

## GET BEHIND CHRIST

*Matthew 16:21-23*

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23)

This is a fairly straightforward conversation. Let me point out that the phrase "from that time Jesus began to show His disciples" tells us that this was the first time the crucifixion and resurrection came up. It also tells us that Jesus didn't talk about His death and resurrection once, but repeatedly from this time forward. He wanted His men to be prepared for what was to happen. Even so, they really weren't prepared for the reality of it.

Peter was disturbed by what Jesus said and dared to rebuke Him. Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter for having his mind on the interests of man, not the interests of God.

TRANSITION: We need to think about what Jesus meant by "the interests of God" and "the interests of man." We also need to think about what it means to "get behind" Christ.

## THE INTERESTS OF GOD

*Matthew 16:21*

Jesus says that Peter's mind is not set on the interests of God but the interests of man. What are the interests of God? We've already been told by the Lord Jesus:

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. (Matthew 16:21)

God's primary interest, as Jesus puts it here, is the full manifestation of His own glory. That glory is only perfectly expressed in Jesus Christ, who is the Eternal Word of God, the perfect and full expression of all that God is.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to reveal God to us.

Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus

who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Hebrews 1:3 says that

who is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3)

So how does Jesus manifest the glory of God? First and foremost, by the exercise of divine justice and divine mercy.

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son (John 5:20)

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

## JUSTICE AND MERCY

**Justice** is always that which is **deserved**; **mercy** is always that which is **undeserved**. God exercises justice by rendering to His creatures what they deserve. God exercises mercy by granting His lovingkindness to those who are undeserving of it.

Now, we know that since **justice** is always that which is **deserved**, the exercise of **justice** requires someone who **deserves** it. And since **mercy** is always the **undeserved** lovingkindness of God, the exercise of mercy requires someone who is undeserving of God's lovingkindness.

But where would a holy God find someone who deserves His righteous judgment? And where would a holy God find someone who is undeserving of His lovingkindness?

We see that the fall of both angels and mankind was necessary.

## **SATAN AND HIS DEMONS**

God executes only justice with Satan and his demons. There is no mercy for them; there is no forgiveness or salvation for them. Their sin makes them deserving of eternal torment in the lake of fire. They are worthy of it. They have earned it. They deserve it.

## **SINFUL MANKIND**

God exercises justice for every human being and exercises mercy for some.

Every sinner faces the justice of God. Justice is deserved and required and exacted by Holy God for the sins of each person.

Some sinners, but not all, are also recipients of God's lovingkindness by His mercy, which they do not deserve.

How does it work for all human beings to receive justice and only some to receive mercy?

The Bible tells us that Jesus bore the righteous wrath of God against the elect. Jesus did not die for every human being, only for the elect. We know this is true for the simple fact that Jesus actually satisfied God's wrath against sinners. His death does not simply make salvation possible – it actually saves and reconciles. Not all are saved, obviously. So Jesus did not die for all, only for those whom the Father chose to save. The wicked receive the justice of God they deserve. Jesus suffered the justice of God for the elect, who deserved to suffer eternal hell, but who received mercy.

The usual response is to say that's not fair. But understand that it has nothing to do with fairness. Fairness is justice, and justice is what we deserve. We only deserve hell. All God owes anyone is eternal torment in hell. We receive the lovingkindness of God by His mercy, which means that He gives it to those who are completely undeserving of it.

Romans 5:8 says,

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)**

Romans 5:10 goes on to say,

For if **while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.  
(Romans 5:10)

When did Jesus die for us? After we trusted Him and believed the Gospel? No, while we were yet sinners. When were we reconciled? After we trusted in Jesus? No, while we were enemies of God. Just as the prerequisite for mercy is that a person be undeserving, the prerequisite for reconciliation is that a person be estranged. We were reconciled to God while we were still enemies, through the cross of Jesus Christ. The Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Jesus died on the cross at a point in history and reconciled ALL of the elect to God. The Holy Spirit comes to us during the course of our lives and regenerates us according to the Father's election and the Son's reconciliation.

**INTERIM CONCLUSION:** I hope you stayed with me through all of that. The point is this: the perfect and complete manifestation of the glory of God in His justice and mercy came to a precise point at the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. All of human history either builds up to that point or derives from it. It is the point at which God accomplished His purposes for all of mankind. The judgment of the wicked was sealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The redemption of the elect was finalized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing else that so perfectly and wonderfully demonstrates the interests of God.

**TRANSITION:** But Peter disagrees.

## THE INTERESTS OF MAN

*Matthew 16:22*

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” (Matthew 16:22)

God **FORBID** it? God had **PLANNED** it! God **PURPOSED** it! God’s plan for the manifestation of His own glory had been decreed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity past. The Three were in perfect agreement, utter harmony, flawless unanimity.

