

The Implications of Sociology and Holiness The Apostle Peter: A Christian's Life-Cycle

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[Chart of the Recycled Lifestyle.](#)

The segments of an individual's life cycle are relived many times during one's lifetime. In fact each of us is experiencing one or more of the segments at the same time, except in childhood in the beginning. The model shows that every new position at whatever age, begins in childhood and follows through the cycle. There are times in selected circumstances when the total cycle runs its course in a short duration of time. For example, a student on a college campus entering as a freshman has the characteristics of a child, then there is the sophomore adolescent segment. As he/she continues within the college context all the segments can be experienced until he/she is a mature person relative to the college career. Then that student becomes a child again when he/she embarks upon the first job. It is possible for an individual to be a young adult in marriage and certain social statuses but also be a child in his/her first job. People carry around with them many of the segments in varying degrees of development and growth.

In order to illustrate this conceptualization, I will relate it to the life of Peter and show how the life of holiness, hopefully, is related to this life cycle phenomenon.

Peter is introduced in the Book of Mark as a fisherman. No doubt he was considered an adult fisherman, which was his occupation. As a husband, he probably was a young adult. Jesus visited his home and his mother-in-law was living with them. Peter's family relationships appear to be adult since he was fishing with his brother Andrew. All that we know about Peter leads us to believe that he was experiencing his life cycle in its normal patterns for each area of life. He was moving toward maturity in the sequence of experiences in family life, marriage, and occupation. Then he is called by Jesus to be a follower of the Master.

When Peter followed Jesus, he became a child in Christian experience and understanding. As we shall see, Jesus directs Peter into experiences and observations designed to provide basic understanding of the life and work of Christ. Chapters one thru eight reveal seven ways that Jesus enlightened.

- 1:29 - Jesus visits Peter's house — social
- 1:36 - Peter finds Jesus praying — spiritual
- 3:15 - Peter is appointed a disciple — status
- 4:39 - Jesus calms the sea — security
- 5:31 - Peter observes healing of a woman — somatic

5:37 - Jairus' daughter is raised — survival

8:29 - Peter says, "You are the Christ" — self-actualization

Note these seven variables of life are evident in Genesis, the third chapter in the temptation of Adam and Eve.

You will not die — survival

You will be as gods — status

You will know good from evil — self-actualization

The fruit was good to look at and eat — somatic

It would make here wise — security

She shared it with Adam — social

They were naked (stripped of God) — spiritual

Every new Christian finds these needs fulfilled in Christ.

After Peter states that Jesus is the Christ, he moves into adolescence. Observe his adolescent behavior as he endeavors to operationalize his actualized self as a Christian.

8:32 - Rebukes Jesus about going to Jerusalem to suffer

9:5 - Suggests building three tabernacles

9:37 - Discusses who is the greatest with other disciples

10:28 - Says to Christ, "we have left all to follow you"

14:29 - Promises not to fall away

14:37 - Sleeps in the garden

14:47 - Cuts off servant's ear

14:54 - Follows at a distance

14:66 - Denies Christ

All these behaviors are indicators of adolescent living. Note how a grown adult in many areas of life can be vacillating and uncertain about himself as a new Christian. Peter did not return to his former life or backslide. He was learning how to live an actualizing experience in an environment totally new to him.

Even though Jesus observed and felt the impact of Peter's behavior, He did not reject him nor cut him from the team. After the resurrection, Jesus singles out Peter for special attention (Mark 16:6) and gives him an assignment (John 21:15-19) of feeding His sheep and lambs. This is Jesus' way of initiating Peter into young adulthood. The confidence of Jesus' way of initiating Peter into young adulthood. The confidence of Jesus on Peter's behalf encourages him to assume the leadership in replacing Judas (Acts 1:15-26). This act shows young adult characteristics.

The next time we see Peter, he is with the disciples on the Day of the Pentecost. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. This experience ushers him into the adulthood segment of his Christian cycle. He is bold, unvacillating and undaunted by his failures of the past. Let us note some of the behavior demonstrated in the adult segment of his Christian life cycle.

In Acts, the 15th chapter, an account is given of the sharp conflict over whether the Gentiles should be circumcised. Paul gives an account of this contention in Galatians the second chapter. Note the strong language of Paul.

Gal. 2:6 - As for those who seemed to be important (whatever they were makes no difference to me)

Gal.2:11 - When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face

Gal.2:13 - The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy

Gal. 2:9 - James, Peter, and John, those reputed to be pillars

Gal.2:12 - Peter was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group

These are sharp words. In fact Paul confronted each leader in the early church. Barnabas was confronted about John Mark.

