

# POWER

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

## SIMON PETER'S SHADOW: AN OVERVIEW OF PETER'S LIFE (PART 2) *Wade L. Webster*

**A**lthough Peter's shadow no longer exerts the miraculous power that it evidently possessed at one time (Acts 5:15), it does continue to encourage us to arise and walk with the Lord. In the first part of this study, we noticed that Peter played the roles of prodigal and preacher during his lifetime. In this second installment of our study, we want to notice additional roles that Simon Peter filled during his pilgrimage on earth.

### The Pastor/Presbyter

When Jesus appeared to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius (Galilee), he asked Peter three times if he loved him. Each time Peter affirmed his love and Jesus gave him a charge relative to His flock. Peter was told to feed Christ's lambs and sheep (John 21:15-17). Lambs and sheep refer to the young and the old of the flock. Peter was given the responsibility of providing a wholesome diet for those of all ages (1 Tim. 6:3). Please note that the flock belonged to Christ. Jesus said, "My lambs...My sheep" (John 21:15-17). Likely, Jesus' words to Peter remind the Bible student of Paul's words to the Ephesian elders. Paul declared, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). It is the responsibility of elders to "take heed" and to "feed" the flock.

As the Head of the church, Christ is the Chief Shepherd. As an elder, Peter and those with whom he served were under-shepherds. In the first epistle that bears his name, Peter wrote, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:1-4). As an elder,

Peter fulfilled Christ's charge for Him to feed the flock. I think that it is worthy of mention that Peter evidently qualified to serve as an elder. I believe that this is a crucial point to make because some argue or act as if no one can meet the qualifications today. Yet, one as seemingly flawed as Peter, did qualify. It is interesting to consider Peter's life in light of some of the qualifications.

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

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

### The Pupil

Often, in the gospel narratives, Peter is identified as a disciple (Matt. 10:1; Matt. 16:13-16; 26:35-36; Matt. 16:40; Mark 8:33; Mark 16:7; John 18:15-17; John 18:25; John 20:2-4; John 20:8; John 21:1-2). The term

disciple refers to "a learner" or "pupil." For three and a half years, Peter was an apprentice of Christ. He was one of only twelve to be invited to attend MSOP, the Master's School of Preaching. At the feet of Christ, the Master Teacher, he learned great lessons. Space will not allow us to notice all of the lessons that Peter learned, but we will notice two of them:

- **Peter learned a lesson about forgiveness.** When Peter heard the Lord's teaching on how to treat a trespassing brother (Matt. 18:15-17), he asked the Lord a question about forgiveness. He asked, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). In his commentary on Matthew, John Phillips noted that "the rabbis had decided that three times would be forbearance and forgiveness enough." Peter doubled the number given by the rabbis and added one for good measure. No doubt, Peter thought that he was being extremely generous. However, the Lord said that Simon stopped far short of what love required.

Peter was not to forgive "until seven times: but, until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). Jesus then went on to tell the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant to drive the point home (Matt. 18:23-35). Luke records a similar occasion when Jesus spoke of a brother trespassing against someone seven times in a day and asking for forgiveness an equal number of times that same day (Luke 17:3-4). On that occasion, the disciples found it necessary to ask Jesus to "increase" their faith (Luke 17:5). The forgiveness that Jesus spoke of on that occasion required a greater faith than they possessed at that moment.

- **Peter learned a lesson about humility.** The gospels record that the disciples often argued over who was the greatest

(Matt. 18:1-4; Matt. 23:11; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; Luke 22:24-26). The mother of James and John even got involved by asking Jesus to pick her boys to sit on His right and His left hand when He came into His kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28). Do you not love her? She wanted the best for her boys. However, her spirit, as well as theirs, was wrong. Jesus did much to try to combat this silly, selfish, sensual, Satanic, and sinful spirit among His disciples. As you may recall, on one occasion He took a child and set the child in their midst, declaring:

*"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:2-4).*

The disciples were in need of conversion or deflating. They were so puffed up with pride that they were not going to be able to fit through the narrow gate of heaven unless they humbled themselves (Matt. 7:13-14; Matt. 19:24). As great as the lesson with the child was, it paled in comparison to the lesson that He would teach on the eve of His arrest. On that occasion, Jesus Himself became the example.

As you recall, after supper, Jesus laid aside His garments, strapped on a towel, poured water into a basin, washed the disciples feet, and then wiped them with the towel (John 13:4-5). Jesus was teaching the disciples the true nature of love. Please note that the context begins and ends with love (John 13:1; John 13:34-35). The chapter opens with the love that Jesus had for the disciples and it closes with the love that they were to have for one another.

Likely, the thirteenth chapter of John reminds the Bible student of another thirteenth chapter. In the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, often called the love chapter of the Bible, Paul noted that true love "envieth not,"

"vaunteth not itself," "is not puffed up," and "seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:4-5). It was these characteristics of love that Jesus was demonstrating to the disciples by washing their dirty feet.

He was teaching them that true love always serves. It serves no matter what, no matter when, and no matter whom. It serves even if the job is washing dirty feet or changing a stinky diaper. The task of washing feet was slave's work. It was assigned to the lowest servant. Yet, Jesus did it. Furthermore, true love serves no matter when. It serves even if it is a person's last night of freedom, as was the case with Christ. It serves at 3:00 p.m. or at 3:00 a.m. In like manner, true love serves no matter whom. It serves whether it is for a friend or for an enemy.

