

## A New Name

**By George Davis and Michael Clark**

Paul wrote about God's promise to Abraham saying, "... (just as it is written, 'I have appointed you a father of many nations') before God, whom he believed, the One who gives life to the dead and calls *those things which are not as though they were*" (Romans 4:17 EMTV- emphasis added)

God calls those things that are not as though they are. We see in this passage the principle that governs growth and maturity in the kingdom of God. At the center of it all is the giving and receiving of a new name. God's way of leading Abraham and Sarah to the fulfillment of the promise began with changing their names from Abram ("father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") and Sarai ("She that strives") to Sarah ("Princess" or one who inherits all things). The promise that God gave to Abraham and Sarah was not fulfilled by striving, but by divine inheritance. Every time He spoke their new names, He was calling those things that were not as though they were. This is the faith of God at work. Abraham and Sarah's condition was grim. There wasn't a single shred of physical evidence to support the possibility of the fulfillment of God's promise to them.

Abraham's body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb was barren. God sees through to the end of a thing. He is called the Alpha and the Omega for a reason. He knows what He intends to do and finishes what He starts. True faith takes into account the working of His mighty power on our deadness and barrenness to bring about His will. He sees our Isaac long before we do.

In God's dealings with Abraham, the father of the faith, we see a principle of faith at work that looks at the substance of things that are not seen, especially as it applies to the new name he gives. Just as God saw Abraham in Abram, Sarah in Sarai, Israel in Jacob, Paul in Saul and Peter in Simon, He sees a new name in every one of His children. In the Hebrew culture, name, character and position are synonymous. The changing of a name corresponded to a change of character and position. With God, however, the new name is given well in advance of the realization of what the name promises.

To us this is contradictory because we are taught to view evidence from a purely empirical point of view-something we can handle with our hands and see with our natural eyes. From our perspective there is no evidence to support God's view of us.

There are simply too many blemishes and weaknesses in our lives. We often feel as hopeless as Abraham and Sarah were childless. Our present deadness and barrenness stand before our eyes like two atheists demanding proof of God's existence. The great gulf between God's promise and where we are in relationship to it is the real test of faith.

I, Michael, went through many years of testing and trials. I was in a spiritual wilderness. I was looked upon by my fellow Christians at best as an anomaly among them, or worse yet, rejected as not one of them. I felt like Job, surrounded by his "friends" who were constantly trying to psychoanalyze him while he was in pain and just needed to be loved.

It was at the end of this time that I was at a church conference in a class called "The Heart of David." At the end of the class the teacher picked up his guitar and led us in a song. The lyrics went like this:

I will change your name.  
You shall no longer be called  
Wounded, Outcast, Lonely, or Afraid.

As I sang it along with him I was thinking, "Yup! That is my name, Lonely Reject." But the song did not end there.

I will change your name.  
Your new name shall be  
Confidence, Joyfulness, Overcoming One  
Faithfulness, Friend of God

These things were not true! I was not confident, joyful, nor did I feel like an "overcoming one." At that point I said, "God, who am I that you would call me your friend?" Then I heard

One Who Seeks My Face.

That was when I broke. I slumped down to the floor as my knees buckled under me from the impact of what Father was saying to me. I was His faithful friend because in all my trials and loneliness for Him, I had sought His Face. He was calling those things

that were not as though they were until they fully become who I am in Him; confident, joyful, faithful, overcoming friend of God. What a great salvation we have!

We are not just saved by faith but also by hope. Hope is locked in tandem with waiting for what is clearly promised but not yet realized. This is the nature of a promise. A promise is a guarantee that something will certainly happen or be done without our help! The promise is there but the realization is not. This is where hope comes in. Without hope (expectantly looking to a future fulfillment) there can be no patient waiting. Consider Paul's words.

For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:22-25 KJ2000)

We are saved by hope! And true hope patiently waits for God to fulfill His promise. This is where fallen human nature crosses grain with the promise. Waiting is not our specialty. Most of us get a glimpse of what God has for us and we set out to help Him make it happen. God created the universe and all that is in it without us, but we can't depend on Him to be the Omega in our lives. Like the foolish Galatian church, we set out to complete in the flesh what God started by His Spirit. But we must wait! For though we can foster an Ishmael, we cannot create God's Isaac! God has shut our womb to such an exercise. If we are to see the promise fulfilled we must wait on God to fulfill it. So we either wait in hope or act in haste. Either God is birthing or we are striving, and what is not of faith is sin. We must learn to wait on the timely appearance of what God is calling into existence. This is the bedrock Christ builds His church on. He calls those things that are not as if they were, and as we stand in faith, He allows us to see the evidence of those things that are not seen with mortal eyes. Now let's consider how this relates to the new name. We will consider two other instances of this--one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. Let's begin with Jacob.

