



**FAILURE  
IS NOT FINAL**



**GOD IS COMMITTED TO  
OUR RECTIFICATION**

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RECTIFICATION**

“God does not take away life, but  
plans ways so that the banished one  
may not be cast out from him.”

(2 Samuel 14:14)

BY DON E. STANTON

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## DICTIONARY

Some of the terms used in this book.

**THE MESSIAH:** from the Hebrew word, *HaMashiach*, which means “The Anointed.” THE CHRIST also means “The Anointed,” and comes from the Greek word *Christos*.



**YHWH:** The Name of the Almighty revealed in the Hebrew Bible - The meaning of the Name is “**the Eternally-existing One.**” It may be pronounced as **YAHWEH** or **Yahwah**, but must be spoken with reverence.

Religious Jews do not speak the Name of YHWH, but use substitute words - *Adonai* (Lord) or *HaShem* (the Name). But God never said, “Don't speak My Name!”

In most English Bibles, YHWH is rendered as LORD (four capital letters).

**Y'shua** is the original Hebrew Name of Jesus, and means, "Yahweh is Salvation."

## BIBLE QUOTATIONS

used in this book are from the *Clear Preferred Version (CPV)*, a clear, compared teaching version by Don Stanton. It employs modern English, and uses the original Names of YHWH and Y'shua. Words in *italics* are not in the original, but are supplied to complete or to amplify the English translation.

The CPV is not complete, but scriptural quotations used in most of our recent publications are from the *Clear Preferred Version*.

## 1

### GOD IS COMMITTED TO OUR RECTIFICATION

Sometimes we may feel our lives are like a ball of wool that a frisky kitten has been playing with all afternoon. It's a mess. It's chaos, a failure. It is finished.

But there's good news! There's great news that I must share with any discouraged or defeated reader. It is "gospel truth." You do not need to grovel in the dust for the rest of your existence because of your failure. God does not want you to bear an intolerable burden of guilt for time and eternity. No! He wants to set you free from fear and frustration, and He is willing and longing to RECTIFY your life. He is waiting to take up the strands of your life, and untangle the knots that *you* or circumstances have created.

Someone has penned: "Our failures are the stepping stones to future success." There is quite an amount of truth in that statement, for much of our real learning, our experiential learning, comes out of our mistakes, our blunders and our failures.

There never was a swimmer who did not drink a few mouthfuls of water. There never was a boxer who did not sustain a stunning blow. There never was a carpenter who did not hammer his own thumb at some time. There is not one pilgrim, in heaven or on earth, who did not stumble somewhere along the narrow way. And there is not one of my readers, I suppose, who has not experienced failure somewhere in his life.

Someone has said, "the person who is afraid of making mistakes, usually never makes anything." I am not saying we should take failures lightly, but let's face it! In our lives there are bound to be mistakes and failures, somewhere. No man is perfect and sinless. If he says or thinks he is, he deceives himself, as John says:

"If we claim that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:8)

Failure, however, need not, and must not be, final - for those who trust in God. If a man has right motives before him, he can, by God's grace, overcome his mistakes, and press on to success. He can soar to great heights once more. Sometimes a person needs help and encouragement - and certainly, if he is willing for it, he can call upon the Heavenly Master and receive His power. And there is no-one better to call upon, and no-one more adequate to meet all our needs, than Y'shua, the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself.

It is true, we could name some great people whose careers have been ruined by failure. But if we really analyse their situations, we will see that their failure is not so much the mistakes they made but the inability to overcome and to push ahead to success. That inability has often been a result of built-up fears, guilt and panic.

When pressure builds up, some people resort to pushing “the panic button.” By that expression, we mean, they panic and resort to foolish, irrational measures. Instead of overcoming, they give way to defeat; they are like a terror-stricken man who runs from a grizzly bear, and jumps over a precipice. Or like the old idiom expresses it, they jump from the frying pan into the fire. Some people resort to suicide. Some go insane. Others just go further and further down a tunnel of darkness into uselessness and frustration.

A defeated or discouraged person definitely needs help - spiritual help most of all, for our most basic problem is spiritual. Without God, a man is living by his own power and that power is constantly in danger of a breakdown.

My readers in India are accustomed to the electricity supply being cut off for an hour or two – or longer. And we all know the chaos and inconvenience when there is a breakdown in power or energy supplies. And the breakdown of our own natural, human energy can lead to utter confusion and chaos in our lives.

In a very real sense, God permits us to “break-down,” so that we can begin to realize that we need a greater power to direct our lives. We need God!

