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## **RESPONDING WELL TO CORRECTION, REPROOF AND REBUKE SECOND POSITIVE EXAMPLE: PETER (2) FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POSITIVE OUTCOME**

In the previous message, we looked at several failures in Peter's life. We noted that he stands out as the apostle with the most recorded instances of faltering and failures and as the one who was corrected and reproofed by the Lord more than any other apostle or believer in the New Testament. However, we know that Peter continued to grow and mature and went on to become an effective and outstanding apostle of the Lord. He also fulfilled a significant role in the establishment and growth of the early church.

Peter's life as recorded in the Scriptures can be a strong encouragement to us when we falter and fail. Many of us may readily identify with Peter because we too often falter and fail. However, we must not assume that we will also grow well and serve effectively like Peter. It is helpful for us to reflect over the factors which contributed to the very positive outcome in Peter's life for our own learning.

We will consider three factors in this message.

### **1. Peter did not react negatively to correction and rebuke**

In all the records in the Scriptures of Peter, there is no indication of him becoming angry, reactive or bitter as a result of being corrected or rebuked. There is also no indication of Peter becoming discouraged and despairing such that he was not able to go on properly.

This does not mean that he was indifferent to rebuke and failures. When he denied the Lord three times, he wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75). He did not treat his failure lightly. He was deeply sorry for having failed the Lord. But Peter did not give up in despair even after such a significant failure. That was why subsequently the Lord Jesus had the confidence to specifically commission him to tend and shepherd His sheep.

And so because Peter did not react negatively to reproof and rebuke, nor become discouraged and despair, he was able to continue to learn, grow and benefit from the Lord's teachings, including His rebuke and correction.

You may ask: Why was Peter able to respond well to correction and rebuke? Why was he able to carry on well despite faltering and failing on various occasions? How can this be true of our lives?

The next two factors can help to answer these pertinent questions.

## **2. Humility of Peter**

The spirit of humility in Peter helps us understand why he did not react negatively or become bitter or angry when he was corrected or rebuked for his failures and faltering. It enabled him to respond well, learn well and make good progress in the context of faltering and failures. We must nurture the spirit of humility in our lives if we want to walk well with God.

Peter shares with us his personal convictions on humility in 1 Peter 5:5-6. These exhortations and truths, written many years later, must have meant a lot to Peter in his own life and experience.

### **1 Peter 5:5-6**

5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

*"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another"*

We see here the importance of humility for good relationship with one another.

*"For God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble"*

Humility is also important in our relationship with God. If we are proud, God would be opposed to us. But if we are humble, He will give us grace. Peter is clearly speaking from experience as he had received much grace from God and the gracious dealings of the Lord in his life.

*"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time"*

This is also a truth that Peter had learned in his own life. He had learned what it means to humble himself under the mighty hand of God as God dealt with him through the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul. As Peter learned to respond humbly to correction and rebuke from the Lord Jesus on various occasions and from the apostle Paul at Antioch, God exalted him at the appropriate time. He became an outstanding leader in the early church.

True greatness and exaltation comes from the Lord, not through self-exaltation or self-assertion or others exalting us. It comes only when we have learned to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and His dealings in our lives, when we have

nurtured the spirit of humility and put to death all stirrings of pride, self-righteousness and a rebellious spirit.

*Humility of Peter severely tested at Antioch*

The quality of Peter's spirit of humility was severely tested in the incident at Antioch described by the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:11-14.

**Galatians 2:11-14**

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

The apostle Paul publicly corrected and reproved Peter in this incident. Notice that in the verses preceding this account, Paul has testified that God had worked effectively through Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised and that Peter was regarded as one of the pillars of the early church.

**Galatians 2:8-9**

8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),

9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

This means that when Peter was publicly reproved by the apostle Paul, he was already a prominent leader and apostle with an effective ministry. This was indeed a very humbling experience for him.

It was not easy to respond well under such circumstances. Yet, not only was there no indication of negative reaction or bitterness towards Paul, we see Peter referring to Paul in a very warm and positive tone in 2 Peter 3:14-16.

**2 Peter 3:14-16**

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter referred to the apostle Paul as "our beloved brother Paul". Peter also spoke highly of him and acknowledged the wisdom God had given to Paul and attributed to Paul's writings the same status as the Scriptures.

When Peter said that some of the things that Paul wrote were hard to understand, he was referring to the depth in Paul's writings, which those without spiritual insight have difficulty understanding, "which the untaught and unstable distort".

Writing with such high regard for Paul even after being openly reprovved by him is a reflection of a high degree of the spirit of humility in Peter. Indeed, the quality of Peter's humility shines through in this passage.

*Let us learn to be truly humble*

How many Christian leaders can respond the way Peter did if they were to be publicly corrected and rebuked? Not just outward show or lip-service but genuinely from the heart? How many believers can respond in this way?