### **Jacob and the New Name**

All Christians are on a journey that began the moment they believed. Our Lord Jesus is the way and the Holy Spirit is our guide and vehicle. The destination is God Himself.

Jacob's travels led him to an increasing comprehension of God, and those who have embarked to follow the Good Shepherd have a similar journey. God, in His foreknowledge, has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. He has called, justified and glorified us and these are all spoken as if they are already done, in the past tense (see Romans 8:29-30). Again God calls those things that are not as though they are.

Jacob's journey was a pilgrimage of discovery and transformation in which "the God of Abraham and Isaac" became his God. After deceiving his father Isaac and taking Esau's birthright, Jacob found himself fleeing from his angry brother. He had a dream that very night as he lay on the ground sleeping. He saw a ladder extending from heaven to the earth with the angels of God ascending and descending and ascending on it. God stood above the ladder confirming the covenant that He had made with Abraham and Isaac, "I am the lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac." Note that He did not say here, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Did Jacob know God in the same way his fathers knew Him? God's words here seem to be introductory. "Hello Jacob. I am your grandpa's God and your father's God. Am I yours?" Jacob must go through many trials before God could say, "I am the God of Jacob."

Jacob named the place of this highly significant meeting Beth-El meaning, "House of God." From here Jacob must journey on, following on to know the Lord. It will take years of breaking. In short, God was about to lay the ax to the root of Jacob's natural bent toward conniving and taking with his arm of the flesh. Even in his birth, this natural strength was evident; he came into this world grasping his twin brother's heel as if to pull him back into the womb so he could be the first born. As he grew he became a man who continued to take matters into his own hands. When he fled from Esau, Jacob went to live with and work for his uncle Laban. Little did his uncle know that he was about to meet his match in Jacob. The two stood toe to toe, one deception after another, deceiving and being deceived. In spite of being tricked into being Laban's slave for 21 years, Jacob remained unbroken. Finally, Jacob left with two of Laban's daughters as his wives and the best of his herds, still very much in control.

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "[Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.](#)" (Genesis 31:3).

Jacob initially was sent to Laban's house by his natural father Isaac to save him from the wrath of his elder brother, but now he is sent back home by his heavenly Father, God Himself. Little by little Jacob was learning to trust God more, and his own strength and opinions less. By faith he was now willing to face the fear that he once ran from. He obeyed God and set out for home. He must have remembered his brother Esau's threats, but God promised him, "I will be with you." God always rewards our obedience to His commands when we step out by faith. It is through this obedience that our faith in God has a chance to grow (See James 1:2-4). Because of his trust in God, Jacob, perhaps for the first time, made himself truly vulnerable. Even then he still could not resist his natural tendency to manipulate his circumstances. He sent messengers with oxen, asses, flocks and servants on ahead to Edom to meet his brother, in hopes that he might temper his brother's anger and find grace in his sight. However, a messenger returned to report that Esau was coming with an obvious war party of 400 men. This struck fear in Jacob's heart, so he divided the remaining people and flocks into two bands, thinking that if one band were smitten the other might get away. Had Jacob forgotten God's words, "I will be with you"? At this point Jacob was undoubtedly grasping again, looking to his natural strength and craft to save him. "I will appease him (Esau) with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." But Esau and his men kept coming. After having exhausted all the possible avenues of escape, Jacob fell to his knees, and prayed.

"O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children." (Genesis 32:9-11)

God led Jacob to his own Red Sea experience, and he had difficulty standing still. His scheming mind was teeming with evasive thoughts; how can I soften my brother's anger, where to hide and what to do? Finally, Jacob is reduced to prayer. Sad to say, it was his last resort, just as it is with many of us. Isn't this often this case? How often have we heard the comment in an hour of need, "All we can do now is pray"? We give the situation to God only when we are faced with circumstances beyond our control.

Here in this story we are witnessing the breaking of Jacob and what was perhaps the first truly insurmountable circumstance in His life.

