

## The Rock of Peter?

Jesus often made comments that confused the people around him—even his own disciples. The Disciples often asked Jesus to explain himself. The Church has also been confused over some of his comments and teachings. One of the big bewilderments for the Church is over Jesus' statement regarding Peter. Was Jesus referring to Peter as the foundation of the Church? Well, let's look at the event and see what Jesus actually said. To do this we could look at John or any of the Synoptic Gospels, so I randomly chose the eighth chapter of Mark, using *The Message* by Eugene Peterson:

1-4 Some Pharisees and Sadducees were on him again, pressing him to prove himself to them. Jesus told them, "You have a saying that goes, 'Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning.' You find it easy enough to forecast the weather—why can't you read the signs of the times? An evil and wanton generation is always wanting signs and wonders. The only sign you'll get is the Jonah sign." Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

5-6 On their way to the other side of the lake, the disciples discovered they had forgotten to bring along bread. In the meantime, Jesus said to them, "Keep a sharp eye out for Pharisee-Sadducee yeast."

7-12 Thinking he was scolding them for forgetting bread, they discussed in whispers what to do. Jesus knew what they were doing and said, "Why all these worried whispers about forgetting the bread? Runt believers! Haven't you caught on yet? Don't you remember the five loaves of bread and the five thousand people, and how many baskets of fragments you picked up? Or the seven loaves that fed four thousand, and how many baskets of leftovers you collected? Haven't you realized yet that bread isn't the problem? The problem is yeast, Pharisee-Sadducee yeast." Then they got it: that he wasn't concerned about eating, but teaching—the Pharisee-Sadducee kind of teaching.

13 When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some think you are John the Baptizer, some say Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

15 He pressed them, "And how about you? Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17-18 Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am.

[or more literally: Men have not revealed this to you, but my Father *revealed* this to you].

Everyone knows you as Peter, a rock [Greek: Petros—a large piece of rock. Presumably because he was either a strong-stocky guy, or “rock-solid” in his opinions]. But on this *rock* [Greek: Petra—a huge rock like Gibraltar] I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.

Which rock was he referring to? Peter (Petros)—a man or the Rock (Petra) of God's ability to *reveal to the hearts* of men who he is?

He wasn't saying, “on you *Peter*” (Grk: petros) I will build my church. It is upon this rock (Grk: petra) of *revelation knowledge*—God's ability to reveal—demonstrate—prove—convince people who is, that Jesus builds his Church. Peter was a man—an ordinary man that possessed wonderful character traits—as well as human failings. I can almost see the look of joy on Jesus' face when Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." His eyes probably enlarged, eyebrows raised and with great joy he said, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't figure this out on your own—this understanding of who I am—God revealed it to you! I am proud of you—you're a Rock, Peter (strong, solid, sturdy), but on this rock—this ability of God to reveal things to you is far more solid, stronger, sturdier—and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades can not overcome it—even the demons of hell can't stop my Father from bringing his kingdom on this earth.”

Does Peter give you the understanding of who Jesus is, or does the Spirit of God *reveal* that to you? Does salvation come through Peter, or the Holy Spirit?

19 "And that's not all. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven."

[was he referring only to Peter? If so, Peter is dead and we no longer have complete and free access to God's kingdom. You might as well quit praying for the sick; quit praying about your job—just give up and wait for Peter to return.]

20 He swore the disciples to secrecy. He made them promise they would tell no one that he was the Messiah.

21-22 Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up

alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, "Impossible, Master! That can never be!"

23But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works." [Whoa! Is Jesus calling the "Rock" on which the church is built, Satan?]

Peter said that he was sure of Jesus being the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God. However, nothing can be more wrong than to suppose that Christ meant the *person* of *Peter* was the rock. Peter was an ordinary man—nothing unique about him—however there is something unique about this ability of God *revealing knowledge* to your heart.

I will give you *a new heart* and put *a new spirit* in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)

Why is he doing that? Of what value will it be? That is how he will be able to commune with you—teach you—fellowship with you.

And I will put *my Spirit within you* and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall heed My ordinances and do them. (Ezekiel 36:27)

You disagree with this understanding? Well, that's okay, Jesus said he would upset your apple cart of ideas, but let's consider some other verses.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:14

It is impossible to read or hear the Word of God and understand it by your own efforts. Does this surprise you? Look at what this passage says, apart from God's Spirit being present, God's word is foolishness and not understandable. A person can read it night and day for forty years and understand nothing.

Jesus speaking to the Jews who were persecuting him said, "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:37-40)

These people could quote the Scriptures to you left and right, yet Jesus said that God's Word did not dwell in them. What does he mean? Jesus means that the Bible knowledge they had was nothing more than words in a book. They had pieced together their image of God and had not submitted themselves to God and allowed God to reveal to them who he really is. In their pride and arrogance, they thought that they could reach up and take hold

of God. Without the personal revelation, spiritual truth is unknowable. It is impossible to come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God unless God reveals it to you.

