

WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL SAVED, REMEMBER JOHN 6

'WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL SAVED, REMEMBER JOHN 6:37

"And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.

I shall never forget a delightful lady in Scotland who listened as I explained the Gospel, and then exclaimed, "I know all that, but I do not feel saved." I tried to explain that when Christ said "Whosoever will, may come," He included her in His great invitation. Yet it did not matter what I said, she always answered, "It is useless. I do not feel saved." It appeared that if she could have experienced an electric shock, it might have strengthened her faith. James said, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20), but my friend countered that statement with one of her own, "Faith without feeling is useless."

Faith is more important than feelings. A man may be deliriously happy, exuberant with praise, and ecstatic about his religious experiences, but if at the Day of Judgment God rejected him, his feelings would be inconsequential (Matt. 7:21-23). On the other hand, a man may be depressed about his spiritual condition, but, if God welcomes him into the everlasting kingdom, doubt cannot prevent his entry. What God says is more important than feelings.

When God accepts a man, that person is accepted whether or not he believes it to be true. If God rejects a man, that soul is lost in spite of anything he may feel or say. Human emotions can change dramatically, but the Word of God is changeless and abides forever. To be saved a sinner must come to Christ, and when he does, nothing in time or eternity can prevent his being accepted. To doubt that promise is to dishonor God and destroy one's own happiness.

The Message of Forgiveness... Converts Come to Christ

"And when he (Jesus) saw their faith, he said unto him (the man with the palsy), Man, thy sins are forgiven thee" (Luke 5:20). The story of this text was remarkable, for apparently the sick man did not ask for forgiveness. He was brought by his friends in quest of healing. When the Lord saw their faith, He announced that the sinner had been forgiven. He did not promise to pardon the man at some future occasion. Christ forgave him instantly. The complaint of the assembled rabbis was understandable, for according to the law what Jesus did was unprecedented. The miracle which the Lord performed endorsed His testimony. The man was forgiven.

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The Means of Forgiveness... Converts Love Christ

"And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). She was a woman of the street, but she had access to the homes of important people. Probably she had often visited that home and had purchased favors with immoral actions. Yet on that occasion, she was there for a different reason. Somewhere she had heard the Teacher from Nazareth, and His words had transformed her desires. When she bathed the feet of Jesus and used her hair as a towel, when her tears expressed the intent of her soul, the Pharisees condemned her. Nevertheless, the story told by Jesus revealed the sincerity of her repentance. It would have been impossible for Christ not to forgive one whose devotion was so evident.

The Majesty of Forgiveness... Converts look to Christ

"And Jesus said unto him (the thief), Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). It is inter-

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esting to note that the criminal did not ask for forgiveness. Yet none can deny he was pardoned, for otherwise he would not have accompanied the Lord to paradise. Suppose someone had asked, "But how can you be sure of this?" The thief could have replied, "Do not be ridiculous. I have the Lord's word for it, and He knows what He is talking about." That Savior has never changed.

The Miracle of Forgiveness... Converts Serve Christ

Writing to his friends John said, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake" (1 John 2:12). The recipients of God's grace had united with other believers, and an assembly had been formed. Together those early Christians served their Lord and preached His message to the people of their generation. It is interesting to discover that in John's epistles the verb to know is used at least twenty-seven times. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "If there were one soul in hell upon whom were the marks of the blood of Jesus, all Heaven would be off to the rescue." Remember the words of the familiar chorus:

Only believe, only believe,
All things are possible,
Only believe.

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WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE A FAILURE,
REMEMBER PETER AND LUKE 22:32

"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

There is nothing more distressing than a feeling of failure. The realization that you have disappointed the Lord, your family, friends, and acquaintances is heart-breaking. The pain is accentuated by the knowledge it happened because of personal pride and over-confidence. The memory that God's warnings were disregarded when we said "It could never happen to me" is devastating.

Simon Peter provided the most prominent example of that type of person. When Luke described how the apostle "went out and wept bitterly," he expressed in one sentence the collapse of Simon's ego. Peter was always an enthusiastic disciple, but his reply to the Lord's warning was indicative of his character. Jesus said to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Peter replied, in so many words, "Lord, you need not worry about me. I am ready to go with you, both into prison and to death. That could never happen to me!" No man could doubt his sincerity. Peter meant every word he uttered. Unfortunately, circumstances change things, and Peter's brash statement was soon to be challenged.

There was a great difference between looking into the face of Jesus and staring into the tantalizing eyes of the maiden by the soldiers' fire. It was one thing to be boastful in the presence of other believers, but the true test of Peter's loyalty would come when he was surrounded by enemies. Perhaps there was rebellion in Peter's soul when he overlooked the other words of Jesus. "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" Later, when remorse broke his heart and tears ran down his face, Peter believed himself to be the most despicable man on earth. Many people share that experience, and shame is often the greatest hindrance to returning to active service for Christ

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God's Grace Is Greater Than Our Guilt

It is possible that someone will read these words and be haunted by memories. Perhaps a sense of shame has mined his or her service in God's kingdom, and perhaps other people also suffered. To

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a degree, the captive Jews in Babylon knew that experience, for one of their number wrote, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1). To live with past failures is a cross too heavy to be carried. The Lord knew about Peter's failure even before it happened, but that knowledge never impaired His love for the over-confident follower. Instead of criticizing Peter, Jesus prayed for him.