Jacob now sent gifts on ahead to prepare his way as a peace offering while he stayed behind alone. Then suddenly an angel appeared to him, and true to his nature, Jacob grasped him and would not let go. He wrestled all night until daybreak, saying to the angel, "I will not let you go until you bless me!" Jacob clung to God with the same tenacity he had previously schemed and cajoled. He finally understood that the only answer to his need was God's blessing. How did God bless Him? He crippled him by putting his hip out of joint. From that day on he walked with a limp. Speaking of his own God-given weakness, Paul said, "[Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong](#)" (2 Corinthians 12:10 KJ2000). It was after this that the angel informed Jacob that his name was changed to Israel, one who prevails with God. Jacob named the place of this encounter Peniel, which means "the face of God." God is revealing Himself to Jacob and Jacob is changing. To see Him is to be changed into his likeness.

[Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his four hundred men. He divided the children between Leah and Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants out in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. He led the way and, as he approached his brother, bowed seven times, honoring his brother. \(Genesis 33:1-3 MSG\)](#)

Now Jacob leads the way before the maid servants, his wives and their children. He now faces his brother with them behind him. This shows a total change in character; the coward has become a man of faith in God.

Years later God said to Jacob. "[Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother](#)" (Genesis 35:1). So Jacob and his sons sanctified themselves, changed their clothes, and went forth. In that day, moving such a massive company of people was considered an act of war.

[And they journeyed and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. \(Genesis 35:5\).](#) This is a testimony of Jacob's growing trust in God to protect him and his family. He didn't break

the family up into bands this time. His faith had grown since that day at Peniel where he divided the bands to insure against the worst. Now he steps out boldly, knowing that the God who promised to be with him was indeed with him.

Jacob arrived at the place he had previously named Beth-El (house of God) and there he built an altar renaming this place El-Beth-El (The God of the house of God). In Jacob's journey, he finally came to see beyond the religious trappings of a mere religious house to the God of the house. What a revelation! Christianity is not a system of buildings where God dwells along with the organizations that control them. It is Christ in us! As children, Christianity for many of us consisted of "going to church," singing from the hymnal, and listening to a man in an ornate robe or black suit talk about this God who is in heaven, so very far away. What a glorious day it is when God pulls back the religious veil and we see the God of the house of God.

Based upon this revelation, God spoke to Jacob, "[Your name will no longer be called 'Jacob,' but, 'Israel,' for you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed](#)" (Genesis 32:28 WEB).

The Hebrew name Israel has a twofold meaning:

One who will rule like, or prevail like God and

One who will rule or prevail with God, or along side of God.

Jacob had become like his heavenly Father. He would no longer be known by the name Jacob, the grasper. From then on he was called Israel-one who is like God and will rule with Him.

Like Jacob we are also called to a journey of transformation. We also must be broken of our grasping, manipulating and self-serving ambition and come to a place of vulnerability and utter dependence on God. We must come to our own Peniel where we see the face of God and our natural strength is broken. We must behold His glory with unveiled faces and be transformed into His image from glory to glory (See Corinthians 3:18). We also must be led back to Beth- El where we finally break through the earthly veil of religion (the house) and focus on the God of the house. Paul wrote,

[Since you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly](#)

tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ toward God: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also has made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:3-6 KJ2000)

Here we know God as our sufficiency. We see beyond Beth-El, beyond the cultic, superstitious and shadowy realm of religion, beyond antiquated and abolished temples, altars, staged services, priest craft, rites, rituals and all that is of the Old Covenant. We now walk in a new and lasting Covenant with His law of love inscribed on our new hearts by the power of His Spirit within (See 2 Corinthians 3:9-11, Hebrews 7:21-25, 8:13, and 12:25-29). Finally we have come to that place where the temporal is forever distinguished from the eternal, where the "one thing" is valued over the many. Only then can we prevail with God. Only then can we reign with Him. Only then can we apprehend that for which He has apprehended us.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

## **Simon and the New Name**

Now let's consider this principle of the new name in the life of Christ's disciple Simon (Peter). It all began one day when John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples looking at Jesus as He walked by. John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples who heard this left John and followed Jesus. One of them was Andrew the brother of Simon. Andrew went and found Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah." Andrew led Simon to Jesus. Next we read the first recorded words that Jesus spoke to Simon. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas," an Aramaic surname whose Greek synonym is Petro<sup>s</sup>, or Peter, meaning "a rock" or "stone." (See John 1: 35-42). With a few exceptions, Jesus called Simon by this surname for most His three and a half year ministry.

