

The five epistles we have studied together recently have all been authored by the apostle Paul. They concentrate on establishing the Gospel, life in Christ and the Assembly. They were all addressed to specific persons or assemblies. Eight other epistles were written besides the 13 definitely attributable to Paul. They are more general, addressed to believers in many locations. Peter's are addressed to believers scattered in many areas, some named, throughout a wide region once known as Asia Minor but now known as Turkey. His ministry treats the blessings, trials and responsibilities of believers particularly as belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord while here distinguished between His Assembly which He said He would build, and His Kingdom to which he gave Peter the keys.

*Matthew 16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

The Lord's statements show decisively His "Assembly" is not the same as His Kingdom. Simplistically, the Kingdom includes all who profess subjection to the King, whether truly believers or not. Therefore, the Assembly which consists entirely of believers is distinct from the Kingdom, but included in it, since all believers profess Jesus as Lord..

The Lord told Peter his confession would be the base upon which the Lord would build His Assembly. Peter made a huge leap of God-given insight, confessing Jesus as the Son of the Living God rather than simply as Jesus Christ the rightful Messiah/Son of David he and the other disciples expected. Simon is named Peter, "a stone," in contrast to his grand confession, the rock immovable as a Gibraltar, upon which the Lord would build His Assembly. And more immediately, Peter was given authority to bind and to loose in the Kingdom of Heaven. Men persistently think of "Saint Peter" as the one minding the gates of heaven. He is popularly pictured as the one who reviews the record of earthly deeds and omissions and admits or refuses dead souls entrance to the "pearly gates" into heaven. But Peter was never given authority over the gates of heaven. The Lord Himself has the keys of death and hades, not Peter, Revelation 1:18. The Lord gave Peter the keys to the **kingdom of heaven**. Under this authority vested in him

by the Lord he administered the kingdom of heaven, binding or loosing people's sins while they are upon the earth. We saw Peter exercising this authority in announcing salvation to new converts from the Jewish multitudes attending the feast of Pentecost. He later confirmed salvation in those who received the Christ in Samaria under Phillip's evangelical work. Still later he was used of God to introduce Gentiles to the kingdom of God when he visited the Roman Centurion Cornelius, his household and guests. He also acted to bind sins upon persons. Ananias and Sapphira were denounced by Peter after they lied to the Holy Spirit, and the Lord removed them from the presence of the saints on earth, Acts 5. Later Peter rebuked the attempts of Simon the sorcerer to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit for himself, Acts 8. Peter, therefore, fulfilled his commission using the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to admit or refuse people on earth. This authority and responsibility was also given to the local assemblies in every place where believers are gathered to the name of the Lord, even today, Matthew 18:15-20.

No, Peter never was given, nor did he take, authority on earth or in heaven over entrance of persons into heaven. The church wasn't given this authority either, although the Pope has, by claiming Peter as the first pope, arrogated this to the church, much to the dread of its members. The devil has successfully taken the Lord's rightful glory, authority and grace available to the repentant sinner and handed it to "St. Peter" (and also to the "Virgin Mary," the mother of Jesus). Both would be appalled if they knew such blasphemy was being done to their Lord and Savior by those using their names, deceived and deceivers. Deceived, but to die in their sins! Lost! What a shame!

If I counted correctly Peter and Paul are each mentioned about the same number of times in the New Testament. Peter had a privilege that Paul never had. He personally walked with the Lord Jesus for all three and one half years of His public ministry on this earth. And Peter, with James and John, saw the Lord transfigured while a Man on earth, a preview of His glorious return to reign. On the other hand Paul had a privilege Peter never had. He saw and heard the Lord after His ascension, a glorified Man at the right hand of God in heaven itself.

Peter also had another privilege few others have experienced. Few will allow someone else to change their name. Naming something or someone is an indication of one's authority. Adam was called by the Lord to name all the animals. Ultimately he named his wife as well. God made the woman out of his side to be his companion, his wife. He names her Eve, and she accepts that name, and her position as one named by him. Brides appropriately celebrate their marriage by accepting their husband's

surname. Jehovah exercised His authority changing Abrams's name to Abraham. Jesus surnamed the disciple, whose name had been Simon from birth, Peter (or Cephas in Aramaic). Peter accepted his new name readily without protest. He uses it on his epistles. (James and John were also given a surname by the Lord, "Boanerges," which is, "The sons of thunder," apparently befitting their natural temperament.)

Peter is a well known personage throughout the Gospels and early Acts. He was probably the most prominent, but adventurous and impetuous, of the twelve disciples. He usually spoke his mind, too often before thinking, but this changed once indwelt by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. He was a working man, a fisherman by trade, a good and godly man, not an intellectual. Although not of Judea he was religiously faithful to the Law of Moses, honestly protesting he had never eaten unclean creatures when directed to by a voice from heaven, Acts 10:14. Earlier, disheartened after denying the Lord, he returned to fishing in Galilee but the Lord restored him to the service to which He had called him, John 21. He was originally brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew and immediately became a believer and enthusiastic disciple and was given his surname. As we noticed above, Peter was the first to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was not simply the Son of David as the disciples first took Him to be while looking for the coming kingdom to free them from the Roman occupation. His many exploits and his sometimes

rash statements and actions make for an interesting biography if one follows his life through the gospels and the first twelve chapters of Acts. He drops out of sight at that point while the Holy Spirit takes up the conversion and activities of Paul. Peter's last appearance is in the conference in Jerusalem in Acts 15, where he testifies as to God's mind to include the gentiles as equals in the Assembly. Later he would fail to uphold that truth in Antioch and Paul had to withstand him to the face. That unpleasant incident is described by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. However grace triumphs and Peter's second epistle ends with an endorsement of Paul's writings. All of their ministry is compatible and reinforces one another. Of course it would, being the inspired word of God. How wonderful God is to have preserved the individual personalities and styles of those He chose to write the scriptures.

Peter's epistles are just like the Peter we learned to know and like and love in the gospels and the Acts. They are practical with both warm hearted encouragement and faithful warnings. He especially encourages the suffering saints whatever the source and nature of the trials they experience. As with Paul, Peter shows us that suffering is the "name of the game" for faithful believers. His second letter, as with many "second epistles," reaches onward to conditions that can be expected in the last days, days we are certainly in today. Listen to what he has to say to us.

By Ronald Canner, October 13, 2004