Reflect on this statement: "He who is reactive or bitter is a fool". The word "fool" here is not used in a derogatory sense but in the way the Scriptures uses it. Proverbs 1:7 tells us that fools despise wisdom and instruction. The Book of Proverbs has many references to the fool who does not respond well to the truth. It is not because of lack of mental capability but because of moral deficiency and unwillingness to respond well to God's instructions.

It takes strength of character to respond humbly and positively to correction and rebuke. Some people mistake such a response as a sign of weakness. But it is actually an indication of meekness, which requires strength of character and strength of conviction in the truth.

If we want to develop a character that is truly pleasing to God, we need to nurture a spirit of humility.

But we may ask: So what does it mean to be humble? How does one become humble? Why does it have such a significant bearing on responding well to correction, reproof and rebuke and making good progress in our spiritual life?

The spirit of humility is closely related to a healthy spirit of submission and the spirit of meekness, but contrary to the haughty, self-righteous, self-assertive and rebellious spirit.

There are some truths that we all need to recognise. We are nothing apart from the grace of God. There is nothing good in ourselves, that is, in our flesh. There is nothing positive that we can contribute to God's eternal kingdom apart from the grace of God. These are abiding truths whether we recognise them or not.

When light dawns and we are deeply convicted about these truths, we know there is no place for pride and that it is foolish to be proud. We know the only reasonable response is humble submission to God and having a spirit of humility. We then look to the Spirit of God to help us nurture the spirit of humility.

Paul recognises and is deeply convicted about these truths.

**Romans 7:18**

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

The Lord Jesus tells us in John 15:5 that He is the vine and we are the branches. If we abide in Him and He in us, we bear much fruit. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. We will not be able to contribute anything that is of value in God's eternal kingdom.

**John 15:5**

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

So the one who is humble knows that there is nothing to boast about in relation to himself. Whatever he can do or attain to is by the grace of God. As Paul puts it: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

The one who is humble also recognises that there are various weaknesses and deficiencies in his life, which God in His goodness and grace is trying to help him overcome. He knows "we all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2), and he is deeply grateful to God for His provision of forgiveness through the death and resurrection of Christ. He knows he is far short of God's high calling and intentions for us in Christ and there is much to learn and grow in the truth. He therefore humbly submits himself under the mighty hand of God. He is open to the Lord to show him his weaknesses, deficiencies and failures. He is eager to learn and is deeply thankful for God's gracious dealings and teaching, whether directly or through others. He knows that to be corrected, reprovved and rebuked on the basis of truth is the path to spiritual progress. He also knows if he fails to respond well, he will degenerate and become an ugly and negative person.

This does not mean he will agree with everything others tell him. But he is truly open and eager to learn from the Lord, and so he is willing to be corrected on the basis of truth, and if needful, to be reproved and rebuked.

*Peter's exhortations on having a humble, submissive and meek spirit*

The apostle Peter has much to say on the subject of a humble and submissive spirit as he was deeply impressed with its significance.

In 1 Peter 2:13, Peter urges all of us to submit to every human institution for the Lord's sake.

**1 Peter 2:13**

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

A humble and submissive spirit is very important because at the heart of man's problem is pride and a spirit of rebellion. To work out our lives well as believers, we need to learn to be humble and nurture a healthy spirit of submission. As we learn to submit to every human institution for the Lord's sake, it would be a good testimony to others and promote order in society and a conducive environment for the spread of the gospel.

In 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter addresses servants.

**1 Peter 2:18-19**

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Peter exhorts servants to be submissive to their masters, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. They are to do so "for the sake of conscience toward God". The words of Peter here indicate such submission has relevance beyond our relationship with others and has a bearing on our relationship with God.

The Lord Jesus Himself manifested a submissive, humble and meek spirit in His life and Peter encourages us to emulate Him.

**1 Peter 2:21-24**

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

What was the example that Christ left for us to follow? It was the way in which He went through unjust suffering. The Lord Jesus did not revile those who reviled Him. He also did not utter any threat but kept entrusting Himself to God the Father who judges righteously. His submissive, humble and meek spirit shone through in the way He went through the Cross. Although He is the Son of God, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, He was willing to be subjected to humiliating treatment because it was in accordance with the will of God. The Lord Jesus did not suffer in vain. He bore our sins on the Cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds we are healed. His suffering provided the way of salvation for all mankind.

Peter also exhorts wives to be submissive to their husbands, even if their husbands are disobedient to the word of God. Their husbands may then be won over by their chaste and respectful behaviour. This shows us that the manifestation of a humble, submissive spirit can have a positive impact on others.

#### **1 Peter 3:1-2**

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

In 1 Peter 3:3-4, Peter highlights the kind of spirit that women should aspire to.

