

TURNING DOCTRINE INTO LIFE

“Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’.” —MATTHEW 16:23

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Some said John the Baptist, others said Elijah and others said Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. “But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-17).

We can imagine how pleased Peter was to hear Jesus’ response, but seven verses later the tune drastically changes. Jesus rebukes Peter, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” What happened? Why this sudden change? Verse 21 tells us, “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

We are very familiar with this, but it was totally new and devastating news for the disciples. Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (16:22). If we think about it, Peter’s response is a contradiction in

terms. To say “never” is to cancel out the fact that Jesus is Lord, and to say “Lord” is to cancel out the right to say “never.” And this is what epitomizes Peter’s problem as it does for many of us. Peter has his doctrine correct – “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, but his doctrine had not yet been translated into life and experience.

When Jesus said, “You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men,” He is referring to operating by human reasoning. Doctrine is absolutely vital, but cannot make us spiritual. What Peter knew in his mind had not yet worked out into spiritual life. Jesus was still among them, not in them, and verse 20 tells us that He warned His disciples not to tell anyone He was the Christ. It is not the affirmation of Christ being the Son of God that is the foundation of Christian living. Even the demons believe that and tremble. It is the actual life of the risen Christ indwelling us that is the foundation in which doctrine comes to life as we begin to know and experience Him.

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, that You are the means by your Spirit that turns my doctrine into real life experiences of You.

TO REFLECT UPON: Has Christian doctrine come alive for me?