In Romans 16:25-27, Paul wrote:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation* of the mystery hidden for long ages past, *but now revealed* and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him -- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (NIV)

Everything that pertains to salvation is a mystery hidden in Jesus Christ. The world looks at Jesus Christ and sees, at most, an historical figure, and no more. To the world Jesus Christ was a martyred religious man whose death moved his followers to establish a major world religion. To the world, Christianity is a religion, but to those who God has revealed himself, the Bible is reality; His Spirit is a reality; His new creation is a reality.

This word *mystery* in the above passage is not like a mystery as we generally think of. It is not something that we can search out all the clues of and then piece together the truth. Today when we think of a mystery that is what we think, but the word that appears in the Bible has a slightly different meaning.

The biblical word *mystery* refers to the *secret* teachings of a fraternal organization. The Masons are a fraternal organization that has *secret* goings on during their meetings. What they do and why they do it and what it means is a *secret* known only to the members. The organization holds the key to understanding their symbols and phrases. Outsiders cannot understand because they do not have the key.

This is the *mystery* being spoken of. In the above passage, however, we see that God has hidden the gospel message in Christ. What this means is that unless you enter into Christ you cannot understand what it means to be a Christian. This knowledge is a mystery to the world and only with the Holy Spirit, the Teacher, is the understanding available. The Holy Spirit is the key that unlocks the mystery.

It is valuable for you to realize that the understanding of a scripture is given to you by God. It is not your zeal that enables you to understand the Scriptures in TRUTH, but rather your purity of heart, the clearness of your conscience and the sincerity of your faith. It is because of your relationship of love with God that he gives you all good things.

Let me briefly show you the cycle of receiving understanding. First God moves in your life. Then you respond to God by seeking to know him better, that is, you hear his voice and respond as he intended. As you seek him in truth and grow in your love for him, he gives you the understanding. This increase in understanding gives you a clearer vision of

God who then appears to you to be even more beautiful than you had previously thought, which causes you to seek him more, and so on and so on.

A relationship with God is a relationship of love. God has hidden himself that he might reveal himself to those who love his true character. The proud, the arrogant, the domineering, will never see God. To them he is a mystery.

What we need to do is to read the Bible with complete honesty, seeking to understand in truth. What I mean is that we read, asking God to reveal the meaning. When you come across a passage that you do not understand fully, then ask God to reveal it. Mark the passage and come back to it. Ask God in prayer what it means. How does it relate to other passages? Remember, the truth is what agrees with every passage. The truth is what is, not what I want it to be.

Recently I was reading some of the material on a certain web site and the author said that not one person was going to go into the 'Lake of Fire' because the Scriptures say that 'all' men will come to the knowledge of the truth. This person had maybe fifty passages that said 'all,' so the author concluded that meant *all*, but the problem is that there are other passages that clearly say that everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life will be thrown into the Lake of Fire or something like that. Now the truth is what agrees with all the passages, not what our lawyer minds want to piece together of God's Word.

When confronted with a paradox like this we must pray and seek revelation from God. If a person thinks they can play the lawyer with God and win; they have been deceived and the truth is not in them. It is not the words that are true but the Spirit in the words. The spiritual truth expressed in the words is true. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:6 (NIV)

Several years ago I was visiting a church and they had a guest speaker. This man was a dynamic speaker. He had clever phrases and emotional punches; he stirred up everyone into an emotionally charged body. He quoted from Isaiah 55 where the Scripture says that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. So he concluded that we should replace our thoughts with God's thoughts. What he said was that when you are reading the Bible and you run across something that says a thing is different than what you think, that you should change the way you think to conform to the Bible.

Well now, that sounds reasonable, doesn't it? The problem is, this is earthly reason, and not spiritual revelation. If I run around sticking 'God's thoughts' in my mind, without true understanding, am I really thinking God's thoughts? No, of course not. Without a personal revelation of the meaning, you are thinking nonsense thoughts.

One thing we must be is honest. If you do not understand, spiritually, what a scripture means, then seek to understand, ponder the verse in your mind, ask God to reveal it. As

you ponder the verse let God guide your mind to other verses and look for the connection, that is, how they fit together.

Let me give you an example. Here's how I do it and how the Lord teaches me. When I want to understand some event in the Bible, I pray and ask God to show me what the scriptures reveal about it. I used to get a 4 X 6 card and mark the top "The Coming of the Lord," or whatever I am asking God to show me—now everything is on my computer.