It is when we are experiencing a sense of burden, and powerlessness, that the Messiah, Y’shua, comes alongside and says:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Then when we rest upon Him, we find:

“He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of him who lacks might . Even though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, those who wait *with hope* for YHWH will renew strength. They will soar up with wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:29-31)

There may be some reader saying “That’s okay in theory, but it doesn’t work in my confusion and condition. I’m too bad. I’ve really ruined everything.”

It is true some people are ruined by a lifetime of deceit or sinful living. If you go in for a career such as drug smuggling, bank robbery, or prostitution, you can be guaranteed eventual failure and ruin. Or if you follow a pathway of cheating, of stealing, alcoholism, riotous living, debauchery, you can also expect failure and defeat; for it is spiritual law:

“Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)

“Oh,” you say, “There is it. It proves it - you have to pay for your failure. There is no escape.”

“But oh,” I reply, “God can supersede even this law. He can overrule, so that even a wicked person may be saved from the full penalty he deserves. In fact, God has said:

“The soul that sins will surely die.” (Ezekiel 18:4). And yet, He also says, Whoever believes on the Lord Jesus will be saved, and not die, but he will receive everlasting life. (John 3:16)

So my friend, there is hope for anyone who calls.

Most of my readers will not be classified as drunkards, drug addicts, thieves, perverted or murderers, but even if you are included in this list, I want to tell you right at the start of this book, God can save you. He can change you, and He can turn your failure into fulfilment, and your defeat into victory. Your inability can be the gateway to His power. I will show examples in following pages, of lives that have been transformed - so wonderfully transformed, that they have become as new people.

### **WE DO NOT HAVE TO ACCEPT FAILURE AS FINAL**

In this book, I have no intention of writing about Psychology for Living. I want to deal with the spiritual side of failure and victory, for this I know very well; God is interested in our spiritual rectification. More than that, He commits Himself to rectify us, and He will do it if we simply call upon Him. As the Scripture says: ‘Whoever will call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Romans 10:13)

The Word of God is sure, it is positive. If any man receives the gospel, the good news of God, and embraces the Son of God as his personal Saviour, God will not leave that man, but will commit Himself to rectifying that life. God will work in that person: He will straighten him (or her) out, and by all means, He will achieve His purpose in him.

Paul explains:

“I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue that work until the day of Christ Jesus, bringing it to completion.”  
(Philippians 1:6)

Rectification is a word that describes God’s work of making a man what He ought to be. It means the work of setting right, of remedying, of purifying, of cleansing. It means the same as “conversion.” It means much the same as the Biblical word “sanctification,” although sanctification means much more than setting right - it means perfecting, and setting apart for holy use.

Rectification is a major part of Salvation. When the Scripture talks about saving us from our sins, it is not merely saying saving us from hell.

God is not interested merely in saving people from the Lake of Fire, and getting them into Heaven. God is not like a political party that will receive any unscrupulous character who is willing to cross the floor and stand on its band-wagon. God is interested in making people right - in changing their lives, in making them like Himself. So if He says He will save us, it means that He must rectify our lives.

Look at 1 Timothy 1:15:

“*It is a trustworthy statement, and worthy of full acceptance, that Messiah Y’shua came into the world to save (rectify) sinners, among whom I am the foremost.*”

Do you think Christ Jesus came just to transplant sinners into Heaven? Surely not! He came to save them, to rectify their lives, so that they would be fitted to live in God’s holy place.

It is with this rectification in view that James writes:

“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *obvious*, rampant evil, receive in meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21)

In the Old Testament, the question is asked, “How can a young man cleanse (rectify) his way?” The answer is the same as in James - the implanted word of God:

“By taking heed to Your Word.” (Psalm 119:9)

Several other verses also speak of this rectification of lives:

“Therefore beloved, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of body and spirit, perfecting holiness in reverence, *and standing* in awe of God. For the sorrow *that is* according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation (*rectification*).” (2 Corinthians 7:1,10)

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation (*rectification*) with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

It is only the power of God that can rectify a person’s life, and praise the Lord, that power is available to every one of us. Listen to what Paul says:

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation (*rectification*) to every one who believes.” (Romans 1:16)

“For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved (*rectified*) by His life.” (Romans 5:10)

The reason I emphasize the word rectify, is because it helps us to recognise God’s intention in our lives. Sometimes (and we so easily deceive ourselves), we want to be saved, but we don’t want to be rectified. We want to be saved from the consequences of sin, but not saved from the in-working of sin. The Scripture is clear:

“This is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

And if God is committed to our sanctification, or perfection, then He must be committed also to our rectification.