#### **1 Peter 3:3-4**

3 Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Peter urges women to nurture a gentle and quiet spirit. The word translated “gentle” can also be translated as “meek”. A meek and quiet spirit is precious, of great value in the sight of God. Such a spirit is imperishable. It will carry on for eternity, unlike external adornments, which will be taken away from us. This is the kind of spirit that all women should aspire to.

Although Peter addresses women in this passage, this truth of the preciousness of having a “gentle and quiet spirit” applies to all believers. Yet it seems to me that what is described here has a feminine aspect that is especially beautiful when

attained to a high degree by women. A sister who develops this kind of spirit to a reasonably high degree will be able to manifest a quality of character that is beautiful, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all those who can appreciate what is truly beautiful. It is not an outward thing that one puts on. It is an inward reality, the hidden person of the heart, which manifests itself through words and actions.

Peter sums up what he is seeking to communicate on the humble, submissive spirit by exhorting all of us to be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit. All these qualities are important for good relationship among the brethren.

**1 Peter 3:8-9**

8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

The spirit described in verse 9 is similar to that described of the Lord Jesus in 1 Peter 2:23. When we nurture a humble, submissive and meek spirit in accordance with the will of God, He will shower His blessings on us.

So we see Peter emphasising very strongly in his first epistle the importance of having a humble, submissive and meek spirit. He was deeply impressed with its significance in his own experience. Are we also deeply convicted of its importance? Do we also desire to nurture such a spirit in our own lives?

*Humility a vital quality God requires of us*

Let us reflect on what is central to what God requires of us as believers.

**Micah 6:6-8**

6 With what shall I come to the Lord  
And bow myself before the God on high?  
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,  
With yearling calves?

7 Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams,  
In ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

The prophet Micah tells us that God requires us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. These are key areas and they all have to do with moral issues.

If we want to live a life that is truly pleasing to God, we must learn to walk humbly with our God. Otherwise, we may do many things for God, offering thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil, and yet find out in the end that none of them is acceptable to Him.

### **3. Peter was sincere and definite in his commitment to the Lord and to the truth**

The third factor which contributed to the very positive outcome in Peter's life is that Peter was sincere and definite in his commitment to the Lord and to the truth. He was not easily deterred by difficulties and obstacles along the way, including his faltering and failures.

When the Lord Jesus called Peter to follow Him, Peter immediately left his net and followed Him.

#### **Matthew 4:18-20**

18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Peter's response to the Lord's call to follow Him was sincere, definite and decisive. And Peter persevered in that path till the end of his life, dying faithfully for the faith, in accordance with the will of God, which the Lord Jesus indicated to him in John 21:18-19.

There are two verses that help us understand and appreciate this attitude of Peter.

We read in John 6:66 that many of Jesus' disciples were withdrawing from Him and were not walking with Him anymore. They had stumbled over His words. In verse 67, the Lord Jesus asked the twelve: "You do not want to go away also, do you?" This was how Peter responded:

#### **John 6:68-69**

68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

69 "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

Peter probably also did not understand the words of the Lord. But that did not deter him or cause him to turn away from the Lord. Peter had come to recognise and believe that Jesus is the Lord and He is the Holy One of God and that He has words of eternal life. And so Peter affirmed his commitment to follow the Lord. His response manifested loyalty and steadfast commitment to God and truth. This kind of commitment to God and truth is very important if we want to be stable.

It is because of this kind of commitment that Peter was not easily shaken or discouraged. Difficulties of whatever kind may come, including faltering and failures, being reprovved and rebuked. But, by the grace of God, Peter persevered in the face of them all. He did not give up. He carried on, knowing that as he looked to the Lord, the Lord would help him. Peter knew that the Lord has words of eternal life, that He is the source of life, the life that really counts.

If we have this kind of commitment to God and truth, even when we fail and are reprovved, we too will be able to learn from them and then get up and carry on.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this message, we considered three factors that contributed to Peter making good progress in his walk with God and in his service for Him, despite his weaknesses and deficiencies. He did not react negatively to correction and rebuke; neither did he despair nor give up. He was humble, and was sincere and definite in his commitment to the Lord and to the truth.

Like Peter, all of us have weaknesses and deficiencies. If we want to grow unto maturity like he did, we must be willing, even eager, to be corrected and taught on the basis of truth. If not, we will not make good progress in our lives. In fact, we will be in a precarious position.

God desires that His children grow well and be stable in their lives. To attain to that, we need to be committed to God and the truth and have the kind of attitude and posture that we see in Peter.

In the next message, I will consider with you the meaning and nature of Peter's failures. The meaning and nature of failures are not all the same. It is especially important to try to understand the moral issues involved so as to understand the degree and gravity of the moral failure.

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