



Global College of Ministry

EXPLAIN

The Christian and Bible Characters

Peter: The Man of Power

“And the believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (Acts 5:14-15).

Peter was the chief disciple of Jesus Christ. In every listing of the disciples Peter is mentioned first. His name is mentioned 146 times in the Gospels and 57 times in Acts. He consistently takes the lead and seems to be a “born leader.” He was quick to ask Jesus questions and to give advice. He revealed that Jesus was the Christ and exercised faith by trying to walk on water. He is the only one who tried to protect the Lord on the night of His betrayal. He is the most prominent person in the first 12 chapters of Acts. He was the native of a small fishing village called Bethsaida but moved his business to the larger, commercial city of Capernaum. He owned a large house there and was a successful businessman. He likely had a primary school education and was referred to by the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 as “ignorant and unlearned.”

His character is one of the most charming in the New Testament because it shows his humanness. He was eager, energetic, impulsive, confident, bold, daring, but also weak, and cowardly. He was tenderhearted, self-sacrificing, and loving. He quickly moves from one extreme to another. He was inconsistent, unstable, and outspoken. When empowered by the Spirit he became powerful, stable, humble, bold, and courageous.

The Gospel accounts close with Peter defeated and having denied the Lord. The *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* gives seven steps to his fall:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Conceit | Matthew 26:33 |
| 2. Ease | Matthew 26:40 |
| 3. Rashness | John 18:10-11 |
| 4. Following afar off | Matthew 26:58 |
| 5. Evil Associations | John 18:18 |
| 6. Open Denial | John 18:25 |
| 7. Blasphemy | Mark 14:70-71 |

As you read the Book of Acts you can see:

- Peter was a man of power and had great influence in the Early Church.
- He was the most powerful person in the Early Church.
- He was a bold preacher, prayer warrior, and used in the Gifts of the Spirit.
- He gave wise direction and supervision to the church.
- Peter was a leader.
- Although Peter had power we never read of him misusing it.

- He did not involve himself in a power struggle nor did he seem to be power hungry.
- Even though Peter had been given the Keys to the Kingdom, preached the first Pentecostal sermon, and was the speaker for the group we do not find him assuming authority.
- He did not try to exercise authority over the others.
- He seems to have been respected by the others and looked up to as their leader.
- He is the one Paul went to see after his conversion (Galatians 1:18).
- He not only preached the first Pentecostal sermon but also performed the first Pentecostal miracle.
- In his miracle ministry he exposed the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.
- He could have used his association with Jesus and his anointing to promote himself but he didn't.
- People brought their sick hoping his shadow would overshadow them.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* writes, "Peter...exhibits the qualities of Jesus that the Holy Spirit shaped in him: a readiness to embrace suffering rather than prestige, a wisdom developed from experience and not imposed from a book, a humility that lacked nothing in vigor and imagination. From what we know of the early stories of Peter he had in him all the makings of a bully. That he didn't become a bully (and religious bullies are the worst kind) but rather the boldly confident and humbly self-effacing servant of Jesus Christ...is a compelling witness to what he describes as a brand-new life, with everything to live for."

(Note: A 'bully' is "someone who enjoys oppressing others weaker than himself" *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*.)

Many leaders today would have misused this power and would try to manipulate people. Peter has given a wonderful example for all leaders to follow.

Peter in the Book of Acts:

Acts 1:1-26	Part of the 120	
Acts 2:1-47	Pentecost's	Spokesman/Preacher
Acts 3:1-11	Heals Lame Man	
Acts 4:1-35	Boldly Stands Before	Sanhedrin
Acts 5:1-11	Exposes Ananias and	Sapphira
Acts 5:17-42	Gamaliel	
Acts 8:14-25	Deals with Simon the	Sorcerer
Acts 9:32-35	Heals the	Cripple
Acts 9:36-43	Dorcas Raised from	the Dead
Acts 10:1-48	Preached to the	Gentiles
Acts 11:1-18	Defends His Actions	
Acts 12:1-24	Peter and the Angel	

What Can We Learn from Peter's Life

The *Revell Bible Dictionary* suggests areas we can learn from the life of Peter. These are adapted here:

***Peter Walks on the Water
(Matthew 14:22-33)***

Even though his faith wavered he had courage to step onto the water.

***Peter Rebukes Jesus
(Matthew 16: 21-28)***

If we accept Jesus we must submit our understanding to Him also.

***Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial
(Mark 14:27-31)***

Peter learned he was weak. We must rely on God rather than ourselves.

Jesus Restores Peter (John 21:15-25)

God can use us despite our failures.

Peter Preaches the First Sermon (Acts 2)

God will back up His Word with results.

Peter Welcomes the Gentiles (Acts 11)

When attacked about preaching to the Gentiles he carefully related what happened and explained how God had led him. He showed wisdom and courtesy in his actions.

No matter how important we may be, we still need others to rebuke us when we are wrong. We are not above mistakes or correction.