God wants to lift us up, not to throw us down. And should we see any fault, any mistake, any failure in another person’s life, let us remember that God wants to rectify his life as well as our own, and that we are not called to serve God by helping to throw another down.

The Lord Jesus is the Great Physician, not the Great Undertaker. He is interested in healing people, not in disposing of them.

If you have a motor car, and it has a punctured tyre, do you send your car to the disposal yard because of the flat tyre?

If you have a watch, and the winder breaks, do you throw the watch away, and not have it repaired? And if the Lord sees a fault, or many faults, in one of His people, will He cast him away, and not rectify? Certainly not! If God is not willing that the worst sinner should perish, how much more is He unwilling that one who has committed his life to His keeping, should fall short of His intention. God looks ahead and sees the finished product

- the life that He has molded to His perfect design - and thus He commits Himself to bring it about.

So when it comes to the question of failure, it is clear that for the one who trusts in the Heavenly Master, failure can never be final. Failure can only be a step in learning, a means of recognising our need for rectification and for greater maturity.

Romans 8:28 makes it clear that ...

“*God causes* all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

A believer then, cannot accept failure as final.

The Word implanted in Him, and the Holy Spirit living within Him, must continue to strive to lift him up out of defeat, and to lead him on to victory. The Spirit of God is so gracious, and He unravels the mistakes we make, by working them so intricately into a web of purpose and success. And being our Teacher, He delights to impart wisdom to us when we ask. And when we open our lives to Him, He rectifies and leads us higher, into God's nature.

Failure, although it brings temporary sorrow, should not cause a believer to despair. If I have failed, it makes me realize that there is some lesson I still have to learn, or master. It makes me realize that the imperfections of my life must be recognised and yielded up to the in-working of God. It makes me realize that I have not yet reached the goal. I still have a long way to go, and I need the Spirit of God to guide me, and to carry me through.

### **THE FLESH MUST FAIL**

We could list many causes of failure - selfishness, pride, hatred, greed, lust, animosity, laziness, impetuosity, unfaithfulness, envy, jealousy, unnatural affection, lack of self-control, carelessness, lack of faith, and so on. But all these things can be summed up in one phrase - the activity of the “flesh” - that is, the human nature in a person and its carnal or unspiritual efforts.

It usually comes as a shock, when we first comprehend the fact that God expects nothing of our **human** efforts, except failure! We, of ourselves, can do nothing but fail! And any success that our human nature manages to achieve is actually a failure. This seems strange, until we realize that human nature, or as it is called in scripture, “the flesh,” cannot please God, even though it takes the form of religiosity, or even an apparent (but not real) spiritual life. Paul explains:

“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the desire *and* willingness *to do good* is present in me; but how to do right I do not find.”  
(Romans 7:18)

The “Flesh” or “mind of the flesh” is the human or carnal nature.

“For those who are *walking* according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, *the sinful nature*, but those who are *walking* according to the Spirit, *set their minds* on the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh, *the carnal mind*, is death, but the mind of the Spirit *is* life and peace, because the mind of the flesh, *the carnal mind*, is hostile toward God; for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is

it able to do so, and those who are *walking* in the flesh, *the sinful nature*, cannot please God.” (Romans 8:5-8)

That Paul is not referring to the body is clear, for he tells the believers:

“However you are not in the flesh, *the sinful nature*, but *you are* in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9)

## THREE BASIC LESSONS

### LESSON 1: WE CAN DO NOTHING

Our human nature can never please God, and neither can it fulfil the commands of God. It can try, and it can make a good counterfeit, but it cannot succeed. This is the first basic lesson we need to learn. As the Lord Jesus puts it:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. If anyone lives in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for **without Me you can do nothing.**” (John 15:5)

Many a failure comes from the fact that we have confidence in our “flesh.” We put our faith in our own strength, instead of in the Lord. Victory in the Christian life is not self-effort plus God’s help. It is God taking over control of my life.

Our own inadequacy; our own inability; our own can-do-nothing-ness! This is our first lesson.

### LESSON 2:

#### CHRIST IN US IS THE POWER OF GOD

The second lesson we must learn, is the adequacy of Christ, the ability of God, the overwhelming sufficiency and power of God to do in us, what we can never accomplish ourselves.

That power and adequacy is within us, if we belong to Christ. See, in Romans chapter eight.

