

## Lesson 15

### Man's Ineptitude: God's Workmanship

**Introduction:** The three main things we have continued to highlight throughout all of these lessons in order to maintain a proper perspective have been:

- God's eternal plan of redemption was determined before the foundations of the earth, and it has been God Who has carried out and fulfilled this plan. He has done all of the initiation and has carried it all out on man's behalf.
- Every thought and intent of man's heart is only evil from childhood; therefore, mankind is absolutely incapable of doing one thing for himself in terms of restoring our relationship with God.
- In all of the recorded accounts we have looked at through this study, God have given us physical examples that testify to the validity of the two previous points.

These things were His focus in the Old Testament as well as now in the Gospels in the life of Jesus. Along with all that God was doing through Jesus' life to prove to the masses that He truly is the Son of God, the promised Deliverer, there was also the personal and up-close revelation and "discipleship" He was doing in the lives of a few individuals, namely, His disciples.

In today's lesson, we are going to look at the life of Peter and Jesus' interaction with him. It is very interesting to note that we will see Jesus emphasizing in the life of Peter the exact same things we saw God the Father emphasizing in the lives of all that we saw Him interact with through the Old Testament. The things we saw Him emphasize through the Old Testament and through the life of Jesus in the gospels also hold true for us today as His children.

Before following the progression of Jesus' interaction with Peter and the other disciples, let's first look at a few verses that clue us in a bit on some of the spiritual understanding of Christ and His finished work that Peter had at the end of his life.

- **Read 1 Peter 1:14-16; 4:1-2; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 3:18.**

So, how did Peter get to this point? How did he become an Apostle of the church writing such deep spiritual truth? How did he go from being someone whose every thought and intent of the heart was only evil from childhood to being someone with this kind of deep spiritual understanding? Let's follow the progression of Jesus' interaction with him through the gospels.

- **Read Matthew 4:18-19.**

This is the first recorded interaction we have of Jesus with Peter, and it begins with Jesus calling him to follow Him and stating that HE will make them

“fishers of men.” Because we know the rest of the story, we know that in calling these men to be His disciples, they were being chosen by God for involvement in the carrying out of His eternal plan of redemption. Their role would be to become Apostles, the first leaders of the church on earth, as well as to be those whom the Holy Spirit would inspire to write Holy Scripture. True to form, God once again works in a way that the world wouldn’t have by selecting the type of men He chose for this role. Instead of choosing highly trained and educated men to become the first church leaders and writers of scripture, He uses uneducated fishermen and a greatly despised tax collector for these roles!

This is no different than what we saw Him do in the Old Testament with the choosing of Abraham and Sarah, the Nation of Israel, Moses, etc. He selects those whom the world would never expect in order to prove that it is HE who is carrying out HIS plan. His choosing of them was not based upon anything in and of themselves, but upon who HE was going to make them into becoming.

- **Read Matthew 4:23-25.**

These verses give us a quick summary of how Jesus did this work in their lives. He simply had them follow Him, listen to His teaching, and watch Him reveal Himself and Who He was through the things He did.

You are going to see that Jesus’ discipleship of His disciples had a much different focus and emphasis

than what we tend to think. Our discipleship is usually training people to stop doing certain things and begin doing certain other things. But Jesus' discipleship consisted of the revelation of two things: first, "you can't trust in yourself for anything." Second, "I am the Son of God and your only hope is to trust in Me."

- **Read Matthew 8:14-16.**

Shortly after beginning to "follow Jesus," they go to Peter's house and Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. Then that night, many demon-possessed people were brought to Him. He cast out the demons with a simple command and He healed ALL the sick. He was showing His compassion, His power, and His authority. He was showing Who He is.

- **Read Matthew 14:13-21.**

Verse 14: Jesus got out of the boat, saw the crowd, had compassion on them and healed the sick. Again, revealing His compassion, power, and authority.

Verse 16: Jesus said it wasn't necessary to send the crowd away, that the disciples should feed them. He knew they couldn't feed them, but this was all a "set up" to begin preparing them to see that they can't depend upon themselves; but because of Who He is, they CAN depend on Him.

It's also interesting to note that Jesus, Who is the expressed image of God, was also manifesting some

of the same attributes we've seen God manifest in the Old Testament—His love and compassion, His wisdom, power, and sovereignty.

- **Read Matthew 14:22-31.**

Verse 22 says that immediately after the bread was collected, Jesus **INSISTED**, **MADE**, or **COMPELLED** the disciples to get back into the boat and cross to the other side. Then it says that a storm blew up when they had returned halfway across.

These men were seasoned fishermen. They knew when a storm was coming. They knew when it was good to go out on the water and when it wasn't. I think that's why it says Jesus **MADE** them get back in the boat. He was putting them into a situation in which they would clearly see who **HE** is, as well as who they are. These are the two main foundational truths that must be in place in order for us to have an ability to trust God. First is an absolute confidence that He is Who He's revealed Himself to be, and secondly, that we grasp how hopelessly helpless we truly are to depend upon ourselves for anything.

