tell us that the behavior of children which we find unacceptable is not wrong behavior but is the developing of the child. We answer by saying it is not the developing of the child that is evident in such behavior but the depravity of the child. Scripture says, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). If the thinking of man is evil from his youth, then so will his deeds be evil from his youth. But this truth is not palatable to man. So instead of condemning evil

deeds, he honors them and legalizes them. It is as foolish as honoring the fact of lameness.

Limitations from his problem. The cripple who confronted Peter and John could not go anywhere on his own. He had to be "carried" (v. 2) wherever he went. Furthermore, he was so limited by his lameness that he was reduced to begging. Therefore, he was not productive but was a burden on society.

Sin always limits the sinner. It limits such things as his happiness (broken homes, as an example), his health (AIDS demonstrates this problem vividly), and his productiveness (alcohol, as **[Seite 247]** an example, takes a big toll on workers' attendance and skills); all of which makes him a burden to society. Few things illustrate this burden to society as well as the welfare crowd does. They are so limited by their sinful ways (such as their drinking and immorality) that they are unable in body and desire (mostly desire) to work. All they can do is beg; and, as a result, they have become a big and disgusting burden on taxpayers' money.

2. The Cure

Peter and John did not give the beggar a handout. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (v. 6). Instead of giving the beggar a coin they gave him a cure. They wisely addressed the cause of the man's problem rather than the effects of the problem. F. B. Meyer said, "We must see to it that we do not rid ourselves of responsibility for them [the beggars] by a passing dole. It is wiser far to consider the cause of distress and poverty, and endeavor to remedy it, than to drop a meager coin into the outstretched hand and pass away." Our government certainly could use this advice, for they seem to think that money will solve the problems of the welfare crowd and of the unruly rioting people in our inner cities. However, rather than giving these folk money, we need to give attention to that which has made these folk a problem to society.

Churches also need this advice. Too often when people show up at church and want a handout, the church gives them a few dollars and then sends them on their way. We, however, have made it a practice in our ministry to not do that. Instead, we have dealt with the person in regards to their spiritual condition—which is the root cause of their begging a handout from the church. Of course, many of the beggars are not interested in attending to their spiritual needs and will get very upset when you focus on that instead of giving them money. But giving them money is nothing but a quick cop-out of responsibility, and it simply hinders and delays the solving of the beggars' problems. Of course, we will be criticized for our attitudes and **[Seite 248]** actions in this area and will be called hard-hearted and other such names. But the beggars who evidence little interest

in their spiritual needs are the ones to be criticized, not those of us who are addressing their spiritual need. If the lame man had refused the cure from Peter and John because he was more interested in material handouts, it is the lame man who needs to be criticized—not Peter and John.

As we examine the cure, we again look at the Gospel in this incident. We can see the Gospel of Christ in the source, speed, and sufficiency of the cure.

Source of the cure. The source was Christ. "In the name of Jesus Christ … rise up and walk" (v. 6). Leave out Christ and you do not have a cure. Later in Peter's message to the multitude about the curing of the man, Peter will emphasize the fact that it was Christ Who did the healing. As in salvation, the cure came from Christ. It did not come from man; nor did it come from the cripple. Peter and John did not have the power in themselves, and the cripple could not heal himself either. It was all Christ.

Speed of the cure. The cure was instantaneous, for "immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength" (v. 7). The cure was not a process of many weeks and months of gradually getting well. This aspect of the cure reflects one of the great facts about salvation—salvation is instantaneous the moment one asks Christ to save him. You will never find an account in Scripture where once a person believed in Christ, his salvation came some weeks or months later. Salvation always came the moment the person believed.

We can be mighty glad that salvation comes in an instant. What a fix we would be in if it took a period of years. If it did, many would never be saved before they died. They would die before the process was completed. But one of the blessed truths of the Gospel is that as soon as folk put their trust in Christ, they are instantly saved.

[Seite 249] *Sufficiency of the cure*. This cure was not partial. It was not a cure that affected one leg but not the other. It was not a cure which gave him strength to walk but only with a severe limp. No, this cure was absolutely complete; for he was seen "walking, and leaping" (v. 8).

When Christ saves it is sufficient. You do not need something else to make the saving of your soul complete. The legalists in the days of the early church tried to add adherence to the law to complete salvation. Another group that wanted to add to the salvation process in those days was the Gnostics with whom Paul had to deal. They wanted to add the learning of knowledge to make salvation complete. The problem of denying the sufficiency of Christ in salvation is still with us today. The church of Rome wants to add purgatory; others want to add church membership, baptism, and the doing of good deeds. But when Christ saves, nothing else is needed. He does a complete job. He is totally sufficient.

3. The Confirmation

The evidence of the healing was obvious, for he was "walking, and leaping" (v. 8). Peter and John did not need to go around and try to convince people that the man was healed, for it was most evident to anyone who knew the man that he had been healed. The evidence was not questionable or hard to find. It was right before their eyes and undeniable.

A true salvation experience will also show plainly. When someone claims to be saved—or when some preacher claims to have had many conversions in a service—the evidence will be most apparent, if it is real. Lack of obvious evidence gives justified reason to suspect that there has not been any true salvation experience.

We would especially note here that the confirmation of the man's healing was not found in something odd, strange, or curious; but it was found in the common round of life—in both his walk and his talk. Salvation will be confirmed in the same manner. It is not by some bizarre act or deed that we best convince **[Seite 250]** men we are saved, but it is simply by our walk and talk that we give the best evidence of our redemption.

Walk. He who had never been able to walk at all is now seen "walking" (v. 8) and also "leaping" (Ibid.) which eliminates any question about his legs being healed. In the same manner, when a lost soul is saved, he will also show it by his walk. He will start walking in the ways of the Lord; whereas he formerly did nothing of the sort. And walking in the ways of the Lord, you will see him in church, too. The first place the healed man went to after being healed was "into the temple" (Ibid.), the place of worship. When a person is truly saved, we can expect the same. A professed convert who does not show up in church to worship is a suspect convert.

We simply cannot get excited about the claims of many preachers and evangelists regarding the many souls they say were saved in their services; for when we observe their boasted converts, we do not see a change in walk. Therefore, we discount the conversion experience. "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16) is the test, and many of these so-called converts do not pass this test.

Talk. The healed man was "praising God" (v. 8) as a result of his healing. His lips as well as his legs now honor God; his talk as well as his walk glorify God. When a person comes to Christ, it will affect his tongue. And this change will not be hidden from the public, for "all the people" (v. 9) were cognizant of his praising God. If you claim to have faith in Christ and people around you cannot tell it by the way you talk, you probably do not have it. It does not take long for true Christianity to show in a person's lips. But he who has little honor for God

in his lips gives little evidence of salvation.

B. THE MESSAGE FOR THE MULTITUDE

As was the case on the Day of Pentecost, so it was here—the world does not understand a Divine work. "And as the lame **[Seite 251]** man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering" (v. 11). Peter quickly recognized this situation as an opportunity to preach Christ. "And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people …" (v. 12) by preaching to them Jesus Christ. Peter's sermon here was another great sermon like the one he preached on the Day of Pentecost. Christ was again the central theme. Peter spoke of the glory for Christ, the rejecting of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the believing in Christ, the ignorance about Christ, the fulfillment in Christ, the repenting about Christ, the testimony about Christ, and the blessings in Christ.

1. The Glory for Christ

The first thing Peter did in his sermon was to make it clear that it was Jesus Christ, not Peter or John, Who effected the miracle of healing. "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 walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus [in this healing]" (vv. 12, 13). Unlike so many folk today, Peter did not want the glory and credit. He was quick to give it to Christ.

Peter was concerned to honor that which God honors. God is in the business of honoring Christ, and so Peter wants to honor Christ. But few men are like Peter. They do not care to honor what God honors. God honors Christ; but man dishonors Him and in some terrible ways as TV, Hollywood movies, and apostate preachers have demonstrated. God honors truth, but man exalts falsehood by making lying appear clever and profitable. God honors virtue, but man gives its accolades to some of the most perverse and unholy of practices. Failure to honor what God honors will bring great condemnation from God. No one will prosper where it counts the most when they do not honor what God honors.

[Seite 252] 2. The Rejecting of Christ

Peter told the crowd that they "denied him [Christ] in the presence of Pilate, when he [Pilate] was determined to let him go … ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you" (vv. 13, 14). The word "denied" here is a different word in the Greek than the word used to describe Peter's denial the night before the crucifixion. The word used to describe Peter's denial means to disavow something—Peter disavowed that he knew Jesus Christ. The word "denied" in our text means to speak against, hence, to reject

something or someone. Peter is here indicting the crowd for rejecting Jesus Christ. Peter characterized the rejection as an act of both stubbornness and stupidity.

Stubbornness. They rejected Christ in spite of the fact that "Pilate … was determined to let him go." God does so much to encourage us to believe. In fact, so much does He encourage us by various means, that we can correctly conclude that those who go to hell do so because they are stubborn. They harden their neck to all encouragements to be saved. All appeals and opportunities to encourage one to turn to Christ are rejected. God worked in Pilate's heart to want to let Christ go. A corrupt Roman ruler was actually (unknown to himself) trying to keep these people from rejecting Christ. But these folk still persisted in calling for Christ's crucifixion in spite of Pilate's contending with them (cp. Matthew 27:22, 23 as an example). It was a case of great stubbornness.

People often try to conceal by many guises their stubbornness to believe. But their unbelief is still stubbornness. And stubbornness explains why talking and preaching to some people about Christ is like speaking to a brick wall—there is no penetration. No amount of reasoning will persuade them, and the best of arguments will not convince them, for they are too stubborn to yield to the truth.

Stupidity. The stupidity of their rejection of Christ is seen in **[Seite 253]** their asking for Barabbas to be released to them instead of Christ. Barabbas was a rascal. Scripture describes him as a notorious prisoner who was guilty of many crimes including murder (Luke 23:19). But still the people preferred him over Christ. So Peter said they "desired a murderer to be granted unto you [them]; and killed the Prince of life" (vv. 14, 15). They rejected the giver of life ("the Prince of life") for the taker of life ("a murderer"). They rejected the holy and just ("Holy One" and "the Just") for the unholy and unjust (Barabbas the criminal).

This is ever the history of sinful man. He persists in sin which will destroy him and scorns righteousness which will bless him. He must have his drink, his immoral escapades, his gambling, and other vices; but he quickly and gladly gives up righteous living. So he chooses to be destroyed instead of being blessed. Stupidity describes his attitude and conduct, even though intellects in places of education praise him for it.

3. The Resurrection of Christ

Peter does not let the crucifixion of Christ end the story of Christ. He quickly brings in the resurrection. He said the crowd "killed the Prince of life, [but adds] whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses" (v. 15). How important the resurrection truth is. Had Christ not been raised, Peter would have no message. He could not go on. But He is raised from the grave. Peter speaks of the power effecting the resurrection and the proof accompanying the

resurrection.

The power effecting the resurrection. The power behind the resurrection was "God." Man can boast of much power—he can build powerful machines, motors, and bombs. But he does not have the power to raise men from the dead. Some are foolish enough to think man is going to possess this power someday. These folk go so far as to freeze corpses trying to preserve them until the day man has the power to restore to life. But all of that is in vain, for only God can raise from the dead.

[Seite 254] *The proof accompanying the resurrection*. As he did in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter offered as a proof of Christ's resurrection the fact that the disciples had seen the resurrected Christ ("we are witnesses"). It was great proof, as we noted in our last chapter, because the disciples originally did not believe Christ would rise from the grave. They thought the crucifixion was the end. And even when they were first told that Christ was risen, they still did not believe it (Luke 24:10, 11). Hence, their claim of seeing Christ would not be viewed as mere wistful thinking. It was not fanciful hope against hope, but it was most credible evidence.

4. The Believing in Christ

Peter has shown the Divine side of the healing, now he shows the human side. God, through Christ, was the power that healed the man. But the man would not have been healed had he not believed in Christ. Peter said it was "through faith in his [Christ's] name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (v. 16).

Faith in Christ works great wonders in man. This cripple was "made … strong" and given "perfect soundness" as a result of faith in Jesus Christ. The world mocks the idea that something so simple as merely believing in Christ can bring great changes to a person. They think only their complex plans and programs can change man. They are ever legislating and appropriating for great grandiose programs which they think can change bad men to good men. But faith in Jesus Christ will accomplish infinitely more for man in five minutes than all the boasted programs of men will accomplish in five millenniums. We are in great need of strength of character and soundness of thinking today. But it will not come apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

5. The Ignorance About Christ

Peter attributed the people's wicked conduct towards Christ **[Seite 255]** to ignorance. He said, "And now, brethren, I wot [know] that through ignorance ye did it [crucified Christ], as did also your rulers" (v. 17). The ignorance here was the worst kind of ignorance, and it was also willful ignorance.

The worst kind of ignorance. No ignorance hurts man more than ignorance about Jesus Christ. You can survive many kinds of ignorance but not this one. Ignorance of Christ will curse you throughout eternity. In the quest for knowledge today, men are learning everything but what is most important to learn. We do not despise the learning of other things, but we are stating here that nothing is so important to learn as the truth about Jesus Christ. Ignorance of Christ resulted in the killing of Christ, the very Son of God. That ought to convince man that this ignorance is the worst kind of ignorance possible.

Our Christian schools and colleges need to be reminded of the importance of learning about Christ. Much emphasis in our Christian schools is being given to enlarging the curriculum, but we do not detect much emphasis on enlarging the curriculum in teaching about Christ and His Word. And some of the things being enlarged in the curriculum ought to be decreased or even dropped, such as, the emphasis on psychology and drama and modern art. We need to put the same emphasis on the knowledge of Christ that Apostle Paul did when he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:8).

The willful kind of ignorance. The ignorance which crucified Christ was a willful ignorance. Some would make Peter's statement about ignorance a sort of softening of the condemnation of the action of crucifying Christ. Ignorance does not excuse from evil, but in some cases it may minimize the guilty. But not in this case! The evidence Christ gave the people makes any crucifying of Christ willful ignorance. They chose intentionally to reject the truth. The rulers would not check the records to verify Christ's claims of His identity, and they and the people **[Seite 256]** would not accept the miracles and messages of Christ. There is no mitigation of evil here. It is willful ignorance and such ignorance will find no sympathy from God.

Willful ignorance is still a problem today in spiritual things. We all could know more about the things of God, but we choose not to. Folk skip church and thus avoid increasing their spiritual knowledge by a willful choice to do other things. Few study the Bible regularly but willfully choose to limit their spiritual knowledge by doing other things than studying the Scripture. Parents will insist and see to it that their children do not miss school where they can learn their ABC's. But the same parents will frequently take their children out of Sunday School and church to travel on some pleasure trip. That is willfully perpetuating spiritual ignorance.

No one can complain that deficiency in spiritual knowledge is a result of their lack of opportunity. Rather it is a lack of will. Folk simply do not choose to learn spiritual things. They willfully choose to be ignorant of important spiritual

truths.

6. The Fulfillment in Christ

Peter told his audience that the suffering on the cross by Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy. “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled” (v. 18). Paul would later say the same thing when he said, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The crucifixion of Christ fulfilled a host of Scriptures. Christ’s death was announced repeatedly in the Old Testament. Such passages as the great fifty-third chapter of Isaiah declared the vicarious sufferings of Christ.

In speaking about the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Christ’s death, Peter indicates he has come a long ways from those days when he fought the idea of Christ suffering and dying and had to be severely rebuked by Christ for his attitude (Matthew 16:21–23). Now he not only accepts the idea that Christ had to die, but he also substantiates it by Scripture. In a **[Seite 257]** few years, Peter grew a good deal spiritually. Would that more of our church members would do likewise. But too many stagnate after salvation and grow very little spiritually the rest of their earthly sojourn.

That Christ’s death is predicted in such detail in the Scripture emphasizes two important truths about the crucifixion. We have noted these truths earlier in this book, but we will note them briefly again here. First, it *verifies the control of God*. The crucifixion was not a time when God lost control to the belligerence of man; but rather the death of Christ for the salvation of man was planned in detail by God before time began. Second, it *validates the claims of Christ*. He was indeed what He claimed to be. No other person fulfilled Scripture about these predictions as did Christ. He is, therefore, the Promised One. He is the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of man.

7. The Repenting About Christ

Peter’s sermon was aimed at getting people to repent—to change their attitude about Jesus Christ. All the indicting and explaining was for the purpose of leading souls to receive Christ as Savior and Messiah instead of rejecting Him as they were now doing. So Peter said, “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; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” (vv. 19–21).

The repenting about Jesus Christ would result in blessing both for the individual and for the nation.

Blessing for the individual. The great blessing for the repenting individual is

the blessing of the removal of sin. “Repent … that your sins may be blotted out.” There is no greater blessing from repentance than having our sins blotted out. It opens the door of heaven for us. We cannot enter heaven with any charge of sin against us. The record must be clean. Our **[Seite 258]** sin must be completely removed. It must be blotted out, or we will go to hell when we die. Repentance gains us this great blessing of the washing away of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Blessing for the nation. Beginning with “when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord,” Peter shows the crowd what repentance about Jesus Christ would do for the nation. If the entire nation repents, it would bring the return of Jesus Christ to be Israel’s Messiah. This would result in the restoration (“restitution” of verse 21 means restoration) of the nation. But most of Israel did not repent. Individuals repented—and their number was in the thousands (cp. Acts 4:4)—but that was only a small fraction of the nation. Most of Israel continued to reject Christ. In our next chapter, we will notice that the rejection was very strong and resulted in much persecution for the apostles and other believers.

The repentance of Israel regarding Christ is going to happen in the future, however (cp. Zechariah 12:10–12). And when it happens, Christ will rule over Israel and restore its borders and make it the greatest nation on the face of the earth. What a restoration that will be! Israel now only has a fraction of the land which belongs to the nation. When Christ returns, Israel will get all of its land—other nations will not be able to hinder the restoration either.

It will not be the United Nations or any nation that will bring about this restoration. It is Christ Who will bring it about. That should not surprise us, for surely today we have learned that politicians and all the legislation they propose and pass will never restore anything worthwhile.

8. The Testimony About Christ

To reinforce his message and to give a warning to those who would not repent, Peter again appeals to the prophets.

First, he cites what Moses said about Christ in the great passage in Deuteronomy. “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A **[Seite 259]** prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (vv. 22, 23; cp. Deuteronomy 18:15–19). Peter minces no words. While offering the grace of repentance, he still warns sternly that failure to repent brings destruction. Peter had not learned, like many modern day preachers, to soften up his message so it would be more palatable to sinful man.

However, Peter was not trying to hold a job, be popular, or gain some high position in the eyes of man; so he preached the truth as it should be preached.

Second, Peter said Samuel and other prophets spoke similarly. “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (v. 24). Peter’s message has plenty of support from the Scriptures. He is not giving them a message of his own ideas. He is preaching the Word!

Our messages need the support of the Scripture, or they are not valid messages. That is one reason why so-called Christian psychology, which is so popular today, is so perilous. It lacks Biblical support. It appeals to the flesh, but it will not appeal to the spirit. These men who call themselves Christian psychologists do not exposite Scripture. They exposite experience. There is a world of difference between the two. One is of God; the other is not. One is trustworthy; the other is not.

9. The Blessings in Christ

Peter finished his message to the multitudes by restating the truth that Christ is the source of blessing. He had stated at the beginning of the message that it was not he or John that had the power to heal; but it was Christ. Here at the end of the message, he reminds the crowd that Christ is the great Blesser; and he adds that salvation is the great blessing from Him. “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (v. 26).

[Seite 260] *The Great Blesser*. No one is a greater benefit, a greater blessing to society than Jesus Christ. But the world has not caught on yet. This is evidenced by the fact that they do not want Christ. They do not want the Great Blesser. All over the world, the efforts to drive Christ out of society are ever present. The increasing efforts to pervert our constitution about the separation of church and state are nothing more than the devil’s attempt to rid us of Christ. Other nations are even more overt in their anti-Christ attitudes. Yet, what a tragedy it is that men drive out the very One Who could benefit them the most.

The great blessing. Though Peter and John through the power of Christ had worked a miracle of healing on the cripple, yet it was the blessing of “turning away … from … iniquities” that is emphasized here in the closing of his message. The greatest blessing that Christ can give is the forgiveness of sins. But people seek Him for a host of other reasons rather than for the forgiveness of sin. Folk want Christ as a teacher, an example, a martyr, a revolutionary, and a supplier of material and physical needs before they want Him as Savior. Israel wanted Christ as a King but not as a Redeemer. They wanted to be saved from their political foes but not from their spiritual foes. They wanted Him to deliver

them from the enemy without but not from the problem within. The healing of the cripple was a wonderful blessing. Christ can and does graciously supply physical and material needs, and it is not wrong per se to seek Him for these things. But the wrong is in seeking Him for these things only and not for the more important spiritual needs of our lives. In what is Christ most important to you?

[Seite 261] XV

THE CONFINEMENT

ACTS 4:1–30

SHORTLY AFTER PENTECOST the early church began to feel the wrath of the adversary for faithfully serving and preaching Jesus Christ. Their experiencing of hostility in the Lord's work is not uncommon, however; for whenever God does a work, you can count on the devil endeavoring to counter it.

Peter was understandably one of the main targets of the first persecution of the early church. His faithful service for Christ had done much to bring about the salvation of thousands of souls. He was, therefore, a special problem for Satan's kingdom.

In this study of the first persecution of the early church in which Peter was a prime target of the persecutors, we will note the reactivation of the persecutors (vv. 1–4), the review before the persecutors (vv. 5–12), the reasoning of the persecutors (vv. 13–17, 21), and the release by the persecutors (vv. 18–30).

A. THE REACTIVATION OF THE PERSECUTORS

During the time of Christ's ministry on earth, the persecutors were very busy. They would follow Christ around and dispute with Him and act hostilely toward Him. Then they plotted and planned how they could kill Him. But after the crucifixion and the resurrection, the persecutors were dormant for a short season, for Christ was gone, and the disciples were out of the public eye (while waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit). But the healing of the cripple and Peter's sermon following the healing reactivated the persecutors. The events of Pentecost did not seem to excite them much—although it doubtless put them on **[Seite 262]** the alert—but the healing of the cripple and Peter's sermon was too much for them. Therefore, they went on the attack again, so much so, that it resulted in Peter and John being put in confinement overnight by the persecutors. "And as they [particularly Peter, but also John] spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold [some place of confinement] unto the next day" (vv. 1–3).

In examining this reactivation of the persecutors, we will note the identity of the persecutors, the indignation of the persecutors, the incarceration by the persecutors, and the indifference to the persecutors.

1. The Identity of the Persecutors

The group which comprised the persecutors was made up largely of the Sanhedrin, the most powerful Jewish governing group at the time. Thus they did much of their evil through the auspices of the Sanhedrin—which gave their persecuting evil the appearance of respect to the populace. Our text lists some specific members of group: "the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees … rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas [a former high priest], and John [not the apostle but a member of the High Priest's family], and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest" (vv. 1, 5, 6). This list emphasizes that the persecutors were no second rate group in terms of position in the world. The persecutors were comprised of those in high and esteemed positions; and they represented the religious, intellectual, and governmental leaders of the Jewish community.

It is a habit of the devil to do his evil through those of high and respected positions in the world. This gives him greater clout. When a professor in college, or a man in high position in religion, or a high government official attacks the Gospel, people pay attention. In contrast, if some lowly skid row bum **[Seite 263]** attacks the Gospel, few listen. So Satan dresses up his evil in the finest clothes, gives himself the appearance of "an angel of light," and makes his workers look like "ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15). Therefore, do not be fooled by the status, the popularity, or the charming personality of the attacker. Compare what he says to what the Word of God says; and if it doesn't pass muster with the Scriptures—reject whatever the person says, no matter who he or she is.

2. The Indignation of the Persecutors

What upset the persecutors? They were "grieved that they [particularly Peter] taught the people, and preached though Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (v. 2). The word translated "grieved" means, according to A. T. Robertson, "to be worked up, indignant." Vincent describes it as being "vexed through and through." This tells us that the persecutors were very, very upset about the preaching of the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ. They most definitely did not like the message of Christ and His resurrection. The message of Peter got to them. It inflamed them with great anger. What a terrible response this was to the greatest message ever to come to man. Unbelief can bend one completely out of shape.

Satanic opposition is still rooted and grounded on the fact that Jesus Christ is

being exalted and that He is preached as dying for our sins and rising from the grave on the third day. Leave Christ out of the message and Satan will stop harassing you, but make Christ prominent and you will become well acquainted with the opposition of hell.

The attack today may be more subtle than in Peter's time. In Peter's day, they plainly said why they attacked (v. 18). Today, the enemy will attack the dress, delivery, character, and other things of the minister of the Gospel to try to stop the work of God. But do not be fooled by side issues. When an attack occurs, stop and ascertain what the one being attacked is saying about Christ. Is he faithful in preaching Jesus Christ? If so, you have the answer as to why he is attacked. And you also have **[Seite 264]** exposed the character of those who are attacking. This means that many dissident church members are more respected than they ought to be. They need to be exposed for what they often are—unsaved people who feign themselves as redeemed and who are a great tool of the devil.

3. The Incarceration by the Persecutors

Sooner or later those who oppose the message of the Word of God will do what they can to silence it. So while the message was going forth, the persecutors "came upon them … laid hands on them, and put them in [a] hold" (vv. 1, 3).

Freedom of speech and other freedoms will be taken away quicker from those who faithfully proclaim the Word of God than they will from anyone else. And do we ever see this happening in our country today! Homosexuals can go into schools and freely teach their filthy, wretched evil; but teachers in those same schools are not allowed to mention the creation view of the Bible. Graduation speakers can say any off-beat thing they want, but the Supreme Court says we cannot have prayer at a graduation exercise. Churches will experience more harassment over building and zoning restrictions than taverns, gambling joints, and other dens of iniquities. If there is the slightest mention of God in some government places, our courts will stop it; but the same courts will not stop pornography (some of the esteemed judges tell us they cannot even define it). We have read about a Bible study in a home being stopped because of some infraction of a city ordinance—yet beer parties and their noise go on and on.