One of these exceptions occurred at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the

Messiah, the Son of the living God." It must be noted here that the blessed revelation was not that Jesus was the Messiah, but that He is the Son of God. Andrew had already introduced Simon to Jesus as the Messiah. The revelation that the Father gave to Peter was that Jesus is the Son. In this lies the meaning and significance of His uses of the two words for rock: *Petros* - a stone - for Peter and *Petra*, a massive foundational rock.

To Simon's answer Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of John, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter (*Petros*), and on this rock (*Petra*) I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (See Matthew 16:17-18).

Simon was the name given to Peter by his natural parentage, Simon son of John. This revelation was about two fathers, one earthly and One heavenly, and their sons, one earthly and One heavenly, one fleshly and One spiritual. Nothing Peter received from his flesh and blood father could perceive this heavenly revelation. Natural abilities had no part in it whatsoever. "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63), and where the life of the Spirit is, there is revelation. On the backdrop of Simon's natural relationship to his earthly father, Jesus showed Simon the true meaning of his new God given name, Peter.

So what does this have to do with the foundational rock (*Petra*) upon which Christ builds His ecclesia, "that also He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad" (See John 11:52)? Here is the significance of why God gives us a name that matches how He sees us in our final omega form. It makes no sense unless we consider it in the context of family, the children of God. The blessed revelation is of His Son, "you are...the Son of God"--Christ the *Petra* or massive foundational Rock. This Son is as foundational to the family of God as Isaac was to Abraham's family. When Jesus used the word ecclesia in our passage, He was not only using it in the sense of a large called-out gathering, but expanded its meaning to include the lineage and growth of the family of God. We are talking about our Father, His Son (Mat 16:17-18) and many more sons (Romans 8:14-18, 29-30 and Hebrews 2: 10). The Son is the Rock or Foundation Stone (See Isaiah 28:16), but that is not all that is being implied here. Just as Isaac represented the hope of a new lineage to Abraham, the Son makes the way for the heavenly lineage of Abba Father. Flesh and blood will

have no part in this family nor can it conceive of the ultimate intention of our Father. Simon the son of John could not imagine it, but Peter could.

To see Jesus as the Son is to see God as Father! This is the revelation the true Church is built on--"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" To see Jesus as He really is, is to know Him as the Son. The life is in the Son. He who has the Son has life. Knowing this, we understand that He is "the first begotten of the Father" and that many more begotten ones---many sons of the Father-- are being birthed, nurtured and brought to maturity by the Father as His called out assembly.

Here it might be proper to shed some light on the real meaning of John 3:16, which so many of us have founded our belief in our salvation on. More correctly translated it reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only [earth born] Son, that whoever believes into him should not perish but have eternal life." There are a few things that are often overlooked in the deeper meaning of this verse. First, Jesus is God's only earth born Son. He sent Him into the earth to be born of a woman, but He was inseminated by the Spirit of God in that vessel. We who believe are also conceived from above by the Spirit. "That which is begotten by the flesh is flesh, and that which is begotten by the spirit is spirit. You should not be marveling that I said to you, 'You must be begotten anew'" (John 3:6-7 CLV). We have initially been born from the union of our fathers and mothers, but this is not enough. God has more for us. He wants to be our Father by inseminating us with His Spirit. We might be born of an earthly mother, but we must be given a new life source by our heavenly Father.

Next we should note that when we are born from above, we are born into Jesus Christ, the Son. Belief in Jesus is not just giving mental assent that He lived on earth 2000 years ago or even that He is God's Son. True belief transports us out of the grip of this world system (kosmos) into the Son. We don't just believe in Him. Faith places us into Him. Jesus taught the disciples saying, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5 KJ2000). Faith places us in the Son and it is there we are meant to abide just as a branch abides in its parent vine. Only here can we bear fruit unto the Father. Apart from abiding in Christ, subject to His will, we can do nothing in God's kingdom. Jesus makes the will of God plain in his final prayer before He went to the cross. "That they

may all be one, according as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, that the world should be believing that Thou dost commission Me. And I have given them the glory which Thou has given Me, that they may be one, according as We are One" (John 17:21-22 CLV). Just as Jesus is one in the Father, so are we meant to be one in them because we have been conceived by the Father and born into Christ. Without living in Them and being one with Them we can do nothing.