“For what the Law was powerless to do ... God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness *or* guise of sinful man *to be an offering* for sin. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh, *the sinful nature*, but according to the Spirit ... And if the Spirit of Him who raised Y’shua from the dead dwells in you, He who raised the Messiah from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:3, 4, 11)

### LESSON 3: WE MUST YIELD OUR LIVES TO THE CONTROL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We do not need to beg God to send down power from heaven to help us. His power is His Spirit, who is already in us, if we belong to Christ. All that we need is in Him - the Spirit of Christ.



If you have electricity installed in your home, all you need to do is to switch the power on. You don't need to write to the Electricity Dept, and beg them to send you some power.

Of course, if the electricity has never been installed, you will need to do whatever is required to effect an installation.

So it is in your spiritual life. If you do not have the Holy Spirit within you, then you have first to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. If you have received Christ as Saviour, then you have already received the Holy Spirit, for you cannot separate Them. And if you have the Spirit of God (who is, indeed, "Christ in you,") then you do not need to beg for power. You need only to "put the switch on." How? By yielding your life to the control of the Lord. As Scripture says:

"Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God ... Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service and spiritual act of worship." (Romans 6:13; 12:1)

So the third lesson we must learn is to walk according to the Spirit - that is, to let the power of the Spirit of God control our lives, and fill us, so that it can be said:

"I no longer live, but *it is* the Messiah *who* lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

Failure means that either we have not learnt these three basic lessons, or that there is some lack in implementing these lessons. If we have failed, it is our human nature that fails. If we are truly successful, it is the work of God in us. When we view from this spiritual angle, we see failure as something temporary, and we see that the solution is in yielding to the power of God.

This is the spiritual life - not our own efforts, but the power of God living in us, filling us, empowering, and leading us.

A lovely hymn expresses the truth like this:

*How I praise Thee, precious Saviour,  
That Thy love laid hold of me;  
Thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me,  
That I might Thy channel be.*

*Channels only, blessed Master,  
But with all Thy wondrous power,  
Flowing through us, Thou can't use us,  
Every day and every hour.*

*Emptied that Thou shouldest fill me  
A clean vessel in Thy hand;  
With no power but as Thou givest  
Graciously with each command.*

*Witnessing Thy power to save me,  
Setting free from self and sin;  
Thou hast bought me to possess me,*

*In Thy fulness, Lord, come in.*

*Jesus, fill now with Thy Spirit  
Hearts that full surrender know;  
That the streams of living water*

*From our inner man may flow.* - M. E. Marwell

My reader, if you have failed, or if you ever do fail, DON'T PRESS THE PANIC BUTTON, but commit your failure to Him who is well able to rectify you completely.

“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.” (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

## 2



### WHAT TO DO WITH ADAM AND EVE?

If we go right back to the beginning, to Adam and his wife, Eve, we see the entrance of failure in the human race. Here were these two beautiful, privileged people. They had perfect fellowship with the Lord, lived in Paradise, had every provision and every opportunity and resource to reach forth to the full maturity that God had intended for them.

But the test came, and they ate of the forbidden tree. Oh the tragedy! They did the one thing that God specifically told them not to do. What defeat! What failure! A sin that would affect every babe that would ever be born into the world. What should God do?

Well, if many of us Christians had been there to advise God, we would have emphasized that the best thing the Lord could do, would be to dispose of these first two people, and start all over again.

That's the “mind set on the flesh.” That's the carnal attitude that is expressed by many Christians today. If someone makes a mistake, or fails, or falls into sin, they reason the best thing to do is to “put them away,” so that they cannot do any more harm - to the Church at least.

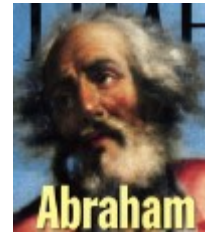
But God was determined to rectify. It was a grievous sin into which Adam and Eve fell - disobedience, and although they were put out of the Garden of Eden, God immediately set out to rectify these now-miserable creatures. He provided garments for them by slaying the first animals that ever died. And in slaying those animals, God showed that for the forgiveness of sins, blood must be shed. The animals that died in that first sacrifice, were a picture of the Lamb of God (the Lord Jesus Christ) who at the right time, became the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The Lord Jesus is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), which shows that salvation was the pre-universal provision of God. God was not taken by surprise when Adam and Eve sinned. He had a plan for their recovery. Their failure was not to be final, but a steppingstone to ultimate perfection.

So it is with us today. God is seeking to reconcile all things unto Himself, through Jesus Christ. (Colossians 1:20). And to all who are reconciled to God, is this same ministry entrusted.