***Paul Berates Peter for Discrimination
(Galatians 2:11-21)***

Study Questions

1. How do we know Peter was Jesus' chief disciple? _____

2. What type of education did this great man of God have? _____

3. Explain, in general, the steps that led to the fall of Peter. _____

4. What was Peter like after being empowered by the Spirit? _____

5. Outline some of the points that made Peter a good leader. _____

6. List four (4) things Peter did in the Book of Acts? _____

7. What are four (4) different things we can learn from the life of Peter (according to *Revell Bible Dictionary*)? _____

A Closer Look at Paul

“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day” (Acts 22:3).

In taking a closer look at Paul, we find characteristics worthy of reproduction in our lives.

Introducing Paul

Paul was the second most noteworthy figure in the history of Christianity next to Jesus. He is acclaimed as the greatest missionary of all times. He was committed to the Gentiles. He is noted as Christianity’s chief theologian. He wrote one quarter of the New Testament. Nearly two-thirds of the Book of Acts tells his story. His conversion is repeated three times in Acts.

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:4-10).

Paul was a rare breed.

-  Jewish by birth.
-  Roman by citizenship.
-  Born and raised in Tarsus (Acts 21:39). Tarsus was a Roman colony and famous for its university.
-  Taught by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the most famous and highly respected rabbi of the time.
-  Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).
-  Strong natural leader.
-  Possessed strong convictions.
-  Zealous of the law.
-  Self-starter and motivated.
-  Tremendous thinker and gifted speaker.
-  Could speak three languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic).
-  Had the finest education and possessed an incredible knowledge of the Scriptures.

Man of Confidence . . . in God

Paul allowed the Holy Ghost to refine his natural abilities. He did not put his confidence in his personal history, abilities, social class, education or whom he knew. He placed his confidence in his God.

“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

Man of Vision

Paul had a clear vision and a God-given purpose. He pursued this vision with all of his strength. He accomplished God’s purpose in his life because he clearly heard from God and had confidence in Him.

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:15-16).

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Man of Prayer

“These three words, ‘Behold he prayeth,’ are in themselves a summary of Paul’s life. He here begins his ministry by prayer, and ends it the same way. (See 2 Tim. 4:16.) Paul literally prayed anywhere and everywhere for anything and everything. He prayed for sinners and saints, for potentates and prison guards, for Jews and Gentiles, for leaders and laymen.” (*Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible*, page 378)

Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke depicts Paul as a man of constant prayer. Earlier, in the Book of Luke, he portrayed Jesus in the same way. Paul began his Christian walk blind with three days of prayer and fasting.

Man of Humility

Paul had everything that could be contributed as success, but he knew how to be abased (to be humbled).

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:12-13).

Man of Patience

He knew how to wait on God for direction. He spent three years in the desert learning from God before he began his actual ministry.

“To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:16-18).

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

Man of Persistence

Paul was zealous before and after his conversion. He did his best with what he knew. He responded to the truth revealed to him and was committed to preaching the gospel. No matter what problems came his way, he continued to do what he was called to do.

Man of Integrity

Paul was a man of integrity.

“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

Man of Knowledge

Although Paul was educated, he did not put his confidence in his education. He determined that he would know Jesus Christ. He believed that people were converted, not through eloquent speech, but by the declaration of the gospel, in the power of the Spirit. Paul demonstrated that the true test of intelligence was the ability to make truth simple enough for all to understand.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but

in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Man with a Plan

Paul was a hard worker and through his planting efforts the future development of Christianity was secured. Paul's missionary strategy is worthy of consideration and use even in our modern day.

- 📖 Took a partner or team to a major city.
- 📖 Went to the political and economic hub.
- 📖 Reached Jews and Gentiles.
- 📖 Drew a small group of believers.
- 📖 Taught the new believers.
- 📖 Moved on so that they could continue to build the foundation.
- 📖 Left each new church in the hands of the locals.
- 📖 Developed close relationships with the new believers (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).
- 📖 Charged them with the responsibility to reach out.
- 📖 Revisited the churches that he established.
- 📖 Wrote letters of instruction and encouragement.
- 📖 Sent teachers from time to time to promote maturity.
- 📖 Used the power gifts of the Spirit to assist in evangelism (Acts 19:11-20)
- 📖 Expressed his love and concern through constant prayers. Even when he could not be with his converts and helpers, he prayed for them.
- 📖 Fought to keep the gospel uncluttered and simple (Acts 15:10, 19).

This zealous persecutor became an equally zealous Christian. He was bold and was a man of iron will.

Man of Impact

Paul was able to impact his world through:

- 📖 Being transformed by God.
- 📖 Standing for truth.
- 📖 Preaching.
- 📖 Providing leadership among the churches.
- 📖 Being zealous in evangelism.
- 📖 Establishing churches.
- 📖 Visiting them on a regular basis.
- 📖 Writing.
- 📖 Training young men (Timothy and Titus).