Now, just moments earlier Jesus said that Peter was a stone, and that He would build His church on Peter’s confession that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In First Peter 2 he says that all Christians are living stones being built up into a spiritual house. We could say that Peter was the first living stone to be placed in that spiritual house.

Then Peter makes a second, satanic confession: God forbid it, Lord! This shall not happen to you!

But [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (Matthew 16:23)

The living stone became an obstacle in Jesus’ way. Peter was so influenced by satanic thinking that Jesus **CALLS** him Satan, which means adversary or opponent or enemy. Why? Because Peter’s mind was not set on the interests of God, but the interests of man.

## THE INTERESTS OF MAN

The interests of man were first manifested by Eve in Genesis 3:6:

Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise . . . (Genesis 3:6)

A similar passage is found in First John 2:16,

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (First John 2:16)

Since the fall of man, the very same interests have occupied the hearts and minds of the human race.

**The first interest of man is to prioritize physical experience.** God said they were not to eat that fruit, but Eve decided it was good for food. This is the lust of the flesh John speaks about. So God says that sex outside of marriage is sin, but the world says it's good. God says that homosexuality is an abomination, but the world says it's good. God says all sin is wicked and destructive and worthy of judgment, but the world says it's all good.

**The second interest of man is to measure everything by personal satisfaction.** The fruit Eve saw was a delight to the eyes. This is the lust of the eyes. This is sensuality, the idea that what we really exist for is to have our senses satisfied. People are so deceived about this that even churches build themselves on sensuality. Really? Yes. When worship is a matter of incense, bells, a certain kind of stained-glass environment, or a certain kind of music and the ambiance of a concert, you can be sure that sensuality is at play.

**The third interest of man is the worship of self.** Eve decided that the fruit would make her wise. She would be better if she ate the fruit. John calls this the boastful pride of life. False teachers abound in the church because sinful people love and worship themselves. As long as a teaching celebrates the person and promises whatever makes one happy, that teaching will find an audience. It's why books like "The Purpose Driven Life" and "Your Best Life Now" are so popular. They feed the deception that life is really about us reaching and enjoying our own potential.

## GET BEHIND ME

*Matthew 16:23*

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:23)

I want you to notice that Jesus does not just rebuke Peter's idea; He rebukes Peter himself. He speaks harshly. He has no sympathy or respect for Peter in that moment. You see, we are so blind to our own spiritual state that Peter might have spoken out of concern, but was really motivated by Satan. Jesus knew that, and spoke accordingly.

Years ago I worked on a plan for the church I pastored at the time. We were going to focus on biblical discipleship, evangelism, and fostering a culture of service within the church. A prominent believer in that church said, and I quote: "I don't know if any of that is biblical." I was absolutely stunned that someone who claimed to be a Christian would say such a thing. I still am. Because the focus was not on making people feel good about themselves and giving them an enjoyable time on Sunday



morning, but on spiritual depth and growth, this man virtually denied the very foundation of what it means to be a Christian and a church.

Peter got in Jesus' way. He made himself an obstacle to the glory of God.

So Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind Me; get out of My way; stop trying to trip Me up; stop trying to change My course." The Lord told His disciples what was going to take place in order to prepare them and give them a solid foundation for faith. "Behold, I have told you in advance," Jesus says in Matthew 24:25. Jesus told His disciples many things ahead of time so they would know those events were not mistakes or coincidences but part of the predetermined plan of God.

Peter needed to get behind Jesus. He needed to stop being a stumbling block, an obstacle.

## BRINGING IT HOME

Beloved, we need to get behind Jesus Christ and not put obstacles in His way. What do I mean?

**First, the world constantly demands that we stifle our own beliefs and accept and embrace its values.** If we go along with that idea, we are putting an obstacle in front of the purposes of God and the Gospel. The world has actually convinced millions of Christians that the best way to represent Jesus Christ is to keep silent and let the wicked do what they do. That's love, they say. No, that's hatred. True love speaks the truth in love. It puts Jesus Christ before the world, just as the Father did when He publicly displayed Jesus as a satisfaction for sin.

**Second, our own sinful flesh wants to argue and debate about the will and purposes of God.** Some try to make the will of God confusing and hard to understand and substitute their own feelings and impressions. But the Scriptures are really very clear. It's not that the will of God is impossible to understand, but that it so often contradicts our desires. There is no Christian maturity without denying ourselves and putting our sinful flesh to death.

**Third, we need to regularly come to the Scriptures and be renewed in the thinking of our minds.** It takes time to have our minds retrained according to the Scriptures. You will not speak what you have not read. You cannot trust what you do not believe. You will never confess what you have never submitted yourself to. There is a direct relationship between your time in the Word of God and your ability to get behind Christ instead of being an obstacle to His work.

Jesus wants us out of His way. He wants us to follow Him and not attempt to lead Him.