But though confined and restricted, God's faithful ones still enjoy a freedom of soul which no persecutor enjoys. And unless the persecutors repent, they will someday experience a confinement that is not just some overnight ordeal (like the confinement of Peter and John) or for some years of life on earth—but for eternity. Better to have the freedom of the soul and be confined in some men's "hold" than have freedom on this earth but end up confined in the lake of fire for

all eternity.

[Seite 265] 4. The Indifference to the Persecutors

God is still on the throne. Man may rant and rave and appear to be pushing God off the throne, but it will never happen. Furthermore, when men seem to be getting the upper hand, God has ways of reminding men that they do not control nearly as much as they think they do and God is still in charge. So it was in Jerusalem at this time. Verse 3 of our text tells us that Peter and John were put in confinement, but verse 4 says, "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of men was about [better translated—'came to be'—that is, the total now saved since Pentecost] five thousand." At least two thousand more folks turned to Christ after Peter preached his second sermon. Three thousand came as a result of his first sermon; now another two thousand receive Christ, making the grand total five thousand. The persecutors may be able to arrest some people, but they cannot stop the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of people. People will be saved in spite of the persecutors. Everyone does not listen to evil leaders—contrary to what our liberal news media would like us to think.

This verse is a great encouragement to those who serve God faithfully but who experience a lot of adversity in their work. Sometimes it does look like the enemy is gaining the upper hand and God is being pushed aside. But never believe it. God so controls things that He can make the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10)—something we have noted before in our study of Peter. The very evil that man does is often used by God to accomplish His purposes. Men by their evil may appear to be stopping a work, but God only uses it to do an even better work. Persecution has often appeared to stop the work of God; but just as often, it has spurred on the work of God. The animosity towards the saints in our text was more than countered by a great number turning to Christ.

B. THE REVIEW BEFORE THE PERSECUTORS

After being left in confinement overnight, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin to have their case reviewed. In **[Seite 266]** looking at this review before the persecutors of the action of Peter and John, we will consider the inquiry of the persecutors and the indicting of the persecutors.

1. The Inquiry of the Persecutors

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them [Peter and John] in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (vv. 5–7). Two things, neither of which is good, can be said about this inquiry. It was ignorant of truth and it was

insulting of good.

Ignorant of truth. Though they were the leaders of Israel, these men doing the inquiring of Peter and John were so ignorant of what was going on that they did not know how Peter and John brought healing to the cripple. “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” was the question that exposed their great ignorance.

How often it is that people in prominent position in society are very ignorant of the most important issues of life. They know the ins and outs of politics and money and economics and technology and other matters; but when it comes to spiritual matters, they are virtual dunces. Ask the president of our country or some other high official a simple question about spiritual matters, and they will stumble around fishing for an answer because they do not know the answer. College professors in our large universities are no different. And these folk have no excuse for their ignorance. Their ignorance is willful just as the ignorance of the Sanhedrin was willful. Sin so controls their hearts that they do not want to learn the truth about God, about Jesus Christ, about spiritual matters.

In all our learning, let us not get so carried away in the learning of secular matters that we do not learn well in the spiritual area. Secular matters have their place, and it is not necessarily **[Seite 267]** a sin to learn these things. But spiritual matters have an infinitely higher priority. They have to do with the eternal destiny of our soul. Therefore, let us not be ignorant of the matters which are most important in life. Get into the Word of God and learn it well.

Insulting of good. In all of this examining of Peter and John, the Sanhedrin demonstrated they were in direct opposition of that which was good. They treat Peter and John like criminals, even though they had brought about the marvelous healing of a cripple. They treated the miracle of healing, which brought great blessing to a man crippled all his forty some years, as though it was an evil deed. And why is it that they are so insulting of good? It is because of their attitude towards Jesus Christ. They despised Him with a passion.

There is a direct correlation between our ability to honor the truly honorable and how we are honoring Jesus Christ. You cannot despise Christ and have a good sense of values. This fact is being evidenced more and more in our nation. We are seeing less and less honor and respect for that which is good. Honesty and morality, as an example, are being openly scorned and ridiculed today; while people of the vilest lifestyles are given an abundance of accolades. But we should not be surprised, for our day has less and less time for Jesus Christ; and that only predicts less and less honor for that which is truly good.

2. The Indicting of the Persecutors

After the Sanhedrin inquired about “what power, or by what name, have ye

done this?" (v. 7), Peter responded with a great response. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 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. This is **[Seite 268]** 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" (vv. 8–12).

Peter did not waste or water down his words. He got to the root of the matter quickly and went after the persecutors and indicted them plainly and powerfully. Peter spoke of the source of healing, the stone of rejection, and the Savior of mankind; and in each case, he plainly and boldly indicted the Sanhedrin.

Source of healing. The Sanhedrin wanted to know the source of the healing ("By what power, or by what name"), and Peter told them—it was Jesus Christ, the One Whom God raised from the grave. But in revealing the source of the healing, Peter severely indicted the Sanhedrin when he said of Christ "whom ye crucified." This was a real slap in their faces. It said the One Who effected the healing was the One the Sanhedrin had killed. That certainly does not say much for the Sanhedrin's wisdom and benefit to society. Peter's statement made it very obvious that the members of the Sanhedrin were fools in their attitude towards Christ. They were so ignorant and hostile to good that they crucified the One Person Who could bring such marvelous blessings, as this healing, to mankind.

As we have previously noted, the leaders in the world are too often a curse to mankind rather than a blessing because of their spiritual ignorance and hostility. A man in government leadership is not going to be of much help to the land when he is spiritually ignorant. Sometimes conservatives get all excited about some politician because he has associated with Christians at times. But this excitement is usually unjustified; for the politician, at his best, will generally be found to be in kindergarten spiritually; and that will not help much when he is in office.

Stone of rejection. The second indictment in Peter's answer was to refer to Psalms 118:22 and tell the Sanhedrin that the very stone, Jesus Christ, which was the corner stone ("head of **[Seite 269]** the corner"), the most important stone of the building, these persecutors had rejected, had "set at nought." Vance Havner tells of Joseph Parker, the eloquent English preacher of the early 1900s, referring to this text in Psalms and saying it illustrated "the ineffectiveness of the expert." Every age seems bent on demonstrating this stupidity of the experts who tried to

build without the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. As Vance Havner said, “Man will try all kinds of mud before he will try the Rock.” Ruins of failures are strewn across the pages of history as witness to the fact that you cannot build without Christ and really succeed. Israel tried it in Peter’s day and failed miserably and has suffered many centuries as a result.

But Israel is not the only one that has tried to build without the Chief Cornerstone. We, too, have often built without Him. We have tried to build empires of peace without Him, the Prince of peace; and the results have been war, bloodshed, and destruction. We have built our education without Christ in the classroom and, as a result, have become educated fools. We have built our homes without Christ, the Head of the home; and this has brought about the disintegration and ruin of marriages and families until “single parent” has become a common and even (of all things) a respected term. Many have tried to build their theology without Him. But unless your eternal hope is “built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness,” your hopes are doomed. Do not build without the Chief Cornerstone or your building will one day crumble into shameful ruins.

Savior of mankind. The final of the three indictments was to declare that the only way man could be saved was through Jesus Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other” (v. 12). The persecutors would not like that. They trusted in the law (which they did not even keep), in Moses, and in the fact they were blood relatives of Abraham (cp. John 8:33, 39). It was a severe rebuke to them that the only way of salvation was through the very One they had crucified. But they needed that rebuke. They were wrong in their thinking, and they needed to be told they were **[Seite 270]** wrong. You will never correct a person, if you do not tell them they need correction.

Men still fight the message of this verse. Be they Gentile or Jew, they would replace or add to Jesus Christ for their salvation. They simply will not accept the fact that Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of men. Works, knowledge, baptism, church membership, confirmation, and other things are relied upon to open the door to heaven; but “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).

C. THE REASONING OF THE PERSECUTORS

Peter’s response to the inquiry of the Sanhedrin silenced them. What they heard and saw put a temporary lock on their attack. So they called for a private meeting. “When they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves” (v. 15). They did not know what to do. “What shall we do to these men?” (v. 16). It is encouraging how God can, if He wishes,

confound the enemy ever so quickly.

In studying the reasoning of the persecutors, we will look at the conclusions they made which resulted in the calling for a private meeting and the concern they had which was voiced at the private meeting.

1. The Conclusions of the Persecutors

The Sanhedrin could not help but make four conclusions about Peter and John. And these conclusions were all against the persecutors. They concluded that Peter and John were courageous in character, commoners in society, companions of Jesus, and confirmed in healing.

Courageous in character. "They [the Sanhedrin] saw the boldness of Peter and John" (v. 13). Peter and John would not cower before this council of the Sanhedrin. This really bothered these leaders. Intimidation was one of the most effective methods they had for controlling the people. They did not need facts **[Seite 271]** to keep folk in line. They simply intimidated them. This is often the way evil men work. They try to present themselves as all powerful and all wise, so that you will not dare to cross them. But do not let evil bluff you. Stick with the truth and stand up and speak it.

The greatest courage is always displayed when men stand for Jesus Christ. Living for Christ is not a weakling's game as some think. Some view being a Christian as something for sissies, young children, and the aged—people who appear too weak to have the courage to stand for much of anything. But that is a lie hatched in hell, for living a consistent Christian life requires more courage than doing anything else. If you do not think so, then why are you afraid to pray for your meal in a public eating place? Why are you afraid to let folk around you know where you stand in regards to Christ and the Bible and things right and wrong? Why are you afraid to live your faith in front of the folk you work with day after day? The faithful followers of Jesus Christ are the most courageous people in the world. Do you belong to this group, or are you a coward spiritually? Remember what Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32, 33). It takes courage to confess Christ before men; the coward will not do it.

Commoners in society. The Sanhedrin "perceived that they [Peter and John] were unlearned and ignorant men" (v. 13). "Unlearned" and "ignorant" means they were not educated and trained in the schools of men as other professionals were (the word "ignorant" does not carry here the usual meaning we have for it in our language today—here it means to be untrained). What the Sanhedrin perceived was that Peter and John, though preaching with great skill and

bringing about a miracle healing, were not trained in the schools of the religious leaders. They did not have the formal training that was so esteemed and revered. **[Seite 272]** Today we would say they did not have a college degree; they were not ordained by some big church; they did not have a "D.D." or other status-giving degree letters in front or behind their name. In short—they were not accredited by the world. They were just commoners, just plain ordinary folk. Yet, they performed with excellence and this caused the Sanhedrin to really marvel. How could they do this without what the world thinks is so important? The answer is that Peter and John had been trained by the greatest Teacher of all —Jesus Christ, and they had been "filled with the Holy Ghost" (v. 8). But the persecutors knew nothing of this sort of training and enabling. All they knew were the schools of men.

We do not condemn going to college to be trained for the ministry; we do not condemn being ordained; and we do not necessarily condemn a man being awarded a "D.D." or some other degree. The lesson here is that we can have all these things and still be nothing for God. But if we are fully surrendered to God, have been devoted to the study of the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit works through us, we can do wonders for God whether we have all the training, ordaining, degrees, accreditation, etc. which the world thinks is so important. Today we put so much emphasis on training the head that we forget that training the heart is the most important training of all. Let the heart be filled with devotion to Christ, and let it be surrendered to the leading of the Holy Spirit Who guides us through the Word of God, and that person will serve God with excellence.

Companions of Jesus. The Sanhedrin "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (v. 13). These persecutors put two and two together and concluded that Peter and John had been keeping company with Jesus. They concluded that fact because of the way Peter and John were speaking and acting. What a great compliment this was for Peter and John!

People can tell where you have been, whom you have been with, and what you are. If you are truly devoted to Jesus Christ, as Peter and John were, the world will figure it out quicker than **[Seite 273]** you think. You do not have to carry around a big Bible in a conspicuous manner or wear a big button on your lapel to inform others that you belong to Christ. It will show in your manners, your dress, your attitude, your speech, your work, and in many other ways. If you have the real thing people will know. If they have to ask you if you are a Christian, you may need to go the mourners' bench.

People can tell if you have character trouble, too. You may try to conceal the fact that you have been in evil places with evil people and that inside you are not

really a true believer. But it will show. Tell-tale signs will give you away. Come from a den of iniquity, and the smoke smell on your clothes gives you away. Be with evil people, and your language will slip and give you away. Be ungodly but feign yourself a Christian, and sooner or later the Judas will come out of you.

Confirmed in healing. "And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.… for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it" (vv. 14, 16). The Sanhedrin could not argue with the obvious. They knew without a doubt that the miracle had been performed. The very man who had been a cripple—whom they knew well, for he had been laid at the gate day after day to ask for alms—was "standing" there with the disciples in an uncontestable confirmation of his healing. Yet, they would not believe or honor the truth.

How adamant and stubborn unbelief is. The best of facts will not convince. Those who say they do not believe because there is not enough evidence are not being truthful. Evidence abounds about Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Character cripples who have been healed through Christ are standing all around to give evidence of what Jesus Christ can do in the heart of man. But the reason folk do not believe is because they choose not to believe. Unbelief is an act of the will; it is not a lack of convincing the intellect.

[Seite 274] 2. The Concern of the Persecutors

After making the conclusions they did, the Sanhedrin needed the private meeting we spoke of above. They obviously could not discuss their troubling (to them) assessments of the situation in front of the accused. So they had the accused leave the council chambers so a private meeting could be held. The private conferring of the council indicated they had two primary concerns: they were concerned that the preaching of Christ be stopped and that the praise of man be salvaged.

The preaching of Christ be stopped. Typical of many governing bodies, the Sanhedrin was concerned about the wrong things. They did not have proper concerns. There were so many evils in the land which they should have been concerned about stopping, but they were concerned instead about stopping that which was good. They wanted especially to stop the preaching of Christ. So they said, "Let us straitly [sternly] threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name" (v. 17).

In every age there are many councils and governments and people in power who try to silence God's preachers and stop the preaching about Jesus Christ. They treat the men of God and the message of God as a great evil. As an example, you would think today by the government's action against the Bible

and prayer in school that the Bible and prayer are great evils which we cannot possibly tolerate in our schools; for they can inflict disaster in our schools upon the students and faculty alike. How the devil must laugh when men in long black robes solemnly decree that the Bible and prayer cannot be in our public schools. All that their decisions evidence, however, as it was with the Sanhedrin, is that the leaders of our land are woefully (and willfully) ignorant of true values; and instead of being in high places of leadership, they ought to be out digging ditches (although with their sick minds, they might not do well at ditch digging either). Their decisions and decrees reflect neither knowledge nor justice. So it is with many government leaders over the world who have aggressively attacked the preaching of the Gospel.

[Seite 275] *The praise of man be salvaged*. One of the primary concerns of this group of persecutors was that they ever be esteemed and praised by men. They lived and died on their press clippings, to speak in today's terms. Christ described them well when He said, "All their works they do for to be seen of men; they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms [positions] at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi [or as in our day, 'Doctor, Doctor,' or 'Professor, Professor,' or 'Reverend, Reverend']" (Matthew 23:5–7). But the preaching and miracles of the apostles were stealing their thunder, and that they could not tolerate! Yet, they dare not do anything that would upset the people, lest they lose the coveted praise of the people. "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people" (v. 21).

The situation was indeed frustrating to these persecutors. They wanted to put the noose around the necks of Peter and John, whom they viewed as renegades disrupting the religious world. The persecutors did not like being told they were sinners and being showed up on their performance. But because of their desire to salvage the praise of the people which they were losing to the disciples, they restrained themselves from doing all they would have liked to do to the disciples.

How pathetic that the only reason they did not do more evil was because of their fear of losing the praise of men. You had better have better motives than that for doing right; or you will soon, like this Sanhedrin, be doing bloody deeds. The Apostle Paul gives us the best motive for our conduct when he says, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). If that is your motive, you will not do evil. If only the praise of man is your motive, you will do lots of evil.

D. THE RELEASE BY THE PERSECUTORS

After the Sanhedrin had had their private meeting, they called Peter and John

back to the council chambers, threatened them, **[Seite 276]** then let them go. We will look at four things concerning the release of Peter and John. They are the restrictions given the apostles, the rejection of the restrictions by the apostles, the return of the apostles to the believers, and the report of the apostles to the believers.

1. The Restrictions Given the Apostles

The Sanhedrin, in threatening Peter and John, tried to stop them from further propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "And they called them [back to the council chambers], and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (v. 18, they repeated this threat after Peter had responded to it, cp. v. 21). What a pathetic order. But it is typical of many legislative bodies in the world today, including most of the legislative bodies in our land. They cannot be counted upon to make laws that benefit the land, but they are ever making laws that hurt a land. Especially are they making more and more laws and decrees to try and limit the preaching of the Gospel. As we noted previously, there are more restrictions placed on propagating the truth about Jesus Christ than there are on just about anything else.

The laws, orders, and decrees of these councils and legislative bodies only reveal what wicked hearts are in mankind. They venomously and vehemently attack truth but defend evil to the extreme. Of course, society is no different. It mocks and rejects the godly, while it exalts and honors the despicable ungodly. A man who lives holy and honest and upright will find more scorn from society than the one whose life is a moral cesspool and terribly stained with gross dishonesty and underhanded dealings. But the ungodly honor their own. What one honors and what one attacks indicates what kind of heart he has.

2. The Rejection by the Apostles

The restriction the Sanhedrin put on the apostles went over like a lead balloon as far as Peter and John were concerned. "Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be **[Seite 277]** 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" (vv. 19, 20). This was a terse and firm answer that in plain and simple words told the Sanhedrin that their command was going to be flatly ignored—period!

Two reasons were given by Peter and John as to why they would not obey this command given them by the Sanhedrin: they would obey God rather than man, and they would adhere to the facts not fables.

God not man. This theme will come up again in another session before the Sanhedrin (cp. 5:29). Christians are normally to obey the government. But when government rules conflict with God's rules, it is another story. Peter and John

were preaching the Gospel under the authority and command of God. Regardless of what man said, they were not going to quit. They were not going "to hearken unto you [the Sanhedrin] more than unto God."

Peter and John give a great example of standing their ground in their devotion to the Lord. So many Christians today back off their convictions when man threatens and orders them to stop. We read of the famous fiction author, Grace Livingston Hill, who was told by her publisher to tone down her religious message in the books. In the book on her life story, she candidly admitted that she did indeed do that so her books would be more acceptable to her publisher. She faced a choice—water down the message or a publisher would not publish her books. She caved in, in contrast to the behavior of Peter and John. But Grace Livingston Hill is not unique. Few Christians stand like Peter and John. Most yield to the threats and pressures of the world and stop their outspoken proclamation of the Word of God.

Facts not fables. The Sanhedrin was arguing against facts. So Peter and John said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (v. 20). To stop preaching Christ would be to stop preaching the truth and let error have full sway. **[Seite 278]** Peter and John were not about to live a lie, or deny the obvious, or say that the cripple was healed by the power of someone other than Jesus Christ, or deny the facts about the crucifixion and the resurrection.

To compromise because of the threats of the world is to go against truth and against facts. Our message is not hearsay; it is not wistful thinking; it is facts; it is truth. We have a choice—either lie or tell the truth. Compromisers are living a lie. They may not think so; but they indeed are.

3. The Return of the Apostles

"And being let go, they went to their own company" (v. 23). Peter and John used their freedom to assemble themselves with God's people. What a rebuke this is to our day. Give us release from our burdens, sicknesses, labors, and trials, and we will use our freedoms not to assemble with the saints to worship, pray, and study the Word but to pursue selfish interests. Release us from financial burdens, and we buy all sorts of toys to play with which takes us away from worship. Release us from sickness, and we use our health to do other things on Sunday rather than worship. Release us from extra hours of work, and we use those extra hours for selfish enjoyments and continue to say we are without time to serve the Lord in church. The reason some folk are not given freedom from their burdens is that they would not use their freedom properly. They would only use it to backslide.

4. The Report of the Apostles

Peter and John did not keep from the people the hostility of the persecutors.

“They … reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (v. 23). There were two good reasons for their reporting to the saints the animosity of the Sanhedrin. They were to enlighten and to encourage the church.

They told the church to enlighten them. The church needed to know what to expect in preaching the Gospel of Christ. We make a great mistake if we tell God’s people that after they have **[Seite 279]** come to Christ and start serving Him everything will be smooth sailing from then on. We have heard testimonies to that effect, and they give us the false idea that once we start doing right all will go well with us. That is not a true picture of life. Serve Christ faithfully, and you can expect the devil to put you in his sights and fire at you. Paul, in Ephesians 6, talks about armor, not picnic baskets. Knowing the character of the enemy is not to discourage us, however, but to alert us so we will be adequately prepared for the attack.

They told the church to encourage them. The church would be encouraged to know how the Lord helped Peter and John through the trial. The saints needed to know that God can indeed help them and deliver them in times of trial. They needed to know that the One they served was more powerful than the ones who opposed them. It is easy to think the opposite. The enemy often looks bigger than God, and this discourages us so much we want to quit. But we serve a great God Who can help us through our trials. Peter and John would remind the people of that fact. No wonder that after Peter and John gave their report, the people praised God (vv. 24–28) and then prayed for more boldness to serve Him faithfully (vv. 29, 30).

Oh, that every saint of God would live his faith so well that he, like Peter and also John, would go through trial with such victory that it would be an inspiration and encouragement to others to praise God and serve Him more earnestly. But, alas, too many saints meet trial with so little faith that they are only a discouragement to others regarding what faith in Jesus Christ can do for them in troublesome times.

[Seite 280] XVI

The Couple

Acts 5:1–13

Peter had fought opposition to the church that came from *outside* the church. Now in this chapter, we will see him fighting opposition that came from *inside* the church. Opposition comes from both places, and that from inside the church generally does much more damage than that from outside the church. One of the reasons opposition from inside the church does so much damage is that the church seldom deals as earnestly with opposition inside the church as it does

with opposition outside the church. Sin problems in the church are often treated with kid gloves, and this gives Satan a great advantage in hindering the work. Peter, however, did not treat sin problems in the church lightly. He attacked them with a vigor seldom, if ever, seen in our churches today.

The problem in the church, which Peter had to deal with here, was located in the giving department—many church problems are located there, unfortunately. The problem Peter faced was limited to two members of the church, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. The early church in Jerusalem had pooled their possessions so that all the members of the church would be provided for in the trying times which came on them in the early days of the church (Acts 4:32). So "as many 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; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:34, 35). One of these generous gifts is especially noted in the closing verses of the fourth chapter of Acts. Barnabas, **[Seite 281]** who would later travel with Paul, "Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles feet" (Acts 4:37). After Barnabas made his gift, Ananias and Sapphira decided to make a similar gift—but in appearance only.

In this study of the problem couple in the early church and how Peter handled the situation, we will note the defilement of the couple (vv. 1, 2), the detecting of the couple (v. 3), the denouncing of the couple (vv. 3, 4, 7–9), and the death of the couple (vv. 5, 6, 10–13).

A. THE DEFILEMENT OF THE COUPLE

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy [knew] to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (vv. 1, 2). At least three common evils can be seen in this sin of Ananias and Sapphira which Peter had to deal with in the church shortly after Pentecost. They are the sin of pride, dishonesty and greed.

1. The Sin of Pride

The gifts of Barnabas and others in the church, who had sold their lands and other possessions and had given all the price of the sale to the church, are the type of gifts that do not go unnoticed. People in the early church would give much honor to such impressive acts of benevolence and sacrificial giving—and rightly so, for such impressive deeds of godliness need to be given honor. Of course, Barnabas and the other givers did not give to gain any honors; but they gave because their hearts were right with the Lord; and, therefore, they were greatly committed to God's work.

It is evident that Ananias and Sapphira viewed these gifts more in the terms

of the attention and praise they received than in the terms of the help these gifts gave to God's work. And they coveted this praise—which is the habit of pride. To try to gain this praise, they sought to duplicate these gifts. But since they were not performing to help the work of God but only to help **[Seite 282]** themselves to obtain praise, they duplicated this generous and sacrificial giving in appearance only. Those seeking the praise of men are only interested in outward appearance, not inward character, and they will perform likewise.

There are always some people like Ananias and Sapphira in every church who are more interested in the praise they can gain at church than in the work of God itself. Their heart is full of pride, and so everything they do will be done in such a way as to gain maximum publicity and to look like a far greater work than it is. They can never do anything quietly or incognito. They must be noticed; they must get all the attention and praise they can squeeze out of a performance. And since they are so anxious for praise, they will often not wait for others to recognize their deeds but will quickly and persistently toot their own horn loudly and frequently to inform you in exaggerated terms about their great (according to them) performance. Oh, how we need to pray and beware that such a desire for the praise of men does not gain a foothold in our hearts; for if it does, it will corrupt our character and service.

2. The Sin of Dishonesty

The whole performance of Ananias and Sapphira was filled with dishonesty. As we noted above, it was only in appearance that this couple would endeavor to duplicate Barnabas' gift. Therefore, this meant they were going to be dishonest about the whole thing. They wanted their gift to appear to be a more sacrificial gift than it was. Others had sold some land and had given the whole price of the sale to the church, and so they also sold some land to be able to make a gift to the church. But when they made the gift to the church, they "kept back part of the price" (v. 2) while giving the impression that they were like Barnabas and the others and were giving the whole price. Therefore, they lied about their giving; and Peter did not hesitate to call it a "lie" (v. 3) either.

Lying about one's giving is, unfortunately, not uncommon in the church even today. People lie to the IRS about how much **[Seite 283]** they gave at church; they lie to others about how much they gave; and sometimes they even lie about the giving of others, if the giving of others is better than their own giving and if the lie will make the others' giving look bad. But if you have to lie to make your giving look acceptable, it is proof that your giving is not acceptable. Lying about your giving is so bad that it is better not to give at all than to be deceitful in your giving. Ananias and Sapphira were not compelled to sell their land and give the entire price of the sale to the church. Peter emphasized this when he said,

“Whiles it [the land] remained [unsold], was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (v. 4). Ananias and Sapphira would have been much better off if they had not sold the land than to sell it and be dishonest about the price. But the desire for the praise of men often drives men to sell their character in order to obtain accolades of men, even though the accolades of men are short term at best.

