

Peter's Denial of the Lord:

A Gospel View of Our Failures as Christians

Scripture: *Matthew 26:69-75.*

Summary of Sermon: God recognizes the **fact** of our failures, **foresees** our failures, and **forgives** our failures.

Introduction

One Easter story that is much-neglected is the story of the Apostle Peter's denial of the Lord. And yet this Easter story of Peter's failure is obviously very important because it is one of the few Easter events that are recorded in all the four NT Gospels.

I believe this story is significant because it presents to us a gospel view of our failures as Christians. First, this story teaches us that God recognizes the **fact** of our failures as Christians. Second, this story teaches us that God **foresees** our failures as Christians. Third, and most importantly, this story teaches us that God **forgives** our failures as Christians.

I trust that these **3F's** will encourage all of us when, in our walk with God, we fail to be all that we know God wants us to be, and we fail to be all that we ourselves want to be in our walk with God.

Read Passage.

I. Fact

- 1) We know from the various gospel accounts that, just a couple of hours before Peter denied the Lord as we read in this passage, Peter had tried to prevent the arrest of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane by using a sword to cut off one of the ears of one of soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus.
- 2) And yet, here in this passage, Peter melts in fear before a servant girl in the courtyard of the high priest.

Peter, the man who, just a couple of hours before, was so full of courage and good intentions, is now full of shame, bitterness, despair, and tears. Peter, the man who swore that he would die for Jesus, is now swearing loudly three times that he doesn't even know Jesus.

The maid servant recognized that Peter spoke with the accent of someone who comes from Galilee in the northern part of Israel, just like Christ. But look at how Peter responded to here, and to the others who also recognized him as being one of the disciples of Christ.

In short, Peter failed, and he failed miserably.

- 3) But Peter's story of failure is not unique in the Bible. As a matter of fact, I believe it is true to say that the whole Bible, from beginning to end, is a story of the fact of human failure.

Think about it. Adam and Eve failed, even though they lived in a perfect world. Abraham failed; he told lies about his wife. Moses, the man God uses to rescue the Israelites from Egypt, failed to enter the Promised Land.

David, the man after God's own heart, failed terribly in his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband. Solomon, the son of David, failed by re-introducing idolatry into Israel. Throughout the OT, the people of God failed generation after generation through their persistent idolatry and disobedience to God.

- 4) The NT equally records stories of God's people failing. Even in this story of Peter's denial, a few verses earlier, in **Matthew 26:35**, Matthew tells us that all the disciples swore that they would not deny Jesus, and yet, in **Matthew 26:55**, in His hour of great need, all the disciples abandoned Christ and fled. They all failed.
- 5) I believe that one of the reasons the story of Peter's failure is recorded in all the four Gospels is that it calls us, as Christians, to honestly admit the fact and the reality of our failures.

We all often fail to be and to do what we know God expects of us as His people. I fail. You fail. We all fail in one way or the other, in big ways and in small ways.

- 6) For example, I don't know about you, but I must confess that I find Peter's failure in this passage to be quite understandable because I cannot claim that I would have stood firm when Peter caved in.
- 7) So, I believe we can summarize **our first F** from this passage by saying that failure is a **fact** of our Christian lives that we do well to admit and to face honestly in the same way that the Bible admits and faces it so honestly.

II. Foreknown

- 1) Earlier in this chapter, in **Matthew 26:21**, Christ had said to the disciples: *Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.* The disciples were shocked to hear this. They responded by saying: *It couldn't be me! No way! Not me!*
- 2) Again, in **Matthew 26:31**, Christ said to the disciples: *This very night you will all fall away on account of me.* Again, they all responded by saying: *No, no, no! Of course we won't!*
- 3) Peter replied by saying: *Me? Never! I won't disown you, even if all these others do! You know me, Lord! I am even prepared to die for you!* In **Matthew 26:34**, Christ responded to Peter by saying: *This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.*
- 4) In other words, the failure of Judas and Peter and the rest of the disciples was foreseen and foreknown by the Lord.
- 5) In John's account of this incident in **John 13:38**, after Christ had told Peter that Peter would betray Him, in the following verse, **John 14:1**, Christ then went on to say this to Peter and the rest of the disciples: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me.*
- 6) Those are truly amazing words given the fact that Christ knew beforehand that all of them would soon abandon Him. When Christ spoke these words to the disciples, what He was really saying to them is this:

I know very well that one of you is going to betray me, and that one of you is going to deny me, and that all of you are going to abandon me. But all the same, I'm going to the cross to die for you, so don't let your hearts be troubled. Just put your faith in Me and what I am going to do for you soon on the cross.

. Isn't that just amazing?! That is the gospel of Jesus Christ!

- 7) So, I believe we can summarize **our second F** by saying that all of our failures as Christians are foreseen and **foreknown** by God.

