

THE FOUR FIRES OF PETER'S PERFECTING

1Peter1:6-9

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Dr. Alexander Whyte in his book on NT bible characters informs the reader that: *No disciple spoke as often and as much as Peter. No disciple was so sharply rebuked by our Lord as Peter. No disciple ever dared to rebuke the Lord but Peter. No other disciple ever so boldly confessed, and straightforwardly acknowledged and encouraged our Lord as Peter did. And no one ever intruded and interfered and tempted our Lord as Peter repeatedly did.*

Yet, Jesus never spoke words of approval and praise and blessing to any other man as He did to Peter. But, at the same time, and almost in the same breath, Jesus said harder things to Peter than he ever said to any of the twelve disciples.

Simon Peter was dynamic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, hotheaded. But for all his strengths, Peter had several failings in his life. Still, the Lord who chose this ordinary fisherman, continued to mold him into exactly who He intended Peter to be.

PETER BY THE FIRE

(Luke 22:54-62)

Peter was made an eyewitness of all Christ's sufferings after the arrest. I also believe Peter was discreetly watching from a distance when Jesus was suffering unimaginable pain on the cross. By witnessing the sufferings of the Savior, Peter would never be the same.

Providence would have Peter sit by the fire, among the officers who made the arrest of Jesus. Imagine that! In the dark of the night, he chooses to sit with the ungodly, Christ-rejectors and crucifiers and enemies of His disciples.

By the fire Peter must have been cold not only on the outside, but terribly cold on the inside. His heart was no longer a heart warm in grace. I believe he was freezing up within. Sitting by what I call the "world's fire" was of no benefit for him.

He was a very self-confident person. He had often boasted how he would stand up for Christ no matter what. Even to the point of death. Many were his boasts.

As Peter stood and warmed himself by the fire of the enemies of Christ, he was tested by God and tempted by the Devil. What would Peter do? Would he stand up for Jesus and boldly declare his allegiance? Would his boasts stand? Or would he cower and deny Him?

Well, we all know the outcome, how Peter who first confessed Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" cringed before the accusations, cracking under the pressure. He denied his Lord not once, not twice, but three times. In that hour, God used a rooster to remind the cocky Peter he had turned chicken.

Let us not be hard on Peter though; in the same situation we might have done worse. Peter denied our Lord by speaking out, but how many times do we deny Him with our silence, because we are too afraid to witness on His behalf.

All this denying exposed Peter's true nature and character – his pride, selfishness, and fear. All along Peter was trusting his own wisdom and strength. Scripture also tells us how Peter slept in the garden when it was time to pray. Prayerlessness and self-confidence are a formula for failure.

The point is: Peter did not expect to deny Christ. *If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall* (1Cor .10:12).

Never say never. How often we hear Christians say I will never do such a thing. No, not me! Never, only over my dead body, I will do that. Let us be careful and consider how we speak. Our natural strength can turn into weakness in a split second. So many end up doing what they vowed never to do.

PETER UNDER FIRE

It was by the fire that Peter was brought under fire. When the officers of the High Priest led the Lord out of the hall, and out through the porch and past the fire, the Lord stared Peter straight in the eyes.

The eyes of the Lord are like blazing fire (Rev. 1:4). Hearts are searched and scrutinized by His piercing eyes. But I do not think Jesus was judging Peter. I don't think Jesus was saying, *"I told you so."* I think there was in His eyes, love, and sympathy for Peter. I believe the Lord's look of tenderness and compassion, was saying, *"Peter, why are you causing yourself so much sorrow."*

The Lord's compassionate look effected Peter to a great extent. It brought to remembrance his former boosts and how the Lord had prophesied his

denials. Peter was greatly pained. Peter knew he had broken the Master's heart. Jesus had already been manhandled, mocked, accused and here now one of his closest disciples, dearest friends, adds to those deep wounds by denying him.

Peter knew by doing what he had done, he had joined the evildoers and the tormentors and had added unnecessary pain to Savior's soul. Under his self-ignited fire, Peter came to the end of himself. His spirit was broken. His pride was shattered. His self-will and self-confidence were totally crushed, so much so that he went out and wept bitterly.

He felt he done great evil in the sight of his Lord that night. Years later, he wrote, "*The face of the Lord is against them that do evil*" (1 Peter 3:12).