3. The Sin of Greed

Why did Ananias and Sapphira keep back part of the price of the land for themselves instead of giving it all to the Lord’s work? The answer is greed. Ananias and Sapphira were materialistic. They were primarily concerned about the things of this world and not about the things of God. They are not alone, of course. We still are plagued with many of this kind in our churches today. They show their greed at church in various ways. Some show it in their fussing about every advancement the church would make in the mission program, building program, or other programs of the church. Advancements cost more money, and these greedy members certainly do not want to have any pressure put on them to give more to the church or be put to shame by having everyone around them giving more than they are willing to give. Other members show their greed in the exactness of their tithing (if they tithe). They will figure their tithe to the penny. The idea that they could round it off to the next nearest dollar or even better to the next nearest five or ten dollar amount is foreign to their thinking. It is to the penny and **[Seite 284]** not one penny more. Furthermore, they are very adept at limiting just what is their tithable income. When figuring their offering, they act like folk do in figuring their taxes. They find every deduction possible; so they do not have to give. All of this is simply greed; it certainly is not godliness; that’s for sure.

We learn from these three evils in the character of Ananias and Sapphira about some of the kind of people who are real troublers in the church. First, people who are filled with pride and are, therefore, most anxious to obtain the praise of men are nothing but trouble in the church. Envy and jealousy, which are part and parcel of pride, will provoke many upsetting situations in church which hinder the work of the church. Second, dishonest people are another group that are bad news for a church. Their lying tongues and dishonest behavior will do much damage to the church. Third, greedy people are also big problems in the church. Those who are selfish, greedy, covetous, and materialistic cannot be a helpful part of an organization whose Leader, Jesus Christ, sacrificed His all by coming to this earth and giving His life on Calvary that souls might be saved.

Take a look at the troublemakers in your church, and see if they do not have some or all of the character problems which Ananias and Sapphira had. These

two were the first two troublers of the church from inside the church, and they have thus given us an example of whom we need to watch out for in the membership of our churches.

B. THE DETECTING OF THE COUPLE

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not concealed for long. Soon it was detected and made known. And it was Peter who let Ananias and Sapphira know that their sin was known. We note two things about this detection of sin by Peter—the sureness of the detection and the spiritualness in the detection.

1. The Sureness of the Detection

Sin cannot be concealed. Its nature is to squeal. Sooner or later it will give away its presence—God will see to that. Ananias **[Seite 285]** and Sapphira found out quickly that "be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Ananias had no sooner made his gift than "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?" (v. 3). Peter's announcement regarding Ananias' sin must have been a terrible shock to Ananias, for Ananias would think that only he and Sapphira knew the arrangement about holding back part of the price. But God also knew; for no one can keep secrets from God; and when God knows, the whole world can know—if He chooses to inform them.

And God chose to inform the world about the sin of these two. First through Peter and then through the Word of God, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira has been well known. Think of the multitudes that have been informed over the last two thousand years about the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. What fools we are if we think we can conceal evil. To think that way is to confess we have left God out of our thinking; and when we do that, much trouble lies ahead for us.

2. The Spiritualness in the Detection

Peter's discerning of the lie reminds us that those who walk close to the Lord will have discernment that others do not have. Peter was obviously given supernatural revelation about the details of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. But all of God's people can, through the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, have Divine help in discernment that does not come to the natural man. If we get into the Word as we ought and pray as we ought (which two activities are essential conditions for the Holy Spirit to work in us), our spiritual senses will be sharpened; and we will be able to detect quickly what is right and what is wrong. We will have the invaluable ability to be able to discern the sinfulness of many practices and people.

But many saints do not get into the Word of God much and do not pray much; and, therefore, they cannot discern well. Their spiritual senses are so poor that when a spiritual skunk comes along they think it is perfume. They cannot tell the

difference **[Seite 286]** between Ananias and Peter. They cannot discern the difference between some slick talking apostate on TV and a true minister of God. They are so poor at discerning that they think some deceitful-tongued woman troublemaker in church like Sapphira is a godly woman; and if some discerning pastor wants to discipline the woman, they rise up and protest vehemently, try to throw out the pastor, or leave the church themselves.

Furthermore, these members who lack discernment do not have the ability to perceive evil in such things as the secularization of the church program and the worldly music, with its hellish beat, that has become so popular in our churches. When these things come into the church and church people (including many ministers) are confronted about the wrongness of them, the standard reply is that these things reflect only normal acceptable change or different tastes; and, they argue if we are going to attract people, we must adjust to the age we live in. But the discerning soul knows that these things reflect a good deal more than acceptable change—they reflect alarming corruption. They reflect more than different tastes—they reflect defiled tastes. And the people they attract will not be people interested in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, but these people will be to the church what the mixed multitude was to Israel. Oh, how important it is to have spiritual discernment if we are going to be kept from many spiritual perils.

C. THE DENOUNCING OF THE COUPLE

Ananias and Sapphira did not get the praise they sought. Instead of praise they got denounced—and by Peter, the leader of the church. Peter, however, had to denounce Ananias and Sapphira separately inasmuch as they did not come together to make the gift. They may have had legitimate reasons which made it impossible for them to come together. But it is very difficult to think they had a legitimate reason for coming separately when, in their situation, coming separately was too obviously a ploy to prolong the accolades of the crowd. By coming separately, the people would first praise Ananias; then, when Sapphira came, **[Seite 287]** they would do the praise thing all over again. Hence, the praise would be repeated, prolonged, and be more noticeable. People who want the praise of men have clever (but disgusting) ways of gaining as much praise as possible.

Peter's treatment of Ananias and Sapphira gives us a good lesson on how to deal with sin in the church. We will see this in the sternness, faithfulness, and correctness of the denouncing which Peter gave the sinful couple.

1. The Sternness of the Denouncing

When Ananias presented his gift to the church, Peter spoke very sternly to him. He said, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" (v. 3). And when Sapphira came later,

Peter was just as stern; for he told her, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out” (v. 9). These were very sharp rebukes. The language was very strong—too strong for many in our churches. Such people tell us we should be more gentle and charitable and, therefore, not be so abrasive with Ananias and Sapphira. But in this case that would amount to being gentle and charitable to evil! Ananias and Sapphira committed a vile sin and deserved to be denounced in strong language. The language Peter used corresponded to the sin that was committed.

The attitude opposing a strong stand against evil in church is so strong today that it is often integrated into church constitutions. Many church constitutions are filled with so many rules and regulations regarding the way in which the church deals with sinful members that a pastor, like a policeman, has his hands so tied that he can hardly rebuke a sinner without getting into trouble with the constitution. In some churches, the constitution makes it easier to get rid of the pastor than to get rid of a delinquent member. Constitutions ought to make it difficult for people to become members of a church but very easy for them to lose their membership. Church membership is not a right; it is **[Seite 288]** a privilege—and it is a privilege which carries with it many responsibilities. And if you do not fulfill these responsibilities, you should justifiably lose the privilege. The church does not need irresponsible members.

One of the big problems in churches today is being too lenient with sin in the church. People in our churches often complain about the leniency of the punishment that comes from the courts of our land. But complaining about that only shows their hypocrisy, for they will not deal with sin in the church any better than courts deal with crime. Today in most of our churches, Ananias and Sapphira would not be rebuked sternly as Peter rebuked them; but they would be counselled gently; and then to help them feel “restored,” Ananias would shortly be elected to the board and Sapphira would just as quickly be given solo parts in the choir or be made one of the organists or pianists of the church or given a Sunday School class to teach.

This observation is not the wild imagination of the writer! This is something we have observed going on in our churches again and again. As an example, we know of a pastor who within a year or less after he resigned his church because he got caught having sticky fingers with the church money was hired on to the ministerial staff of a large church. Also, we had a college friend who, when he was a pastor of a large church, ran off with another women for a few weeks; yet, in spite of that, some of his church members wanted him to stay on as pastor (which he didn’t). But about a year later, he did accept a call to a large church in

a big city to be on the ministerial staff. It is not uncommon to hear about people in the church who after they had committed adultery were not disciplined; but instead of being disciplined, the church ran to console them; and in a matter of months, they were given a class to teach or some other position in church. The same occurs when people in the church get divorced. They are not denounced, but instead they are invited to such things as a divorce "support group," and then soon they are appointed or elected to some prominent position in the church. (Divorce support groups are sick—if you are **[Seite 289]** going to have them, why not have murder support groups, stealing support groups, cheating support groups, and adultery support groups as well. However, what we need in the church instead of these groups is groups that support holiness!). All of this lenient dealing with the defiled in church is sickening and is a curse on the church. But if we dealt with sin in the church as Peter did, we would clear up a lot of nagging and disabling problems in a hurry and promote the honor of God.

2. The Faithfulness of the Denouncing

Peter was faithful in rebuking sin no matter where the sin was located. Hence, Peter did something most ministers and churches seldom do—he rebuked one in the church who had money. Generally the church member with money is treated with great honor and respect in the church regardless of his character. They are put on important boards, and their advice and wishes are given honor above those who are less wealthy—even though the less wealthy have more expertise in church matters and are more spiritual. It does not seem to matter if these wealthy people have unsavory or questionable lifestyles or business practices. These things are carefully overlooked and not mentioned. Hence, these wealthy members can live just about any way they want and get away with it at church; for they have money; and the church does not want them to get upset and leave. Even though these wealthy members could give a whole lot more than they do, they often are given special treatment because, out of their great abundance, they give more than those who have less to give.

But Peter was faithful to righteousness. He did not compromise in dealing with the wealthy. Sin was sin no matter who committed it. Therefore, he did not hesitate to denounce Ananias and Sapphira. Oh, for more men in our pulpits today who have the faithfulness of Peter in them.

3. The Correctness of the Denouncing

When Peter denounced the evil of Ananias and Sapphira, he **[Seite 290]** described Ananias' sin as a "lie to the Holy Ghost" (v. 3) and Sapphira's sin as "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" (v. 9). In denouncing their sin this way, Peter indicated that he understood the main harm of their sin—it was primarily against God. It was God the Holy Spirit, not the

church, they were mainly lying to. It was God the Holy Spirit, not the church, they were primarily tempting. The first and foremost indictment of any sin is that it is against God. David emphasized this fact of sin being primarily against God when he confessed his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. He said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4). The word "only" is best understood as "chiefly," as Bible students know. Our sin does indeed cause troubles in other people's lives. But the primary evil of sin is that it is against God. Sin diminishes God's honor and reflects evilly on God's character.

If we would get this truth through our heads, we would look a lot differently at sin. So often our aggravation at evil is only if evil adversely affects us personally. If sin only affects others, we yawn and go on our way. Especially are church people this way about sin in the church. If the sin of others in the church does not aggravate them personally in a noticeable way, then they get disgusted when the pastor wants to take action against a delinquent member. They accuse the pastor of getting much too upset about the sin and then tell him to get busy "winning souls" and remember that people are not perfect.

However, what these people need to realize is that the sin has greatly dishonored God; and if the church is going to honor God (and it must if it is going to have a valid ministry), it must take a strong stand against sin in the church. Failure to strongly rebuke and denounce sin is tantamount to dishonoring God. Peter shows the justification for the stern rebukes he gave Ananias and Sapphira by telling them they had sinned against God.

D. THE DEATH OF THE COUPLE

God killed Ananias and Sapphira in judgment for their sin. We note four things about this judgment. It was sudden in its coming, **[Seite 291]** severe in its character, shaming to the couple, and shocking to the community.

1. The Judgment was Sudden in its Coming

Ananias and Sapphira died suddenly because of their sin. After Peter denounced Ananias, "Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost" (v. 5). Later when Sapphira was confronted by Peter and was denounced, she also fell "down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost" (v. 10).

At times God in judgment strikes men down suddenly because of their evil. The Bible warns about this sudden judgment. Proverbs 6:15 says, "Therefore shall his [the evildoer] calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy [help, deliverance]." The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks similarly: "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

While all sudden deaths must not be viewed as God striking down a person in

holy judgment, yet we must not go to the other extreme and never see judgment in sudden death. When someone is making persistent trouble in the church and suddenly is snatched out into eternity—you are witnessing the judgment of God upon that person, and you need to take sober warning of the action. Do not try to explain away the suddenness of the death as though it was just one of those things. Put two and two together for a change, and let the event warn you of the seriousness of opposing God.

God, of course, does not take every sinner out of the way by sudden death. He has other means of judgment besides sudden death, and He knows which judgment is the best for each person and each situation. But the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira ought to make a number of members in our churches fear and tremble, for you do not want to fool around and play games with God and get out of sorts at church as they did, or God may decide to move up the date of your funeral.

[Seite 292] 2. The Judgment was Severe in its Character

The judgment of sudden death upon Ananias and Sapphira was a very severe judgment. Many people laugh at the idea of judgment for sin, but they will stop laughing the moment they begin to experience Divine judgment, for judgment is no joke. God is a holy God, and He will deal with unrepented sin in holy judgment as Ananias and Sapphira illustrate.

The severity of the judgment here underscores the sinfulness of the sin. We noted earlier in this chapter that mankind is too often very lenient in their denouncing and punishing of evil conduct. This leniency simply and condemningly evidences that mankind does not view sin as all that serious. We can understand the ungodly world thinking this way, but it is sad to see our churches also thinking that way. However, a great many churches do not have a good wholesome view about the seriousness of sin, and this not only affects the way churches discipline sinning members, but it also affects doctrine. Those churches whose doctrinal statement does not include eternal condemnation in hell for the sinner are simply telling us they do not view sin nearly as sinful as God does.

When we view evil with less and less condemnation, we only promote evil. Many people in our churches are very sensitive about taking a strong stand against sin or dealing severely with a sinning member (in fact, it seems like most people in church think this way today); but in this attitude, they are only encouraging more sin. They think they are encouraging love and kindness, but their thinking is as fouled up as it can be, for encouraging evil is certainly not encouraging love and kindness!

Let the severity of the judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira remind us that

we must not look carelessly at any sin. All sin is like a deadly poisonous snake. You cannot take a careless or light view of it, or it will slay you, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)

3. The Judgment was Shaming to the Couple

Dropping over dead at church before a preacher who has **[Seite 293]** just denounced you for your dishonesty in your giving is certainly not dying in honor. What a shameful way to die. Ananias and Sapphira desired to be honored beyond and above their performance. But their unholy desire resulted in their gaining great shame instead. For nearly two thousand years now, their names have been associated with disgrace. God’s judgment not only took their lives suddenly, but it brought great and lasting shame to Ananias and Sapphira.

What a warning this is to those who push and shove and pull strings and lie and cheat to get the praise of men. They, unlike Ananias and Sapphira, may gain some temporary praise in their life time; but it will not be long before shame sets in. Often we have seen this experience in politicians. Few people try to gain the accolades of man more than politicians. And the lying and misrepresentation that goes on to gain the praise of man is enormous. Some get elected this way and are in the spotlight of fame and glory for awhile. But it is not long before shame settles in and becomes their close companion. Some die before the disgrace sets in; but not many years after they die, the skeletons come out of the closet and the shame takes over.

The next time you get anxious about getting the praise of men, ponder the effect of this evil ambition on Ananias and Sapphira. Let God take care of the honors; you take care of doing His will. And remember that sin has a built-in shame factor, regardless of the particular sin.

4. The Judgment was Shocking to the Community

The suddenness and severity of the judgment which came upon Ananias and Sapphira made the judgment very shocking to others as can be expected. Scripture says, “Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (v. 11, cp. v. 5), and “the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them” (v. 13). We will note here the two chief effects which this judgment, in being such a shocking action to the community, had in regards to the church—it purified the church and it magnified the church. It made the church a **[Seite 294]** better church both in God’s eyes and in man’s eyes.

It purified the church. This judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, because it was so shocking, brought “great fear” on the other church members. “Great fear” here should be understood as that fear which promotes righteousness. When a child is punished for some evil, a brother or sister has a tendency to walk softly,

that is, to be more careful of his or her behavior. So it is in the church. Judgment is not only to deal with the guilty, but it is also to be a warning and instruction to others to behave righteously. This truth is illustrated in Proverbs in "Smite a scorner, and the simple [innocent] will beware" (Proverbs 19:25); and "When the scorner is punished, the simple [innocent] is made wise" (Proverbs 21:11). Therefore, when judgment comes to the wayward, do not think only of the guilty but think also of the innocent. The early church learned an invaluable lesson in the death of Ananias and Sapphira. It taught them very pungently the importance of an upright life. It brought purity to the church; and this made the church a more powerful church (v. 12), which we will note more about in our next chapter.

It magnified the church. Those in the community outside the church also experienced "great fear" (vv. 5, 11) because of the shock of this judgment. As a result, "the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them [the church]" (v. 13). The death of Ananias and Sapphira was good advertisement for the church. It resulted in the church gaining respect. Today our fundamental, Bible-believing churches too often have a huge credibility problem with society. Society sees all the sin in the church (and the world knows about it in detail), and they see how the church tolerates it, and that turns them off. We may fear that if we get too strict the world will not be interested in our message (and that is the fear of a host of fundamentalist churches and also their excuse for the worldly music and other lower standards being accepted in church). But we need not fear that problem at all! Those that would encourage this fear are not **[Seite 295]** tuned into the Word of God. If they were, they would know that what we need to fear is sin corrupting the church and thus destroying its testimony to the world. If we want a respected testimony for Jesus Christ, we will have to take a strong stand against sin in the church. Peter has shown us the way; now we need to pray for courage and faithfulness to follow his example.

[Seite 296] XVII

THE CHURCH

ACTS 5:11–40

THE EARLY CHAPTERS of the book of Acts clearly show that Peter was very prominent in the early church. As one reads further on in Acts, other saints of God will become prominent in the record, such as Stephen and Philip, and beginning with the thirteenth chapter, the Apostle Paul. But in the early chapters of Acts, Peter is the most prominent of the saints. As he was the leader and spokesman for the twelve disciples, so he was the leader and spokesman for the early church. And he was an excellent leader and spokesman, too. His courage,

his messages, his stand for righteousness, his spiritual discernment and power, and his great loyalty to Jesus Christ, which was the foundation of it all, gave the early church great help during the critical days of the church's infancy.

In this chapter of our study of the life of Peter, his prominence in the church will be most evident as we look at the power of the church (vv. 11–16) and the persecution of the church (vv. 17–40).

A. THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

In our text we again see the fact that the early church was a powerful church. We have seen this fact ever since Pentecost. Such texts as Acts 4:33 which says, "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," inform us of the great spiritual power the early church had. Today our churches have programs, promotion, publicity, prestige, and popularity; but they do not have power. Yet, the one thing **[Seite 297]** churches must have if they are going to do a worthwhile work for God is spiritual power.

From our text, we will note two things about the great spiritual power which existed in the early church—the conditions for it and the confirmations of it—and in each case, Peter will be prominent.

1. The Conditions for Power

There are a number of conditions the church must meet if they are going to be a powerful church. Early in Acts we learned that the church must be filled with the Holy Spirit if there is to be power. Furthermore, we also learned in Acts that the church must be a praying church if there is to be power. As an example, "when they had prayed, the place was shaken" (Acts 4:31). In our text from Acts 5, two other important conditions for power are listed. They are the purity of the church and the unity of the church. If the church does not meet these two conditions, there will be little power. A defiled church and a divided church is not a dynamic church—which explains why so many of our churches have so little spiritual power today.

Purity. The removal of Ananias and Sapphira from the church helped to purify the church which we noted in our last chapter. It removed from the church two members whose sinful ways could effectively weaken the church just as Achan weakened the armies of Israel in Joshua's day. And their death also influenced the rest of the church in a purifying way, for "great fear came upon all the church" (v. 11). This purifying of the church greatly promoted the power of the church as it always has and will.

We certainly need to be reminded in repeated and forceful ways today of the fact that purity promotes power in the church. The way we tolerate sin in the church today is shocking (as we noted in our last chapter). But though the church tolerates sin (and some think this toleration is a great display of love), God will not tolerate sin; and God will not give the church power **[Seite 298]** when it tolerates sin. Churches may look impressive to the natural eye, but without purity they are like the church of Laodicea that thought they were really a successful church but were instead "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17) and, therefore, without spiritual power which is so necessary if the church is to accomplish a true work for God.

Peter's holy and bold stand against Ananias and Sapphira reminds us that the leadership of the church must lead the way if the church is going to be a pure church—and, thus, a powerful church. The pastor must stand faithfully against sin not only in his preaching but also in his practice. Church congregations may not appreciate or follow the pastor's stand against evil; but whether they follow or not, it is his duty to lift the standard of conduct in his ministry. Many pastors are nothing but compromisers; and instead of lifting the standards of conduct, they only try through clever rationalization to justify the current status quo in the matter of personal righteousness in the church. A church will not become a purer and, thus, a more powerful church when the pastor is that way.

Unity. The unity of the early church is a striking feature of the early church

and is seen repeatedly in Acts. “These all continued with one accord in prayer” (Acts 1:14); “they were all with one accord” (Acts 2:1); “them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32); and in our text from Acts 5, we have “they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (v. 12). Unity, like purity, is also a vital characteristic of the church if power is to be present. Arguing and bickering and disputing—such as goes on in so many board and business meetings in our churches—indicate a great lack of unity and, hence, a consequential lack of power.

The unity that brings power needs to be defined here. It is a unity in doctrine, in deportment, and in devotion.

First, there must be unity in *doctrine*. The church must believe the same about vital theological matters. They must be **[Seite 299]** united in believing correctly about Jesus Christ, the Bible, God, salvation, heaven, hell, and other vital doctrinal matters. You will have no spiritual unity, and hence no power, if some believe in the deity of Christ and some do not, if some believe in salvation by grace and some do not, and if some believe in the authority of the Word of God and some do not.

Second, there must be unity in *deportment*. The church must have the same upright convictions in morals, music, and manner of life. This goes back to the importance of purity again. But we mention it again because unity is involved.

We have many problems there today. Our churches are often very divided in regards to standards in many important areas. A number of members—and mostly it is the younger generation—have become quite tolerant of the declining standards of society and so view many unholy things as acceptable. Other members—and generally they are the older ones—do not tolerate the lowering of standards as they still cling to Biblical convictions. Because of this sharp division in our churches, some churches are even having two services now—one that is called a contemporary service to cater to the younger generation and their lower standards regarding music and other things, and one that is called a traditional service geared to suit the older folk who still cling to conservative convictions. Now having two services does not promote unity! It only promotes division! And having two services is rooted and grounded in compromise. Pastors who have gone this route in their churches are nothing but politicians trying to satisfy both sides. They certainly do not understand the importance of true unity in the church, and they certainly are not acting like God’s man standing straight and true for that which is right. We have little time or respect for such pastors and their programs. Their churches may become popular with the world, but they will never have the power of God.

Third, there must be unity in *devotion*. The church must be united

devotionally as “one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32) indicates. Some churches have unity in doctrine; that is, they **[Seite 300]** will all sign the same doctrinal statement without reservation; but they do not have unity in devotion. Some of the members want to spend a great deal of time playing ball in back of the church; while others think (and more properly) that church is primarily a place for spiritual exercise and, thus, prefer a program that emphasizes the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. So there is no unity in devotion in that situation. But unless there is unity in devotion to the spiritual business of the church there will be precious little power. The early church did not assemble to play ball, have a swimming party, or go on a picnic—they assembled to worship and pray and preach the Word of God. Today, such services in church are far outnumbered by the meetings for recreation, socials, and other similar things.

2. The Confirmations of Power

Our text records two important evidences of the power in the early church: the miracles performed by the church and the multitudes added to the church.

Miracles performed by the church. The power in the early church was very evident in the many miracles that were performed by the church. “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people … There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed every one” (vv. 12, 16). So great was this power to heal that people “brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (v. 15) and heal them. Peter, being the leader of the church, was logically a special object of those seeking help.

And those seeking help were not disappointed, for this was not the type of healing campaigns we have in our times. The power in the early church was truly of God, and so it was not difficult to confirm this fact in the miracles of the early church. **[Seite 301]** The miracles were in the open where all could see—none were done in quiet and then the populace told to believe it as the frauds do today. Also “they were healed every one.” Unlike so-called healers today, they did not pick and choose who would get in the healing line. All who came were healed; and if the afflicted just got located in a place where Peter’s shadow would pass over them, they experienced healing. Obviously, this was the real thing. It was easy to confirm substantially. It was not a phony commercialized set-up like so many healing campaigns today which have a credibility gap of mammoth proportions.

The lack of power in our churches today is conspicuously evident by the lack of anything happening that cannot be explained by natural man. When power is

present, folk will not be able to explain everything that goes on at church with the pat answers of the world; but they will have to admit that God is working in a wonderful way. Such things as changed lives and opened doors of unexpected opportunities for the church's ministry come about when God's power is present. And they amaze the onlooker who will have no answer for these things unless he admits that it was a result of the power of God working in these situations.

The shadow of Peter producing miracles illustrates the power of unconscious influence. Walking down the street, he would be unaware of all those who might be touched by his shadow; yet the influence was present. We influence more than we realize, for much of our influence occurs without our awareness of it happening. The character of our life will determine the influence. Peter was walking a most godly life; and, therefore, his influence would be good. But many live unholy lives—and their shadow casts a curse on people, not a blessing.

Multitudes added to the church. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (v. 14). The early church grew as a result of the power of God. Today we add multitudes to the church via various promotional schemes. Such things as "Squirt the bus driver Sunday" and **[Seite 302]** "Pepsi-cola Sunday" and "Balloon Sunday" and "Greased pig Sunday" and a host of other carnal gimmicks are used to bring in the multitudes instead of relying on the power of God. If churches were to rely on the power of God today to bring in the multitudes, they would reach nary a soul; for they have so little spiritual power. But they have plenty of promotional power; and every conference, seminar, and work shop seems to advance more promotional schemes and gimmicks and tricks to build the crowd at church. Such tactics, however, will not build the kind of church God wants the church to be. It will draw a cheap crowd just like garbage draws flies. On the other hand, when the power of God is the means of building a church, people will be "added to the Lord" as our text indicates.