III. Forgiven

- 1) In **Luke 22:31-32** Luke records that, just before Christ warned Peter that he would deny Him three times, Christ said to Peter: *Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.*

Peter then went on, as we have seen, to deny Christ. Peter's courage failed, but just as Christ prayed for him, Peter's faith did not fail.

- 2) In **John 21:15-19**, towards the end of John's Gospel, the resurrected Christ appeared out of nowhere near the Lake of Galilee where the disciples had gone to fish. He performed another miracle for them that involved their catching a great deal of fish, and He made breakfast for them.
- 3) After they had all eaten, and as they are starting to walk away from the lake, Christ turned to Peter and He asked Peter this question: *Peter, do you love me?* Christ asked Peter this question three times, just like the three times that Peter had denied the Lord.
- 4) Christ, I believe, did this to affirm to Peter that Peter's faith in Christ, and his salvation, had not failed, even though Peter had lost his nerve in the High Priest's courtyard.
- 5) Mind you, this is the resurrected Christ who has already been on the cross and who, on that cross, had taken upon himself all of Peter's guilt, failure, shame, disgrace, humiliation, and sin.

Please notice how the resurrected Christ did not wag His finger in Peter's face and say to him: *I thought you said you would never betray me?* This is what you and I would have done, isn't it?

In **John 21**, Christ did not wag His finger in Peter's face because, in **John 3:17**, Christ declared that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Christ did not come into the world to condemn Peter, but to save Peter. Christ did not come into the world to condemn you and I, but to save us.

- 6) My dear brothers and sisters, on the cross, Christ carried all our failures and our guilt and our shame. When we place our faith in what Christ did for us on the cross, God forgives us all our sins, and His Holy Spirit in-dwells us to impart into us the very life of the resurrected Christ that empowers to reject sin.
- 7) So, I believe we can summarize **our third** and **final F** by saying that the God who knows the fact of our failures, and who foreknows our failures, is the same God who, in and through Christ and the gospel, also decisively **forgives** our failures.

Conclusion

So, this is how the story of Peter's denial of the Lord teaches us that God recognizes the **fact** of our failures, that God **foresees** our failures, and most importantly, that God **forgives** our failures as Christians.

Let me end by pointing to three gospel truths and applications from this passage.

First, in **Matthew 26:33**, when Peter said to the Lord, *even if all fall away on account of you, I never will*, Peter was depending on his own strength and his good intentions to overcome this serious temptation to sin, and the result of this self-dependence was his failure.

Now, a few months later, we see that this same Peter, in **Acts 4:19**, now empowered by the Holy Spirit, standing before the entire Jewish religious authorities of whom he had been scared to death in **Matthew 36**.

When they asked him to stop preaching the gospel, Peter boldly declared to them that he would rather obey God than obey them. Peter was now no longer depending on his own strength and his good intentions which had made him fail before; he was now depending on the strength of the resurrected Christ imparted into him by the Holy Spirit.

This shows us that when we are confronted with temptations that can result in our sin and failure, we must call on the Lord in prayer, and we must desperately depend on His strength to bring us through. **1 Cor. 10:12-13**.

Second, to become a Christian, the first thing we do is to admit and confess that we have failed God. But, once we become Christians, it seems the last thing we want to do is to admit that we still fail.

We find it hard to admit that the way we often think, or what we look at when we're on our own, or the way we sometimes treat people who are less privileged than ourselves, shows failure on our parts to live up to our Christian ideals. For some of us, perhaps we have failed in ways that we are deeply ashamed of.

But please remember this, unlike Peter, you are not in the courtyard of the high priest. Please remember that you are not on trial, because Christ went on trial for you. Please remember that on the cross, Christ, the only human being who never failed, who never sinned, took your place, took all your sin and failure to death, and because you have received by faith that work of Christ on the cross for you, God now looks at you as though you have never sinned or failed. Please remember that this is why the God who foreknew your failures past, present, and future, still saved you. This is the great good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is why in **1 John 1:8-10** the Apostle John reminds us that Christ has already died for every sin we have ever committed, or will ever commit, and the Apostle goes on to counsel us that when the Holy Spirit nudges us to remind us that we have sinned, or that we have failed, all we need to do is to humbly acknowledge that sin or failure, and we accept by faith the forgiveness that is already ours in Christ.

Third, it is urgent for us to remember that our sin and failures, even though they are forgiven by the Lord, always come with a storm of trouble attached to them. They can ruin our reputations, our relationships, and they always leave a stain on our lives.

For example, Peter's biography in the Bible is forever stained with the record of his denial of the Lord. Our failures let down our families, and they set a bad example for those who look up to us, like our children. Our failures also give Christianity a bad name among unbelievers.

So, please, we dare not take sin and failure lightly as Christians, because every time we fail, like Peter in this passage, in one way or the other, we too deny the Lord.

Let us pray.

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