

Lessons We Can Learn from Peter

(Special Topical Lesson)

I. Introduction

- a. Let's start with an analogy based on mining.
 - i. While some people view studying the Scriptures as an academic pursuit, in my mind, it is more like mining for gold or other precious stones or minerals.
 - ii. Mining is a dirty job. A good miner comes out of the mine at the end of a day of exploring, tired and covered with dirt. However, if he has been successful, he will pull out gems that he unearthed that day.
 1. Some days, a good miner may find great treasure. Other days, he may find little or nothing of value. But he perseveres.
 2. Few people are excited about the idea of going down into a dark hole in the ground and getting dirty in the process. However, when they see a miner emerge and show them the precious stones and minerals he just found, their attitude can change.
 3. Seeing evidence of the precious gems can be a strong motivation for us to enter the mine ourselves, seeking to find our own treasure.
- b. In Protestant circles, Paul is typically considered the greatest of the apostles, far overshadowing Peter.
 - i. The reasons that many today consider Paul to be more important than Peter include the following.
 1. Martin Luther claimed Paul's writings, especially Romans, presented the truest, most perfect form of the gospel.
 - a. Those interested in theological fine points tend to gravitate to Paul's writings rather than to Peter's.
 - b. Peter was a fisherman by trade, a blue-collar type person. His letters and preaching are straightforward, practical, and easy to understand.
 2. The elevation of Paul (and demotion of Peter) may be in reaction to the enormous emphasis that the Roman Catholic church has placed on Peter.

- a. They view Peter as the first human head of the church, from which they derive the concept of the papacy. They see Peter as ending up being the first bishop of the church in Rome. From that, they claim that all future bishops of Rome held authority over the entire worldwide church.
 - b. In fact, the leading Roman Catholic church building in Rome is named “Saint Peter’s,” after the apostle. Many Catholics hold that the church was constructed above the crypt where the bones of Peter were buried.
 - c. Growing up Roman Catholic, the first Bible passage many of us learned was the statement by Jesus to Peter:
 - i. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (**Matthew 16:18-19**, NKJV)
 - ii. This passage was used to support the idea that Peter was the head of the church. Based on that, the Roman Catholic church (which claimed Peter as its first head) was the “one true church” established by Jesus. It claimed to have been given the authority of “binding and loosing.” They further maintained that the line of succession began with Peter and continued over time through the subsequent bishops of Rome to the present day.
3. Another reason Paul is given greater prominence in the eyes of many today is that the three missionary journeys of Paul are emphasized in the second half of **Acts**.
 4. Furthermore, while we have several epistles authored by Paul in the New Testament, we have only two relatively short letters from Peter.
 5. Also, some point to passages in **Galatians 2** to support the idea that Paul was a greater apostle than Peter.

- a. In **Galatians 2:7**, Paul said the gospel to the Gentiles had been committed to him, while the gospel to the Jews had been committed to Peter.
 - i. Since there are a lot more Gentiles in the world than Jews, many have assumed that this means Paul was given the more important mission.
- b. In **Galatians 2:11-16**, Paul recounts the story of how he had rebuked Peter publicly in Antioch for withdrawing from associating with Gentiles.
 - i. Apparently, Peter, out of fear of reaction from Judaizing Christians, had been hypocritically acting as if the Gentile Christians needed to follow the Law of Moses.
- c. Regardless of how you view Paul and his role, I would like to highlight some of the important things about Peter, to encourage everyone to take his example and teaching more seriously. I have found that many blessings in my spiritual life have come through carefully studying Peter and his writings.
 - i. Things to consider in Peter's favor include:
 1. Throughout the gospels, Peter is presented as the most prominent of the twelve apostles.
 - a. He is mentioned first in lists of the apostles.
 - b. Sometimes it says, "Peter and the other apostles."
 - c. He was the only disciple to walk on water with Jesus.
 - d. He is present in special situations where only a few of the apostles are invited (among the three at the Mountain of Transfiguration, and with Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane prayer before Jesus' betrayal).
 2. Peter is the chief spokesman of the apostles in **Acts 1 and 2**, at Pentecost.
 3. In **Revelation 21:14-20**, it describes the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ (which I assume refers to the church, in the future) as having its wall built on *12 foundations of precious stones*, on which are engraved the names of *the 12 apostles*.
 - a. *Note the importance of the twelve apostles.* Paul is not referred to here.

