

WITH OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Simon Peter : A Study in Character

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The character of Peter is, by universal admission, one of the most fascinating in scriptural biography, and this fascination it owes partly, to the frank and open-hearted humanity of Peter, partly, to the greatness of the events in which, as disciple and apostle, he was privileged to bear a part, above all, to that intimate nearness to Christ into which his erring, as well as generous and lovable, personality brought him. Any estimate which we form of his character must take account of two things, first his natural endowments, and then the transformation which he underwent when he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. There is no character among the disciples in whom we may trace so clearly the Master's workmanship.

1. Peter brought with him into the service of the Master all the qualities acquired by his experience as a fisherman on the Galilean Lake. These were courage, faith, resourcefulness, above all patience, the quality without which no fisher can succeed. These qualities are important, for Jesus said that he would use them, and make Peter a "fisher" of men. There were young men in Galilee who were looking for the Messiah, but they were full of the spirit of discontent and idleness. They had no wish to continue at their ordinary callings, because they desired to take up arms against the Roman government. When Jesus came, it was not to those restless and dissatisfied spirits that he went in order to obtain disciples, but to the men of toil. He respected their manly labor, and he saw in them the steady and reliable qualities which would make them fit disciples. Such a man was Simon Peter, whom the Lord now called to follow him. He had learned as a fisherman the priceless lesson of quiet patience, a quality very near to the "meekness" of which Jesus speaks, and of which he says that those who have it are blessed.

2. We are accustomed to think of Peter as a man of immensely strong character, for that is the meaning of the new name which Jesus gave him at his calling. He said to him : "Thou art Simon ; thou shalt henceforth be called Cephas or Peter, which means a Rock." By nature, Peter was not at all like a rock, but like shifting sand or running water. With all his good qualities, he was impulsive and passionate, easily misled and diverted from his purpose. When Jesus gave

him the name of "Rock," he was thinking of the new character which he was to form in Peter. All of us need in the same way to have a new spirit given to us, and when we submit our wills to Christ, the weak are made strong, and the unstable and erring are given tenacity of purpose. We should think of the new name which Jesus has for all his followers, and ask ourselves what he desires us to be.

3. Peter had in his heart always a deep and sincere love of holiness, and he felt the divine purity and goodness of his Master. He desired to be like Jesus, and if he had many faults, he saw them and grieved over them. Once he fell down at Jesus' feet, and said, "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He felt unworthy to be a disciple of Jesus, and wished for the moment to go away. But Jesus would not let him go, but laid his hand on him, and said that he would make him an apostle to men. We must always think of Peter's heart as full of reverence, and full of the desire to be like his holy Master. This is the spirit which makes a true disciple, for Jesus says that those who hunger for holiness of character shall have what they so fervently desire.

4. It is a characteristic of Peter that he is always found with his Master and that he constantly strives to imitate him in every action of his life. There is no task or danger which he is not ready to face for Jesus' sake. Is not this the meaning of the cry which he uttered when he saw Jesus walking on the water, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water?" He wished to follow Jesus in everything, even though to do this was as difficult as to walk on water. Only, he discovered that he needed faith and the Master's hand to support him, and this is the key to Peter's life all through.

5. If there was one fault which more than another hindered Peter in his desire to be a like-minded follower of the Master, it was the pride which made him unwilling to stoop to lowly acts of service. The ideas of service which Peter cherished were the great ideas, and the occasions in life which he loved were the great occasions. Thus on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he saw his Master revealed in his glory, Peter was in his element, so to speak, and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." But when, in the Upper Room, the same Master went down on his knees to wash the disciples' feet and give them all a