It is important to note that a backdoor revival preceded this frontdoor revival. The church, under Peter's leadership, had just experienced a backdoor revival in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. A backdoor revival is often needed in order to have a genuine frontdoor revival. Many churches would do well to get rid of the malcontents, troublemakers, discord sowers, covetous, carnal, and other like members. It would clear out the church for better members. You are not going to fill your church with godly people when it is filled with the other kind.

B. THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

We noted in the previous chapter of our book that whenever God does a work the devil will endeavor to counter it. The greater the activity of God, the greater the

activity of Satan. So we should not be surprised to read right after all the great work going on in the early church—multitudes being added to the church and miracles in abundance being performed—that "Then" (v. 17) persecution made its presence known again; that "Then" the enemy was "filled with indignation" (Ibid.). The devil always gets upset when God works mightily among men.

Persecution had first raised its ugly head against the early church after the cripple had been healed through the ministry of Peter and John. Now it will attack again and even more vehemently. **[Seite 303]** "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (vv. 17, 18).

In looking at this second persecution which came upon the early church, we will note the practice of the persecutors, the powerlessness of the persecutors, the perplexity of the persecutors, the persistency of the persecutors, the proclamation to the persecutors, and the perverseness of the persecutors.

1. The Practice of the Persecutors

Persecution is mean. It is the habitual practice of persecutors to be cruel, mean, oppressive, and unjust in attacking God's people. In keeping with this practice in the case before us, they "put them [the apostles] in the common prison" (v. 18). This is the second time for Peter to go to jail for serving Jesus Christ with excellence, and it will not be the last time he will experience incarceration for serving God well. You cannot serve God faithfully as Peter did and not be the object of vicious attacks by the enemy. Faithful service invites persecution.

Today we seem to think this truth does not apply to our land. We readily assent to the fact that in other countries, such as those with cruel dictatorial governments, godly preachers can experience persecution and, as a result, end up in prison and be put through terrible suffering which could even result in their death. But in our land, we seem to think that if one serves well he will be famous, popular, and have a big church in a big city with a big salary. So if a pastor gets thrown out of a church, we automatically think he has been a failure and needs some instruction on how to pastor. Now that may, of course, be the case in some situations. The pastor may be very deficient and maybe not even called to the ministry. But on the other hand, many pastors are dismissed by their church because they are faithful to God in doing their work. Their ministry is simply too straight for the people. Few churches in our land can tolerate a faithful ministry anymore and are more likely to persecute such **[Seite 304]** a ministry than praise it. Their persecution may not be jail, as in the case of Peter; but it may instead be a cruel and unjust dismissal of the faithful pastor from his

pastorate.

2. The Powerlessness of the Persecutors

Persecutors may seem to be all-powerful at times. However, God is still running the show. Therefore we read, “But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth” (v. 19). Peter will have another one of these experiences where he is miraculously released from prison. In that case, he will be the only one in prison. Here he shares the miraculous delivery with the other apostles.

When things get dismal and dark and we are nearly overwhelmed by the enemy, it is most encouraging to read a verse like this. The enemy may work; “But” God works, too. God can unlock any prison door if He so pleases. He has the keys to any prison the persecutors have.

We need to ponder here from our text several important truths about the deliverance of the apostles from prison.

First, the *practice of deliverance*. Though God delivered the apostles here, He does not always free every persecuted saint. Hebrews 11:32–37 reminds us of that fact and so does Acts 12:2 which tells of Herod killing James. The fact that not all the persecuted are delivered does not mean God is not able to deliver all; it simply means it is not His will to free all the incarcerated saints. We may not understand the reasons for this unwillingness of God to free all the persecuted saints; but we must by faith believe that He has reasons which transcend our understanding; and when we learn the reasons in eternity, they will reveal the wisdom of His will.

Second, the *purpose of deliverance*. When the saints were released in our text, they were told to “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (v. 20). As we have noted in previous studies, release from prison or burdens or other problems is not so we can enjoy selfish pleasure. It is primarily so we can serve the Lord better. God released Peter **[Seite 305]** and the other apostles here so they could go back to the Temple and preach the Gospel again. When you are freed from burdens, suffering, taxing responsibilities, etc., remember it is to enable you to serve the Lord better.

3. The Perplexity of the Persecutors

Great is the perplexity of the persecutors. They were fighting a force much more powerful than they realized. When it was discovered that the apostles were back preaching the Gospel at the Temple and that everything was in place in the prison, “they doubted [were perplexed]” (v. 24). They could not figure out how the apostles got out. The officers [those sent by the persecutors to check out the prison] reported that the prison doors were still “shut with all safety [that is everything was secure in the prison], and the keepers standing without before the

doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within" (v. 23).

All Christ rejectors will have this problem of perplexity sooner or later. One does not broaden his mind, enlighten his understanding, and increase his wisdom when he rejects Jesus Christ. Frustration, confusion, and perplexity will plague the rejectors about the things of God, about the most important things in life. They may have no problem understanding a host of other things; but in spiritual matters, they will always be in a quandary until they bow down before Christ.

4. The Persistency of the Persecutors

The devil does not quit easily. He will play the game earnestly until the last second of the clock has ticked away. Peter and the faithful saints will be a target of Satan as long as they are alive. Our text reminds us of his persistency in persecution. As soon as the persecutors found out that the apostles had gotten out of jail and were at the Temple preaching the Gospel, "Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them [the apostles]" (v. 26). They went after the apostles again. One would think the persecutors would stop and ponder the situation and conclude that God was working on behalf of the apostles. **[Seite 306]** But persecutors do not bring God into their thinking and do not want God in their thoughts.

Persecution is like temptation. It may let up and be hindered by circumstances at times, but it will come back to attack. Therefore, we must not be surprised that even though the enemy has been beaten back convincingly that he will still rise up and attack again. Faithfulness in God's service will discover persistency in the devil's animosity.

5. The Proclamation to the Persecutors

The arrogant persecutors, who thought they could command the apostles on what they could and could not do and say, got a severe denouncing from Peter and the other apostles. The denouncing came right after the persecutors had admonished the apostles for preaching the Gospel again by telling them, "Did not we straitly [strictly, sternly] command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (v. 28). Peter, the spokesman of the apostles, gave them a short but stern message which put the persecutors in their place and gave a great witness for Christ. We will note the priority in the message and the particulars of the message which Peter gave to this wretched group of persecutors.

The priority in the message. Peter commenced his short speech to the persecutors by saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (v. 29). This told the council how they were ranked in regards to who would tell the apostles what to preach. This priority was voiced before to this same bunch of persecutors when Peter, along with John, "said unto them, Whether it be right in

the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). There, like our present text, this bunch had told the apostles "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). Here in our text, they were stronger in their insistence on telling the apostles what message they could not preach. They said, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" (v. 28).

[Seite 307] There are many folk who think they can tell God's preachers what they are to preach. Governments often try to clamp down on the Bible message and prohibit preachers from preaching the truth. Church denominational headquarters will sometimes send out notices to tell the preacher what to preach on such and such a Sunday. And congregations frequently think they are the authority, too, and hesitate not to tell the preacher what he should preach. But few things are so presumptuous as someone trying to tell God's man what to preach. And few things will aggravate a true man of God more than to have men tell him what he should or should not preach. A true man of God gets his message from God. He is to preach the Word as the Holy Spirit leads him. When a preacher considers a pastorate, he needs to make that crystal clear to the church.

The particulars of the message. Peter's message was the same which he had preached ever since Pentecost. The same fundamental truths rang forth clearly and plainly. As in his other messages, it covered the crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, and attestation of Christ. When speaking of the *crucifixion* of Christ, Peter indicted the crucifiers, "whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (v. 30). The *resurrection* of Christ was emphatically proclaimed in "God of our fathers raised up Jesus" (v. 30). The *exaltation* of Christ put Christ at God's "right hand" (v. 31), and it declared that Christ was the Messiah and Redeemer of mankind —"Prince and a Savior" (Ibid.). The *attestation* of the this message about Christ brought in the testimony of both the apostles and Holy Spirit. "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (v. 32).

Preaching the same truths he had preached before showed the great character and courage of Peter. Peter did not change his message to suit the situation. He did not water down or leave out some parts of the message because he was in a perilous place standing before his persecutors. It is easy to preach with enthusiasm the great truths of the Word of God when we are **[Seite 308]** speaking to a friendly audience which frequently "amens" our message. But it is a different story when you are speaking to a group whose response will be predictably very negative to the message—such as the group Peter was speaking to who "were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them" (v. 33). But though

Peter was standing before a group that would violently reject his message and would be bloodthirsty for his life, he still proclaimed the same message. Such preaching makes most preachers look like cupcakes. So many preachers bow down to the dictates of nothing more than church board members and other members who are out of sorts. What would they do if they faced a hostile, persecuting group as Peter faced?

6. The Perverseness of the Persecutors

Following Peter's sermon and the expected rejection of it by the persecutors, the council of persecutors did two things which showed how perverse they were in their thinking and behavior. They listened to the twisted counsel of Gamaliel and then treated the apostles in a totally unreasonable and cruel way. There was a perverse counsel and a perverse court in the Sanhedrin chambers that day.

Perverse counsel. Many folk read Gamaliel's counsel and think he gave some good advice. After all, Gamaliel was able to cool off the persecutors for a while. But even though he had impressive credentials—he was "a doctor [teacher] of the law, had in reputation among all the people" (v. 34)—Gamaliel's counsel was rotten to the core. What Peter said upset the persecutors violently, but what Gamaliel said did not. That ought to say something about the evil of Gamaliel's counsel!

We will note three things about Gamaliel's counsel which were wrong. He used a wrong criteria, made a wrong comparison, and gave a wrong command.

First, *a wrong criteria*. Basically, Gamaliel said to let time be the judge. He concluded his little speech by saying, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this **[Seite 309]** work be of men, it will come to nought; But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply [perhaps] ye be found even to fight against God" (vv. 38, 39). On the surface this sounds wise. Time will indeed vindicate truth. But Gamaliel's counsel is wretched counsel for what it does not say. Is time the only judge here? Of course not! What about facts? Are they not to be considered in judging the proclamation of the Gospel? To ignore the facts is to be criminal. The facts were abundant! If they are not permitted to be part of the thinking here, one will never come to the right conclusion.

So Gamaliel's counsel is very, very poor; for it is dishonest. He does not want to consider the facts. He could not help but be acquainted with many facts, but he leaves them out of the argument. No judgment can be made correctly if you do not consider the facts. A man who leaves out the facts in a judgment of a case is a dishonest man.

Second, *a wrong comparison*. Gamaliel compared the apostles to "Theudas" (v. 36) and "Judas of Galilee" (v. 37). What an inaccurate, inappropriate, and

incongruent comparison. In no way did they compare to the apostles. Their message and manners were as different as day and night to that of the apostles. These two men were a bunch of renegades whose behavior was criminal. But unbelief delights in putting God's servants in a derogatory category. The more derogatory the better, for it will influence others to make wrong judgment of their ministries.

Gamaliel was very dishonest, very corrupt in this comparison. He was trying to get the persecutors to not be hasty in making judgment of the apostles; yet in comparing the apostles to two notorious wild men, he was already making judgment and in the negative. It was a clever ploy which would let the council know he was on their side, yet he made it sound like he was a fair minded judge.

Third, *a wrong command*. Gamaliel told the persecutors to "Refrain from these men, and let them alone" (v. 38). Wrong, wrong, wrong. Yes, they should refrain from persecuting these men; but they should not just leave them alone and go on their **[Seite 310]** way paying no attention to these men as Gamaliel's command insists. They should listen to the apostles and heed what the apostles are saying. The apostles had the greatest message ever given mankind. It had to do with the eternal destiny of the soul. It is the devil's advice to pay no attention to God's preachers. Gamaliel is only saying what the devil wants said. Do not listen to the message of the Gospel is Gamaliel's advice. So is Gamaliel giving good advice? Absolutely not!

Of course the persecutors liked Gamaliel's advice. He did not honor the truth. He did not indict the persecutors for killing Christ; he did not insist Christ was raised from the dead; he did not speak of the honor Christ had in heaven with God; he did not speak of all the evidence and all the great testimony to the message of the apostles; and the action he advised the counsel to take got them off the hook; for they did not know what to do in this situation. It was embarrassing to them that they could not keep the apostles in jail; and they "feared the people" (v. 26); so this counsel suited them fine. But anytime your counsel regarding the message and messengers of Jesus Christ goes over well with a group of ungodly people, your counsel is of the devil!

Perverse court. Though the council "agreed" (v. 40) with Gamaliel, they did not do what he told them to do. "They … called the apostles [they had been put out of the room so Gamaliel could give his advice privately to the persecutors], and [when they had] beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go" (Ibid.). That is not justice nor is it being consistent. Gamaliel said to "Refrain from these men, and let them alone." So if they follow Gamaliel's counsel, they will give the apostles their release and stop bothering them. They will not condemn them but let time be the judge. And

especially should they not condemn them; for as Gamaliel said, they may be found to be fighting against God if what the apostles are doing is right.

But this bunch of persecutors has no intention of showing character in the court room. Therefore, they still beat the apostles **[Seite 311]** and ordered them to stop preaching the message about Christ. Talk about a perverse court!

The persecutors' action against Peter and the other apostles is representative of many court decisions today in our land. But we should not be surprised, for justice will not be practiced when Christ is rejected. Hence, our courts will give out perverse rulings which in the name of justice perpetrate injustice. Our courts act as weird and unjust as did the persecutors in our text. As an example, the courts stop prayer in school and tell us they did this so we do not offend the lone atheist here and there. But they completely ignore the fact that stopping prayer offends multitudes of other people. Sadly, we also see this perverse form of judging going on in the church. Church members, as an example, will accuse a pastor, who does not do everything they want him to do, of not caring; while at the same time they give him a puny salary which makes it evident they do not care at all.

All of this perverse judgment reminds us where Christ is rejected, justice will be wanting. Where devotion to Christ is lacking, wisdom to make honest judgment will be lacking. It also tells us that God's faithful servants will often be terribly misjudged and mistreated in this world. But this world is not the end. We have an eternity coming, and in eternity it will be a different story. It will no longer be as the writer of Ecclesiastes observed, "Folly is set in great dignity … and princes walking as servants" (Ecclesiastes 10:6, 7), but that which is truly honorable will be the only thing that is honored. Too bad our churches do not reflect that more than they do.

[Seite 312] XVIII

THE COMMITTEE

ACTS 8:1–25

THE GREAT PERSECUTION of the early church in Jerusalem resulted in the Gospel being carried to other parts of Palestine and eventually other nations, too, as many saints were forced to flee Jerusalem in order to save their lives. While many believers did flee Jerusalem because of the persecution, the apostles, however, continued to stay in Jerusalem. "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*" (v. 1).

Though remaining in Jerusalem, the apostles continued to keep in contact

with the believers that had fled Jerusalem and with the churches that these believers were establishing by their proclamation of the Gospel. In our study in this chapter, we will note one of those contacts in which Peter was very much involved. He was part of a two man committee, appointed by the apostles in Jerusalem, which was sent to the city of Samaria to see the new believers there who had been won to the Lord through the ministry of Philip. In this study we will note the people on the committee (v. 14), the purpose of the committee (vv. 15–17, 25), and the problem for the committee (vv. 18–24).

A. THE PEOPLE ON THE COMMITTEE

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John" (v. 14). Samaria had experienced a real spiritual awakening as a result of the ministry of Philip. This is not the **[Seite 313]** Philip who was a member of the twelve disciples; but the Philip who is known as "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8). He, along with Stephen, was also one of the seven "deacons" chosen earlier by the church in Jerusalem to take care of the daily ministrations of the widows in the church (Acts 6:1–6). Philip was one of those who fled Jerusalem because of the persecution. He fled to Samaria where he carried on a most blessed ministry. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (vv. 4–6).

This mighty moving of God in Samaria soon became known in Jerusalem, for "the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard" (v. 14). When a real work of God is happening, the word will get around. You will not have to advertise the fact in some magazine or boast of the statistics wherever you go, etc. The change in the converts' lives will be sufficient to get people talking and telling about what's going on. The same is true individually. If you claim to have become saved and nobody knows, you probably have not been saved. But if your salvation is real, it will show pronouncedly and quickly. The real thing cannot be hidden. When God does a work, it soon becomes most evident.

The interest in the work in Samaria prompted the apostles in Jerusalem to appoint a committee to visit Samaria. As we noted in the introduction of this chapter, the apostles selected Peter and John to make the trip to Samaria. Selecting these two men to travel together is not surprising. It was a natural selection. Both were great men of God, both were leaders in the church, and both were special friends and companions together in the Lord's work. So they were a natural to be selected to be the committee of two to go to Samaria.

Since this is the last time in Scripture in which these two are especially

mentioned together, we want to take time here to look at the association of Peter and John. No study in the life of Peter would be complete without some extended mention of his close **[Seite 314]** association with the Apostle John. We will note the history of their association and the helpfulness of their association.

1. The History of Their Association

In reviewing the history of the association of Peter and John, we will note from Scripture their early association, their selective association, and their close association.

Their early association. The first association of Peter and John recorded in Scripture was the report that they were in the fishing business together with their respective brothers (Andrew and James) and with John's father. "James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners [in fishing] with Simon" (Luke 5:10, cp. Mark 1:16–20 for the inclusion of Andrew). Then they were associated together in Peter's conversion. John, along with Andrew, Peter's brother, was present when Peter came to the Lord (John 1:35–42). They were also reported together with their brothers when they were called by Christ into His service (Luke 5:1–11). And they were brought together with the other ten disciples to form the group of Christ's twelve disciples (Mark 3:14–19). These early associations of Peter and John laid the ground work for their eventual deep and lasting friendship.

Their selective association. After being chosen members of the twelve disciples, Scripture reports that Peter and John were associated together in a small and select group. These two, along with James, became a select group of three of the twelve disciples. These three are mentioned together in some significant events. First, they are seen together in the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37); then they are seen together at the transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2); and later they are seen with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33) the night before the crucifixion. On another occasion Andrew, Peter's brother, is included with these three. This association occurred when the three plus Andrew asked Christ a question in private regarding things to come (Mark 13:3). This resulted in the **[Seite 315]** famous "Olivet Discourse" Christ gave regarding the future.

Their close association. The preparation of the Upper Room for the Passover supper the night before the crucifixion, is the first of some incidences in which just the two of them are associated together. Here we see more clearly their close friendship and their working together as a team in the Lord's service. There are at least ten incidents reported in Scripture of this association of the two together. We list them in chronological order of their occurrence.

First, as we have just noted, the two of them are reported as preparing the

Upper Room for the Last Supper which Christ had with His twelve disciples the night before the crucifixion. “And he [Christ] sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat” (Luke 22:8).

Second, the two of them are associated together in an incident during the Last Supper. Christ had said that one of the disciples was going to betray Him. Anxious to know the identity of the betrayer, “Simon Peter therefore beckoned [means some meaningful nod of the head] to him [John], that he should ask who it should be of whom he [Christ] spake” (John 13:24). John was “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” (John 13:23) at the time and would be closer to Christ and thus able to find out the answer. Being fishermen, the two would know how to communicate without speaking so “beckoned” fit their skills.

Third, at the trial of Christ, Scripture mentions the two together. Peter, who was at the time having much spiritual trouble following Christ, “stood at the door without [outside the court chambers]. Then went out that other disciple [John] … and brought in Peter” (John 18:16). This rather touching evidence of their close friendship shows John especially looking out for Peter, as close friends do, to see to it that he got into the court chambers to view the trial.

Fourth, after the resurrection of Christ, Mary Magdalene reported “to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple [John]” (John 20:2) that Christ was missing from the tomb. One of the things **[Seite 316]** this report tells us regarding the association of Peter and John is that Peter must have been staying with John after the crucifixion. With three denials weighing heavily on his mind, he needed to be with John, his close friend, who could help him during those awful moments in Peter’s life.

Fifth, Mary’s report was met with skepticism, and so the two of them are reported as running to the tomb to check out Mary’s report (John 20:3–10). It was an interesting incident in which John outran Peter but hesitated at the tomb while Peter, when he got to the tomb, kept on going right into the tomb.

Sixth, the two are mentioned together in Scripture in the last chapter of John during the fishing episode on the Sea of Galilee when Christ came to them on the shore; and they did not recognize Him at first. But after the great catch of fish, John immediately realized that it was Christ and told Peter. “Therefore that disciple [John] whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord” (John 21:7). John and Peter were obviously close together on the boat at the time, and John told Peter first because of their close friendship.

Seventh, later on in that experience, after Christ had conversed with Peter, Scripture reports John following Peter and Christ as Peter and Christ walked on the shore talking (John 21:20). This precipitated Peter’s question about what John was to do. “Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple [John] whom Jesus

loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21:20, 21). Why did Peter not ask about the others on the fishing excursion? Because John was his closest friend and the one whom he was most concerned about.

Eighth, we do not read far into the book of Acts until we again find the mention of these two together. The first time is in regards to the incident in which the cripple of over forty years was healed. "Peter and John went up together into the temple" (Acts 3:1) to pray and there they were met by a cripple "Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. **[Seite 317]** And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us … Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:3, 4, 6). After the healing, the lame man went into the temple but clung to Peter and John. "The lame man which was healed held Peter and John" (Acts 3:11).

Ninth, the healing of the cripple and the message which Peter preached following the healing resulted in Peter and John being arrested (Acts 4:3) by the Jewish religious leaders and incarcerated overnight then brought before the religious court the next day to be tried. But the two were an impressive duo in their behavior throughout this ordeal, and so we read that "they [the religious council trying the two] saw the boldness of Peter and John" (Acts 4:13). At the trial the two were told to stop speaking in the name of Christ; "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19).

Tenth, the last mention of the two together is found in our text in which, as we noted above, they were appointed a committee of two to go to Samaria.

2. The Helpfulness of Their Association

The close friendship of Peter and John certainly shows the value of having good friends. These were great men of God; and, therefore, would be most helpful to each other in the most important matters of life. They would be a great encouragement to each other to pray, to stand fast in the Lord during times of persecution, and to live holy and upright lives. Their close friendship certainly had to be a factor in both of them serving the Lord so excellently in the days of the early church.

It is also interesting to note how each complimented and helped the other in their personalities. Peter was impulsive, but John was cautious. Peter was emotional, but John was calm. Peter was outspoken, but John was reserved. Peter was a leader, but John was more of a follower. And Peter's zeal was balanced by John's perception.

[Seite 318] How important it is to have the proper friends and associations. Choose friends of excellent character and spirituality, and you will have better character and spiritual growth. But if you choose friends from the world, they will drag you down and corrupt your life. As someone said, “Lay down with dogs and you will rise up with fleas.”

We need to note here that in order to have good friends you must be a good friend. If you want friends of noble spiritual traits, you must also possess the same. If you are not of good character, do not expect people of good character to want to be your close friend. Good friendship is a two-way street. Both must be contributors to the helpfulness of the association. But if one is very deficient in character, the friendship will never work. If you lack good friends, the reason is in you, not in people of good character. If you want to know what kind of person you are, take a look at your friends; for your friends reveal your character.

B. THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE

Why were Peter and John sent to Samaria? Were they to spy on Philip? Were they to make sure the new converts were subordinate to the apostles in Jerusalem? Were they trying to play down Philip’s success so it would not take away any glory of the apostles’ success in Jerusalem in winning people to Christ and in performing miracles? Were they hoping to steal some of his converts to start a church of their own? No, none of these reasons express in any way the reason why Peter and John were sent to Samaria. They express the actions of a lot of religious visitations today but not the visit of Peter and John to Samaria.

The reason Peter and John were sent to Samaria was to help the new converts grow in the Lord. They did this by assisting Philip’s ministry in a helpful follow-up ministry (vv. 15–24), which we will note in more detail here, and in helping to extend his ministry in preaching the Gospel throughout Samaria. They “testified and preached the word of the Lord … in many villages of the Samaritans” (v. 25). They were working with **[Seite 319]** Philip—not against him. They were “laborers together” (1 Corinthians 3:9) in the Lord’s work. Churches were not competing against each other then as they so often do now. They were working together instead.

Peter and John were of particular help in Samaria in the matter of the Holy Spirit. They “prayed for them [the new converts], that they might receive the Holy Ghost; (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them) … Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (vv. 15–17). The delay in receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion was a dispensational situation which does not occur today and did not occur very long after the beginning of the early church. But the situation was present at that time; and Peter and John, having apostolic authority, addressed the need of the people. While this particular need

for a follow-up ministry is not present today, there are other important things a follow-up ministry can do which Peter and John did. As an example, we still need to pray for new converts ("prayed for them" [v. 15]); and we still need to instruct the new converts in the way of God ("testified and preached the word of the Lord" [v. 25]). These two things can and should always be done by saints for new converts wherever they are won to the Lord.

So many individuals and groups are not helpful like Peter and John, however. While they say such things as they are "arms of the church," they are really armament against the church. They like to descend upon new converts in a church not to see how they can help the new converts but rather to see how the new converts can help them. Cults often endeavor to steal converts this way. But this wretched practice is not limited to the cults. Unfortunately, we have a good many evangelicals who hesitate not to look at someone else's new converts as prey for their work. As an illustration, we once had a Gideon Bible representative phone and ask us to send to a Gideon's meeting some of our best men so they could be used in the work of the Gideons. My response to the caller was, I am sure, certainly not expected by him. I told the Gideon representative that I would **[Seite 320]** do no such thing; and that if he wanted good men to be part of the Gideon organization, he should go out and win his own crew to the Lord. Furthermore, I said that our church had enough work to keep these men busy all their free time and I did not appreciate him trying to take people away from our work to help his work. I am sure my remarks upset the Gideon representative, but I am also sure that he would have been very upset if I had called him and told him to send me some of his best Gideon workers so I could enlist them in the work of our church—and thus decrease greatly their involvement in the Gideons. This illustration, I want to make plain, is in no way an indictment upon the entire Gideon movement. The Gideons have done an excellent work over the years distributing Bibles. Not all Gideon workers are like the one that phoned us. But he is an illustration of a practice we see more and more today in Christendom which does not reflect the good practice of Peter and John at Samaria.