Study Questions

1. What three words serve as a summary of Paul's life? _____

2. How does Luke depict Paul in the Book of Acts? _____

3. With Paul's long list of qualifications it would be easy for him to put confidence in himself. However, whom did Paul put his confidence in? How do we know this? _____

4. Provide a Scripture showing Paul as a man of integrity. _____

5. What is the true test of intelligence? _____

6. How much of Acts is written concerning the ministry of Paul? _____

7. How much of the New Testament was written by Paul? _____

8. How many times is Paul's conversion mentioned in Acts? _____

9. How was Paul able to impact the world? _____

10. Write a paragraph about Paul's strategy in establishing churches. _____

Ready to Receive

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:24-25).

Apollos preached what he knew and walked in the light he had received; yet his message and understanding were incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla found him serious about serving and obeying God, and they provided him with a complete understanding of truth. This was done in an attitude of love, not condemnation.

“Like many preachers what Apollos said was quite true. What he left out demonstrated his inadequate understanding of Christian truth.” (*Holman New Testament Commentary—Acts*; General Editor—Max Anders, Author—Kenneth O. Gangel)

“Apollos, a wonderful Bible teacher and preacher, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. While he was in Egypt, someone had told him about John the Baptist and what John had said about Jesus, but that is all he knew. He had never heard the rest of the story! So he was preaching boldly and enthusiastically in the synagogue . . . Priscilla and Aquila were there and heard him—and it was a powerful sermon. Afterwards they met with him and explained . . .” (Acts 18:24-25, *LB*).

Characteristics of Apollos

-  An educated (learned) man. Academic knowledge is not enough.
-  Eloquent in speech.
-  Mighty in the Scripture. He was dynamic in his preaching. He was well acquainted with the Old Testament law and the prophets. Note that the New Testament never records any other preacher as “mighty in the Scriptures.”
-  Instructed in the way of the Lord.
-  Fervent in spirit. He had the zeal and desire to spread the truth. He was on fire for God. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* says, “He burned to impart to others the truth he had himself received.”
-  Taught diligently the things of the Lord. He was a hard worker.
-  Well versed in Scripture. However, his message and understanding was incomplete.

 A bold man.

He needed the rest of the story.

“It is possible for a man to teach accurately what he knows; and it is possible that another, who possesses more information on the subject than the former, may teach him more accurately, or give him a larger portion of knowledge. Apollos knew the baptism of John . . . As far as he knew, he taught accurately. Aquila and Priscilla were acquainted with the whole doctrine of the Gospel . . . and in this they instructed Apollos.” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Electronic Database)

Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, possessed a humble, teachable spirit and was not ashamed to receive instruction from an ordinary couple—even from a woman. With so many abilities,

Apollos could have easily been proud, but he was willing to learn and better himself to become more effective in the ministry. Aquilla and Priscilla’s explanation affected both his salvation and his ministry.

Apollos was humble, possessed a teachable spirit, and a “yes, this is what I’m looking for” attitude.

Being position-oriented keeps some people from advancing in the things of God. Apollos was more concerned about his standing with God, than his position with man.

Adam Clarke also said, “It is disgraceful to a man to be ignorant, when he may acquire wisdom; but it is no disgrace to acquire wisdom from the meanest person or thing.”

Pride, self-righteousness, and a “who are you to tell me” attitude keep many from accepting the truth, teaching, or correction.

Apollos “was glad to receive instructions from them, to be shown by them his defects and mistakes . . . Apollos . . . did not rest in the knowledge he had attained, nor thought he understood Christianity as well as any man . . . but was willing to have it expounded to him more perfectly. Those that know much should covet to know more, and what they know to know it better, pressing forward towards perfection.” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*, Electronic Database)

was not intimidated or proud. Apollos could have concluded that he did not need any more teaching. However, he had a teachable spirit.

Characteristics of Teachable People

“He was able to receive what Aquilla and Priscilla had to say. It is crucial to underline this strongly . . . Our religious listeners will be given a new perception of the fact that whatever they know or however faithful they have been, there always is more to learn. The sure sign of spiritual maturity is the undefensive willingness to grow . . . After swaying the crowd, the mighty Apollos was willing to listen to two tentmakers!” (Lloyd Ogilvie in *The Communicator’s Commentary*)

Teachable people—

-  Are humble.
-  Are open for correction.
-  Add value to themselves and others.
-  Are success-oriented.
-  Are willing to improve.
-  Realize they are not perfect.
-  Recognize when something is missing (and will not be satisfied until they find it).
-  Look at what they have and where they are coming from. If what they have is true, and what is to be added is more truth, they do not throw away the foundation. They add to it.
-  Hunger and thirst after righteousness.

If you want to learn, you can learn from anybody. Apollos did not look at Aquila and Priscilla as being below him in educational level. He saw truth and seized it gladly.

Study Questions

11. What was the problem with Apollos’s message? _____

12. What did the things Apollos left out of his preaching demonstrate? _____

13. List five of Apollos’s characteristics. _____

