

# Peter - Think Before You Leap

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*"From that time forth began Jesus 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 Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" {Matthew 16:21-24}.*

The apostle Peter is quite a study in contrasts. None would question that he meant well, but, as was said of one of our less effective past presidents, "He meant well, but he did so very poorly." Permit me to say at the outset of this lesson that my words are not intended to discourage anyone from loving this good, courageous man. Rather, they are intended for us to learn from his mistakes. Do you remember in Galatians 2:11 how that Paul had withstood Peter to *"the face because he was to be blamed"*? This same Peter referred to Paul later as *"our beloved brother Paul"* (2 Peter 3:15). He was apparently above bearing a grudge. Would that we could do the same.

## Peter's Character

Peter was one of the *"pillars"* of the church, along with James and John (Galatians 2:9). One does not reach such a position unless there are character traits equal to it. He is the spokesman for God whose message is recorded in Acts two, though the others spoke also. It was Peter whom God used as the spokesman when there was a replacement needed for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15). It was Peter who healed the lame man, who *"leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God"* (Acts 3:8).

*Peter was impulsive. He often acted first and thought second. He quickly dropped his net at the invitation of Christ. When Jesus walked across the water Peter stepped over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward him. After the resurrection, Peter threw himself into the sea, and swam impulsively to shore, not waiting for the slow rowing of the boat.*

*Peter was a rare combination of courage and cowardice, of great strength and regrettable instability. Christ spoke more often to Peter than to any other of His disciples, both in blame and praise. No other disciple is so pointedly reproved by our Lord as Peter, and no disciple ever ventured to reprove his Master but Peter.*

*There was one redeeming factor about Peter's character and that was his exquisite sense of sin. He was extremely sensitive and tender in his spirit in this respect. It was Peter who said; "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man (Luke 5:8) (McBirnie, 51).*

Peter's sensitivity is also shown in that, after he had denied the Lord, Jesus turned and looked upon him, *"And Peter went out and wept bitterly"* (Luke 22:62).

Perhaps had he not had this impulsive character trait he would not have been molded into the great apostle of Christ that he was. We admire him, and love him, for the great good he did for the cause of Christianity in his day. We only pray that God might take our character traits and mold us into something a small percentage as useful as was Peter.

### **Peter's Mistakes**

Besides the mistake which we referred to in our opening passage, and to which we will return shortly, Peter was guilty of other mistakes. For instance, he warmed himself with the crowd at our Lord's trial; and, when asked if he was one of his disciples, "*He denied it, and said, I am not*" (John 18:25). This was the occasion of Peter actually denying Christ three times, as Jesus had said he would.

Shortly before this denial, Peter had cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant (John 18:10). Carnal violence was totally against what the Lord had taught, but Peter had not learned the lesson as yet. Others had asked about whether they were to take up swords, but Peter didn't wait for an answer (Luke 22:50-51).

In the Galatians two reference, Peter had refused to eat with the Gentiles, "*fearing them which were of the circumcision*" (Galatians 2:12). His bad influence in this was so strong that even Barnabas was carried away into it. Paul rebuked them when he "*saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel*" (Galatians 2:14). The cause of Christ could have been seriously damaged had Paul not had the courage to confront Peter on this occasion. And, we must assume, that Peter and his companions abandoned their withdrawal of fellowship from the Gentiles immediately afterwards. If not, I suspect we would have had another confrontation documented in the scriptures.

### **Think Before You Leap**

Peter's problem seems to be that he had a zeal that would move him to go beyond what the Lord said, not taking the time to think before he forged ahead. He would actually have thwarted the plan of God for redeeming man if he could. Aren't we happy he was not successful! In Paul's prayer for Israel he stated that "*they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge*" (Romans 10:2). This flaw in their understanding lead them to "*establish their own righteousness*" rather than submit "*themselves unto the righteousness of God*" (Romans 10:3). Zeal made it's own rules and thus thwarted the plan of God for these individuals. In Psalms 78:41, Asaph wrote: "*Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.*" God wanted to bless the children of Israel by giving them the land of promise. They would not cooperate and this caused God to be limited in what he could do for them. Heaven only knows how much God is limited even today from the lack of cooperation he gets from man. We need to learn from Peter to "think before we leap." There is little value in trying to jump a mud hole in two leaps. For individuals to look upon their faithfulness from a percentage point of view is a waste of time, and very self-serving. Are you seventy percent faithful? Would you jump from a plane with 70 percent of a parachute? Do you see my point?

Peter's rebuke of the Lord, saying, "*Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall be unto thee*" (Matthew 16:22), reveals a lack of understanding of what "Lordship." You do not rebuke one who is your Lord. It also

reveals that Peter did not understand the mission of Jesus; that he came here to die for the sins of mankind.

### **Others Who Hadn't Learned To "think before you leap"**

In Acts 23:12 there were Jews who "*bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.*" These fellows were going to have a long hunger spell because Paul lived several more years. They should have thought before they took this leap. Had they done so they would not have had the embarrassment of backing off from the vow. With Ananias and Sapphira there was the "*kept back part of the price*" leap that actually cost them their lives. It was not necessary. God had not required of them the whole price. Their pride and their lies were very costly. Had they given some thought to it they, perhaps, would not have gotten themselves into the situation.

Multitudes of examples of this sort could be given. It seems to be a human race problem, this not thinking before we leap. Perhaps this will help us to begin the practice.

### **End Notes**

McBirnie, William Steuart. *The Search For The Twelve Apostles*