Another illustration of this problem here is seen in those who have or belong to some Bible study group or other Christian organization. They wait for someone to be converted in the church so they can recruit that person for their personal interests outside the church. Rather than helping the convert to get established in the local church, they are eager to get him involved in their group outside the church.

Then there are the dissident members in the church who also illustrate this problem. They try to run things at church in opposition to the pastor and board.

To help them do this, they recruit the new converts for friends or for their own Bible study groups, etc. in order to alienate the new converts against the pastor and church leaders. This then gives the dissidents more votes and supporters at business meetings to gain control of the church. It is a dastardly form of conduct, but it is being done all the time in our churches. Peter and John, however, were of an entirely different character. They came to help Philip in his ministry so the saints would grow in the Lord. Many Christian groups and people could certainly learn a valuable lesson here in the mission of Peter and John.

[Seite 321] C. THE PROBLEM FOR THE COMMITTEE

Peter and John had not been in Samaria long before they ran into the problem of Simon the sorcerer. Simon "which beforetime [previously] … 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 a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries" (vv. 9–11). But when Philip came to town preaching Christ, "Simon himself believed also; and … was baptized" (v. 13). But though saved, he still had plenty of the flesh in him; for "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" (vv. 18, 19). To further study this problem of Simon the sorcerer, we will note the coveting of Simon, the castigation of Simon, and the concern of Simon.

1. The Coveting of Simon

When a person is saved, he or she does not always gain the victory over their besetting sins overnight. Sometimes the drinker and smoker and gambler, as an example, struggle with these temptations long after they have been saved. Any saved person knows that salvation does not eliminate temptation and that the desires of the flesh must be put in place, or they will rise up and dominate. So it was with Simon.

We especially emphasize here this problem of gaining the victory over besetting sins; for in dealing with the problem of Simon, some think his unsavory actions indicate he was not saved. But Scripture plainly says he believed and was baptized. To conclude that Simon was not saved because he evidenced fleshly desires after his salvation is to conclude that anyone who evidences fleshly desires after salvation is not saved. That is definitely not a healthy conclusion. Nor is it a healthy conclusion to argue with a plain statement of Scripture which we have here in the case of Simon's conversion.

[Seite 322] Simon's problem was his desire to have the power and prestige which he had before his salvation. Prior to his salvation he had "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" (vv. 9, 10). So for some time Simon had considerable power and prestige. However, when he became saved, that was the end of his being a sorcerer and, therefore, of his power and prestige in society. But seeing the apostles' power to lay hands on people (which gave them the Holy Spirit) was too much for Simon. He coveted that power. And Simon thought he could gain that power by money. So "he offered them money" (v. 18). for this power.

We can understand a new convert, like Simon, having this problem; for new converts do not mature in a few days. But, unfortunately, we often see folk acting like this who have been saved for years. They may not be so overt as Simon in expressing their desire to have power and prestige, but the way they push and shove and pull strings for high office in the church evidences that the same fleshly interests are dominating their lives. Some men give sizeable gifts to churches and colleges in an effort to obtain (virtually "buy") recognition and to also obtain appointment to prestigious boards which gives them great esteem and power. Such action evidences the same spirit as Simon. These people covet to be somebody important in society and throw money around to get it. But it is a spirit wholly incompatible to Christianity.

2. The Castigation of Simon

Peter has already shown us how to deal with sin in the church when he gave Ananias and Sapphira a very severe rebuke in condemning their ways. Now we see Peter again showing us how to deal with sin in the church in the way he castigated Simon for his sinful conduct.

Peter would not tolerate sin or deal gently with sin in the church as many (probably we should say most) in our churches **[Seite 323]** would. Many in our churches would hardly rebuke Simon for fear he would get so upset he would leave the church. Peter, however, is not concerned about *how many* members the church has but *what kind* of members they have. He is more concerned about the holiness of the church than the popularity of the church. Therefore, he gave Simon an extremely strong denunciation. He said, "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" (vv. 20–23). Our churches are so sick in the way they oppose evil today that language like that from a pastor in a morning service would get him (not the sinful member) voted out of the church before the evening service. This, of course, helps evil to grow and become a

monster in the church so that no pastor can succeed in the place.

Peter, in castigating Simon, declared Simon's rejection, described Simon's condition, and defined Simon's need.

Declared his rejection. There is a threefold rejection of Simon in Peter's castigation of him. First, his money is rejected; second, his thinking is rejected; third, his ambition is rejected.

First, Simon's money was rejected. Money talks and often buys position and influence in the church. But it will not do that where a Peter is involved. Poor as he may have been, Peter was not interested in dirty money. He would not corrupt his message or his ways or the church to improve his monetary situation. How many troubles would multitudes of souls escape if they scorned unjust gain as Peter did.

Second, Simon's thinking was rejected. Simon thought you could buy position and power in the church. That still is the current thinking in our world and in many of our churches. We remember how, in our early years, one of the well-to-do persons in our small town approached my father in all earnestness wanting **[Seite 324]** to know how much money it would cost to join our church. Grace is hard on the flesh. We like to earn (or buy) our spiritual blessings. But it cannot be done.

Third, Simon's ambition was rejected. Peter told Simon, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter." Simon wanted the power of an apostle; and, therefore, he also wanted the position of an apostle. His ambition was to have a calling that was not his. Some in every age presume in this area and it is treading on dangerous ground. Before you pursue a Divine calling, such as a preacher or missionary, you make very sure that God has called you to that calling. The church is constantly agitated with the problem of people who are pushing themselves into callings that are not for them. In fact, this problem is a lot bigger than most church members realize. Divorced people insist they are entitled to hold church offices which Scripture says they are not qualified to hold. Women are today pushing to be pastors—and in our fundamental churches where they cannot do that (at least not yet), they try to dominate business meetings and lead the church unofficially. Also, some men have for the glory of "being up front" gone into the ministry. Those who presume a calling will end up being most unsatisfied in service and will cause many a headache in the church.

Described his condition. Peter was not complimentary. He did not make the mistake of trying to say so many nice things about one who had done a very sinful thing that the evil of the person was watered down or almost overlooked. No, that was not the way Peter dealt with evil. Rather, Peter described Simon's sinful condition in very plain and fitting terms. Peter told Simon that "thy heart

is not right in the sight of God" (v. 21), and that Simon was "in the gall of bitterness [poisoned by bitterness], and in the bond of iniquity [dominated by iniquity]" (v. 23). There was nothing in those statements from Peter which would inflate the ego. Peter's statement to Simon was a hard-hitting and humbling condemnation of the ex-sorcerer's ways. If we dealt with sin like that in our churches today, it would clean **[Seite 325]** out a great deal of sin in the churches and give the churches some spiritual power they have never had before.

Defined his need. Peter made it very clear what Simon's need was when he said to Simon, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (v. 22). Repentance (which included praying to God for forgiveness) was Simon's great need here. Repentance is the only saving action against one's evil. If Simon is to be helped, he must repent; otherwise he will only be encouraged in his unholy ways.

We make a mistake in church when we fail to tell delinquent members to repent. But many in the church today would never address sinning people this way. They would have told Simon that being a young Christian, he just did not understand how the church worked; and that if he would come to some special Bible studies on a one-and-one basis, they would help him see how the church worked. But that approach to the problem is a bunch of nonsense even though it is popular! Simon's problem, like that of all these folk who are out of sorts in the church, was a sin problem; and repentance was the need of the hour.

Note that Peter spoke of the need of having the "thought of thine heart" forgiven. Most people look at the deeds and give little attention to the thoughts of the heart. Yet, it is the thoughts in the heart that are the heart of the problem. We must attack our sinful thoughts if we are going to conquer sinful deeds. We do not want to wait until we have committed an evil deed before we seek God's forgiveness. We need to start with the bad thought first. When the heart entertains an evil thought, pray to God right on the spot that He would cleanse your heart of such a thought and ask Him to forgive it. It is much easier to oppose sin in the bud than in a full grown tree.

3. The Concern of Simon

After Peter had given Simon a scorching rebuke, "Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none **[Seite 326]** of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (v. 24). Peter's response caused Simon to have a great concern about his own situation. There is both good and bad in this concern. The good is in the fact that Simon did not argue with Peter or walk off in a huff because Peter rebuked him so harshly. You can hardly rebuke anyone in church nowadays without people arguing or walking off and then getting other church members to side with them in accusing the pastor of being most unloving

in the way he treated them. But Simon did not do that. He did not argue with Peter, criticize Peter, or walk out on Peter. Rather, he believed what Peter said about the evil of his conduct and about the judgment that it threatened to bring upon him.

The bad in Simon's concern may not be readily seen in a casual reading of the text, but it is there in the text just the same. The bad is in Simon's refusal to pray and in his request for prayer.

First, *refusal to pray*. Simon did not pray as he was told to pray. Peter told Simon to pray (v. 22), but Simon does not pray. Rather he asks Peter to pray. He will not do what he ought to do. He is concerned about retribution but not about responsibility. He wants others to do his work for him. If the truth were known, many who come to see their pastor and ask the pastor to pray for them seldom pray for themselves. They soothe their conscience by having someone else pray for them, but they are too carnal to pursue this spiritual exercise themselves (which is one reason why they have those problems which send them to the pastor to pray for them). Furthermore, this problem with these people does not stop with prayer. This kind does not want to do anything at times to help themselves. They want help but want everybody else to do the work.

Second, *request for prayer*. To request another to pray for you seems like a good thing to do. But it may not always be a good thing, for you may be very evil in how you want the other person to pray. Simon wanted Peter to pray only that the consequences of evil would not happen. He says nothing about praying that the evil in his heart would be removed. He was **[Seite 327]** concerned about being exempt from judgment, but not from his sin. This attitude is typical of those who really are not repenting of their sin. Men everywhere want to escape the wrath of God, but they do not want to conform to the will of God. They want to live unholy lives and fulfill their every evil lust, but they do not want to pay the penalty. As an example, a girl lives immorally and, as a result, becomes pregnant. Complications beset the pregnancy so she asks the church to pray that the pregnancy will be free of the complications—but she does not ask the church to pray that the evil of her lustful heart will be removed. She wants problems removed but not the impurity which caused the problem. Often when these kind of people cry out for prayer, we think they are showing spiritual improvement; and we often mistake their cry for escape from judgment as a cry of repentance. But it is not. It is the cry of souls who need a lot more work done in their heart regarding their relationship to sin and judgment.

Let us not be like Simon. Let us be as concerned about getting the sin out of our heart as we are about escaping the judgment for our sin. Let us be just as concerned about cleaning up our heart of corruption as we are about sparing

ourselves from condemnation.

[Seite 328] XIX

THE COMFORTING

ACTS 9:32–42

IN THE PREFACE of his inspiring book, *Peace in the Valley*, Vance Havner wrote, "It has been said that the business of a preacher is to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.' " Vance Havner spoke of this dual ministry of the preacher to inform his readers that he practiced it in his books. Some of his books were devotional meditations intended to comfort the saints; while other of his books were pungent sermons which discomforted the saints—the sinning ones, that is.

The ministry of Peter also illustrated this twofold ministry of the preacher. In some of our previous chapters, we have seen Peter "afflict" those who were comfortable in their sins. He dealt forcefully with sin in his sermons before the multitudes, in his speaking before the Sanhedrin, and in his dealing with sin in the church. Now in this chapter, we see Peter "comfort" the afflicted. We especially note two cases in our text which show this comforting ministry. They are the restoring of Aeneas' health (vv. 32–35) and the raising of Dorcas from the dead (vv. 36–42). They occurred when Peter "passed throughout all quarters … [visiting] the saints" (v. 32) in Judea and Samaria.

A. THE RESTORING OF AENEAS

When Peter "came down … to the saints which dwelt at Lydda [approximately 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem] … he found a certain man, named Aeneas" (vv. 32, 33) who was in great need of physical help. Peter attended to the need of the man and wrought a great miracle of healing in him.

[Seite 329] In examining this incident of Peter's comforting ministry, we will note the problem of Aeneas' health, the power for Aeneas' healing, the proof of Aeneas' healing, the precept in Aeneas' healing, and the product from Aeneas' healing.

1. The Problem of Aeneas' Health

Aeneas had a very serious physical problem. He had been bedridden for "eight years, and was sick of the palsy" (v. 33). Being "sick of the palsy" meant that he was paralyzed. Vincent says, "Whenever Luke mentions this disease, he uses the verb and not the adjective … [which is] paralytic." Then Vincent adds, "His usage in this respect was in strict accord with that of medical writers." Luke's describing sicknesses in a medical way in his writings is not surprising; for, as most Bible students know, Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14).

Being paralyzed meant that Aeneas could not get around and, therefore, was

bedridden. Today, we have a number of modern devices which aid a person who is paralyzed, even one paralyzed from the neck all the way down, to get about. But in those days, a person who was paralyzed could only lay in bed—a burden to others and a burden to himself. He was helpless and hopeless as far as man was concerned.

The sickness of Aeneas, even though he was a saint, gives us a picture of the spiritual condition of those without Christ. Without Christ the sinner is both helpless and hopeless. As Aeneas was *helpless* to walk because his paralysis destroyed his strength to walk, so the sinner is "without strength" (Romans 5:6) to walk in God's way. Sin disables. We may legalize it, popularize it, and glamorize it; but it still disables. Aeneas' *hopelessness* is seen in that man had no remedy for his condition. Paul said the sinner who is without Christ also has "no hope" (Ephesians 2:12). But thank God there is One Who can help and give hope, and this takes us to our next point.

2. The Power for Aeneas' Healing

When meeting up with Aeneas and beholding his condition, **[Seite 330]** "Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." (v. 34). Again the emphasis is placed on the fact that it is Jesus Christ Who is doing the healing. This truth was previously emphasized when Peter and John were used to heal the cripple before the gate Beautiful of the Temple (Acts 3:6). The power is not in man, but it is Christ's power working through man.

The work of salvation is seen plainly in this emphasis. As Aeneas had no power to heal himself, so in salvation, the sinner has no power to save himself. As the power for Aeneas' healing came from Jesus Christ, so in salvation the power to save the sinner comes from Jesus Christ. As Christ was the answer to Aeneas' problem, so He is the answer to men's sin problem. But leave Christ out, and Aeneas stays paralyzed, and sinners will never be delivered from their sin.

Society today is trying to deal with sin problems, but without Christ. In so doing they look very pathetic. Their great programs, which generally include great outlays of money, are always being proven worthless because Christ is left out. Group after group, politician after politician, so-called experts after so-called experts are ever coming up with what they deem the solution. But it always leaves out Christ and, therefore, is no solution at all; for the only way sin can be dealt with successfully is through Jesus Christ.

3. The Proof of Aeneas' Healing

When God does a work, the evidence will be abundant. You will not have to argue, debate, use sleight of hand, lie, or pressure people into believing a work has been done. You may have to do all those things when you are a fraud and want others to believe you are doing a great work of God. But if God is in it, you

do not have to do anything to prove it—it will show plainly to all who can see.

So it was with the healing of Aeneas. The proof of his healing was so very plain. Here was a man that had been bedridden for eight years. Now, all of a sudden, he is up walking. “He arose immediately” (v. 34). Peter did not have to exhort people **[Seite 331]** to believe a change had been made. All he had to do was let Aeneas walk around. Aeneas would show in his walk that a miracle had been done.

As we have noticed before (such as in the healing of lame man by the Temple [Acts 3]), this is also true in the matter of salvation. When a person gets saved, he will show it in his walk. It will be very different than his walk as an unbeliever. If it is not, we are justified in suspecting the person has not been saved. Today, we hear a number of preachers and evangelists boasting about thousands of converts being won in their meetings. That some are saved in their meetings, we do not doubt. But the number is often very exaggerated! Why do we say this? Because of the walk of all those multitudes who they say were saved in their meetings. Unlike Aeneas, they do not manifest in their walk that a change has occurred. In character they are still paralyzed and bedridden. Boasted statistics mean nothing here; it is the walk that reveals whether or not a person has been saved.

4. The Precept in Aeneas’ Healing

God’s blessings are not apart from God’s commands. We see this truth again and again in Scripture, and so we emphasize it again and again. The truth is prominent in our text. Right after Peter said, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole” (v. 34), he said to Aeneas, “Arise, and make thy bed” (Ibid.). The blessing was followed by duty. The cure was followed by a command. The restoration was followed by responsibility. When God does something for you, do not be surprised if He then wants you to do something for Him. It is only fair. However, you will always find that He will ask you to do a whole lot less than what He did for you.

What a shame that we are so loath to obey God’s commands. Disobedience reveals ingratitude. We seldom think of disobedience in those terms, but we need to. God healed Aeneas; and now Aeneas is simply asked to “arise, and make thy bed.” How shameful would it have been if he had responded to his duty like so many church members respond to their duty.

[Seite 332] The simplicity of Aeneas’ command reminds us that we not only reveal our spiritual character in what we think are the big matters of life, but we also reveal our spiritual character in the small matters of life. How well you perform the little mundane duties reflects where you are spiritually. How well and how prompt you make your bed (as in Aeneas’ case) may say plenty about

your spiritual life. That may make a lot of saints uncomfortable; but it is an old truth taught in Scripture that if you are not faithful in small matters, you will not be faithful in the big matters. Christ spoke of this when He said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).

5. The Product From Aeneas’ Healing

The best thing about Aeneas’ healing was not the fact that he was no longer paralyzed—as wonderful as that was. The best thing about the healing was that it resulted in many folk coming to the Lord. “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon [the plain extending some thirty miles along the Mediterranean from Joppa to Caesarea] saw him, and turned to the Lord” (v. 35). In God’s providence, the paralyzing and restoration of Aeneas was all part of a plan to bring many to Christ.

In this result of the healing, Aeneas learned what we all need to learn; namely, that in order for others to be reached with the Gospel, we may have to suffer first. Lest we complain, we need to remember that Christ suffered for our salvation; and He suffered a whole lot more than we will ever suffer for anyone’s salvation. Furthermore, if we have any spirituality at all, we should realize that if others should come to Christ through our suffering it will more than compensate for any of our suffering.

The truth that our suffering can result in the salvation of others should encourage us when we experience painful times—be it physical suffering, material suffering, or other suffering. It makes our suffering very meaningful. So often at the time of our suffering, we see no purpose, no reason, no explanation. But God does not do things without noble reason. He will not afflict **[Seite 333]** His own unless there is a very good reason for so doing. Of course, it certainly is not easy to appreciate this fact when we are in the midst of difficult times of suffering. But the day will come when God’s wonderful plan will be seen. Then we will rejoice in it all and give God much praise.

B. THE RAISING OF DORCAS

While Peter was in Lydda, a great Christian woman by the name of Dorcas passed away in the nearby town of Joppa. “The disciples [in Joppa] had heard that Peter was there, [and so] they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them” (v. 38). Peter went to Joppa as requested; and as a result, he worked a miracle which resulted in Dorcas being raised from the dead.

In examining this example of Peter’s comforting ministry, we will note the piety of Dorcas, the passing of Dorcas, the pity for Dorcas, the praise for Dorcas, the prayer for Dorcas, the presentation of Dorcas, and the persuasion in Dorcas.

1. The Piety of Dorcas

The character of Dorcas was most exemplary. “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” (v. 36). Two important things are said about her which show her piety: she was a believer and she was benevolent.

Believer. Being called a “disciple” indicates something more than just one who had gone through the motions regarding salvation. She was an earnest believer, one who followed the Lord diligently, and who identified herself with God’s people unashamedly. It was not popular then to be a “disciple” of Jesus Christ. You could lose your possessions and your life for being a “disciple” of the Lord. But Dorcas followed the Lord anyway. Would that her number would fill our churches today.

[Seite 334] *Benevolent*. True piety not only involves our devotion to God, but it also involves our kindness to man. James 1:27 speaks of this duty to man: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Dorcas certainly was faithful in this duty. As we will see later, her benevolence was especially directed towards the widows in the church.

In the performing of her benevolence, as recorded in verse 36, Dorcas demonstrated three things about her faith. First, *it was real*. Her faith showed in her works, for “she did” good works and almsdeeds. She was not just a hearer but was also a doer (James 1:22). Her Christianity was not just talk; it was walk. Her faith was more than a song on her lips, but it was a way of life. Second, *it was great*. She was “full” of good works. Some do a few good things, but she did many. Little faith does little; great faith does much. Third, *it was steadfast*. The word “did” is in the imperfect tense which means she habitually practiced doing good works. She was faithful in her performance. It was a daily, regular way of life with her. This would be why she was “full” of benevolent acts. You do not become “full” of benevolent deeds when you are spasmodic and irregular in your performance.

Oh, that we had more of the faithfulness of Dorcas in our church members. It is so hard to get church members to do anything for an extended period of time, to be faithful day in and day out at their task. They will serve for a short period of time; they will serve in spurts; but seldom will they serve faithfully. That is why so little gets done in the church when much needs to be done.

Many women’s missionary groups have taken the name of “Dorcas” for the name of their group. But the way many of these missionary groups operate, they certainly do not live up to the name. Neither in following the Lord nor in

faithfully doing “almsdeeds” do they follow Dorcas’ example. Most (there are some noble exceptions, but not many) women’s missionary groups spend a great deal of time over tea and coffee and rolls **[Seite 335]** and the reading of the minutes, but they run out of time and energy when it comes to doing anything constructive for God’s servants. “The mountain labors and brings forth a mouse” describes them well. A Dorcas they definitely are not. They only disgrace the name by making it the name of their group, and they are often an aggravation for rest of the church—something Dorcas definitely was not.

2. The Passing of Dorcas

“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died” (v. 37). Living faithfully for the Lord and being a real blessing to those around you does not exempt one from sickness, sorrow, and death. But the Lord is not unmindful of these experiences. He is, in fact, very watchful and concerned about them. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15) certainly fits here. Notice it is the “saints” death that is precious in the sight of the Lord. When sinners die, it is a different matter.

It is true, as we have said many times, that some trials come because of our wayward living. But not all trials are a result of sinful living for many who have been faithful to the Lord experience severe trial in their lives; while at the same time, some who live ungodly seem to breeze through life with a minimum of problems. Dorcas was such an exemplary saint, yet she got sick and passed away while many vile sinners in her city lived on in the enjoyment of good health. But the game is not over with this life. Death does not end it all. The final score is not the score at the time a person dies. Eternity stands before all men, and that makes all the adjustments to assure that the righteousness is duly honored and wickedness is duly punished. Then all the dying will be put in proper perspective.

3. The Pity for Dorcas

Because of their great pity for Dorcas, “the disciples … sent unto him [Peter] … desiring him that he would not delay to come to them” (v. 38). There are two noteworthy observations **[Seite 336]** here in the actions of these disciples of Joppa: they did what they could, and they did not give up.

They did what they could. Not all disciples had the gift of healing or of raising one from the dead. But those who did not have these gifts did not sit around and wring their hands and bemoan their small ability to do anything. Rather, they did what they were able to do—in this case, it was to call for Peter who did have the gifts. It is a simple lesson but an important one that we learn here; namely, do what you can do and do not fret about what you cannot do. God does not gift us all alike. How many gifts we have is not what is important to God. What is

important is how faithful we are in using the gifts that we have. God gave the same commendation to the one who had been faithful with the five talents as He did to the one who had been faithful with the two talents (Matthew 25:21, 23). Let God take care of the number of gifts; you take care of the faithfulness in using them.

They did not give up. One must admire these disciples in Joppa who called for Peter even though Dorcas had died. You will note when they called Peter, they did not request that he raise Dorcas from the dead. They only requested that he come without delay. Whether Peter would raise Dorcas from the dead or not, they still could profit from the comforting ministry of Peter; for he was a true man of God. We can learn from this—when trial comes, do not call for the psychiatrists or psychologists or politicians or other worldly so-called experts. Call for someone who can help you spiritually, someone who can put things in Divine perspective, someone who walks close to the Lord. They will give you the best and most help.

The attitude of the disciples of Joppa was exhibited by the disciples of John the Baptist when they went to Jesus after they had buried John's beheaded body (Matthew 14:12). Christ did not raise John, but going to Christ was a mark of wisdom for John's disciples, for Christ could still give them the comfort they needed.

[Seite 337] In contrast to the actions of John's disciples and the disciples in Joppa, there was one from Jairus' house (probably a servant) who told Jairus to not pursue Christ anymore when death had entered Jairus' home. Jairus' daughter was very sick and near death when Jairus went to Christ and "besought him that he would come into his house" (Luke 8:41). Christ was delayed in coming, and in that time the daughter died. Then "there cometh one from … [Jairus'] house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master" (Luke 8:49). That advice, unfortunately, generally expresses the attitude people have about Christ. They limit His ministry. Christ could still bring great help and so could Peter whether or not they raise the dead. In the case of Jairus' daughter and of Dorcas, Christ and Peter did indeed raise the dead. However, that seldom is the will of God in most cases; but it should not discourage our pursuit of help. To cease pursuing God's help is to give up on God and limit His help.

4. The Praise for Dorcas

Again in our text we have more good things said of Dorcas. We noted above in the first verse of our text the piety of Dorcas. She was a disciple and full of benevolent works. Here we take note of the praise others spoke of Dorcas to Peter. "When he [Peter] was come, they brought him into the upper chamber [where the body of Dorcas had been laid, cp. v. 37]; and all the widows stood by

him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them" (v. 39).