In the churches Paul visited on the missionary journeys, he was able to develop pastoral affections. But among the leaders, he just had to defend his own position at any cost. This in no way affects his spiritual insights nor his effectiveness as God's chosen vessel to interpret the gospel and receive the revelation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit for writing his letters. The lesson we are to learn is that in every generation of the church's history there are Pauls. These men are confronters. They can be very strong-willed. They can say things and do things that hurt people. Their interpersonal relationship skills lag far behind their insightfulness. People do not understand that drive. God in his infinite wisdom is showing us in the very beginning of the church's history that contention will always be strong in His church. Peoples' life segments will not always coalesce in all areas of life. Paul was an adult in his intellectual acumen. He was adult in his ability to suffer hardship. But quite adolescent in his leadership interrelationships. The lack of life cycle crystallization is evident in all of us at given times. A person in leadership is on exhibition as to how well crystallized his life cycle is. The variety of decisions and positions he/she must face elicit a particular cycle segment depending on the nature of the experience. Paul emerged as the leader of the new church. He effectively confronted each apostle and Barnabas and Mark (who demonstrated adolescent behavior as a young Christian when he left the missionary journey - no one in Scripture ever indicts his Christian experience, this is why Barnabas took him in and nurtured him until he became a profitable servant. What a lesson for us.)

How did Peter, James and John, and Barnabas respond as adult Christians to Paul's letter and comments about them? John went to Ephesus and had a ministry for forty to fifty years as a pastor. He has given to us the finest insights into church growth because he pastored over a five generation time span. His letters are written to fathers, mothers, children indicating the generational transmission of the gospel. No other man in the New Testament has such a record. Paul died after twenty years in the church and was in Ephesus only two years. John developed a ministry. This is an adult Christian view.

Barnabas took John Mark under his wing and trained him for service. He duplicated himself in a young man so that the gospel would be perpetuated. One of the most important heritages of a man's life is his ability to reproduce himself in the next generation. Barnabas developed a ministry. This is an adult Christian view.

James stayed in Jerusalem and was willing to be the church secretary. He too developed an adult ministry.

Peter went to Rome (Babylon) and developed a ministry. His letters show an adult cycle segment as he did not retaliate nor seek revenge. He developed a reputation of sufficient renown to fulfill Christ's prophecy of calling him "Petros" meaning rock. (The Catholic Church has honored him by naming him the first pope.)

Each of these men not only demonstrated an adult cycle segment but showed maturity in that God included each one in the New Testament Canon. Peter shows maturity by his statement in II Peter 3:15-16. His final assessment of Paul is "dear brother."

Peter's spiritual growth takes us through his complete life cycle. Perhaps, the Pentecost experience enabled him to respond to belittlement and public renouncement in an adult manner. The Pentecost experience enabled him to maintain a "dear brother" relationship with Paul over the years which showed maturity.

Finally, God chose Mark and Peter to write the most important book of the New Testament; the gospel of Mark. This book was the first book to be written. It is the model for all other writings about Christ. Peter is mentioned twenty five times in the Gospel of Mark. All other writings take their cues from Mark's gospel "according to Peter." The Gospel gives us the life cycle of Peter in his relationship to Christ.

Peter's life is truly a sociological experience. Peter experienced "put down" words. More than that, they were written in a letter to be read by all the churches in Galatia. Paul pleaded his own case. Would you send a letter around to a group of churches and call you Christian mentors hypocrites, reputed to be pillars, fearful, they seemed

to be important? How would you respond to accusations like these if you were involved? To our knowledge Peter responded as an adult. He did not leave the church. He did not disrupt the ongoing processes of the church. Even if Peter had been wrong, Paul appears to be very sharp in his accusations and remarks. Peter, James, Barnabas, and John manifested adult responses in this situation.

Scholars have been united in saying that Paul was insisting that the New Church be separate from Judaism. That may be true, but did Paul have the right to confront and write a letter belittling the apostles? Peter handled this like an adult.

Perhaps, there is another explanation to all this controversy in the early church. Maybe there were two approaches as to how the church should relate itself to Judaism. Paul's view was designed to make a sharp separation. Peter's view may have been to befriend his friends of the past and win them over. He could have envisioned thousands coming into the church. Many times in the church two opposing programs were presented. Paul and Peter had different programming concepts.

Each of us is living out his/her life cycle over and over again. The intensity of each cycle segment and the duration of each cycle segment depends on each individual's understanding and experiences. The concept of being holy provides a pervasive, permeating, and penetrating dimension for all cycle segments that leads to consistency and continuity in one's life. It also provides a measuring concept that guides a person in his/her interpersonal relationships. The strain and anxiety of new experiences, new statuses, new roles, and personal ability can cause a person to vacillate in self-confidence. Being holy provides the measuring concept that tempers the intensity of the infrastructure of one's life.