Verses 28-31: Peter asks Jesus to command him to come out on the water. Peter then sees the waves and wind and doubts and sinks. As you will see, Peter had a propensity for being impetuous and Jesus used it to set him up again to see his need for trusting in Christ.

- **Read Matthew 16:13-17.**

Jesus asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” It was revealed to Peter who Jesus truly was. In his head, he understood and believed that Jesus was truly the Son of God; but in terms of living it out, we will see that many of his actions and the things he said still lacked an ability to truly trust Him.

Even though Peter had been following Jesus for some time, observing His performance of healings and exorcisms, he would still have been unable to make this confession of the identity of Christ unless God the Father had shown Him. Even with the information in front of us, we are blind without God opening our hearts. We can’t make ourselves see. This shows God’s desire to reveal Himself—not only in opening Peter’s heart but in sending His son.

- **Read Matthew 16:21-23.**

Right after Peter gets praised by Jesus for giving the right answer as to Who Jesus truly is, he once again thinks more highly of himself and his own understanding by “correcting” Jesus in regard to His comment about being arrested and killed and ends up being rebuked by Jesus. This demonstrates that it really hasn’t sunk into his heart Who Jesus truly is.

In verse 23, Jesus says, “You are seeing things merely from a human point of view.” Jesus was showing Peter that he cannot trust in his own human reasoning and understanding. He was also showing Peter that He Himself is God and that Peter’s only hope would be to trust in Him.

- **Read Matthew 17:1-6.**

At the transfiguration of Christ, Peter once again sees things through his own human intellect and again gets a lesson on perspective: “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.” In other words, “This is God the Son; be quiet and listen. If you need to do anything, He will tell you. This isn’t about you and what you think.”

- **Read Matthew 18:21.**

Peter asks Jesus, “How many times should I forgive someone? Seven times?” Again, this shows that Peter was on any earthly level. A human to forgive someone seven times for the same offense would be considered very gracious. Jesus’ answer presents the need to be trusting in Him: “No, seventy times seven.” In other words, “so many times that you would be incapable of doing it in and of yourself.”

- **Read John 13:6-9.**

Jesus goes to wash Peter’s feet and again Peter begins to spout off according to his own understanding. First, he isn’t going to let Jesus wash anything. Then he wants Jesus to wash ALL of him. Peter is speaking and giving solutions according to what makes sense to him rather than simply listening and trusting what Jesus was telling him.

As you can see, this whole process of Jesus teaching Peter to trust in Him instead of himself by means of

“failure” has been progressing and building toward the climax of Peter’s greatest failure of all.

- **Read Matthew 26:31-35.**

Peter here really provides a clear example of ways that we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Remember **Genesis 8:21**? “Every thought and intent of our hearts is only evil from childhood.”

So, here’s Peter, a man who fits the description of **Genesis 8:21**, not only vowing a greater devotion and allegiance than ALL the other disciples, but he also totally contradicts the Son of God in doing so. Who is the “All-wise One” here anyway?

Jesus answers and says in verse 34, “Well actually Peter, you are going to deny me three times.” Then in verse 35, Peter answers, “NO, even if I have to die, I will never desert You!” Peter was vehemently arguing his own loyalty and commitment.

- **Read Matthew 26:36-46.**

Notice that in answer to Peter’s last response, Jesus stops arguing with him and instead takes him out to the garden of Gethsemane and gives Peter a first-hand glimpse of what he will be able to expect from himself in terms of his own devotion to Christ. Peter couldn’t stay awake and pray with Jesus for even one hour, let alone be willing to die for Him. Then in verse 40, Jesus says, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Meaning, in your heart, you very

much want to do what is right, but within yourself there is no power to carry these things out. You cannot trust in yourself!

**Discussion:** Name some ways in which we see the reality of this statement (“the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak) in our own lives.

- **Read John 18:10-11.**

Once again faced with a problem, Peter immediately turns to his own solution and pulls out his sword to defend Jesus. Jesus tells him to put it away and says, “Shall I not drink from this cup of suffering that God has given me?” Jesus had been teaching Peter that he can trust HIM, and here Jesus models for Peter His own dependence and trust in God the Father.

- **Read Matthew 26:69-75.**

And so it happens just like Jesus promised it would. Peter denies Christ three times and then runs off weeping bitterly through the streets. No more proclamations of his self-will and understanding. Just brokenness. This was building.

The temptation today is to think that failures like this need to be avoided, but in reality, it needed to happen. Christianity is a relationship and not a religion, and in order for us to live it as God intends, we all must be brought to this point of recognizing two things. First, that we really are who God says we are (**Genesis 8:21**) and that He really is Who He’s

revealed Himself to be—The Great I Am. The Christian life is about knowing Him and communing with Him. It's not about being trained to do what's right.