We learn from this praise the specific works which Dorcas did which are described earlier as "good works and almsdeeds" (v. 36). Dorcas had used her sewing skills and her wealth (to buy the material she sewed) to help the needy widows. Widows generally had much greater needs in those days than today. Especially did Christian widows have material needs, for persecution added cruelly to their privations. The problem of the widows' privations became an early and major problem in the history of the early church and resulted in the appointment of seven men to deal with it (Acts 6). The problem continued to be **[Seite 338]** so prevalent in the early church that Apostle Paul later laid down some rules as to which widows qualified for help from the church (1 Timothy 5).

Dorcas, in helping the widows, instructs us in how the church can be relieved of excessive burdens in their care. Individuals can take it upon themselves to help the needy. Too often folk are too selfish and too lazy to help others themselves and so dump the problem on an already over burdened church administration and budget. Many a pastor can testify of the disgusting situation of having people, who have more money than the church and more time and money than the pastor, come to the pastor and tell him about some family or person who is in material need, then insisting the pastor drop everything and run to assist that person, and that the church spend freely for the case—while they do not lift a finger to help. Dorcas was of different character, however, and gives us a more noble example of Christian benevolence.

5. The Prayer for Dorcas

"But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed" (v. 40). Two important things can be observed about Peter's prayer. It was private and it was positive.

Private. Peter emptied the room of all the mourners before he prayed. When good men want to get earnest in prayer, they will want to be alone with God. Those who can pray more earnestly in public than in private are hypocrites. All public praying is not wrong. But a hypocrite will only pray in public, for he only prays for man to hear. Hence, his prayers will be adjusted for the praise of men, not for acceptance before God. Peter, however, was a true man of God; he was no hypocrite. Therefore, he wanted to get through to God and did not care about impressing man. And he prayed in private because he did not want man distracting from his praying either.

Peter certainly did not act like the so-called healers of our day act who do everything in a way that will gain the most publicity. **[Seite 339]** When the so-called healers of our day pray for the sick, they make a big scene about it. They

make sure they are in front of a large crowd, and they go through a lot of ostentatious actions in praying for the sick. Peter was not a fraud like the so-called healers of our day, however; so he put all the people out of the room where the corpse of Dorcas was and then prayed alone to God.

Positive. Matthew Henry, whose keen spiritual eye frequently observes things in Scripture that most of us do not, noted that Peter did not look at the body when he prayed. Scripture records his "turning … to the body" (v. 40) after he prayed. Henry said Peter's turning to the body after he prayed "intimates that when he prayed he turned from it; lest the sight of it should discourage his faith." That may seem like a humorous and trivial note, but it does indeed teach us a valuable lesson about being positive in our praying by not focusing only on our difficulties. Focusing only on our problems will hinder our performance as Peter demonstrated when he walked on the water, which we studied in an earlier chapter in this book. When he concentrated on the stormy sea and took his eyes off of Christ, he began to sink. So it is with us. Let us not behold the difficulties, the trials, and problems too earnestly lest we forget there is another sight to behold, namely, the promises of God. Do not be like some who are so negative that all they want to talk about are their problems. They are never positive. They never see the good side of anything. This attitude hurts their faith, their prayer life, and their ability to overcome difficulties in life. We are not to ignore our problems and stick our head in the sand about them—but neither do we have to look solely at them either.

6. The Presentation of Dorcas

"Peter … turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he [Peter] gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive" (vv. 40, 41). A **[Seite 340]** great miracle was performed here by Peter who did so through the great power of God. The proof that a miracle had happened and Dorcas was alive was given in Peter's presenting Dorcas alive to those who knew her. Those mourners who had seen her dead body could see plainly that Dorcas was alive. They may have been astounded, but they would have no doubts that the miracle had happened. They could see it before their own eyes.

Again we see here, as we saw in Aeneas and as we see often in Scripture, that the work of God is not without abundant proof. You can examine God's works. Let all the widows and others see. Let them examine the miracle. Let them converse with Dorcas. There is nothing to hide.

How thankful we can be that our faith rests on such great proof. Like the raising of Dorcas from the dead, so our faith is excellent in evidence. "He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3) is

the principle we are looking at. Let the skeptics drone on; their problem is not a lack of evidence as they claim; their problem is they simply do not want to believe.

7. The Persuasion in Dorcas

"And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord" (v. 42). Dorcas dying and then being raised from the dead resulted in many being saved. Like Aeneas, Dorcas had to suffer in order that others might be won to the Lord. The Apostle Paul understood this truth well and addressed it in one of his epistles. He said, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me [his imprisonments and other sufferings] have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12). This certainly puts an encouraging perspective on our trials.

[Seite 341] XX

THE CHANGE

ACTS 10; 11:1–18; 15:1–29; GALATIANS 2:11–14

A TREMENDOUS CHANGE occurred in the dealings of God with man when the Gentiles became part of the early church. Heretofore, the spiritual blessings of God had been almost exclusively Jewish. The Jews were God's chosen people. They had many spiritual privileges Gentiles did not have. Paul spoke of the advantages of this exclusiveness when he said, "What advantage then hath the Jew?… Much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:1, 2).

Unfortunately, the Jews prided this spiritual exclusiveness to a sin. Gentiles were considered dogs, outcasts, and outside the interest and love of God. Even the members of the early church, while not as uncharitable in their view of the Gentiles as were the ungodly Jews, still seemed to view the Gentiles as excluded from the blessing of the Gospel. But all of this would change shortly after the early church commenced, and Peter would be in the forefront of the change. Though Peter was considered the apostle to the circumcised (Galatians 2:7) in contrast to Paul who was seen as the apostle to the uncircumcised (Ibid.), yet it was Peter who was chosen of God to spearhead this great change.

To study this change and Peter's involvement in it, we will look at texts in both Acts and Galatians. Some of the experiences in these texts will occur after the experience of our next and last chapter of this book, but we felt it wise in this chapter to bring all of the texts together regarding Peter and this change **[Seite 342]** in order to establish continuity in dealing with the subject. In studying these texts and this important facet of Peter's life, we will look at the centurion experiencing the change (Acts 10), the contention concerning the change (Acts

11:1–18), the conference supporting the change (Acts 15:1–29), and the censure involving the change (Galatians 2:11–14).

A. THE CENTURION EXPERIENCING THE CHANGE

The initial revelation Peter received from God about this great change involved a Gentile by the name of Cornelius who was a centurion in the Roman army. He and Peter received visions from God a day apart which resulted in Peter visiting the centurion and his household and proclaiming the Gospel to them.

To examine these experiences of Peter and the centurion, we will note the vision in Caesarea which came to the centurion, the vision in Joppa which came to Peter, and the visit to Caesarea by Peter to see the centurion.

1. The Vision in Caesarea

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band … He saw in a vision … an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius … send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter … he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do" (Acts 10:1, 3, 5, 6). Little did the centurion know that this vision would signal a tremendous change in the dealings of God with man. In looking at this vision we will note the man receiving the vision, the message of the vision, and the mission because of the vision.

The man. Cornelius was no ordinary man. He was a "centurion" which meant he was head of one hundred Roman soldiers stationed in Jewish territory in the important city of Caesarea. Caesarea had been built by Herod the Great in honor of Caesar, and it was an important political city where Roman soldiers would have important guard duties. Hence, the position of centurion **[Seite 343]** in this case was most important.

Scripture says Cornelius was also "devout" (Acts 10:2) which is unusual for a military man; but there are, thankfully, always some exceptions (cp. Matthew 8:5–13, 27:54; Acts 27:1–3 for other exceptions of centurions being sympathetic to the Gospel). In his devotion to God, Cornelius led his family to be the same ("feared God with all his house" [Acts 10:2])—which is one of the great needs of our day. Being devout, he was also benevolent ("gave much alms to the people" [Ibid.])—which was unlike many soldiers of the day who stole from the people—and a man of prayer ("prayed to God alway" [Ibid.]). What a rebuke his prayer habits are to many of our church members. They walk in so much more light than the centurion did, yet their prayer life doesn't even compare to his.

Cornelius' character was outstanding. It was also rare, but the world does not give its praises to such character. God, however, notes it and records it for multitudes to see.

The message. The message commended Cornelius for his devotion to God

(“Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God” [Acts 10:4]), and then commanded him to obtain further information regarding salvation (“Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter … he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” [Acts 10:5, 6]). From this message we learn about the need of salvation and the receiving of revelation.

First, we learn about the *need of salvation*. As good a man as Cornelius was, he still needed the Gospel! So the angel of God instructed him to send for Peter who would tell Cornelius about the Gospel. What a lesson we have here about the universal need of salvation. Few, if any, would argue that the man in the gutter needs to be saved. But it is hard for many to accept the idea that the decent, moral, upright, church going, praying, charitable person needs to be saved. But regardless of how good we are, we still need to be saved; for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) and will never save a soul. **[Seite 344]** Being moral, upright, attending church, supporting charities, praying, and reading the Bible does not save. Only Jesus Christ saves.

Second, we learn about the *receiving of revelation*. God will reveal more truth to us when we need it and when we have accepted the truth we have already been given by Him. Cornelius lived his life according to the light he had, but he needed more light, and he received it because he used the light God had already given him. This truth will help those who have trouble accepting the fact that the heathen in some back wilderness are condemned to hell even though they never had a chance to hear the Gospel. All people have had a chance to respond to Divine revelation. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1) may be all the revelation of truth one has, but accept that truth and more will be revealed as needed. The problem with the heathen in the back jungles is that they are like the heathen in civilized society—they reject the Divine revelation they have and, therefore, do not receive further light. Any heathen who accepts the light which God gives him will in due time be given light to be saved.

The mission. This centurion of Caesarea showed excellent response to Divine revelation by immediately doing what the angel of God commanded him to do. He sent a delegation (“two of his household servants, and a devout soldier” [Acts 10:7]) to Peter. And how important it was that he responded so promptly; for as we will see shortly, the delegation arrived at a most providential time which made the mission highly successful. If we want the fullest blessing from God’s commands, we must obey them promptly. Delay in obedience is costly. Those who complain that even though they have obeyed God they have not had much blessing from God may find that their lack in blessings is a result of being dilatory in obeying God’s commands.

The fact that the angel of God did not tell Cornelius the Gospel but ordered him to send for Peter who would tell him the Gospel informs us of a very important truth about the proclamation **[Seite 345]** of the Gospel—God has given that work to men, not to angels. Angels could surely do a better and more faithful job, but it is in God's good pleasure that this great privilege be given to men. We say privilege because that is exactly what it is. What a tremendous honor to be entrusted with such an important message. Men who are sent by a high government official to carry an extremely important message consider the mission to be a great honor. How much more should we who know the Lord count it a great honor to be sent by the King of kings to tell mankind the most important message of all. Yet, unfortunately, we so disesteem the privilege that we fail terribly in our duties. What a tragedy, and what shame will it be when we have to give an account for our unfaithful performance.

2. The Vision in Joppa

While the men sent by Cornelius were on their way to see Peter, Peter had a vision in Joppa which prepared him for the coming of these men and for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. We will note the praying before the vision, the panorama of the vision, the perplexity about the vision, and the providence in the vision.

The praying before the vision. It is important to note that it was prayer which led into the vision, for Peter was praying when the vision came. "On the morrow, as they [the delegation from Cornelius] went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten, but while they made ready, he fell into a trance" (Acts 10:9, 10). Three things can be said about Peter's praying: it was frequent, faithful, and fruitful.

First, his praying was *frequent*. It was the sixth hour (noon) when he prayed. We have learned in previous texts that Peter also prayed at the ninth hour (3 P.M. [Acts 3:1]) and during other times as well. Peter had the habit of praying at least several times throughout the day. This is a contrast to contemporary **[Seite 346]** saints, for they seldom pray even a few times a week. But you will find that great men of God are men of prayer and, therefore, pray frequently.

Second, his praying was *faithful*. According to our text, Peter was very hungry at the time of prayer. Yet in spite of his physical need, he still faithfully pursued prayer. This is not characteristic of most saints, for prayer generally has a very low priority compared to their physical needs. Some give such a priority to physical needs that they cannot even stop to pray before they eat!

Third, his praying was *fruitful*. It resulted in a revelation from God. This fact can be said about Cornelius, too. Those who pray are much more likely to learn

about the will and way of God than those who do not pray. A dispute at a church business meeting will often illustrate this fact. These disputes are frequently divided amongst prayers and non-prayers. The non-prayers, who do not come to church for the midweek prayer services but only come to the midweek service when the church is having a business meeting, haven't the foggiest notion what God wants the church to do. Pastors and board members may spend much time in prayer over a matter and thus perceive readily the will of God. But the non-prayers do not know the will of God and show it pronouncedly at the business meeting many times.

The panorama of the vision. Peter was given a thrice repeated scene. It consisted of "a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (Acts 10:11, 12)—things which the Jew was forbidden under the law to eat. But a voice told Peter to "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common [or unclean]" (Acts 10:13–15). We note three **[Seite 347]** things concerning this panorama and Peter.

First, the *refusal*. Peter, though very hungry at the time, would not yield to what he thought was a temptation in the panorama to satisfy his physical appetite. Often temptation comes when physical appetite has been deprived for some time which then makes the temptation stronger. But prayer helps one to overcome temptation, and Peter had been praying just before it came.

Second, the *rebuke*. Peter was rebuked because he characterized things differently than God did. In this case Peter was calling unclean what God had cleansed. Generally it is just the other way around. Humanity habitually calls clean what God calls unclean. So today we call such things as adultery, divorce, homosexuality, gambling, abortion, lying, stealing, and other sins acceptable names and approve of them by our laws. It is time we checked with God to see how He labels things.

Third, the *repetition*. The panorama occurred three times for Peter (Acts 10:16). This indicated the importance of what God was trying to tell Peter. God does not repeat because He is senile and forgetful. God repeats in order to emphasize the importance of something. And important indeed was the scene and message Peter saw and heard in the vision. It would mightily affect his ministry and the proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The perplexity about the vision. Peter did not catch on right away as to what God was trying to tell him. "Peter doubted [was perplexed] in himself what this

vision which he had seen should mean" (Acts 10:17). His perplexity teaches us some important lessons about understanding the message of God.

First, it tells us that illumination does not always come at the time we hear the message. In Old Testament times, Pharaoh (of Joseph's day), Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel experienced this fact. They did not understand immediately the message God gave them. We, therefore, should not be surprised if we do not fully understand a Scripture passage the moment we read it.

[Seite 348] Second, it tells us that illumination delay does not make the message defective. A lot of critics would like us to think so. They make the foolish mistake of evaluating the Divine message on the basis of whether or not their puny minds can comprehend it the first time they hear it or read it. They think that if they do not understand right away then it can never be understood; and, therefore, the message is defective. However, they do not say that when it comes to such things as mathematics. Students in a math class do not open their math book and immediately understand everything the first time they read it. But they are not so foolish as to mock and disbelieve the math book because they do not understand it the first day they read it. They realize that it often takes time before one understands. So it is in spiritual matters, too.

Third, it tells us that illumination is dependent on obedience. It is the same principle we saw earlier regarding why Cornelius obtained further revelation of God's way. Peter caught on as to what the vision meant when he followed the Lord's will in regards to going to the centurion's house in Caesarea. Obey what you now understand, and you will come to understand more in due time. Obedience is the key to increased understanding. That explains why skeptics never catch on, for they have an obedience problem.

The providence in the vision. "While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee" (Acts 10:19). How wonderful to observe God's leading in the life of the obedient soul. Those who obey the Lord will find God guiding providence in their life so that events simply fit together beautifully. Cornelius had his vision before Peter had his so that the messengers of Cornelius would be able to arrive at the place Peter was staying just as Peter was pondering his thrice repeated vision.

A good many professing Christians complain about never seeing things work out in their lives like they do for "the pastor and missionaries." Their problem is in their failure to obey the **[Seite 349]** Lord as they ought. Peter and Cornelius demonstrate that things work out in a wonderful way when one is faithful to the commands of God. We are at the right place at the right time and meet the right people at the right time. The blessing of Divine providence is not a result of luck, but it is a result of faithfulness in doing the will of God.

3. The Visit to Caesarea

The messengers of Cornelius stayed overnight in the house where Peter was staying; and "on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him" (Acts 10:23) to Caesarea to see Cornelius the centurion. Regarding this visit, we will note the companions of Peter, the humbleness of Peter, the message by Peter, and the response to Peter.

The companions of Peter. Peter took "certain brethren" (six in number, cp. Acts 11:12) with him on the trip to Caesarea. Don't pass over this notation lightly, for it sets a good example for preachers today. These six men not only provided companionship with Peter on the trip, but they also more importantly provided good witnesses for what transpired on the trip. And because of what transpired on the trip—Peter speaking to Gentiles and their accepting the Gospel message and giving evidence of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit—he needed some good competent witnesses to verify the happenings of the visit.

There are times when preachers can make visits alone without problems. But in this day and age those times are few and far between. It is, therefore, very important that he have godly men go with him in order to have competent witnesses of what transpires in these visits. The preacher needs that protection to prevent false accusations and also to prevent seductive temptations. Even though a preacher may be conducting himself properly, accusations are hard to refute without witnesses. And many a preacher would not have gotten into serious moral problems had he been careful to have at least an assistant or some other godly brother with him when he made visits.

[Seite 350] *The humbleness of Peter*. When Peter arrived in Caesarea and met Cornelius, the centurion "fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25, 26). Cornelius was ignorant of many things spiritually and so gave Peter honor Peter did not merit. Peter, being a godly man, quickly corrected the situation and refused to take the honor. All ministers do not do that. The Pope certainly does not. He does not hesitate to receive knee-bending and hand-kissing veneration. And a good many other ministers have a problem here, too; for they seem quite interested in exalting themselves. They like to have their assistants and members fawn over them. But the fidelity of a minister is readily discerned by his attitude towards being honored by man. A good minister will be quick to reject honor that does not belong to him. God's men need to be given their due honor; and, unfortunately, they are often not given proper honor by their parishioners. However, a good man of God will be more concerned about receiving too much honor than not enough honor.

The message by Peter. After stopping Cornelius from worshipping him, Peter

visited with him a bit and then said, “I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” (Acts 10:29). Cornelius then answered by restating what we have already read in Scripture previously. He told Peter of the vision he had received which commanded him to call for Peter, and Peter would “speak unto thee” (Acts 10:32).

Upon hearing Cornelius’ answer, Peter then brought a message (Acts 10:34–43) for Cornelius and for those the centurion had assembled to hear Peter. Like Peter’s previous messages which are recorded in Scripture, this one was also a gem. There are at least ten parts to it.

First, the message said God is no respecter of persons. “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). This was a most appropriate way to start with this Gentile audience. It laid aside all differences of race or nationality and emphasized the universal offer and need of salvation. It said **[Seite 351]** that all repenters will be saved regardless of who they are in this world, and that all sinners will be condemned to hell regardless of who they are in this world.

Second, the message said righteousness and reverence are acceptable to God. “He that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:35). We need this truth preached more today; for the fear of God and righteous living are mocked while sin and disrespect of God are tolerated, accepted, honored and made the law of the land. We need to find out what God accepts and then adjust our standards and lifestyle accordingly. Note in Peter’s statement that the fear (respect) of God and righteousness go hand in hand. Therefore, with the disrespect of God being so prevalent in our land, we should not be surprised that sin floods the land.

Third, the message said peace comes by Jesus Christ. “Preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). All peace programs of man are doomed if Christ is left out. The United Nations was doomed from the very start, for they have no room for the Prince of Peace. The same was true of the League of Nations (Vance Havner called it the League of Notions), for it also left out Christ. The great announcement the angels made at the birth of Christ was that peace had come to the earth: “on earth peace” (Luke 2:14).

Fourth, the message said that Christ is Lord. “Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36). This, of course, does not go over well with the man of the world who wants to be his own master. The Lordship of Jesus Christ must be acknowledged and practiced, however, if we are to honor Christ and live a life pleasing to God.

Fifth, the message said the Word of God was prominent in the work of God. “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel … That word, I say, ye

know, which was published throughout all Judea" (Acts 10:36, 37). If it is God's work, the Word of God will be front and center. In Acts, the Word of God saturated the apostles' messages. When the Word ceases to be prominent, Christ will not be prominent; and the Gospel will be **[Seite 352]** perverted. It is alarming how many of our churches have less and less emphasis on the Word of God in their programs. They have so many socials, games, parties, and what all; but they have very little teaching and preaching from the Word. And waving a Bible around in the pulpit does not correct the problem. It is the solid, sound, spirit-filled expository teaching and preaching of the Word of God that will correct the problem. And such teaching and preaching is not synonymous with story telling which seems to be the make-up of too many sermons in our pulpits today. Story telling is entertaining, but it is certainly does not exposite the Word of God.

Sixth, the message said Christ's earthly ministry was good. "Jesus … went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Seems almost ridiculous to have to say that Christ had a good earthly ministry, but the way folk treated Christ then and the way He is pushed out of society now leaves the impression that He is an extremely bad man. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The problem is that man is very bad and evidences it in his rejection of Christ.

Seventh, the message said Christ was crucified and rose again the third day. Him "they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day" (Acts 10:39, 40). Here is the great foundation of the Gospel. Jesus Christ died on the cross (He did not faint as some unbelievers would have us think) and rose from the grave to plead our case and prove His validity. Take away Calvary and the resurrection, and we do not have a message worth preaching.

Eighth, the message said the ministry of Christ was greatly authenticated. Peter spoke of the many witnesses of Christ's life and crucifixion and resurrection. "We are witnesses" (Acts 10:39); and "Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly [so multitudes could see the facts]" (Acts 10:40); and "To him give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43). Peter gives a large and impressive list of witnesses to show that the ministry of Jesus Christ can be fully authenticated. Unlike false religions, **[Seite 353]** Christianity is based on facts which can be greatly attested to with an abundance of evidence.

Ninth, the message said God commanded the apostles to proclaim Christ. "And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God to be the Judge of quick [living] and dead" (Acts 10:42). They were told to preach and told what to preach. God has not changed His orders for preachers today. He has given us the commission to preach and has

told us what to preach. As with the apostles in the early church, the message is to be based on the Word of God; it is to be Christ centered; and, to the disappointment of a good many church members, it is to include the subject of judgment.

Tenth, the message said Christ brings salvation. “Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). This is the climax of Peter’s message. This truth about Christ and salvation was the great truth Cornelius and all those he had gathered to hear Peter needed to hear. It is a simple message but a powerful one. Jesus Christ is the Savior of men. Nothing else will cleanse away our sins. Nothing else is needed to cleanse away our sins. Christ is the answer to our soul’s needs.

What a great message! Packed with great truths, it is another homilitical jewel from a fisherman who was made an apostle by the mighty power of God.

The response to Peter. The response to Peter’s message was one that every true preacher of the Gospel would relish. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Gentiles accepted the message, believed in Christ, and, therefore, the Holy Spirit fell on them as it had at Pentecost. This was the turning point in bringing the Gentiles into the church. And the Jewish mind had a very hard time taking all of this in. But there it was right in front of them. They could not deny it. “They … were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was **[Seite 354]** poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45). What a tremendous change came to the church and to the proclamation of the Gospel with this event in the home of Cornelius. And, how good it was that Peter took with him these Jewish believers so they could behold and be valuable witnesses of the fact that Gentiles could also be saved.

Again we emphasize that when a person is saved, it will be most evident. When the Gentiles came to Christ, no one could deny it. The evidence was great. So will it be when one is saved today. The fact that we see so many so-called conversions showing hardly any evidence or none at all simply says these folks are not saved. Many churches are filled with this kind of people, and they are a pain in the neck to a true work of God. So many boasted conversion statistics have so little evidence. Some of us are accused of being unevangelistic because we do not accept the inflated claims of conversions by many preachers. But we read the Bible, and the Bible says by their fruits ye shall know them (cp. Matthew 7:16, 20). You may brag about all the apples you have on your apple tree. But let us see the tree and the apples before we will believe you. Sorry, even though you are a preacher, we have learned that boasted statistics of conversions too often have little relationship to the truth.

B. THE CONTENTION CONCERNING THE CHANGE

The bringing of the Gentiles into the church quickly produced contention in the church, and Peter was right in the middle of it. When "the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him" (Acts 11:1, 2).

We should not be surprised at this contention. Whenever a great change takes place in the church, there will often be a considerable stir among the members against the change. Especially is this likely when the change is a good change. Experience tells us that when a change is bad, there will generally not be nearly the protest as when the change is good. This difference in reaction **[Seite 355]** to change simply reveals the character of the membership. There is much change in the church today that needs strong protest. Such changes as the change in music (which brings in so-called Christian rock), the change in opposition to divorce and other moral issues, and the change in emphasis from a spiritual program to a secular program (more socials, less sermons) are very corrupting changes; but we hear little protest from the congregations of our churches. However, if a good change is proposed, the opposition will often be loud and long.

To examine this contention with Peter about accepting the Gentiles in the church, we will note the concern of the contenders, the clarification for the contenders, and the concord with the contenders.

1. The Concern of the Contenders

"They that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:2, 3). The concern voiced by the contenders was condemning for the contenders. They tried to hide their true feelings by criticizing a side issue instead of the main issue. They would not come right out and state what really upset them, namely, that the Gentiles were now being included in the church. But they would find some little off-shoot of the main issue, such as eating with the Gentiles, and park on that.

This is a clever tactic of critics. Doing this they do not appear to be opposed to the main issue but appear to be only concerned that some smaller matters need to be corrected. It is a devious backhanded way of criticizing the main issue without being accused of such.

An example of this practice can be found today in a number of those who disapprove of religious practices of any kind being in our schools. These folk do not want others to think they are opposed to religion or God or piety, so instead of coming right out and saying they are opposed to these things, they raise constitutional interpretation questions about such things as prayer or Bible carrying or Christmas carols in school. They will tell you **[Seite 356]** that such

things as prayer and Bible carrying and Christmas carols in the school do not bother them personally, but they are concerned if these things are legal and what it might open the door to in regards to the actions of other movements and groups if these religious practices are permitted in school. But do not be fooled by such an approach. Though they deny it, these people are indeed bothered by prayer and Bible carrying and Christmas carols and other religious observances and practices. They are no friend of God and do not want God in the schools (or anywhere else for that matter). But their attack camouflages that fact, though, unfortunately, it does not hinder the effectiveness of their opposing God in the schools. It just does not make them look like a heathen in their opposition to God.