What is "eternal life"? Eternal means just that; it runs from eternity past to eternity in the future. Our Father has always looked at the life He has for us from an eternal perspective. God is not a man that He should change His mind. He has always had one plan for man, that we should walk as sons of God (See Luke 3:38). He foreknew us in His perfect will and plan long before we were born of the flesh. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29 KJ2000). The scripture says that we have been crucified in Christ and He was slain from the foundation of the world (see Romans 6:6-8 and Revelation 13:8). Comprehending the timelessness of God is hard for us who are bound by schedules, clocks and calendars. God made man subject to the degrading effects of time after the fall. "If you eat of this tree you shall die (dying you shall die)." Yet, God in His eternal plan has placed us who believe into Christ. "But of him, [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, 'He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 WEB).

When Christ died, we died also. When He arose we rose also. When He sat down at the right hand of the Father, we also sat down there with Him. We must not only walk in Him in this life, but we must walk with His eternity in our hearts, seeing those things that are His as though they are outside of time in Him. He calls those things that are not as though they are.

If we do not see this foundational revelation "You are the Son..." we will never know our position in the Father and the Son. We will never see what John saw and recorded in his first epistle. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). Life-changing power comes from the Son as we abide in Him and the Father bestows that power and right upon all who receive Him. "As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the Sons of God!" It is critical that we receive from the Father the same revelation that he gave

Peter. Who we think He is is critically important. It is foundational to all that the Father would do in and through His children! It is the bedrock the called out assembly of Christ is multiplied, grown and built on. "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3 KJ2000). Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to us. A mere Sunday-school teaching or even extensive seminary training will not suffice. God says, "My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts." In the New Covenant even our minds must be made new. "And do not follow the customs of the present age, but be transformed by the entire renewal of your minds, so that you may learn by experience what God's will is--that will which is good and beautiful and perfect" (Romans 12:2 WNT). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5 KJ21).

Only the Father can reveal the Son. There is no knowledge of Him without "...the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:17 RSV).

And so we have in this blessed revelation and in the name Peter the promise of many sons and a conversion much like that of Jacob. This is how Christ's Church is built. God's dealings with Peter reflect the scope and nature of that building. First we see The Rock (Jesus) *petra*--a massive rock, a large stone, the Foundation Himself. Next we have the rock (Peter) *petros*--a small, lively stone and the building material. The recounting of the earthly flesh and blood name Simon with the immediate mention of God's prophetic name Peter draws our attention to the process more than the man--the principle more than the person. "You are blessed, Simon son of John...I say to you that you are Peter. . ." The renaming of Simon to Peter represents the call and destiny of the man. The name Simon represents the choosing of a man by God to be initiated into a process of change according to God's plan. The name Peter represents the end of that process. Peter was not the foundation as some teach, but the name Peter is representative of the kind of building materials (living stones) Christ has chosen and still chooses to use in His building, and also of the principle for quarrying such stones.

Christ builds His Church by this principle of faith, the prophetic nature of the new name (in this case Peter). For the new name carries with it the promise of conversion. We will see this very clearly as we consider the Divine transformation of Simon into that stone.

In choosing the stone for his famous statue of David, Michelangelo settled upon a flawed stone that the previous sculptors had rejected. When asked why he had chosen an inferior stone his reply was "I have chosen this one, because this one is the one with David in it!" The artist could see the finished work in the stone before he ever started. The useless rock had to be removed before David could be revealed. There are five statues that Michelangelo started but never finished, though you can see the human forms in them as they were emerging. Prophetically to this very day, these statues are called, "The Captives." As a master sculptor, Jesus came to set the captives free.

Like Simon, those God has called are not chosen because they are great, noble or wise. No! There is nothing there to commend us to Him. As He did with Simon, He sees beyond our rough exteriors, beyond the faults, beyond the earthly habits and propensities, even beyond our inconsistency. He sees the finished product. He sees an extraordinary image in the unlikeliest of pebbles. He sees the image of His Son in weak and foolish stones. Paul wrote, "[For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty](#)" (1 Corinthians 1:26-27 KJ2000). God sees the Rock, the model for our conformity, and so this divine sculptor sets His hands to form Christ in us.

