

## Rebuilding the Foundations

### I. A Tricky Story

#### Numbers 21:1-9

The Hebrew words for "serpents" and "serpent" in Numbers 21:6 and 21:8 are *seraphim* (plural) and *seraph* (or *saraph*, singular), respectively. It is the same Hebrew word which is left untranslated in Isaiah 6:2 and 6:6, thus hiding from you the uncomfortable (but really cool) reality that there are serpents with wings and feet (dragons?) flying around God's throne.

The other occurrences of "snake" or "serpent" in Numbers 21 are a more typical Hebrew word. Lexicons suggest that *seraphim* are either poisonous serpents or serpents with a fiery red or orange color.

### II. Building the Church on the Right Rock

#### A. Matthew 16:13-18

Here the point is to show that Jesus said he would build his church on a confession that we evangelicals pay almost no attention to!

An interesting sidelight is that after much research, not only in the Scriptures, but in the writings of the early church fathers, the whole passage is pretty simple. Peter was called "Rock" because he was the first one to make the confession. The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven represent the fact that Peter was the first to preach the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, which we can read about in Acts 2.

The binding and loosing to which Jesus refers are the power to forgive or retain sins. An example of how that was used is in 1 Corinthians 5 where a man guilty of a heinous sexual sin was excommunicated. The opposite example, the loosing of his sins, is in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, where the Corinthians are urged by Paul to forgive and receive their repentant brother.

The other apostles, and through them the churches (again as exemplified by Paul's two letters to the Corinthians), were given the same power in John 20:22-23.

Many, if not most, evangelicals will reject my explanation of binding and loosing, but it is the one understood by all the churches of the second century.

#### B. Psalm 2

Psalm 2 is the only place that reveals the Messiah as the Son of God. Peter is obviously making reference to it. A search for "Christ" and "Son of God" together will show you that the Jews, and even the demons, understood the reference to Christ and the Son of God together.

### C. Was Peter the Rock?

I will simply remind you that although the Roman Catholics believe Peter is the rock, they also acknowledge that Peter's confession is the rock (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 424).

Peter was only the rock in the sense that he was the first one to make the foundational confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The Protestant argument that Peter was named Petros, pebble, rather than Petra, boulder is invalid for two reasons. First, Peter could not have been name Petra because of Greek grammar. Petros is male, and Petra is female. Second, Jesus was almost certainly speaking in Aramaic and saying *Kephas* or *Cephas*, and in Aramaic the difference we see in Greek does not exist.

### D. Building on the Rock

I once did a radio show in Sacramento, CA (1992 and 1994). On one of the broadcasts I decided to compare modern Gospel tracts—23 of them that I bought in a bookstore—with the apostles' sermons in Acts. I was stunned (as I am sure you were when I told you) to find that none of the apostles told a lost person that Jesus died for their sins.

Back then I noticed that they emphasize the resurrection and the person of Jesus rather than his deeds. Later I realized they were simply building on the rock of Peter's confession as Jesus had taught them.

All of Acts is my strongest reference to the fact the apostles built on the rock of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but ...

John 20:31 is a very strong piece of evidence

Mark begins his Gospel very similarly (1:1)

Romans 1:1-4 describes the Gospel in almost exactly the same way

### E. The Apostles are Witnesses of the Resurrection

I had never really thought of the apostles as first and foremost witnesses of the resurrection, which was the proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, until I saw how it is emphasized in Acts. Here are the passages:

Acts 1:21-22

Acts 2:32

Acts 3:15

Acts 4:33

Acts 5:30-32

Acts 10:40-41

Acts 13:30-31

## F. Romans 1:1-5

A very concise description of Paul's purpose, which involved the resurrection proving that Jesus is the Son of God in power and which calls for "obedience to the faith."

## G. 1 Corinthians 15:3

This passage was not included in the presentation because I did not have time. Here Paul includes Jesus' death for sins as part of the Gospel. This seems to contradict what I taught.

The answer to this is that I did not have time to explain my use of "Gospel" in my presentation. The word "Gospel" can be used variously. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John include much more than both Jesus' death for sins and his resurrection to prove that he is Christ and Son of God. The use of "Gospel" throughout Galatians 2 clearly includes much more than the atonement and the resurrection.

When I used "Gospel" in the presentation, I was referring simply to that foundational confession from Matthew 16 and to the fact that the apostles' preaching to the lost focused on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is possible I should have avoided that word in the presentation.

Thus, my answer is that the Gospel can include more than what the apostles preached to the lost, but this does not change the fact that we should do what the apostles did and lead people to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (as described in Psalm 2) rather than leading them to confess that Jesus died for their sins.