The contenders in Peter's day were not happy with the Gentiles in the church. But because it would look bad to be opposed to the salvation of Gentiles and the spiritual blessings the Gentiles received, they level their attack upon the side result of the Gentiles in the church, namely, Jews eating with Gentiles. This tactic verily condemned them. They were not being very honest in their charge.

In all fairness to these contenders with Peter, while they do not look good in this contending tactic, their failure was a momentary lapse of good conduct. Unlike most critics in church, these contenders were true saints at heart and when dealt with by Peter, they were quickly reconciled—which we will note shortly.

2. The Clarification for the Contenders

Peter responded to the contenders with excellence—which obviously had a lot to do with bringing peace to the situation. We note four things about his response: the priority in it, the patience in it, the plainness of it, and the proof of it. Noting these four things about Peter's response to the contenders will show us how to deal wisely and effectively with unjust criticism of one's ministry.

[Seite 357] *The priority in his clarification*. Peter did not respond to the charge of eating with the uncircumcised. He was not sidetracked by side issues. He knew what the real contention was all about and addressed it. Sometimes when news media people ask public officials, such as the president, a question, the official in his answer appears to ignore the question (which they indeed do all too often), the reason for this is that sometimes the question is only a side issue. The official goes right straight to the main issue and deals with that instead of answering the question and getting sidetracked from the main issue. So it is in criticism of God's work. Therefore, let God's men be careful to not be sidetracked from the true issue of the contention; or they will not be able to deal with it effectively.

The patience in his clarification. Peter did not lose his temper or make heated

counter charges, but he patiently answered their accusation. He took ample time and "rehearsed the matter from the beginning" (Acts 11:4). However, we want to note that while he did not lose his temper, etc., his patience is not to be interpreted as leniency or weakness. His answer was very firm and showed he was not backing down one iota. He dealt with problems firmly and forcefully; but he did not "blow his top" in doing it. A cool head deals best with contentions.

The plainness of his clarification. "Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by [in] order unto them" (Acts 11:4). Peter started by telling the contenders of his vision in Joppa and then followed with the events as they transpired which we have previously studied in detail (Acts 11:5–17). He does not ramble here and there in his answer which only confuses the matter. He gave a very organized answer which made his answer plain and understandable. Critics, on the other hand, often expose their true motive by their lack of plainness in their criticism. They want to castigate and inflame, not clarify and inform. If they make the issue too clear, they will be defeated. Hence, they need no orderly argument, **[Seite 358]** only inflammatory statements. But truth can afford to present an orderly argument; for it advances by the facts and logic, not by emotionalism.

The proof of his clarification. Peter supported what he said by witnesses, the Word, and wise logic. First, *witnesses*. To emphasize the integrity of what he had said about this experience, he pointed to the six men who accompanied him. "Moreover these six brethren accompanied me" (Acts 11:12). As we noted earlier, Peter was very wise to take these six brethren with him. Especially in visitations which are prone to be questioned is it a good thing to have others with you. Here, the six men who went with Peter could fully validate Peter's account of the experience in the home of Cornelius. Second, the *Word*. Peter pointed to Scripture to support his argument. "Then remembered I the word of the Lord …" (Acts 11:16). Third, *wise logic*. Wise logic is good proof, and Peter used it when he said, "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). When our explanations can be substantiated by witnesses, the Word, and wise logic, they are on very solid ground.

3. The Concord With the Contenders

Not many church contentions end up as well as this one did. "When they [the contenders] heard these things [Peter's clarification speech], they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

Why did this contention turn out so well? One reason was Peter's response to

the criticism, as we noted above. But here we especially look at the action of the contenders and note why it helped the contention to turn out well. It turned out well because the contenders, in spite of their unjustified criticism, respected the fisherman (Peter), the facts, and the Father (God). When you respect God's minister, the truth, and God, contentions **[Seite 359]** will not last long. You may get out of sorts at times (and don't we all); but if your faith is heart deep, you will not for long be a contender.

They respected the fisherman. This respect for Peter is seen in how they listened to him. They did not interrupt him or turn away from him without letting him finish his explanation. They got carried away in their fault finding; but to their credit, they recovered and listened attentively to Peter speak. Folk like that will not cause much trouble in church. They may get upset sometimes, but because of their overriding attitude of respect for the right people and things, they can be corrected and quickly.

So often critics in church will not listen to explanations. Let the pastor or some church official try to explain something at a business meeting and do it ever so well even as Peter did here, and these people interrupt or pay no attention to what he says. And as soon as he stops speaking, they start in again making charges which evidence they did not listen at all. Such critics only expose themselves as the problem, not the answer.

They respected the facts. Peter told them in detail the situation. Then he pointed to the six brethren who could confirm the experience; and unlike many critics in the church and many critics of the Gospel, these contenders gave respect to facts. They did not shut their eyes to the truth, but they had enough decency to bow to truth. People like that are not going to be trouble in the church for long.

They respected the Father. After Peter's explanation, Scripture tells us that these contenders "glorified God" (Acts 11:18) because He had also granted salvation to the Gentiles. These contenders were more interested in God's glory than in their own honor. To glorify God here, they had to eat some humble pie and admit by their actions that their accusation was not justified. When folk are truly interested in honoring God, you will not have lengthy and persistent problems with them. These folk **[Seite 360]** may get off base once in awhile; but if they are truly God's people and truly want Him to be honored, they will be reconciled.

Oh, that all church contenders were like these contenders. They were wrong in their initial attitude of accusing Peter; but when Peter presented the case to them in detail and presented his witnesses and reasoned with them, these people saw their error and recanted ("they held their peace" [Acts 11:18]) and accepted

the change.

C. THE CONFERENCE SUPPORTING THE CHANGE

While the initial contention over the great change in the church ended in concord, it did not end the opposition to the change. Some time later (could be as much as ten years or more later), trouble brewed again over the issue of the Gentiles being included in the fold. The trouble resulted in the church leaders meeting in Jerusalem in a special conference to deal with the issue. In considering this conference, in which Peter played a very important and influential part, we will look at the cause, the considerations, and the conclusions of the conference.

1. The Cause of the Conference

"And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:1, 2).

The cause of the conference was the perverting of the Gospel message to include works. This perversion of Gospel doctrine was being used to subtly attack the change which allowed the Gentiles to be included in the church. In this case the work that was insisted upon for salvation was circumcision. Gentiles were not circumcised as were the Jews; and because some Jews felt circumcision was necessary to be saved, they found it a convenient teaching to attack the change of the Gentiles being in **[Seite 361]** the church. Even though the Gentiles had believed on Christ, been baptized, and the Holy Spirit had come upon them, these teachers, in their animosity towards Gentiles being in the church, insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised as the Jews were or they would not be saved.

Circumcision had indeed been a mark of the covenant for Israel starting back with Abraham. But it was not circumcision of the flesh that brought security to the soul but circumcision of the heart. Like baptism, the outward act normally indicated an inward condition of the heart. But of course, many in every age have the outward act without the inward attitude of the heart. And many in every age prefer that the outward act be the qualification alone rather than having to have a changed heart.

The teachers who were causing the contention here about the Gentiles were not of the character of those folk who were involved in the first contention over the Gentiles being included in the church. These teachers were rascals. They were troublemakers who perverted the truth. The apostles referred to them as those who "have troubled you with words, subverting your souls" (Acts 15:24).

Doctrinally these teachers were doing what a multitude of ministers have done over the ages. They rejected salvation by grace alone, and they insisted that works were necessary to be saved. Such a wretched and damnable doctrine needs to be refuted. Hence, after Paul and Barnabas had experienced some very serious arguments with these teachers of false doctrine, it was proposed that a conference be held in Jerusalem to deal with this problem.

2. The Considerations of the Conference

"And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up" (Acts 15:6, 7) and gave a very important speech at this conference. It was a main factor in bringing reaffirmation among the leaders of the church that the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ was a Gospel of grace for all mankind—for Gentiles as well as Jews. He had a four point message for the conference to **[Seite 362]** consider regarding the Gentiles and their salvation. These points included the gift of the Spirit, the equality of the nations, the weakness of the flesh, and the sufficiency of grace. These four things all emphasized that the Gentiles were saved apart from circumcision the same way the Jews were saved. Circumcision had no part of anyone's salvation.

The gift of the Spirit. A great argument against those who taught that the Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved was the fact that when the Gentiles believed in Jesus Christ, God gave them the gift of the Holy Ghost. Peter said, "And God, which knoweth the hearts [whether the Gentiles believed or not], bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us" (Acts 15:8). That could not be disputed. From the very first when Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, the gift of the Spirit came upon the Gentiles in a most evident way (cp. Acts 10:44–46). Peter said this was God bearing "witness" of their salvation. And indeed it is, for one of the witnesses of our salvation is that the Spirit of God has come to indwell us. "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). So if God gave the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles which thus signified their salvation, why in the world did they need to be circumcised? The answer is obvious—they did not need circumcision to be saved, for they were saved without circumcision.

The equality of the nations. One of the first things Peter said to Cornelius and his household when he visited them was that he perceived "that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). He learned this from the vision God gave him while at Simon the tanner's house in Joppa. Here, Peter repeats that truth. He said that God "put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Peter's statement says plainly that both Jews and Gentiles

are saved the same way—by faith. The Jews were saved apart from circumcision, and so the Gentiles likewise were saved apart from circumcision. It was a **[Seite 363]** strong argument against the circumcision advocates. Salvation had nothing to do with circumcision in the Jews' case; so why should it be made part of salvation for the Gentiles? Faith was necessary, but circumcision was not.

The weakness of the flesh. Circumcision was part of the Old Testament law. The law did not save, but only cursed. Man could not keep the law ("which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" [Acts 15:10]) because the weakness of the flesh made it impossible. Hence, the law was a "yoke" (Ibid.), a heavy burden which only condemned. Peter's argument here is simply a concise statement of what Paul elaborated on in the book of Galatians. We are not saved by the works of the flesh, but by the grace of God.

The sufficiency of grace. Peter's final statement was a great one. He said, "we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11). Peter makes it crystal clear that salvation is all of grace, and that grace is sufficient to save all souls be they Gentile or Jews. This too, like the other statements, means that circumcision is not needed. Nothing else is needed! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needed to save any soul who comes to Him for salvation. It is a great message and a strong argument against works whether the works be circumcision, baptism, confirmation, church membership, or whatever.

3. The Conclusions of the Conference

Following Peter's message to the conference, Barnabas and Paul related their experiences of how God had blessed their ministry among the Gentiles—which experiences also argued against the idea that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised. Then James gave the final speech concurring with Peter and the other apostles that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. In his speech he referred (Acts 15:14) to Peter's message and underscored the validity of what Peter said by saying, "And to **[Seite 364]** this [Peter's message] agree the words of the prophets, as it is written" (Acts 15:15). Peter's message was in accordance with the Word. When a man's message can be substantiated by the Word of God, it is a valid message. If you do not know whether a message is true or not, compare it to the Word of God. If it does not agree with the Word—it is a false message. If it does agree with the Word—it is a true message. James recognized that Peter spoke the truth because Peter spoke according to the Word of God.

James' speech was the sentiment of all those present. The conference revealed that the church leaders stood strongly for the doctrine of salvation by grace and, therefore, in support of the change which brought the Gentiles into the church.

To inform others of the outcome of the conference, they sent Paul and Barnabas to carry letters to the churches stating that the idea that circumcision be part of salvation was not their teaching. “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). The letter also included some instructions about how the believers should conduct themselves in certain matters. The letter said the believers should “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (Acts 15:29). This had nothing to do with salvation but was a guideline to Christian conduct in significant areas of life. When the law is refuted as part of salvation, it is good to remind Christians that this does not mean they can live lawless lives without regard to good moral conduct. Grace does not open the door to lawlessness in conduct anymore than freedom opens the door to irresponsible conduct (as some radicals insist in our society). When one becomes a new person in Christ, he ought to demonstrate it in a holier lifestyle.

D. THE CENSURE INVOLVING THE CHANGE

The last incident we want to study of Peter and the change **[Seite 365]** regarding the Gentiles and the church is the censure which Peter received from Paul about Peter’s actions towards the Gentiles. The incident is reported in Galatians 2:11–14 by Paul. There is some question as to exactly when this incident occurred. It happened in Antioch of Syria, but that is a trip made by Peter which the book of Acts does not report. So we are not able to ascertain with certainty exactly when the incident occurred. Some believe it occurred before the conference in Acts 15, and some believe it occurred after the conference. But it really makes no difference when it occurred as far as our study of it is concerned, for the lessons will still be the same.

We will note the cause of the censure and the character of the censure.

1. The Cause of the Censure

The cause of the censure was twofold. It came as a result of Peter’s inconsistency and influence.

Inconsistency. Peter had been eating with Gentile believers in Antioch until some Jews came from Jerusalem with James. Then he ceased eating with the Gentiles and only ate with the Jews. “For before certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision” (Galatians 2:12). Peter’s conduct was not consistent with what he had been teaching. He had taught, as we have seen previously, that Jews and Gentiles were on the same footing. But here he did not act in accordance with what he taught. When the Jews came from

Jerusalem, he stopped treating the Gentiles equally. Paul justifiably called such conduct hypocrisy ("dissimulation" [Galatians 2:13]), and he was right.

Why did Peter act so hypocritically? It was because he feared what others would think of him. Peter reversed his conduct because of "fearing them who were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:12). You can be sure that when we start fearing man more than God, we will sooner or later be shameful in our **[Seite 366]** conduct. Here the fear of man caused Peter to be very inconsistent in his convictions. It was a sorry bit of behavior by Peter; and behavior we do not like to have to report of him; inasmuch as after Pentecost, Peter was so outstanding in his performance. But Peter was human just as we are, and so he failed at times. But the fact that he was human does not excuse his failure. It does, however, give us a great warning that we must ever guard against the weakness of the flesh. We must be on guard at all times lest the tempter catch us napping, and we succumb to temptation.

Influence. Perhaps the worst thing about Peter's sin is that it caused others to sin. "And the other Jews [Jews with Peter in Antioch, not the Jews which came from Jerusalem] dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation [hypocrisy]" (Galatians 2:13). Peter influenced a good many to be hypocrites, even a great man like Barnabas, the companion of Paul. Paul was justifiably very upset about it—all of which reminds us that sin in the church always brings friction and division in the church.

It would not be so bad if when we sinned we only sinned ourselves and did not cause others to sin also. But that is never the case; "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7). Sin, be it private or public, has far reaching effects into the lives of many more people than we realize. And Peter's sin, because of who he was, really had influence. Others would see Peter behaving as he did and think that it must be alright to act that way; for after all it was Peter, the great man of God, acting that way. So we have a warning here—do not follow people blindly even though they may be very dedicated to God. Always make the Word of God the prime standard of conduct. As great as some men may be in their dedication to God, they are not as reliable a pattern for right and wrong as the Scripture. They are generally worthy of following, but that does not exempt us from making sure the behavior matches God's Word. This is no insult to dedicated souls; but, in **[Seite 367]** fact, the dedicated souls would be the first to tell you this truth.

It is instructive to note here that in the matter of influence, it is not difficult to observe that we can more easily influence men to do evil than to do good. You can live a most upright and holy life before those around you, but few will

follow. Yet, if you sin, you gain a large following. We need to remember this fact lest we draw wrong conclusions about a number of things. As an example, many look at false teachers and note the great crowds they draw, then belittle those who have a godly ministry but have few followers. The godly are told it is a shame they lack the zeal of the cultists, otherwise they would also have big crowds. But be careful before you bite into that bit of philosophy. Some of God's ministers do lack zeal, but remember that error is more appealing to the old nature than righteousness, and evil has more following than righteousness. The godly are zealous for truth (something the cults are not!), and not many are interested in the truth.

2. The Character of the Censure

Some very good things can be said about Paul's censure of Peter. We note four things: it was strong, noble, public, and instructive.

Strong. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Galatians 2:11). This strong censure of one of the main leaders of the early church was probably very shocking to those who heard it because it was so strong. But the evil of Peter needed a strong rebuke. It was causing unholy division in the church, and that needs to be strongly opposed. Many of our churches need to take notice of this rebuke when they are dealing with sinful conduct that divides the church. A divided church is a weak church and will not glorify God well at all. Keeping that in mind will cause folk to deal much more firmly with such sin in the church.

A strong rebuke can be made without sinning, as can be observed here in Paul's censure of Peter. We can also see this **[Seite 368]** truth in Christ's denunciations of evil and in Peter's dealing with evil which we have observed in previous chapters. Some seem to think that if we lift up our voice a bit strongly against sin we are being sinful. But that is not true. Oh yes, there are times when we can sin by giving too strong a rebuke; but we can also sin by giving too lenient a rebuke. Today the church has a great problem in the lenient rebuke area but very little problem in the strong rebuke area. We need to begin rebuking evil more strongly than we do.

Noble. Paul rebuked Peter "to the face" (Galatians 2:11). While the rebuke was strong and not a pleasant moment for Peter, it was an aboveboard rebuke. Paul was not like so many of our church members who do most of their censuring behind people's backs. He came face to face with Peter. He did not talk sweet to Peter when he was around him but then talk nasty about him when Peter was not in his company. Paul was faithful; he was not two-faced. We may not like criticism; but if it is aboveboard and face to face, we can respect it much more than that which is done behind the back.

Public. “I said unto Peter before them all” (Galatians 2:14). Being a public rebuke had to be highly embarrassing to the Apostle Peter. Why did not Paul take Peter aside and straighten him out? Why did Paul drag the dirty linens of the church out in full view of the others? Isn’t this unChristian and suggestive of retaliation of some sort or of being just plain jealous of Peter and wanting to tear him down in public? No, it was none of these things which are so common among people today. Paul rebuked Peter in public because Peter’s sin was public. Public sin needs public rebuke. Peter’s sin being public had caused others to sin. Therefore, the public needed to know that Peter’s conduct was wrong. A private rebuke in this case would have been very deficient in dealing with the sin properly. It would not have informed the public that the action was wrong.

In dealing with sin, we must remember that we are doing so **[Seite 369]** for more reasons than just the guilty person. We are also doing it for the education of others. Others need to know what is right and wrong. When sin is exposed for what it really is, the innocent can learn and avoid being ensnared in the same sin. Therefore, a public sin needs a public rebuke.

Instructive. Paul’s censure of Peter was not some illogical ranting and raving that often occurs in church business meetings. But his censure of Peter was intended to help the situation; therefore, it was filled with good instruction. “I said unto Peter before them all, 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?” (Galatians 2:14). Paul’s censure instructed Peter regarding the particular way his conduct was wrong. This would help Peter to understand the error of his ways and show him how to rectify things. Basically, the hypocrisy of Peter, according to Paul, indicated that Peter expected more of the Gentiles than he demanded of himself.

Many folk are like Peter here. Hypocrites always are. They demand others live better than they themselves live. They exhort new converts to be in all the services at church while they often miss services. They demand others do much at church while they do little. They expect others to carry the load financially while they put their trivia in the offering plate. They pass the buck to everybody else, but not to themselves. It is a sick, irresponsible attitude and one that certainly was not typical of Peter. But, unfortunately, he was guilty of practicing it for a short time in Antioch.

Our rebukes need to be instructive as Paul’s censure of Peter was. We need to tell what is wrong conduct; but it is most helpful when we point out why the conduct is wrong, what the perils of the conduct are, etc. Doing this gives value to our rebukes. Anyone can denounce others, but it takes a wise man to instruct the wrong doers when he denounces them.

In closing this chapter, it is worthy to observe, by looking at other Scripture, that we have no record of Peter getting angry, **[Seite 370]** turning against Paul, walking out in a huff, and causing friction and division amongst the saints because of this censure. To the contrary, we find Peter later on referring to Paul in one of his epistles as “Our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15). That may surprise some; but it should not be surprising to the earnest student of Scripture; for they will know that Scripture says, “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Proverbs 9:8). While Peter had his faults (and no person is without them), it was obvious that he was generally a very wise person in spiritual matters. Such a character will respond well to justified rebukes—which tells us something about the deficiency of character in those dissidents in the church who respond so poorly to justified rebukes even though the rebukes are often much milder than the one given Peter.

[Seite 371] XXI

The Chains

Acts 12:1–23

This last chapter in our study on the life of Peter will focus on another one of Peter’s prison experiences. The book of Acts records three incarcerations of Peter by the enemies of God. The prison experience we will consider in this chapter is the third of these three times. It is different than the previous two times in that he is alone in this imprisonment and the imprisonment is more severe (he is chained in prison and put under special guard as we will note more about later). But like the second of these imprisonments, this imprisonment of Peter had a miraculous deliverance to it.

Some people have trouble staying out of prison because of their criminal conduct, but Peter had trouble staying out of prison because of his godly conduct. What an indictment it is upon the world that it imprisons the best people in society. How well it shows the warped thinking that occurs when men live apart from God. Such thinking cannot discern between good and bad, between true and false, between right and wrong, and between that which is helpful to society and that which curses society. Our land is filled with this kind of thinking today. It shows up in the laws the legislatures make, in the decisions the courts make, in the conduct we sanction, and in the people we honor.

To study this third of Peter’s prison experiences recorded in Acts, we will consider the repression by the king (vv. 1–5), the rescue by the angel (vv. 5–11), the reunion with the saints (vv. 12–17), and the retribution for the culprits (vv. 18–23).

[Seite 372] A. THE REPRESSION BY THE KING

This imprisonment of Peter was instigated by Herod the king. “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. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also” (vv. 1–3).

Heretofore, the book of Acts has reported persecution of the church as coming from the religious segment of society. But in this chapter, persecution is reported as also coming from the government. Herod, who was appointed by Rome as the ruler of Judea and Samaria (Rome also gave him the title of king), now attempts to repress the growing church by attacking it.

The work of God will experience persecution from both apostate religion and evil government. Corrupt religion generally begins it, as it did in the book of Acts; then the government follows by doing the same. Corrupt religion and corrupt government go hand in hand. When corrupt religion dominates the land, a corrupt government will be one of the oppressive results. That fact will help to explain why our government is getting more corrupt.

In this attack by Herod upon the church, we will note the brutality, continuity, inspiration, and hypocrisy in it.

1. The Brutality in the Attack

Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James” and later imprisoned Peter with the intent to kill him, too. The word “vex” in its usage here means to “torment or oppress” (Vincent). That “vex” indicates brutal conduct is verified by the fact that killing godly men was part of it.

The brutality of the persecution reminds us that Satan is serious in opposing the church. He is not playing games. God’s people need to wake up to this fact and stop treating the work of the Lord so casually. Satan means business in opposing the work of God; and we had better mean business in supporting the work of God, if we are going to get anything done for God.

[Seite 373] James’ death was the first martyrdom amongst the twelve disciples. As we have noted in a previous chapter, he, along with Peter and John, was a member of the select three of the twelve whom Christ took with Him on special occasions. Interestingly, though James was the first of the twelve (Judas Iscariot is not considered part of the twelve in the book of Acts) to die, his brother, John, was the last of the twelve to die. Between the deaths of these two great godly brothers were martyred some of the finest saints ever to set foot on the earth. They were the leaders in spreading Christianity throughout the world. And it was the leaders in the church that Herod was going after which is why James was killed and Peter was imprisoned. The devil knows where to attack. He goes after those who are his biggest problems. Are you enough of a problem

for Satan to cause him to want to attack you?

2. The Continuity in the Attack

The fact that Herod (known as Herod Agrippa I in history) should persecute the church should be of no surprise. He was only continuing the hateful attitude of his family towards God and His work. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who killed all the children two years and under in Bethlehem after Christ was born; and he was a brother of the wicked woman Herodias, who manipulated his uncle (Herod Antipas) into beheading John the Baptist. Later his son (Herod Agrippa II) will make the famous statement to the Apostle Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

The whole Herod family was an ungodly group; yet many of the family had much to do with government. They were in prominent positions of power for many years in Palestine. The same can be said of some of the corrupt leaders in our government, too. We behold famous families who, in spite of the fact they are corrupt through and through, continue to get elected to important posts in government in our land. Character is not necessary to be part of man's government, but it is a different story regarding Christ's rule on earth. You may live a godly life and **[Seite 374]** never rule a soul on this earth; but when Christ comes back to reign over the world, you will have a better position than all the rulers of the world powers today.

3. The Inspiration in the Attack

Herod's attempt to repress the church was partly inspired by his desire to try and please the ungodly Jews. "And because he saw it [killing of James] pleased the Jews [the unbelieving Jews], he proceeded further to take Peter also" (v. 3). Herod was playing politics here. He needed to have the Jews in his favor if he was going to survive as their ruler. So when he saw his attack on the church was pleasing to these ungodly Jews, he was inspired to increase the attack in hopes of gaining more approval from them.

Herod illustrates well the peril of desiring to please the ungodly. When folk endeavor to please the ungodly, it will degrade their conduct. It will cause them to sin more and more. Herod had already killed James; now to keep pleasing the ungodly, he must kill again; he must add to his sin. Hence, he imprisons Peter with the intention of killing him shortly.

Herod had a problem which most people have—he preferred to please men more than God. Seeking to please God improves the holiness of our conduct, but seeking to please men more than God corrupts our conduct. It is not necessarily evil to please men. As an example, you ought to do your work well on the job so your boss is pleased. But we must never do wrong to please men. A good test as to whether our pleasing men is proper or not is to observe whether pleasing men

helps the character of our conduct or hinders the character of our conduct. When God is involved in the pleasing business, it will always help the character of our conduct. But pleasing the wrong kind of men will always corrupt our conduct.