Jesus was washing the feet of the one who would sell him for thirty pieces of silver and the feet of those who would abandon Him when he was arrested (Matt. 26:15; Matt. 26:56). It should be noted that "He knew who should betray him" (John 13:11). Jesus did not wash the feet of Judas in ignorance. Furthermore, he did not wash the feet of the others in ignorance.

The end of the chapter reveals that he knew that Peter would deny Him (John 13:36-38). No doubt, you recall that when Jesus came to Peter with the basin and the towel, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet (John 13:6-8). I can see Peter pulling his big ole' fishermen feet back in embarrassment. It was simply unthinkable that Jesus should wash his feet. Peter knew that the towel ought to be in his hand.

Peter's reaction reminds me of John the Baptist's reaction when Jesus came to him to be baptized (Matt. 3:13-14). As you recall, "John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14). In like manner, Peter knew that He should be washing Jesus' feet, instead of Jesus washing his feet. Just as Jesus had to command John to "suffer it to be so"

(Matt. 3:15), He had to convince Peter to allow it.

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

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

## The Porter

Imagine being a doorkeeper at Buckingham Palace, at one of our nation's landmarks, or even at a five-star hotel? Would that not be a great assignment? However, in the Psalms, we read of a greater honor. In the eighty-fourth psalm, we read, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psa. 84:10). The psalmist expressed the desire, but Peter got the job. He got to be a doorkeeper in the house of God or the church.

In the second chapter of Acts, he was given the privilege of opening the doors to the church, using the keys committed to his care by Christ (Matt. 16:19). Those who received the word that he and the other preached were baptized and added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47). What a joy it must have been to have been a doorkeeper on that day. However, there would be other days when the duty was not as delightful.

In the fifth chapter of Acts, Peter had to

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shut the door on a sinful couple. As you recall, as many of the brethren "as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet" so that distribution could be made to those who had need (Acts 4:34-37). Like these brethren, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession (Acts 5:1). However, they only brought a part of the proceeds and placed them at the apostle's feet (Acts 5:2). Of course, their sin was not in keeping back part of the proceeds. After all, the possession was theirs and the money from the sale of it was within their power (Acts 5:4). The sin was in lying to God about the amount (Acts 5:4; Acts 5:7-9).

Just as sin had to be put out of the camp in the Old Testament (Josh. 7), it had to be put out of the church in the New Testament (Acts 5). As you might imagine, "great fear came upon all the church" (Acts 5:11). For a time, "no man" wanted to "join himself" to Peter or the other apostles (Acts 5:13). Can you blame them? They had just seen firsthand that "all things are naked and opened" to the eyes of God and His servants. As Peter shut the door on these liars, we must shut the door on modern day liars (2 John 9-11; Rev. 2:1-2; Eph. 5:11).

In the eighth chapter of Acts, Peter would again have to shut the door. In the eighth chapter, the problem did not involve someone selling something and keeping back part of the price, but rather someone trying to buy something. As you recall, Simon who had formerly been a sorcerer, tried to buy the power to impart spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18). Peter slammed the door quickly on his sticky little fingers, saying unto him

*"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-23).*

Although Simon's heart was not right, it was tender. To Simon's credit, Peter's rebuke brought him quickly to repentance. He asked Peter pray to the Lord for him that none of the things of which Peter had spoken come upon him (Acts 8:24). Like Peter, we must shut the

door on those desiring to make merchandise of that which belongs to God, including their making merchandise of us (2 Pet. 2:3; John 2:16).

### The Partner

The wise man Solomon declared, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9-12).

No doubt, this is why Jesus often sent His disciples out by twos (Mark 6:7; Mark 11:1; Mark 14:13; Luke 10:1; Luke 19:29). Peter was blessed to have two key individuals to lift him up, to warm his heart, and to stand with him.

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

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

- The second man who partnered with Peter was John. I do not know if John paired with Peter for the Limited Commission (Mark 6:7), but I do know that he was paired with Peter to make ready the Passover (Luke 22:8). Furthermore, I do know that they were

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Wade Webster, Editor

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often together with the Lord, along with James, when others were not (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; Mark 9:2; Mark 13:3; Mark 14:33; Luke 8:51; Luke 9:28). Clearly, they shared a close bond with one another and with the Lord.

I do know that Peter and John were fishing partners, both physically and spiritually (Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4:18-22). In the early chapters of Acts, we find them working together to carry the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). As you recall, they were together at the healing of the lame man at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11; Acts 4:13; Acts 4:19). Furthermore, they went down to Samaria together to impart spiritual gifts to the new saints there by the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-25).

What a team Peter and John must have made. I sometimes think of them as thunder and lightning. As you recall, Jesus called John, along with his brother James, a son of thunder (Mark 3:17). Both of them possessed a fiery or thunderous temperament. Although Peter was never called lightning, he certainly had a flashy, impetuous, and lightning-like spirit within him.

Untrained and unrestrained, Peter and John would have been a deadly combination. However, with their spirits molded and channeled by Christ, they became a dynamic duo. They belong among the great friends of the Bible. They sharpened one another (Prov. 27:17). They stuck with one another through thick and thin (Prov. 17:17; Prov. 18:24). They went to jail together (Acts 3-4), they defied the Jewish leaders together (Acts 4:19-20), and they suffered the lash together (Acts 5:40). To their credit, none of these things separated them from one another or from the Lord.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, Spiros. **The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament.** Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, Inc., 1992, #3101.

<sup>2</sup> Phillips, John. **Exploring The Gospel Of Matthew.** Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999, p. 371.

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