- d. **Question:** If you wanted to study Peter and his ministry and teachings, *where would you look?*
- i. There are references to Peter throughout all four gospels. So, the first place to look should be wherever Peter is mentioned in the gospel accounts.
 - ii. Also, note that Mark was an associate of Peter. According to early Christian writers, **Mark's gospel** represents *Peter's account of what happened* during Jesus' earthly ministry. Therefore, if one wanted to learn more about Peter and his perspective on things, Mark's gospel (of all the four gospels) might be the best place to start!
 1. Note the reference to Mark at the end of **1 Peter**.
 - a. "She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son." (**1 Peter 5:13**, NKJV)
 - b. Note that here, Peter referred to Mark as "my son."
 2. See the following references from early Christian writers, that Mark's gospel reflected Peter's account of the events.
 - a. Papias, writing c. 120 AD, in Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) vol. 1, p. 155, as quoted by Eusebius.
 - b. Irenaeus, c. 180 AD, in ANF vol. 1, pp. 414-415
 - c. Clement of Alexandria, c. 195 AD, in ANF vol. 2, p. 573
 - d. Tertullian, c. 207 AD, in ANF vol. 3, p. 350
 - e. Origen, c. 245 AD, in ANF vol. 9, p. 412
 - iii. In the book of **Acts**, especially in **chapters 1-11 and 15**.
 - iv. His two letters: **1 and 2 Peter**.
- e. Going back to the mining analogy we began with, if we wanted to learn the most from Peter, the best places for us to explore or 'mine' would be:
- i. The four gospels, including especially **Mark**,
 - ii. The book of **Acts**, and
 - iii. The letters **1 and 2 Peter**.

II. Lessons I Have Learned from Peter

- a. Things I have learned from studying Peter include:

- i. Lessons on humility.
- ii. The importance of having a healthy fear of God.
- iii. How to bring others to faith in Jesus (evangelism), and what to instruct them to help them be saved and become part of the church once they do believe.
- iv. Importance of every Christian being devoted to reading the Scriptures.
- v. How to teach those who already believe.
- vi. Highlighted one of the most critical (and overlooked) aspects of leadership in the church.
- vii. Opened my eyes to one of the most *practical* psalms in Scripture.
- viii. The essential core of the Christian way of life, captured in one sentence. Simple, but extremely challenging.

b. Lesson No. 1: On Humility

- i. As noted above, multiple early Christian writers affirmed that the Mark's gospel presented *Peter's account* of the life of Jesus. Historical records indicate that Peter's close associate, Mark, wrote the gospel while in Rome. Details relating to Peter from the gospel according to **Mark** include:
 1. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.'" (**Mark 8:31-33**, NKJV)
 2. "Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered." But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.' Peter said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.' Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' But he spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all said likewise." (**Mark 14:27-31**, NKJV)

3. “Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you are saying.’ And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, ‘This is one of them.’ But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, ‘Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.’ Then he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know this Man of whom you speak!’ A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ And when he thought about it, he wept.” (**Mark 14:66–72**, NKJV)
 - ii. Peter did not try to make himself look good in the eyes of others. He was more interested in being honest and admitting his past mistakes before the entire world. He does not try to come across as a ‘hero’ in his retelling of the story. Mark’s gospel pulls no punches in explaining Peter’s failures and shortcomings, such as when Jesus rebuked him and when he denied Jesus three times.
 1. This makes Peter look pretty bad. Only *an extremely humble person* would be willing to let everyone to know things like these, which cast him in such a negative light.
 - iii. Peter has the authority to teach us about the importance of humility, based on his own example. And he does not hesitate to do so, at the end of **1 Peter**.
 1. “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ (**Proverbs 3:34**) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (**1 Peter 5:5–7**, NKJV)
- c. **Lesson No. 2: On the Fear of God**
- i. This is a topic sorely neglected in most churches today, where the focus is on God’s grace, love, and mercy. However, Peter demonstrated the fear of God in his own ministry and preached the importance of it to the Christians.