As Christ is formed in us we exchange our flesh and blood weaknesses for the stability of the Rock. He must increase. We must decrease. This is the nature of the conversion that the new name promises. Just as Michelangelo chose a flawed stone to ensure that the beauty of the work would reflect his true talent, God chooses the weak and flawed stones so that the glory of the finished product might reflect Him. (1 Corinthians 4:7).

We see in Simon Peter the process that purges all believers from dependence on their natural strengths and founds them on the strength and resources of the Rock, Jesus. In many ways we all identify with Simon. Many of us have one particular Simon-like trait. How often have we prayed the well-intentioned prayer, "I will serve you, Lord! I will lay down my life for you." And how quickly have our bold declarations morphed into a bemoaning of our inconsistencies and failures? This is where we are most like Simon.

The Lord had been preparing His disciples for His death on Calvary. He said to them, "Where I go, you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow me afterwards." As usual Simon spoke up, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake" (John 13:37). Sound familiar? This statement was about to become the focal point of the greatest test of Simon's strength and resolve. Jesus answered Simon first with a question and then an answer. "Will you lay down your life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto you, the cock shall not crow, till you have denied me three times" (John 13:38).

Matthew records Peter's response.

"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same. (Matthew 26:35 NLT)

Before we judge Peter too harshly, note that all the other disciples made the same promise, but Simon, being first in so many things, would go through this conversion process ahead of the others. It is one thing to confess Christ, but still another thing to be truly converted to the point where you lay down your life in both living and dying for Him. We know Peter's story. It happened just as the Lord had foretold. Peter, when pressed confronted by those who crucified Christ, openly denied the Savior--not once, not twice, but three times. Luke's records the warning that Jesus gave Simon, just before he made his bold and heroic declaration ". . . I will lay down my life for your sake," that clarifies this event even more.

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and *when you are converted, strengthen your brethren.*" (Luke 22:31-32 - emphasis added)

Jesus warned Simon regarding the nature of the crisis before him. He explained it in the context of winnowing grain as it has been carried on in the East for thousands of years. It was a sifting designed to bring conversion and purity. Winnowing separates the worthless chaff from the precious wheat. Sifting on the other hand separates the wheat from the poisonous tares that are smaller and fall through the sieve and are then cast into the fire.

John the Baptist described the ministry of Christ in this very context. "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12 KJ2000).

God doesn't reject the wheat because of the chaff that clings to it. He threshes and winnows it. This is exactly what was before Peter.

We should pay close attention to the use of the name Simon here, as it was repeated twice for emphasis, "Simon, Simon." Simon must be sifted before Peter could emerge in God's strength. Standing between Simon and the reality of all that the name Peter implied was a divinely ordained sifting. Peter's poisonous pride had to be removed. The chaff of his fleshly ways had to be blown away by God. God used Satan to do the sifting through trials and tests, breaking Simon's natural strength and shaking his self confidence. In this winnowing experience he learned the utter futility of attempting to follow Jesus and do the Father's will in the strength of his own soul.

Although it makes many extravagant declarations of its intention to follow Jesus at any cost, the flesh draws back as the cross draws near. Instead it seeks to comfort itself at the fires of those who crucify the Christ. When put to the test it will always elect to deny Him in order to save itself and Satan knows this. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man has will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). This is the purpose of this crisis. Peter must learn to put no trust in Simon! He must learn to distrust his fleshly resolve and tenacity. Simon must be converted from one life-source to another-from his natural strength to the life and recourses of Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

Simon's denial of Christ is an admonition to us today. How much of our "Christianity" remains unconverted because we evade the cross, preferring rather to draw from the strength of the flesh. How much of our Christianity still needs to be sifted? Without this we may think we are able to minister to the saints of God (as many do), but we will go on lacking the depth of spiritual maturity required to truly strengthen the brethren. Can we honestly say that "... we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (See Philippians 3:3)?

Undoubtedly, Simon's faults have been put on display so that when the enemy sifts us, only our faith in ourselves will suffer. Through each test our faith in Christ grows. One look at Simon and we know there is hope. We know that our Savior is praying and

interceding for us as He did for Peter (See Romans 8:34). "I have prayed for you..." Dear believer, no matter what you are going through right now, remember, He has prayed for you! No matter how painful your trial, remember, He is touched with the feelings of your infirmities, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, He himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17 KJ2000 and Hebrews 7:25). As you endure the painful winnowing process, you will find more than enough strength to see it through, because He has yoked Himself with you. Paul wrote, "So we live in the face of death, but it has resulted in eternal life for you" (2 Corinthians 4:12 NLT). Death and suffering in us is meant to bring forth life not just in us, but in others also. "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren."

