

CHAPTER 13

IMPULSIVE PETER

When we think of the Lord's twelve disciples, Peter is usually the one who first comes to mind. In Matthew 10:1-4 we have the names of the 12 apostles or disciples. Which name comes first in this list? _____ When we read the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) Peter seems to stand out more than any of the other disciples. When something needed to be said, Peter was usually the one to speak up. When something did **not** need to be said, Peter was usually the first to speak up. He was not only the first to **SPEAK UP**, he was also the first to **ACT UP**. As we shall see Peter was always quick to jump into action.

Peter was always quick to jump into things. Of course, the wise thing to do is to look before you jump! Before jumping into a swimming pool it is good to look first and see if the pool is filled with water. Peter had a tendency to jump first and look later. Before jumping off an airplane, it is wise to first check and see if you have a parachute and if it is in good condition. Peter, if he had lived in the age of flight, might have jumped first and then checked to see if he had a parachute halfway down!

Peter was also quick to say things. Often he would speak first and think later. Sometimes Peter said the right thing but sometimes he said the wrong thing. Do the following **MATCHING**:

1. _____ Matthew 16:15-16

2. _____ Matthew 16:21-22

3. _____ Mark 9:5-6

4. _____ John 6:67-69

A. Peter was quick to say the right thing.

B. Peter was quick to say the wrong thing.

The Bible tells us that we are to be "swift (quick) to hear, _____ to _____, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). This implies that we are to slow down and take time to think before we speak and think before we act. When it comes to speaking and acting, was Peter quick or slow?

There is a word which describes people like Peter. It is the word **IMPULSIVE**. An impulsive person is one who acts suddenly based on a sudden impulse or a sudden feeling, without really stopping to think about what he is doing. Another good word that describes people like Peter is the word **IMPETUOUS**. This word is similar in meaning to the word "impulsive." The word "impetuous" describes a person who is marked by sudden, unthinking actions and who speaks or moves quickly and hastily.

Consider the following list of words. Half of these words describe an impulsive, impetuous person. The other six words describe the very opposite. Circle all of the words that describe an impulsive person like Peter:

Calm	Hasty	Excitable
Careful	Cautious	Headlong
Deliberate	Quick	Sudden
Slow	Steady	Swift

Have you ever acted fast without thinking? Did such quick acting ever get you into trouble? Did you ever speak hastily and then later wished that you had never said what you did? Did quick words ever get you into trouble? Do you know of others who have gotten into trouble because they spoke or acted too quickly without thinking about what they were doing?

Are there times when we need to act quickly? If a little child walks onto a busy street, should you spend five minutes thinking about what you should do? If your teacher in school asks you to run an errand, should you say, "Give me about ten minutes to think about whether I should do that or not"? No, we should be quick to obey and we should obey right away! We should be quick to help those in need and those in danger. If someone asks you if you are a Christian, it should not take you a week to come up with an answer! We should be quick to confess the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). Can you think of other times when it is right to be quick in acting or quick in speaking?

An impulsive person is often quick in the wrong way. He jumps too soon. He needs to learn to look before he leaps. He needs to learn to slow down in a good way and not just do something when he suddenly feels like it. Peter needed to learn this, and so do we.

Let's learn from Peter! Peter learned some valuable lessons from his own mistakes. The Lord has recorded many of these things in His Word, the Bible, so that we can learn these lessons also. Let's take a look at certain different events in the life of Peter which show his **IMPULSIVENESS**:

1) A Walk on Water (Matthew 14)

Suppose you had never been waterskiing before. One day the owner of a motorboat takes you and four of your friends in his boat out onto the middle of a big lake. He then says to all of you: "Who would like to try waterskiing?" Suddenly without even answering you jump into the water with a big splash. As your head bobs to the surface you cry out, "I'M READY, THROW ME THE ROPE!" Of course, you forgot to put your life belt on and you even forgot that you need water-skis! Is this how you would act? If Peter had been one of your friends in the boat, he may have done something like this!

Others are much slower and more thoughtful and cautious. They might say to themselves, "Do I really want to try this? What if I get hurt? What if I can't do it? What if I fall and get hurt? I might want to try it, but I don't want to go first. I'll enjoy the ride in the boat and watch someone else try it." What about you? Are you quick or slow about such things? Is it good to be courageous? Why? Is it good to be cautious? Why? Is it even better to be courageous *and* cautious?

Peter had much courage but at times little caution. Read Matthew 14:24-27. The disciples have been struggling in the midst of a stormy sea in the hours just prior to daybreak. Then suddenly

they saw a person walking on the water. At first they thought it was some kind of a "spirit" or ghost, but Jesus quickly identified Himself and said, "It is I; be not _____" (Matthew 14:27).

After they realized who it was, who was the first disciple to speak up (Matthew 14:28)?
_____ What did he want to do?

_____ None of the other disciples thought of doing such a thing! If **you** had been in this boat, would **you** have said and done as Peter? Would you have left the safety of the boat? And remember, the storm was still raging (see verse 32). Peter did not walk on a still and calm lake!