1. Examples of Peter upholding the fear of God in his ministry include:
 - a. In **Acts 5:1-11**, Ananias and Saphira are confronted on their deceit and struck dead. Immediately afterward, it says, “great fear came upon all the church” as a result.
 - b. In **Acts 8:18-24**, Simon the Sorcerer is sharply warned that he is in wickedness, separated from God, and bound by iniquity for his corruption. Peter tells him to pray that *perhaps he might be forgiven*.
 2. Peter calls all Christians to maintain the fear of God.
 - a. “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear....” (**1 Peter 1:17**, NKJV)
 - b. “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - c. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;” (**1 Peter 3:15**, NKJV)
 3. Peter is following the example of his Teacher, Jesus, the greatest preacher of the fear of God of all time (see **Matthew 10**, **Mark 9**, etc.).
 4. Fear of God is critically important because it will keep us out of sin, as explained in **Deuteronomy 5:22-29**.
- d. **Lesson No. 3: On Bringing Others to Saving Faith**
- i. Peter shows us how to approach the first step of evangelism. That is to convince others that Jesus is the promised Son of God, who died on the cross and rose from the dead in fulfillment of the prophecies.
 1. Peter was the first to do this after Jesus ascended to heaven, on the Day of Pentecost.
 - a. We can learn from Peter how to persuade others, using the evidence of fulfilled Old Testament prophecies as he did, especially in **Acts 1-3**, **Acts 10**, and **1 Peter 1-2**.
 - b. I counted 16 prophecies that Peter either quoted or alluded to. They are from the Law of Moses, the Psalms,

and the Prophets (the three sections of the Old Testament Scriptures) as Jesus had taught him and the other apostles (**Luke 24:44-45**).

- i. We don't have a direct record of the explanation of fulfilled prophecy that Jesus gave to the apostles in **Luke 24**. However, we *do have what Peter preached afterward*.
2. This approach (proving the faith from the prophecies) was effective not only with the Jews but also with the Gentiles.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**; to a predominantly Gentile church.
 - b. Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, used this approach in reaching out to pagan Romans.
3. Peter was not a 'Bible scholar.' He had no 'rabbinical school' or academic type training. He was a fisherman who knew his Old Testament prophecies.
 - a. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were *uneducated and untrained men*, they marveled...." (**Acts 4:13**, NKJV)
 - b. **Challenge for Us:** Anyone can do this if they are motivated to study and learn the prophecies!
4. If you want to learn how to do this, start by learning from Peter. Pay attention not only to the Old Testament passages Peter quotes, but also the ones he alludes. Some of his comments suggest to me that there is much more the prophets said about Jesus, beyond the passages he specifically quoted. Consider the following statements by Peter:
 - a. "But those things which God foretold *by the mouth of all His prophets*, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." (**Acts 3:18**, NKJV)
 - b. "Yes, and *all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow*, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days." (**Acts 3:24**, NKJV)
 - c. "To Him *all the prophets witness* that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." (**Acts 10:43**, NKJV)

- ii. Second, Peter explains that Jesus is the one and only way to God.
 - 1. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12, NKJV)
 - 2. He understood and taught clearly that there is only one way for anyone to be saved. It is only through Jesus Christ.
- iii. Third, Peter gives us specific instructions regarding *how to become a Christian* after coming to faith.
 - 1. Read **Acts 2:36-41**.
 - a. Peter’s instruction to the crowd, to those who were convicted by what he had preached on the Day of Pentecost: *repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins*.
 - b. This promise is to all people, everywhere, according to Peter.
 - 2. Peter did not preach anything like the so-called ‘Romans Road’ (In contrast, many Protestants today try to pull a ‘plan of salvation’ from **Romans**, a letter written by Paul to a church whose members were already Christians.)
 - a. Also, in the New Testament, we can find no example where Jesus or any of the apostles told someone to “say the sinner’s prayer” (a relatively modern innovation) in order to be saved and have their sins forgiven.
 - 3. There is a lot of confusion in the larger Christian world on this point, even among some of our friends. If this is a new teaching for you, please study this out on your own. Start with examples from the book that has the greatest number of *examples of people actually becoming Christians*: the **Book of Acts**.
 - a. Or when in doubt, you can simply ask Peter what we should do to be saved after we come to faith in Jesus.

e. **Lesson No. 4: On Devotion to the Word of God, the Scriptures**

- i. With danger of false teachers coming into the church, Peter’s direction is not just to “trust the leaders.” Rather, he tells us to cling to the Scriptures.
 - 1. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one

another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. *The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever.*' (**Isaiah 40:6-8**) Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word,* that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (**1 Peter 1:22-2:3**, NKJV)

2. "And so we have *the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place,* until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (**2 Peter 1:19-21**, NKJV)
 - a. Peter confirms the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit.
 - b. In **2 Peter 1**, his point (Christians must turn to the word of God, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit) is offered as a counter to the problem of false teachers who will come into the church.
 - c. Note that he didn't say that when false teachers appear, "Just ask someone I laid hands on," or "Ask someone who is in the line of succession from the laying on of my hands," or "Just ask the future bishop of Rome regarding what the truth is."
 - i. Instead, he points the Christians back to the Scriptures to combat false teachers who will come into the church.