After denying Jesus Peter must have been in his own slough of despondency. Could he have been thinking to himself, "I am no better than Judas. I also have denied the Lord; he did it for silver and I did it to save my life." But let's not forget the nature of this sifting. Peter was valuable wheat to be gathered into the Father's granary. He was not discarded like chaff or stubble, but in this moment of utter despondency he was closer to pure wheat than he had ever been before. He would soon find this out; Simon would have a unique encounter with Jesus that was more than a mere restoration (as though value had been lost rather than gained in the sifting process). It was a rather uncomfortable commissioning, based upon the new name, Peter. Jesus tested Simon, giving him every opportunity to repeat those words, "I will lay down my life for you Jesus. I will serve you."

After Jesus rose again from the dead, He again tested Peter's metal by asking a question while he was fishing with his brethren. Would he answer this time from his own strength and pride?

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you love (*agapao*) me more than these?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then feed my lambs."

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you love (*agapao*) me?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then take care of my sheep."

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you love (*phileo*) me?"

Simon: "Lord, you know everything. You know I love (*phileo*) you."

Jesus: "Then feed my sheep."

Notice how Jesus does not refer to Simon as Peter, but instead uses his flesh and blood name Simon son of Jonah. The problem was with Simon, not with Peter and Jesus was going to the source of it. Added to this is the fact that there are two different Greek words that Jesus used in the above conversation and both are translated love in English Bibles. The first word is *agapao* and the second one is *phileo*. *Agapao* is love in its highest expression--a sacrificial love, where the one loving gives his all for the one loved. "Greater love (*agape*) has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). *Phileo* is a word that is much cooler in relational intensity which indicates a fondness or a friendship kind of affection. Let's amplify this conversation with this in mind.

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me? Do you love me more than the rest of these, your brothers?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I have a friendship fondness for you."

Jesus: "Then feed my lambs."

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you love me with a sacrificial love, so intense that you would lay down your life for me?"

Simon: "Yes, Lord, you know I have a friendship fondness for you."

Jesus: "Then take care of my sheep."

Jesus: "Simon son of Jonah, do you even have a friendship fondness for me?"

Simon: "Lord, you know everything. You know I have a friendship fondness for you!"

Jesus: "Then feed my sheep."

Because of his previous failure, Simon dared not use the word *agapao*. Instead he used the lesser word *phileo* because he had failed to lay down his life for Jesus as he had once boasted. Each time Jesus asked this it must have been like a finger being poked into an old infected wound. No doubt Simon was Christ's friend. He was fond of Jesus that was certain, but did he love Jesus with a divine *agape* love that produces a sacrificial posture of life? Peter had not yet received the Holy Spirit and he did not know the fruit of the Spirit in his life. How could he *agape* love our Lord? The point of this test was not to rub salt in a wound, but to show him his lack.

Jesus went on to assure Simon that there would come a time when he would indeed glorify God in death and his life. He showed him the difference between Simon the waffler and Peter the rock.

"The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go." Jesus said this to let him know what kind of death he would die to glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me." (John 21: 15-19 NLT)

Only after this conversion and Jesus' death on the cross could Peter hear Jesus say, "Follow me," and know exactly what He meant. It was not a call to follow Jesus in his own energies and resolve, in the strength of a young man who does what he likes and goes where he wants. It was a call to be given over to the love and grace of Christ so completely that the cross was no longer an emblem of suffering and shame, but a glorious door to life. The converted Peter would do the will of his Savior and go where Simon refused to go. Peter did eventually lay down his life for his friend, Jesus. Tradition has it that when he was old, he was indeed bound and taken where he had formerly been unable to go. After years of embracing the cross in his heart, it came to pass that Peter hung upside down on a literal cross, all for the love of his friend and Lord, Jesus. Peter asked that he should not be crucified upright, for he reasoned that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord and Friend Jesus. What devotion! What greater love is there than this, than a man would lay down his life for his friend? Was Peter a stone? Undoubtedly! Was He the foundation rock? No, but he looked an awful lot like Him. Jesus builds His church with such stones.