Did Peter just start walking on the water or did he wait until the Lord told him to do this (Matthew 14:28-29)? _____ Sometimes people get into trouble because they try to do something which God has never told them to do. Peter was not guilty of this. He knew enough not to step onto the water unless the Lord had given him the command to do so.

With much courage and faith Peter climbed out of the boat onto the water. Peter was impulsive and quick to act. If he had really stopped to think about it he probably would have changed his mind! It is like a group of men who are going to try parachuting for the first time. There they are, high in the sky and the door of the plane opens! Who shall go first? The more each man thinks about it the less eager he is to jump. In some cases they actually need someone there to push them out because if left alone they would never jump!

Peter did not need anyone to push him! He acted first and thought about it later. And when Peter did start thinking about it, he thought about it in the wrong way. He thought about the W _____ (Matt. 14:30) and the waves and suddenly **fear** took the place of **faith** and he began to _____ (Matthew 14:30). FEAR and FAITH cannot live together. When one comes in the other must leave! Peter started in FAITH (his first steps) but he ended in FEAR and the Lord had to rescue him. He should have continued as he started.

Peter made many missteps and blunders in his life but the Saviour was always there to pick him up. Peter was dumb enough to make the misstep but smart enough to learn from it. May God help us to learn from our mistakes and failures!

2) Peter Rebuking the Lord (Matthew 16)

In your school class, do you have a student who always seems to raise his (or her) hand first? This person always thinks he has the answer to the teacher's question and is always quick to raise the hand and speak out! Are you like this or are you slow to raise your hand. Some students are shy and withdrawn and never raise their hands and they hope the teacher will never call on them. Is this good?

Peter was a disciple or student of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he sat in the classroom of life with the other disciples he was almost always the first to raise his hand! He was almost always the first one to speak and to answer. Sometimes he had the right answer but at other times his answer was completely wrong.

The Lord Jesus asked **all** of the disciples a question found in Matthew 16:15. Who was the first one to give the answer (Matt. 16:16)? _____ Was the answer correct? _____ How did Peter know the right answer (Matthew 16:17)? _____

Soon after Peter gave this good answer, the Lord gave a very important announcement about what would happen to Him (read Matthew 16:21). Who was the first to speak up after this announcement was given (Matt. 16:22)? _____ Did the student think that he knew more than the Teacher? _____ Did Peter AGREE with what His Teacher said or did he CONTRADICT what his Teacher said?

_____ When God says something that we do not like or that we do not understand it is best to keep quiet or to prayerfully say, "Lord, there is much I don't understand, but I know that You understand and that You are doing what is best. May YOUR WILL be done and not mine!" Did Peter say this? _____

When Peter answered correctly, who helped Peter get the right answer (Matthew 16:16-17)? _____ When Peter answered wrongly, who helped Peter get the wrong answer (Matthew 16:22-23)? _____ The devil can use our quickness and our hastiness and our thoughtless words. We are very fast to blurt out things which should never have been said.

The Lord said that He must suffer and die and Peter rebuked Him for saying this. The Lord was patient with Peter and taught him through his mistakes. It is interesting that later in his life Peter's attitude had completely changed. When he wrote the book of 1 Peter the sufferings and death of Christ were very PRECIOUS to him. Can you find verses in the book of 1 Peter which mention the sufferings and death of Christ and how much these meant to Peter?

3) When We Don't Know What To Say (Mark 9)

Have you ever been in a situation where you just did not know what to say? What should a person do in such a situation? When you don't know what to say, it is often best not to say anything. Not saying anything is better than quickly blurting out something foolish and thoughtless!

Peter was once in a situation where he did not know what to say (Mark 9:2-6). With his own eyes he saw the Lord Jesus transfigured and he also saw Elijah and Moses who appeared with the Lord. The Bible says that Peter "wist (knew) _____ what to _____" (Mark 9:6). Peter seemed to act according to this philosophy: "When you don't know what to say, say something anyway!" That's just what Peter did! He made a quick and foolish statement (see Mark 9:5). Peter's statement was off target in at least two ways: 1) He put Moses and Elijah on one equal level with the Lord. Even the best of men should never be put on an equal level with the sinless and perfect Son of God; 2) He wanted to stay on the mountain which was certainly not God's will for Peter, nor for the Lord who had to come down so that He could begin His march to the cross. **NOTE:** Peter learned from this, and later in his life he said some things about the transfiguration that were right on target (2 Peter 1:16-19)!

Peter did not know what to say so he said something anyway. He should have said nothing. Someone has said this about the person who does not know what to say: "If he says nothing people might think he is ignorant; if he says something he proves it!" May God help us to know what to say, when to say it and how to say it.

4) Should Peter Let the Lord Wash His Feet? (John 13)

In John chapter 13 we see that impulsive Peter is quick to speak two times and both times what he says is wrong! Sometimes impulsive people go to extremes. To them, it is either ALL or NOTHING! They can't seem to find the happy medium.