f. **Lesson No. 5: On How We Should Teach Christians**

- i. **1 Peter** provides a classic template or example of how to teach.
- ii. His primary focus is practical: how to live the Christian life. Notice that rather than lofty theoretical theological points, Peter tackles very down-to-earth problems we Christians encounter, such as:
 1. Suffering

2. Challenges in marriage
 3. Difficult relationships
 4. Relations between church leaders and younger members of the church
 5. Submission to governing authorities and to one another.
 6. Showing love and compassion to others
 7. Keys to effective (and ineffective) prayer
 8. A call to holiness as a way of life
 9. Being aware of the impact of Satan and temptations
- iii. Peter backs up every point he makes with Scripture. This includes admonitions from Old Testament passages, as well as good examples to follow and bad examples to learn from. We can see this way of teaching throughout both **1 and 2 Peter**.
1. Even though he was an apostle who had been with Jesus personally, he did not just preach or teach on the basis of his own personal wisdom or knowledge.
 2. Instead, he continually referred back to the (Old Testament) Scripture.
 3. What a notable example for us to follow whenever we are teaching and preaching in the church!

g. Lesson No. 6: On the Keys to Good Leadership in the Church

- i. "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock*; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (**1 Peter 5:1-4**, NKJV)
1. See the role of elder as that of a shepherd guarding and tending the flock.
 2. See Christ as the Chief Shepherd, to whom all other shepherds must give an account.
 3. Don't lord it over others entrusted to you.

4. Lead first and foremost *by example*.
 - a. Not leading by attempting to micro-manage others, or simply trying to manipulate them to do what you happen to think is best.
 - ii. Over several decades, so many of the problems that I have seen in various churches could have been solved simply by following the instructions that Peter gave here!
- h. **Lesson No. 7: Introducing Us to a Highly Practical Psalm**
 - i. Peter's longest single quote from the Old Testament can be found in **1 Peter 3:8-12**, where he quotes a powerful passage from **Psalm 33/34** and explains how we need to apply that in our lives.
 - ii. This is called upon to support his teaching to husbands, that *they must be considerate of their wives if they want God to hear their prayers*.
 - iii. This direction from Peter (pointing to a psalm that addresses all relationships, effective prayer, fear of God, etc.) has opened my eyes to what has become perhaps my favorite among all the psalms.
- i. **Lesson No. 8: Providing a Concise Summary of the Christian Life**
 - i. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth....'*" (**1 Peter 2:21-22**, NKJV, quoting from **Isaiah 53:9**)
 1. The Christian life is first and foremost about *following the example of Jesus*.
 - a. This is the primary focus of the Christian classic, *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis. The thesis of that book, which I believe is right on target, is that the essence of being a Christian is to understand and imitate Jesus' way of life.
 - b. Peter understood that being a Christian goes beyond just following a set of rules or commands. It is about following in the steps of Christ; following His example.
 2. Here, Peter specifically points to the suffering Jesus endured on the cross without responding sinfully. He reminds us that if we follow Him, we should not be surprised if our lives are marked by suffering as well, here in this life.

- a. Contrary to the message preached in many places today, the 'good news' is *NOT* "Jesus suffered so we can enjoy 'life to the full' here" (and therefore we do not need to suffer anything).
- b. The glory and rest we look forward to will come in the next life. It is not promised here.
- c. May we look to the pattern established by Jesus Himself, and strive to follow that: refined and made perfect through suffering in this life, with the promise of glory to follow in the next one.

III. Conclusion and Takeaways

- a. Let's restore Peter to the prominent position he should have as an apostle. Pay close attention to the many lessons we can learn from him.
- b. I mentioned eight specific things I have learned from him. Feel free to go deeper in any of these areas on your own and to find even more areas for inspiration and application for your own life.
 - i. An attitude of genuine humility
 - ii. Holding up the importance of the fear of God
 - iii. Principles to be used in evangelism.
 - iv. Devotion to the Word of God
 - v. Principles for effectively teaching other Christians.
 - 1. Primary focus on practical matters of the Christian life
 - 2. Using the Scripture to back up every major point
 - vi. Principles for good leadership in the church
 - vii. A practical psalm to meditate on
 - viii. Understanding the essence of the Christian Life: following the example of Jesus, willing to be perfected through suffering for righteousness' sake.