So we see the significance of the new name as it relates to the new creation. Knowing all this, there is one more consideration. How do we live in a way that complements this glorious truth in our own life and the lives of others? In other words, how can we relate to others in a way that affirms the new name that Father has given them? We are called and empowered by the Spirit to know one another after the Spirit as new creatures.

Paul explains:

For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they who live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again. *Therefore from now on know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet from now on know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new*

*creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:14-18 KJ2000 - emphasis added)*

How desperately we need to know one another in a new creation way after the Spirit and not after the flesh. We need to ask the Father how He sees our brothers and sisters in Christ instead of looking upon their "Simon" in process. God has given us each a new name. Do we see them as Jesus does, through His incredibly prophetic eyes? Do we have the new creation eyes to see beyond the biases and prejudices of our flesh and see another person in the light of eternity? There is no greater blessing that we can give one another than to acknowledge in agape love that each of us is God's work in progress. This is the perfect love-filled and faith-filled environment for growth in the *ekklesia* of God. Of the early church it is recorded:

*And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet. And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. (Acts 4:33-35 KJ21)*

We dare say from our own experience that this great grace of the Lord stretches beyond our brother's temporal needs into the eternal scope of God for their lives—a scope of vision that allows us to call those things that are not as though they are.

Henry Drummond wrote of this blessedness in his book *The Greatest Thing in the World*.

"Guilelessness and Sincerity may be dismissed almost with a word. Guilelessness is the grace for suspicious people. And the possession of it is the great secret of personal influence. You will find, if you think for a moment, that the people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion men shrivel up; but in that atmosphere they expand, and find encouragement and educative fellowship. It is a wonderful thing that here and there in this hard, uncharitable world there should still be left a few rare souls who think no evil. This is the great unworldliness. Love "thinketh no evil," imputes no motive, sees the bright side, puts the best construction on every action. What a delightful state of mind to live in! What a stimulus and benediction even to meet with it for a day! To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or

elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. For the respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost; our ideal of what he is becomes to him the hope and pattern of what he may become."

How can we bless one another? Love one another with a love that sees the wheat underneath all the chaff. Such love is empowering. A dear friend, Jay Ferris, put it this way, "Love empowers its object." There is no greater influence than to be believed in. It is indeed empowering. Love believes the best of every person, not blindly but with clarity of vision that differentiates between present shortcomings and the divine call on an individual's life. It sees beyond the old-creation life with its old things to the new creation where all things have become new. Love thinks no evil. Love labors to make all things new. We can make nothing new in our own right. All we can do is see and affirm what our Father is doing in their lives.

Father often reveals the divine name, character, calling and destiny of one of His children. He doesn't give us a general charge to act on someone's obtuse character so that we can be more comfortable with them. Rather we are to seek His great grace and vision for that person and relate in an affirming way to what we have seen. Jesus saw Peter in Simon and prophetically declared the promise "you shall be called Peter" but He did not seem to go out of His way to make it happen. He saw the divine plain and watched it unfold, knowing that the Father would certainly bring it to pass in spite of all the natural obstacles and outward workings of the flesh. Allowing the Father to bring things to pass on His timetable is not necessarily our specialty, but it is the specialty of His love that hopes all things and believes all things.

Seeing with God is one thing but waiting on God and working only when He specifically asks us to work in unison with Him is quite another. How many times did Jesus walk right on by the lame man that spent his life asking for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple and not act? He knew that His Father had a plan for him that would go beyond the man's temporal need of the moment. He knew that Peter and John at a later date would glorify God by healing that man and that it would result in thousands of Jews coming to Christ. Maturity is required or we will be like children in a workshop, cutting Papa's fine furniture into small manageable chunks. I, Michael, have a nephew who built a tree house when he was young. He needed a ten foot ladder, so he took a twenty foot ladder that belonged to his grandpa and cut it in half! What a lesson this is

for us as we cut one another down. Father seeks those who will carry His burden for His people. He wants to show us Peter in Simon. He wants us to relate to each other in a new creation way. He wants us to see the new creation in one another beyond our own immediate needs and comforts and walk and talk with them in a manner that reflects His great love.

May we dare to think it possible to say of each other what the prophet Isaiah prophesied so long ago, "The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by *a new name* that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Isaiah 62:1-3 ESV - emphasis added).

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"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." (Revelation 2:17)