The Lord Jesus wanted to use footwashing as a picture of how God forgives the sins of His children when they confess their sins to Him (see 1 John 1:9). Read John 13:4-8. Did Peter speak

right up? _____ Did Peter want the Lord to wash his feet? _____ He said, "Thou shalt _____ wash my feet" (John 13:8). Peter spoke too soon! Peter needed to learn an important spiritual lesson: The Lord Jesus can have no **part** (partnership, fellowship) with a believer who has dirty feet! When there is sin in our lives, then we cannot be in fellowship with God until we come to God for cleansing according to 1 John 1:9. Thus Peter's statement was wrong and foolish and would be like a believer saying, "Lord, I refuse to confess my sins to You and I refuse to come to you for cleansing!"

Now read John 13:9. To Peter everything is either ALL or NOTHING! Now he wants a complete BATH! He wants Jesus to wash him from head to toe! First he did not want any cleansing but now he wants his whole body washed! Again Peter was quick to speak and quick to say the wrong thing. Every believer is CLEAN (John 13:10) and every believer has already had a complete SALVATION BATH. All of the believer's sins have been cleansed and forgiven! Believers need to confess their sins to keep in fellowship with the Lord but believers do not need to be saved all over again! Peter's second statement was wrong and foolish and would be like a believer saying, "Lord, I have sinned as a Christian and therefore I need to be saved all over again!" Is this true?

The Lord has used Peter's wrong statements to teach us some very important lessons about the Christian life and how the believer should deal with sin!

5)"I'll Never Do It, Lord! (Matthew 26)

Someone has wisely said, "NEVER SAY NEVER!" Those who confidently say that they will NEVER do something often end up doing the very thing they said they would never do! Compare 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Read Matthew 26:31-35. The Lord was speaking to all of the disciples, but which one was quick to speak? _____ What did he say that he would NEVER do (verse 33 and 35)?

_____ Did Peter end up doing what he said he would never do? _____ Have you ever promised your parents or others or yourself that you would never do something, only to end up doing the very thing you thought you would never do?

It's important to have the right kind of confidence. Peter had a great deal of confidence in himself BUT HE LET HIMSELF DOWN! God will never fail us but we often fail ourselves! Consider the following:

1) **"I CAN DO NOTHING!"** This person has *no confidence!*

2) **"I CAN DO ALL THINGS!"** This person has *self-confidence!* (like Peter)

3) **READ PHILIPPIANS 4:13.** This person has *CHRIST-CONFIDENCE!*

What kind of CONFIDENCE DO YOU NEED TO HAVE?

6) Quick to Swing the Sword (John 18)

The Lord Jesus was being arrested on the evening before He was crucified. Which disciple boldly and courageously rushed to the Lord's rescue (John 18:10)? _____ Did the Lord really need Peter's help (Matt. 26:53)? _____ Would this angelic army have done a better job than Peter? _____ We admire Peter for his courage and zeal, but we are saddened to think that his zeal was a thoughtless zeal ("zeal without knowledge") and that courageous Peter would soon be a complete COWARD (see John 18:17).

The Lord was patient with Peter and never gave up on him. About 53 days later, Peter once again took a sword and used it against the enemies of Christ, and this time he was successful! This time his sword did much more than slice off an ear. It pierced deeply into the hearts of thousands of people. We read about this in Acts 2:14,36,37,38,41. In Acts 2:37 the word "PRICKED" means "pierced, stabbed." These people were "CUT TO THE HEART." The sword that Peter used is described in Hebrews 4:12. What was his sword?

7) Ready For Action! (John 20-21)

Let's look briefly at two more examples showing us Peter's impulsive character. The first is found in John chapter 20, as Peter and John went to the tomb on that first Easter Sunday. John and Peter both ran to the tomb. Which disciple was the fastest (John 20:4)? _____ Did he go in the tomb (John 20:5)? _____ John thoughtfully stooped down at the entrance. Moments later Peter comes along. Did Peter thoughtfully stop and stoop down at the tomb's entrance? _____ What did he do (John 20:6)? _____ Peter was always ready for action!

Later seven of the disciples were out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee fishing. Early in the morning the risen Lord Jesus appeared to them on the shore. John, the sensitive and thoughtful disciple was the first to recognize that it was Jesus (see John 21:7). What did Peter do as soon as he found out who it was (John 21:7)? _____ Peter did not waste any time! He was always ready for action!

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Being quick and hasty and impulsive can get us into trouble. Peter's early life (prior to Pentecost) illustrates this again and again. At the same time there is much to admire in a person like Peter. We need men and women and young people who are ready to act for the Lord and ready to speak for Him. We need people who are quick to volunteer to serve the Lord. We need people who are ready for action--ready to do God's will and ready to obey Christ right away! Let us thank God for the energy and zeal and strength which He has given to us, and may we carefully and cautiously and calmly use every ounce of our energy for our Saviour who gave His all for us!

Peter, from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and on, became one of the greatest preachers the church ever had!