God's Desire Is More Important Than Our Distress

In his distress, Peter probably believed his ministry had ended when it was only beginning. The Lord knew his prayer would be answered and mentioned Simon's future ministry. "When thou art converted [turned back again], strengthen thy brethren." Sometimes it is difficult to forgive ourselves. Nevertheless, nothing should ever prevent our obedience to the Lord's call for reconsecration. After the resurrection of Jesus, an angel commissioned Mary saying, "But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him" (Mark 16:7). It seems the despondent disciple had no intention of returning, and it became necessary for the Lord to go in search of his follower (see Luke 24:34). Has He been searching for us?

God's Forgiveness Is More Attractive Than Our Failure

It would have been a tragedy if Peter had refused to respond to the entreaties of his Master. If he had stayed away, who would have been God's spokesman on the Day of Pentecost? Thousands of listeners praised the Lord when they heard the good news from the lips of the man who had failed badly. To dwell upon former failure is distressing. To persist in doing so can easily become sinful—especially when the Lord continues to call for the renewal of one's vows.

Jonah made a mistake, but he recovered and returned. Simon Peter made a mistake, but he also atoned for his failure. John Mark left his colleagues, but he also recovered and served Christ faithfully. If we feel ashamed of former failure, we should remember mistakes may become stepping stones to greater heights of achievement.

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WHEN YOU FEEL UNWORTHY, REMEMBER
WHAT PAUL SAID IN 1 TIMOTHY 1:15

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief"

A man who is completely satisfied and without ambition has outlived his usefulness. When complacency continues, challenge loses its power. Sometimes failure is the source of determination to try again. When Paul in his prison in Rome reviewed his life, he concluded he was the chief of sinners, but he was mistaken in his deduction. Every sincere Christian would question his statement,

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saying, "He never knew me!"

A Definite Mistake

Paul was not the chief of sinners, but he thought he was! Two statements summarize the life of the apostle. Writing to arrogant people in the Philippian church, he expressed the conviction that he had reason to boast more than any of his readers. Yet he regarded his achievements as refuse. He stated the astonishing fact that as "touching the righteousness which is in the law, [I was] blameless" (Phil. 3:6). It seems evident that he was one of the best people on earth. Later in his life he explained that what had been done, was done "ignorantly, in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13).

When he became a Christian, his life was completely changed, and thereafter he strove continually to have "a conscience void of offense" (Acts 24:16). A man with those qualifications could never be the chief of sinners. Nevertheless, Paul believed he was and did not hesitate to claim that dubious distinction. He was approaching the Light of the World, and in that radiance it was easy to see the blemishes on his record. A man in total darkness sees nothing!

A Different Message

Paul believed the Gospel to be unique! Other messages were being preached, but only the message of Christ was "a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance." The Romans taught that might was right, but they left slaves in chains. They believed their emperor was a god, but his conduct was a source of horror. The Sadducees believed death was the end of existence. When they died, they died as dogs and had no hope of anything eternal. The Pharisees believed in survival and claimed it depended on personal

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merit. They created innumerable laws which enslaved men. The Greeks worshiped many gods but were never sure of anything. That was the reason why Paul at Mars Hill in Athens drew attention to an altar erected to THE UNKNOWN GOD. The Athenians were never sure if a forgotten god might be offended, and they became prey to their own fear. None of those messages met the need of the human heart, and consequently Paul affirmed that only the Gospel was "a faithful message worthy of acceptance." It offered a message not found in the religious cults of his generation.

A Delightful Mission

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The Lord was not a political hero who had risen from among men. He had descended from heaven where He had been the King of the angels. He came! That signified pre-existence and a definite act of His own volition. He chose to come to earth. Three facts appear to be obvious: (1) Christ's purpose-He came. (2) Christ's patience-He endured. (3) Christ's power-He rose again to complete His assignment. The Gospel of Christ offered, above all else, assurance of sins forgiven, continuing help through life, and an abundant entrance into a life which had no end (see 2 Peter 1:11).

No other message could relate to the promises of God. Paul would have agreed with the poet who wrote, "Jesus is all we need." If for no other reason, the message of Christ was worthy of all acceptance. There was no longer a reason for any person to rest upon his or her questionable worthiness; everyone could depend upon the finished work of the Son of God.

A Dependable Christ

When Paul wrote his letters to Timothy, he was a prisoner in

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Rome either in a cell or in his own rented house (see Acts 28:30). Behind him lay a lifetime of valiant service. He had endured many difficulties and had suffered as much as any other Christian. His testimony to the faithfulness of God never wavered. His fellowship with Christ remained unbroken.

Obedying the command to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul evangelized the world of his time within a few years. He preached to all types of people, but the strength of his ministry was the abiding presence of the risen Christ. His conduct reflected the high standards of spiritual morality set forth in his doctrines. He lived an

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exemplary life and was able to write, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16). It is far better to say you are the greatest sinner than to believe you are the greatest saint.

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