Then I read the Scriptures and every time I see a verse that applies, I write the Scripture reference on the file I created. Months or years go by and eventually I reach a point where I look at it and start reading all of the passages I wrote down. I pray and ask the Lord to show me what is going on, what it means. I pray, read, and think. Through this process, the Lord's quiet voice says, in my heart of hearts, "Did you see that?" I go back and look and whammo! Wow look at that! It fits! You see, every Scripture will come to pass and all are true. We must pray, and seek, and ask, and knock, until we can see the one truth that fits all the Scriptures. When the Lord shows me something that I have been searching for, it is such a joy. I literally jump up and dance around the room. Praise God! Another thing, when the Lord reveals it to me, I *know* it's true, because I truly understand the matter. He has given me the understanding of how it all fits together in the ONE.

The point I am trying to make is that we must strive to understand the truth, and this understanding only comes through God *revealing* it to us, and he will only reveal it if we will obey him, that is, if we have an active personal love relationship with him. In the world today, we have many Christian denominations with many differing doctrines, but in reality, there is only one truth, for there is only one God. We should all seek to understand the One Truth. As all of the denominations throw out carnal reasoning and seek to be led by the One God in Jesus Christ, we will become more and more alike, until we become one in Christ. Praise God! Those people who refuse to be led by the One God will be revealed for what they are, that is, not of the One Body. Never focus on our differences, but rather seek the One God, that is, Jesus Christ the visible image of the invisible God.

"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence—right before their eyes—they still would not believe in him. So that what Isaiah the prophet said was fulfilled: 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm [the power] of the Lord been unveiled? [Isaiah 53:1] For this reason they *could not* believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hardened hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn . . . and I would heal them.' [Isaiah 6:10] Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.'" John 12:37-41

I have heard people say that they can't understand how the Jews could have seen all the things that Jesus did and not believe. The answer is right there in that passage. They *could not* understand. But we do the same things today. Things that seems so obvious to some, it missed or overlooked by others. Unless God reveals—no one can see.

We must turn from the ways of the world and with our whole heart, mind and body seek to be conformed into his image and likeness.

We always thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (2 Thessalonians 1:3-5)

It is God who chooses to reveal himself to whomever he wishes.

Jesus said of those who enter into heaven: "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. Luke 20:34-36

In the New Testament, we are told many times to live lives worthy of God. This we must do, and as we do, God reveals himself to us. Remember that God and his Word are the same. To understand the Scriptures is to know God.

People who study the Scriptures but do not humble themselves and submit to God will never see the truth. They cannot see the truth, for they have denied God by their failure to honor him as Lord.

Do not be fooled. There is a direct relationship between our relationship to God and our actions. While it is true that we don't earn our salvation we must honor God and submit to his authority over us. He is God after all, and who are we that we should refuse to turn everything over to him?

It is helpful to understand that belief or faith comes from the heart or spirit, and not the mind. It is also helpful to know that God speaks to us, usually, down in the spirit. Our spirits understand God's Word long before our minds do. This is why we Christians frequently know something is true but cannot explain it in words.

Years ago, people would ask me, "How do you know that the Bible is true?" and I could not adequately answer them. I knew it was true, but how or why I knew I could not explain. Psychologist would say that this belief was in my subconscious mind; biblically we would say that it was in my spirit.

People frequently think that they are motivated to action by what they know in their mind, but this is usually only true when the spirit and mind agree. It is in the spirit that the soul lives and it is the spirit that moves us to action.

There is another voice that moves us to action and that is the body. When it is hungry, cold or in pain, it informs the mind so that the mind will move to alleviate the condition. Both the spirit and the body vie for the mind's attention.

Now you, that is, your soul, is in ultimate control of your whole being. You can indulge your body and deny your spirit, or you can respond to the spirit and deny your body.

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him.  
Mark 5:1-2

It appears when reading this entire passage, Mark 5:1-20, that this man had as many as 2000 evil spirits in him, and yet he came to Jesus. It is certain that these 2000 spirits did not motivate the man to seek out Jesus, for they were begging Jesus not to send them out of the area. It was his soul; it was *him*, that sought release.

Now you, my beloved brother or sister, are in control of your being. You are hearing the call of God or you would not be reading this. You must make sure that your body is not in control of your mind, but rather, as our brother Paul indicates, beat your body, and make it be quiet, so that you can conform your mind to the likeness of God. Pray and ask God to fill your heart with the knowledge of God. Draw close to God and he will draw close to you.

. . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.  
Hebrews 10:22-25

We pray and seek God, obediently living the life that pleases God, and God who loves us more than we can possibly understand, fills us with the knowledge of himself. In our obedience and through his revelation we become like him. In this way, God is visible in the earth. We reach out and manifest God to all who are around us. This is what it means to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Our very lives are a light that shines out into the darkness. Like a moth to light, we draw people out of the world into the presence of God. As God's very own children we express God's love, which has become our love, to everyone we meet.

This is not something we learn by reading, but by doing and being transformed into his image and likeness. God gives us the power, the faith, and the hope to become his children in truth. You cannot do this without him. All you have to do is seek him and trust him. Praise God who is our life.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33