- **Read John 20:3-6.**

John actually outruns Peter to the tomb, but it's Peter who burst in looking for His body. It's interesting to note that being broken didn't change Peter's make up or personality. He was still somewhat impetuous. You can see how his impetuosity was being manifested as a desire "for Christ" rather than a dependence upon himself.

- **Read John 21:1-8.**

Peter says he's going fishing and the rest decide to go along with him. They fish all night and catch nothing. Jesus shows up on the shoreline and tells them to cast on the other side of the boat and they catch a huge load of fish. Peter realizes it is Jesus and he dives right in and swims to shore. We need to keep in mind what just took place in Peter's life a few days prior. He had just denied Christ and had been broken and brought to the end of himself. Now, there is Jesus standing on the shore. Peter's brokenness and coming to the end of himself increased his value for Christ and his desire to commune with Him. Jesus was now more the occupation of Peter's heart instead of himself.

- **Read John 21:15-17.**

All the disciples had come ashore with the catch of fish and now they were all sitting around the fire eating together. Jesus asks Peter, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” (Jesus was talking about the other disciples and not the fish.) Meaning, you had vowed that even if THEY ALL desert Me, YOU never will; so, do you love Me more than the rest do? Can your own love and commitment to Me be trusted to lead you to be more devoted than anyone else? We know Peter finally realized what Jesus had been trying to show him all along by comparing the terms for love that Jesus and he used.

Jesus asked him three times, do you love (*agape* love) Me? Finally, the third time Peter responded, “Lord, You know ALL things, You know that I love (*phileo* love) You.” You know that my love for You is only human or brotherly.

It’s also interesting to note that Peter had denied Jesus three times and now Jesus asks him three times if he loved Him. He had denied Jesus while sitting at one fire and now he’s restored to fellowship while sitting at another. Other than the fact that Jesus was showing Peter that he can’t trust in himself, there was no focus put on the fact that Peter had denied Him.

Peter’s failure in and of itself was not the real issue here, but instead it was coming to believe and understand Who Jesus is and the fact that Peter can’t trust in himself. These two things were at the foundation of Jesus making him to be a “fisher of men.”

**Discussion:** Name some ways in which God effectively works to transfer our trust, hope, and dependence from ourselves to Him.

The following verses give us glimpses of how Peter's life was truly transformed: **Acts 3:12; 4:8-13, 19; and 10:25-26**. Notice not only the deep understanding of spiritual truth that he is communicating in these passages, but also the great boldness that growing in the knowledge of Christ has brought about in his life.

Look at Peter's last recorded words to the church in **2 Peter 3:18**. Everything boils down to simply growing in the knowledge of God, our Savior Jesus Christ, and His grace! Growing in the knowledge of God will increase our ability to trust Him and walk in truth.

We see Peter's growth from rash and spiritually immature twig to a deeply rooted tree in what he knows to be true of God. How did this occur? By His grace!

- **Read Ephesians 1:7.**

First, he says that we have been given redemption and the forgiveness of sin, ACCORDING to the RICHES of His GRACE! If you had the choice of a gift according to my riches or according to Bill Gates' riches, which would you choose? This highlights one of the biggest problems in our lives as Christians. Every single one of us believes there is a limit to God's grace! Oh, we might know in our

minds the right answer, but we don't live and walk and relate to God with that belief. When you find yourself AGAIN doing that which you don't want to do (sin) and NOT doing that which you want to do (godliness), do you carry around guilt for a while? When you confess that sin to God, do you "feel" forgiven? When someone offends or sins against us again, we get angry. Sometimes we continue to feel anger towards them even though they may have apologized. We can often ascribe that same type of response to God in His view of us.

Now, as a Christian, do you believe that good works are important for God's acceptance? Do you feel that God accepts you more when you don't sin as opposed to when you do sin? Can certain sins or a certain amount of sin cause God to withhold that which is good for us? In general, would you say that you feel God is pleased with you or displeased with you? What do you base that on?

Do you feel confident in bringing your needs to God just after you've sinned? When you sin, do you feel that God withdraws from you? Is grace that which makes up the difference between the best you can do and what He expects of you? Do you feel more deserving of answered prayer when you've been faithful to follow Him? Do you feel better about yourself when you've had faithful times of prayer and devotions? Are you blameless before God? Do you believe that God likes you? How do you view the Christian life—as being burdensome and difficult to live up to God's standards or as the opportunity to

experience an unending supply of His goodness toward you?

When you miss your quiet time, do you think that things won't go well for you that day? Is it possible to make God love you more or less? Does your faithfulness to live the Christian life make you more useful to God? After confessing sin, do you feel forgiven?

When Peter walked on the water and looked away from Christ, he must have thought there was some other component needed to keep him walking besides Jesus. Had he thought Jesus was sufficient to keep him from sinking, he wouldn't have feared. How easy it is for us to think we are keeping ourselves afloat with our faithfulness!

*To see more of the specifics of how God has revealed Himself to individuals, read through Lesson 37 in the full Knowing God curriculum.*