We all need to take to heart, a lot more than we do, this peril of seeking to please men more than God. God often gets lost in the shuffle because we have our priorities so mixed up. Pleasing men inspires more of our conduct than pleasing God. Many, **[Seite 375]** who will condemn Herod here for seeking to please men instead of God, do not realize they do it repeatedly in many matters of life. As an example, when Aunt Hildie invites them for Sunday dinner, they have to skip church to please her and be present for the dinner. Skipping church does not please God, of course; but Aunt Hildie gets the priority. So they are just like Herod in that they seek to please men instead of God.

4. The Hypocrisy in the Attack

"And when he [Herod] had apprehended him [Peter], he put him in prison … intending after Easter [not our Easter but the Passover observance] to bring him forth to the people [spectators of Peter's execution, not judges]" (v. 4). Herod delayed his planned execution of Peter until after a special religious occasion. How nauseous! He would observe a special religious time as though he were pious; but then as soon as it was over, he would go right back to his wickedness.

Herod is certainly not alone in this bit of gross hypocrisy. Multitudes of people act good during special religious days, such as our Easter; but as soon as the day or season is over, they go right back to their evil. All their pious living for a few days is nothing but sham. They have no intention of changing their ways. They are only putting on an outward show of piety. And such folk think by showing up for their annual appearances at church on Easter and Christmas and maybe a few other special religious days, they will not only impress people that they are pious [some people are gullible enough to be fooled by this religious hypocrisy] but will also impress God and, therefore, make peace with God. Hypocrites think they can have it both ways—they think they can live in sin but still be accepted by God. But nothing could be farther from the truth. God looks upon the heart, and so a hypocritical pious look on special religious days will not pass muster with God!

B. THE RESCUE BY THE ANGEL

Herods of the world may make their plots against the people of **[Seite 376]** God, but they will be no match for heaven. Herod felt he had Peter securely in his grasp, and it would be only a matter of hours before he would kill him. After all, Herod had put Peter in prison, chained him, and "delivered him to four quarternions of soldiers to keep him" (v. 4). To human thinking, the prison was too strong, the guard was too great, and the chains too secure to lose Peter. But

then heaven stepped in, and Peter slipped easily out of the supposedly sure grasp of Herod.

In examining this rescue of Peter from prison by the angel, we will note the moment of the rescue, the means of the rescue, and the meditating about the rescue.

1. The Moment of the Rescue

Two instructive things can be said about the time when the angel came and rescued Peter from prison. It was a praying time and a crucial time.

A praying time. It was while the church was praying for Peter's deliverance that the angel came to rescue Peter. "Peter, therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (v. 5). This is not the first time in the book of Acts and in our study of Peter that we have seen the mighty working of God associated with prayer. Pentecost came when those in the upper room were spending much of their time together in prayer (Acts 1, 2); Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray when they met and, through the power of God, healed the lame man (Acts 3); when the church was praying after the release of Peter and John from prison, "the place was shaken where they were assembled together" (Acts 4:31); Peter and John visited Samaria where Philip was having great results in preaching the Gospel and "when they [Peter and John] were come down [to Samaria], [they] prayed for them [the believers], that they might receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:15); and the great change of the Gospel going to the Gentiles was associated with prayer (Acts 10). Prayer is such a great resource of strength. To the human eye, the forces of evil seem to have **[Seite 377]** all the resources—here they had the king, the prison, the chains, and the guards all on their side. But the saints were not handicapped; for they had prayer on their side; and that is a bigger advantage than all the things the world has. J. Edgar Hoover is reported as saying, "The spectacle of a nation praying is more awe-inspiring than the explosion of an atomic bomb. The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-made or man-controlled powers because prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the infinite resources of God." We need never feel handicapped in terms of resources to meet our problems when we are able to pray.

That prayer was the response of the church to Peter's imprisonment demonstrated the genuineness of their faith. The way professing believers respond to problems in their lives indicates very plainly the character of their faith. Some folk appear to be very devoted in their faith in Christ and His Word until some problem comes along; then they act no better than the world does when they face a problem. But the saints in Jerusalem were not like that; for when they faced the problem of Peter's imprisonment, they turned to the Lord in

earnest prayer because their faith was real.

A crucial time. Peter's deliverance by the angel came in the nick of time. "When Herod would have brought him forth, the same night … behold, an angel of the Lord came upon him" (vv. 6, 7) and delivered him. God is never late. Just before Herod was ready to finish off Peter, and just when the circumstances were the darkest (literally it was night), then God stepped in and brought deliverance.

The flesh worries a lot about God not arriving on time, but He is never late. Many times in Scripture we can observe God coming on the scene to bring deliverance just when we thought it was too late. As an example, Abraham had his knife in his hand ready to plunge it into Isaac on the altar when God intervened and showed Abraham the ram in the thicket (Genesis 22:10, 13). King Saul was moving in for the killing of David **[Seite 378]** when a messenger came to Saul telling him the Philistines had invaded the land. This providentially timed report caused Saul to immediately stop his attack on David (1 Samuel 23:26–28). And God did not part the Red Sea until the Egyptians were just ready to attack the Israelites (Exodus 14). God will always be there when we need Him.

2. The Means of the Rescue

The rescue had both a Divine part and a human part to it. The Divine part is the most obvious part of the rescue, but there is also an important human part to the rescue that we must not overlook.

The Divine part. Peter's rescue involved the miraculous. There are four distinct parts to this rescue in which the Divine miracle power is most evident: the lighting, awakening, falling, and the opening.

First, the *lighting* of the prison. When the angel came to bring about the deliverance, "a light shined in the prison" (v. 7). What was the light for? It was night, and a light was needed so Peter could see his way around. The angel brought his own lighting system with him to rescue Peter.

How symbolic of the Gospel of Christ is the work of this light shining in darkness. Because of sin, men are in darkness and cannot see the way. But the light of God, which shines forth in Jesus Christ, brings deliverance and shows man the way to walk. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Second, the *awakening* of the apostle. The angel "smote Peter on the side, and raised [aroused] him up" (v. 7). Peter was "sleeping between two soldiers" (v. 6) in prison and needed to be awakened so he could walk out of prison.

Peter is one of the most prominent sleepers in the Bible. Three times he is recorded sleeping, and each time it was during a very significant occasion. He is recorded as sleeping on the **[Seite 379]** Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32), in

the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:37, 40, 41), and here in prison. His sleeping in prison is the most commendable of the three. It reflected a deep peace which only God can bring. He could have stayed awake and worried (as we would have); for James had just been killed; and he certainly appeared to be without hope. But God gives peace when our way is right with Him. Such peace the world does not have, for sin does not bring calmness to the soul.

It is instructive to note that twice in this twelfth chapter of Acts, it is said that an angel of God "smote" someone (vv. 7, 23). The word "smote" in the two verses is the same; but the outcome is very, very different indeed! The angel "smote" Peter to wake him up so he could walk out of prison. But Herod was "smote" by the angel "because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost [died]" (v. 23). The word "smote" can mean either a gentle smiting or a harsh smiting. The context will define which; and when heaven is doing the smiting, one's relationship with God will determine which. So live that your smiting from heaven will be in Peter's category, not Herod's.

Third, the *falling* of the chains. "And his chains fell off from his hands" (v. 7). Peter was "bound with two chains" (v. 6) in prison. He was bound with a separate chain to each of two soldiers guarding him between whom he slept. This was "a method of confinement spoken of by other ancient writers, especially by Seneca … and Josephus" (J. A. Alexander).

God is in the business of taking off the shackles that evil would put on us. While Peter is not in prison because of his sin, he still symbolically gives us a picture of how sin (represented by Herod and the soldiers) only binds; it does not free. But God brings us freedom through Jesus Christ Who brings "deliverance to the captives … to set at liberty them that are bruised [by sin]" (Luke 4:18). It is a Divine work, something that man cannot do by himself. Just as Peter could not unloose the chains that bound him, so man cannot loose himself from the shackles of sin. But God can.

[Seite 380] Fourth, the *opening* of the gate. "When they [the angel and Peter] were past the first and the second ward [guard], they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of his own accord; and they went out" (v. 10). Amazing! But no gate of man is ever locked well enough to stop God from opening it, if He so pleases. God can open gates and doors to us that we could never open by ourselves. This should greatly encourage God's people. Often times it seems to many of God's saints that they are locked in circumstances which make them unable to find jobs, housing, and a host of other needs; but God can open doors they thought could never be opened. This is also so very true in Christian service. Some of God's servants feel hemmed in with little opportunity to serve the Lord. But God can open doors of marvelous

opportunities which to the human eye seems impossible to open. Paul spoke of "a great door and effectual is opened unto me" (1 Corinthians 16:9). Do not discredit God's ability to open locked gates and doors for His people. Peter saw it happen right before his eyes, and we can see the same thing happen for us.

The human part. We have said many times, and will continue to say many times, that God does not work miracles when they are unnecessary. God is not in the business of making lazy saints. He does not do for them what they can do for themselves. So it was in the prison rescue of Peter. The miraculous Divine part was most prominent; in fact, it was so prominent that many miss the human part which was also present. We will note here three distinct actions that belong in the category of human responsibility—the human part. Had Peter not done these parts, had he not obeyed the orders from the angel, his rescue would not have occurred even though the Divine part was present. These three parts are the rising, dressing, and following by Peter.

First, the *rising*. When the angel awoke Peter, he instructed him to "Arise up quickly" (v. 7). Lest some be confused, the words "Arise up" here mean to stand up, to get up. The word **[Seite 381]** "raised" used just prior to this command means to simply arouse. Standing up was man's part in this situation. The angel awoke him, but the angel will not stand Peter up. Peter can do that himself, and he is instructed to do it and to do it "quickly," too. Prompt obedience is a must if we are to experience the blessing. The soldiers are asleep; but if Peter does not act quickly, they will be awake. The miraculous being present does not exempt us from moving with haste in places of peril.

Second, the *dressing*. The angel next instructed Peter to get dressed. "Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals … Cast thy garment about thee" (v. 8). Simple instructions but very important instructions. Peter needed to get dressed fittingly for his escape.

We cannot help but see a lesson here that applies to one being delivered from the chains of sin. When a person is saved, he will dress differently. He will dress appropriately for his new freedom. But there are many now-a-days who want to walk out of the prison without girding themselves, without the sandals, and without the garment about them. They want to remain dressed as they were in prison; that is, they want to dress like the world. But heaven wisely declares otherwise!

Third, the *following*. The last command given by the angel to Peter was, "Follow me" (v. 8). That summed up the human part. We must follow what God tells us to do, if the miraculous is going to result in our blessing. Precepts are indeed a part of deliverance. Many saints do not like this part of the deliverance; but if you leave it out, there will be no deliverance. Unless Peter follows the

angel, unless Peter does what the angel tells him to do, there will be no rescue from the imprisonment.

Many of God's people lack blessings which, however, they could have if they would only obey the precept part of the blessing. They respond slowly instead of "quickly" to God's orders; they do not get serious about fulfilling them; and they will not follow the Lord well. Then they stupidly wonder why God seems so distant and their faith seems to be so empty and powerless and unrewarding. But obedience to God's orders will change all of that, however.

[Seite 382] 3. The Meditating About the Rescue

When Peter was rescued, he did some pondering about all that was going on. To look at these meditations about this rescue, we will consider the excitement in the rescue, the extent of the rescue, and the exceptions to the rescue.

The excitement in the rescue. The first pondering of the rescue occurred when Peter began following the angel through the prison. "And he [Peter] went out, and followed him [the angel]; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision" (v. 9). After his experience in Joppa, one can understand how Peter might conclude he was seeing another vision. But vision or not, Peter kept following the angel as instructed. He did not let the wonderment and excitement of the hour diminish his obedience.

Times of ecstasy are times we need to be especially on watch that we do not neglect our duty. We often think that it is times of discouragement that are especially prone to stop us from obeying the Lord. Those times can indeed hinder obedience and oftentimes do; but do not underestimate the fact that good times can be a hindrance to obedience, too.

The extent of the rescue. "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" (v. 11). Peter, in pondering his rescue, realized how great his rescue was. First, he realized he was delivered from Herod's evil intentions. Not all the ugly plans of wicked men come to pass as they have been planned. Sometimes it seems that everything evil men plot and plan always comes to pass. But that is a warped view of things. God is ever overturning the plans and schemes of wicked men to show that they are not running the show. Second, he realized he was also delivered from the expectation of the Jews who expected he would be killed as planned. A lot of things about God and Christ and the Gospel did not come to pass as the **[Seite 383]** unbelieving Jews expected. So it is with sin. "The expectation of the wicked shall perish" (Proverbs 10:28). Man has a habit of foolishly expecting good things from evil conduct. Our society, as an example, expects so many wonderful benefits from gambling; but such does not occur.

And many girls give themselves immorally to some guy expecting to gain much by it, but they soon discover that the gains were a mirage and the losses are many. Righteousness does not leave one holding the bag, however; for Scripture says the righteous' "expectation shall not be cut off" (Proverbs 23:18).

Peter was wise to ponder the greatness of his deliverance. Such ponderings can only encourage one's faith and help one in their future trials. If we do not stop and think about the greatness of our blessings, we will be more prone to forget them; and then when a new trial comes, we lose precious encouragement for our faith in God. Israel did well when they thought on their deliverance at the Red Sea, for it encouraged them when they came to future problems. But when they did not think upon God's great work for them, they failed miserably in their trials (cp. Psalm 106).

The exceptions to the rescue. "The Lord hath … delivered me … from all the expectation of the Jews (v. 11). Peter pondered that things did not happen as the Jews expected in his case. But there are many exceptions to his case. We have noted before that God does not always deliver every saint from the chains of persecution and other trials. Some saints like to think He will always deliver, but He does not always do that. We see the same truth in this chapter. Peter was rescued, but James was not. Peter's life was spared, but James was killed. As we noted earlier, some of the heroes in Hebrews eleven were delivered by miracles, others were not. God does not always heal; for Paul said, "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick" (2 Timothy 4:20).

That some are delivered and others are not does not mean that some cases are too hard for God. It is not a matter of God's power or lack thereof that determines who is delivered and who **[Seite 384]** is not. It is a matter of God's wisdom. It will generally take greater faith to continue to trust and honor God when we are not delivered than when we are. Someday we will know why God let James die but spared Peter. But until that day of explanation comes, we must continue to believe that He does all things right. And we must demonstrate that belief not by moping around in the blues and hanging crepe on every circumstance but by being an upbeat, cheerful, positive Christian in thought, word, and deed.

C. THE REUNION WITH THE SAINTS

The rescue from prison resulted in a reunion with the saints. Peter went from the company of soldiers to the company of the saints as a result of his rescue. We will note here three things about Peter's reunion with the saints: the seeking of the saints, the surprising of the saints, and the speaking to the saints.

1. The Seeking of the Saints

"And when he had considered the thing [his deliverance], he came to the

house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many [of the saints] were gathered together praying" (v. 12). Peter's seeking out the saints after his release from prison is not unexpected, for he had done this before. After release from his first incarceration by the persecutors, he headed straight for God's people (Acts 4:23). Here he does it again.

Turn people loose and let them go wherever they please, and you will quickly discover their character. Peter was a godly man; so when he was given freedom, he went immediately to be with God's people, who were praying at the time. When young people leave home for school or the military service or some other job, and thus experience a freedom from the reins of parents, they soon reveal their character. As soon as they are away from home, many of them will head straight for the dens of iniquity to wallow in sin. But those of a better character seek out Christians and Christian places. Where do you go when you have liberty to go anywhere you want?

[Seite 385] 2. The Surprising of the Saints

It was a great surprise to the saints when Peter showed up in the middle of the night. We note this surprise in the reaction of the maid and the reaction of the many to Peter's arrival at the place where the saints were gathered.

The reaction of the maid. When "Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel [maid] came to hearken, named Rhoda. 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" (vv. 13–15)

We smile at the maid's excitement being so great she forgot to open the gate for Peter. But that is the only fault recorded of her here; and compared to the fault of the others, it is very trivial. The maid's reaction to Peter's arrival said several good things about her which we will note here.

First, it revealed *her knowledge*. It was dark so the maid would have difficulty recognizing the features of a person; but when Peter spoke, "she knew Peter's voice." Many girls (and boys, too) know the voice of a host of ungodly singers and actors of the world. But they would never recognize the voice of any great preacher of the land. Rhoda was different, however. Lowly as she was as a mere maid, she had knowledge that commended her. In contrast, one can find a good many people in our churches—and many of these are high officials—who seem to know about everything and everybody around town; but when it comes to knowing spiritual things—things worth knowing compared to a lot they do know—they are dunces. Rhoda shames many by her knowledge.

Second, it revealed *her steadfastness*. When she told the group that Peter "stood before the gate," no one believed her. They even accused her of being

“mad.” But she did not waver in her conviction. She “constantly affirmed that it was even so.” Would that all believers would ever be that faithful in standing for the truth when others come along and challenge their faith **[Seite 386]** and scornfully belittle their person. Especially is it hard to stand when other believers are doing the criticizing, as in the case of Rhoda; but stand she did; and stand we should.

The reaction of the many. There were “many” (v. 12) gathered at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, when Peter showed up; but with the exception of Rhoda, the response of the “many” to the knowledge that Peter had come was not very complimentary of them. It revealed that though they were good people at heart, they still had some insincerity, inconsistency, and inconsideration in their faith.

First, the *insincerity* in their faith. The unbelief of the group about Peter standing by the gate indicated they were not praying with sincere faith. Though they prayed “without ceasing” (v. 5) for Peter, they really did not have much hope that he would be delivered. But we can throw no stones. We, too, when praying for God to work on our behalf, often do not really believe down deep inside that God will answer the prayer. If the truth were known, a great percentage of our praying is like that. And prayers that are not prayed in faith do not do as well as prayers that are. God was gracious here in delivering Peter even though the saints evidenced that their faith was not very strong. And God is still doing the same for our prayers today. This does not, of course, excuse or encourage our lack of faith; rather it shows what great things we could be doing if we prayed with faith instead of a lack of faith.

Second, the *inconsistency* in their faith. When Rhoda “constantly affirmed” (v. 15) that it was Peter who stood before the gate, the folk finally believed that somebody was standing before the gate; but they decided it was an “angel” (Ibid.), not Peter. Now that is incredible inconsistency in their faith! To believe an angel is standing before the gate brings in the miraculous more than it does to believe that Peter is standing before the gate. If they had enough faith to believe it was an angel, they should have had enough faith to believe it was Peter.

The inconsistent belief of the “many” here in our text reminds **[Seite 387]** us of the skeptics who will not believe the simple, logical explanations made in the Bible but must invent other explanations which require more faith to believe than the Bible’s explanations. As an example, they say they cannot believe that God created the universe; but they can believe that all of it happened by some cosmic explosion some billions of years ago. Now it certainly is a lot harder to believe the skeptics’ explanations here than it is the Bible’s explanations! And it would be a lot harder to believe an angel stood before the gate than it would be

to believe that Peter was there. Skepticism in faith leads to most inconsistent beliefs.

Third, the *inconsideration* in their faith. When our faith is not what it ought to be, we will not be as considerate of other people as we should be. Because of the faithless reaction of the "many" to Peter's arrival, Peter had to keep knocking ("But Peter continued knocking" [v. 16]). This was not being very considerate to Peter. While deficient faith argues (because it is deficient) inside, a great saint of God is left outside. Sometimes that is a picture of our churches. Many good people do not become part of our church because of the inconsiderate behavior of those who are already members of the church.

There is another lesson here which we can see in Peter's being forced to keep knocking. A miracle had opened the gate in prison, but he was forced to knock continuously to get into the house of the saints. Some doors—doors we cannot open ourselves—God will open for us. But other doors we will have to open ourselves. And sometimes we will often have to knock on these doors very persistently. All of this teaches us to be faithful in our work, to not give up, and to not expect everyday to be an easy day but to keep at it through thick and thin.

3. The Speaking to the Saints

After Peter was let in the house, he "beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren" (v. 17). God had **[Seite 388]** done a great work; and Peter wanted other people, particularly the saints in this case, to be informed about it. Knowing of this great deliverance would encourage the saints. They were living in very difficult times. Persecution had been very cruel to them. It was taking the lives and possessions of some, and many were forced to flee from Jerusalem. The church needed to hear some encouraging news, and they got it with the report of Peter's deliverance.

Notice that Peter especially mentioned James (the half brother of Christ, cp. Galatians 1:19) as one to be told about the great deliverance of Peter from prison. "Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren." This statement reminds us of what the angel told the women at the grave on the first Easter Sunday morning. He said, "Tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:7). Peter needed that special mention because at the time he was especially discouraged in his faith as a result of his denials of Christ. The James in our text could use some special encouragement, too. James was a prominent leader in the church (cp. Acts 15:13ff), and the slaying of James (the brother of John) and the imprisonment of Peter would easily make him suspect he was perhaps next on the list. Peter would know the value of a special singling out of those who

needed extra encouragement, and it would be of great encouragement to James to know of Peter's Divine rescue. God knows when we need special help and encouragement, and He will provide it in order to keep us serving Him.

D. THE RETRIBUTION FOR THE CULPRITS

The experience of Peter's third imprisonment is immediately followed in Scripture by a report of what happened to those who played a major roll in his imprisonment. The retribution upon both the keepers of the prison and the king (Herod) who ordered the imprisonment of Peter is recorded. While we do not rejoice when anyone perishes in their sins, it is, however, encouraging to note that though at the beginning of chapter twelve of Acts it looked like the wicked were winning, yet at the end of the chapter **[Seite 389]** the godly were on top. Life is that way. The world today may seem to be like the first part of chapter twelve; but when the chapter of world history is over, it will be like the end of chapter twelve—the godly will be victorious, and the wicked will be destroyed.

1. The Retribution Upon the Keepers

"Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, [concerning] 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" (vv. 18, 19). Peter's disappearance was a real puzzle to the soldiers, which we can readily understand; and it was a real provocation to Herod, which we can also readily understand. So because the keepers had failed to keep their prisoner, Herod did what was customary in those days to do to guards who had lost their prisoners—he killed them with dispatch.

These keepers had made a bad choice in their lives. They chose to serve Herod regardless of whether their duty was right or wrong. In serving Herod, their job was more important than their conscience and their character. Everything they did for Herod was not necessarily evil. But at times the job called for them to do things that were not proper and right—and they went along with their job's requirements. They would do whatever Herod said. Therefore, they went along with the terrible unjust act of keeping Peter in prison. That was a terrible mistake. Retribution came upon the keepers, and it was severe. You cannot choose to serve a Herod and fulfill duties contrary to God's way without encouraging Divine retribution (Herod was the means by which God brought Divine retribution upon the keepers). When you work against God, He will work against you.

Many people today are doing the same thing as these prison keepers. These people may not be guards in prisons which incarcerate the saints, but they may simply be employed in some store in our fair land. Many of their duties are not evil, but some of their duties call for them to do things which are not right, **[Seite**

390] things which are unholy and opposed to God—and, like the keepers of the prison, they go along with their job's requirements. So if they must sell lottery tickets, they do; if they must sell booze and tobacco, they do; if they must serve cocktails, they do; and if they must skip church and to do these things on Sunday, they do. Their job has a priority over their conscience, over right and wrong, and over God. And because so many are doing it, they are seldom condemned. Even the folk at church are so accustomed to such things that they seldom condemn such behavior. But working these jobs is still wrong, and there will be a price to pay if they do not repent and get out of the unholy situation they are in.

Sometimes folk are blinded to this folly because of the apparent gains they achieve by serving Herods. When these soldiers were guarding Peter, they would not envy Peter but would be glad they were in Herod's employment. With Peter in prison, the guards looked to have an enviable position in contrast to Peter. He was a lowly, despised, and chained prisoner. They were the macho guards who could strut their position in society. But soon all of that changed. Soon they would give everything to be in Peter's shoes, for soon they perished in ignominy. The gains that sin promises are ever so deceiving.

2. The Retribution Upon the King

The end of Herod also came very ignominiously. After he had put the keepers to death, he "went down from Judea to Caesarea, and there abode" (v. 19). While there he soon met his doom. It came about when "upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them [in the local public arena]" (v. 21). Scholars tell us the "royal apparel" which Herod wore for his oration was a very gorgeous robe. It was threaded with silver and reflected dramatically in the sun when he wore it to speak in the outdoor arena at Caesarea. Being so glamorously arrayed when he spoke would give encouragement to the crowd to acclaim him highly—and they did. They said he was "the voice of a god, and not of a **[Seite 391]** man" (v. 22). Herod, of course, liked the acclaim and took it all in. But God did not like it; nor did He like what Herod had been doing to the church. So "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 [died]" (v. 23). Scholars tell us that what is described here by "eaten of worms" was a repulsive disease of the intestines. In short order, Herod went from glory to gore, from acclaim to shame, from splendor to stench, and from alive to dead all because of his wickedness.

The king and the keepers joined hand in hand to attack the righteous, but it was not long before both had died terrible ignominious deaths. "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (v. 24). Yes, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked

shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered" (Proverbs 11:21). Any time you oppose God and His workers, you are courting disaster. You may not meet your shameful end as quickly as did the king and the keepers here, but it is coming unless you repent.

How different was Peter's life than that of his attackers. Peter's life, in contrast to their lives, was a life blessed by making wise choices. He chose to serve God come what may. It cost him much to serve God with this kind of dedication—it started in his giving up his fishing business and ended in his giving up his life in martyrdom. But unlike his persecutors, Peter did not die empty handed. His rewards are and will be many. Honored for several millenniums in this world, he has even more and greater honor coming in eternity. Such is not the case of his attackers. Nor is it the case of countless multitudes in every age who have chosen to serve evil. May the life of Peter be a great inspiration to all of us to serve Jesus Christ faithfully and fervently and to count no cost too great to be a devoted servant of our Lord.

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Notes

[← 1]

* The person listed is the author of the book which follows his name unless an asterisk (*) appears after the book title. In this case the person is a contributor to the book or is quoted in the book. Our quoting of a person does not mean we necessarily endorse all the beliefs, practices, or associations of that person.

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