Thankfully, Peter's brokenness led to blessedness, to sincere repentance and "godly sorrow." But on that same night, another disciple was also full of sorrow, but his sorrow was not a "godly sorrow", but a "worldly sorrow." The bible says Judas went out early in the morning, having no tears, to hang himself.

Satan had sifted Peter, and he proved to be wheat. Satan had sifted Judas, and he proved to be chaff.

The look the Lord had a powerful impact on Peter that day. Christ looks down on each one of us today. The look of His love is cast on us to bring about an awakening of conscience so that we might see our sins for what they are. Like Peter, we are to see our sins in the light of his love for us.

Our sins have caused God unimaginable pain, so much pain. But His love is greater than our sins. Mercifully, the penalty for our sins was paid by His Son, Jesus Christ on the cross. Therefore, we can be reconciled to God

through Christ. He can forgive us now that the debt is paid. Sin has been conquered. Love has won. Grace is available.

The Bible says that *while we were still in our sins, God demonstrate His love for us by sending His Son to die on the cross for us.*

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

We read in John 21, of the restoration and recommissioning of Peter. In that chapter of John's gospel is recorded how Peter and six other disciples were on the Sea of Galilee fishing early in the morning. They fished in vain. They weren't catching.

All the while, the risen Christ stood on the shore, but none of the disciples realized it was Him. He called out to them, "*Friends, haven't you caught any fish.*" "*No,*" they answered. "*Throw the net on the right of the boat, and you will find some.*", Jesus said.

They took the Stranger to His word, miraculously catching tons of fish. John, the beloved disciple realized it was the Lord and told Peter. Peter without hesitation, put on his outer garment, jumped out of the boat, and swam to shore.

Jesus had prepared a breakfast of sizzling fish on a coal fire. It's so amazing, it was by a fire where Peter denied the Lord three times, and it was by another fire that he will be restored. By that fire of burning coals, that very day, Jesus singles out Simon Peter and questions him concerning his love for Him.

Peter had denied his love for the Lord three times and now the Lord would ask him three times if he really loved Him. *Simon Peter, "Do you truly love me?"* Peter was hurt by it because it touched his sore spot. Shameful and painful memories were aroused. The three public denials demanded three public confessions. Peter each time replied, *"You know that I love You."* He added Lord, *"You know all things."*

Jesus made a special point of forgiving and restoring Peter and re-commissioning him as an apostle (John 21:6, 15-17).

PETER ON FIRE

(Acts 2:1-4)

Peter had been to by the fire, under fire, but now we see him on fire. The fire of Holy Spirit's empowerment. It's good to be purged from the sin, self, and the world. It's good to be dedicated to the work of the Gospel. But there's something more: we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost, tongues of fire came to rest on each disciple as they prayed in the upper room. And they began to speak in different languages. It was a sign of the arrival of the promised holy Spirit. They were now endued with power and made ready to preach the gospel unto the ends of the world.

Like the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the Lord had become for Peter a fire in the heart and in his mouth. As the key spokesman of the twelve, Peter was so filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that his fiery sermon brought 3,000 souls to their knees.

Later, Peter healed a lame beggar (Acts 3) and preached boldly before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4). Even arrest, beatings, and threats could not dampen Peter's resolve to preach the risen Christ (Acts 5). He preached with passion, with persuasion and with power!

Jesus had promised that Peter would be foundational in building the Church. He was given the keys of the kingdom. He fulfilled the "opening of the church door" to all nations in three stages:

Peter preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and Jews were saved and added to the church. Then, he was present when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8) and, so half Jews and Gentiles came in. Finally, he was summoned to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who also believed and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10) and the Gentiles came in.

In this way, Peter "unlocked" three different worlds and opened the door of the Church to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

PETER'S FINAL FIRE

(John 21:18-19)

Later in life, Peter spent time with John Mark (1 Peter 5:13), who wrote the gospel of Mark based on Peter's remembrances of his time with Jesus. Peter wrote two inspired epistles, 1 and 2 Peter, between A.D. 60 and 68.

Jesus said that Peter would die a martyr's death (John 21:18-19)—a prophecy fulfilled during Nero's reign. Peter's final fire was the offering up of his body as a burnt offering.

Tradition has it that Peter asked to be crucified upside down, for he deemed himself unworthy to die as his Lord. At about the ripe age of 70, in Rome, the great apostle Peter sealed his testimony with blood, proving his great love for the Savior.

Peter was a man who was tried by fire.

*But then they took note that Peter "had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).
Being with Jesus makes all the difference.*