The teaching of the atonement, at least in the New Testament, is reserved for believers, not unbelievers. Apparently, it is one of those holy things that we should not give to dogs or pigs (Matt. 7:6). In fact, even the apostles heard about Jesus' coming death only immediately *after* they found out Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16-21; Mark 8:29-31; Luke 9:20-22)

## III. God's Sure Foundation

This part of the teaching came from a desire to teach the basics of Christianity at my home church. It seemed like starting from the foundations was a good idea. In the presentation I simply gave all the passages that talk about the foundation of God or of Christ.

I left out only the fact that the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). As it applies to us today, I believe that means we are built on the

Scriptures as well. Since I taught from the Scriptures (and about the purpose of the Scriptures) and since I was pretty sure everyone agreed with me that the Scriptures are foundational, I left that part out.

Here are the Scriptures I addressed:

2 Timothy 2:19  
1 Corinthians 3:11  
Matthew 7:24-25

#### IV. Good Works

- A. The purpose of the Scriptures is to equip us for good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- B. Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and live godly (Tit. 2:11-12)
- C. Grace removes the power of sin (Rom. 6:14—this wasn't in presentation)
- D. The new birth/creation is so that we do good works (Eph. 2:8-10)
- E. The atonement is to make us zealous for good works (Tit. 2:13-14)
- F. The Spirit is to empower us to do good works (Gal. 6:8-9)
- G. We are to assert boldly and constantly affirm the need for good works (Tit. 2:15 & 3:8)
- H. We will be judged by our works (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; Jn. 5:29; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:11-15; some other passages that imply judgment by works, even for Christians, include especially Rom. 8:12-13; 1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 6:7-9; Eph. 5:3-8; Php. 3:8-15; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; and all of Rev. 2-3)

#### V. The Atonement

I covered one tiny aspect of the atonement. I pointed out just one aspect of the incomprehensible vastness of the atonement. When Jesus died he gave us opportunity to leave the race of Adam and become a new human, a reborn child of God (Rom. 5 & 6; 1 Cor. 15). When the children of God are revealed, the whole creation will rejoice (Rom. 8:19-23).

Again, I covered one small part of the atonement. I am not claiming that is all there is.

##### A. Romans 2:6 and Galatians 6:8-9

These two passages say almost exactly the same thing except that the second includes the fact that we must patiently continue to do good works by the power of the Spirit.

In other words, the judgment described in Romans 2:5-8 has not changed. (See also Eph. 5:3-8.)

This because it is a good judgment by a good and fair God (Ezek. 18:21-30)

Thus, Jesus' death **did not change the judgment!**

B. Jesus died to change us, not the judgment

1. Romans 3, Romans 7, Romans 8:3-4
2. Jesus' death freed us from slavery to sin, through all the means covered earlier: the Scriptures, grace, the new birth, and the Spirit of God
3. These passages say we were slaves to sin and that the Law of Moses could not free us.
4. Romans 8:3 tells us, however, that what the law could not do, God did by sending his Son.
5. We have seen that the judgment is still by works, and that we still need to expect it (1 Pet. 1:17). Now, however, we can be ready for it.
6. One of the best passages showing that Jesus did not change the judgments, though it was not covered in the presentation, is the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3.

VI. Bonus on the Atonement: "Jesus Paid the Penalty"

This was not in the presentation, but it is important and related. We say that Jesus "paid the penalty" all the time, but the Bible never says it.

- A. Can you find "paid the penalty" in the Bible? (Hint: no)
- B. The origin of this teaching is known. It began with St. Anselm in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it was fully formulated by Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. (Peterson, B. 2017. "Paving the Way? Penalty and Atonement in Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology." Web. Academia. Retrieved August 11, 2017 from [https://www.academia.edu/1719664/\\_Paving\\_the\\_Way\\_Penalty\\_and\\_Atonement\\_in\\_Thomas\\_Aquinass\\_Soteriology\\_](https://www.academia.edu/1719664/_Paving_the_Way_Penalty_and_Atonement_in_Thomas_Aquinass_Soteriology_). See also <http://www.theopedia.com/satisfaction-theory-of-the-atonement>)
- C. According to Scripture Jesus paid a price to purchase us, freeing us from slavery to the Law of Moses and from slavery to sin, which made us his possession, his slave (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
- D. Nowhere, however, do the Scriptures tell us that Jesus paid the penalty of our sins.
- E. This is because God was already merciful. His wrath is satisfied by repentance, not punishment (Ezek. 18:11-20; Ps. 51:16-17; Acts 11:18; Acts 26:20; and a lot of others, but that's a good start)