“That is, that God was *personally present* in the Messiah reconciling the world to Himself, not counting *men’s* trespasses against them; and *He* has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ - *the Anointed One*, as though God were entreating through us. We implore you on behalf of the Messiah; Be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

### 3



## ABRAHAM - LEARNING FROM FAILURES

Have you ever noticed in Hebrews chapter eleven, that most of those who are listed as stalwarts of faith had some big failures in their lives? The failures are not mentioned in the “Honor Roll,” but they are in the Old Testament history.

It is not the lack of failure that qualified these great people to a place of honour, but their faith in the adequacy of God, which enabled them to triumph after their failures.

Abraham was a great man of faith, and is called the friend of God, but he had some notable failures.

When he and Sarah went down into Egypt to escape a famine, Abram made the big mistake of claiming that Sarah was his sister, and not his wife. This action was the activity of “the flesh” - the human nature, in Abraham. He thought that to lie, was the way to save his life. As it turned out, he nearly lost his wife to Pharaoh’s harem, and he could easily have lost his own head, too.

Abraham must have really felt a big failure after that. But he had a long-way to go in learning that those who are in “the flesh” cannot please God. (Romans 8:8)

Later, Abram’s herdsmen, and Lot’s herdsmen got to fighting, which led to a big split in the family. It ended up with Lot and his tribe going down to the valley of Jordan, and Abram going to the Negev.

Abram must have felt pretty guilty about that. And when Lot started “sitting in the gate” of Sodom - possibly the most evil city in the world, Abram must have blamed himself. I suppose all of Lot’s tribesmen were involved in the wickedness of the cities of the Jordan. Was it all Abram’s fault? What a big failure he was in allowing the split. No wonder he pleaded with the Lord to save the cities if even ten righteous were found.

As the cities belched forth like a fiery furnace, how Abram must have buried his head in agony. What a failure! Maybe he should go back to Ur of the Chaldeans from where he

had originally come and forget the call of God. How could God forgive him, when so many lives were lost on account of him?

Abram was beginning to learn the lesson that “in my flesh, is no good thing.” Were Abram’s big blunders the reason that God was blessing him with cattle and flocks, but not with a son?

No Abram! - it’s because you have to learn the difference between “the mind set on the Spirit” as opposed to “the mind set on the flesh.”

Abram’s next blunder was to listen to Sarai’s advice, and to take Hagar as wife, and to have a son by her. This again was the human or carnal activity that cannot please God. It certainly seemed a reasonable solution to his barrenness - but it was a counterfeit solution. It would never stand in the line of God’s promise. And what trouble that child Ishmael caused.

Abraham! How many more failures are you going to have? How the tempter must have accused him. (And that’s just what Satan does - he tempts you to resort to “the flesh” and when you do, he will accuse you for doing so!)

Then God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and Sarai’s name to Sarah, saying Sarah would become a mother of nations. But Abraham made another mistake:

“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before You!’” (Genesis 17:17-18)

Abraham wanted the son of his human carnal decision to fulfil the promise of God. Oh so often this is the reason for our failures. We want our fleshly activity to please God. Our mind is still set on “the flesh.”

Abraham had to learn that God was all sufficient. Faithful is the One who promised, who also can bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Sarah had to learn the same lesson. She also laughed, and to make it worse, she lied, saying, “I did not laugh.” Oh how she must have accused herself after that! Not only did she feel a terrible failure for not bearing a child, but now she had lied face to face to the LORD. Would He now cancel His promise, and let her wallow in agony of soul? Or would He even now forgive her, and yet give her a babe? Yes! God was interested in her rectification, and He wanted to make her a blessing, in spite of the blunders she and her husband had made. So, Isaac was born.

The next mistake was on Abraham’s part:

“Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, ‘Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.’ And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. But God said to Abraham, do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.” (Genesis 21:9-13)

Abraham leaned towards the “flesh” and reasoned, “We must retain the result of my human activity!” But Sarah had learnt the lesson - fleshly activity and spiritual resources do not go together. Often we are slow in learning that lesson, and so we pray, “Dear Lord, please bless my carnal activity.”

No! The Lord is seeking to sever us from such activity and reasoning. He wants us to embrace His spiritual resources, and to find fulfilment in Him.

Sarah was right in demanding that the son of “the flesh” should not co-exist with the son of “the spirit.”

“But it is unjust” you say, “Ishmael should not be blamed. It was not his fault that he was born in that situation. Even Hagar did not ask to become Abram’s concubine.”

Oh! There’s the “mind set on the flesh.” God was well able to preserve and bless Ishmael - and He did - and that without any further carnal activity from Abraham. But Ishmael and Isaac were not to dwell together, for greater failure would follow if they tried.

These two sons are a type or picture of the **two natures** that are at work in the believer - the “old man” (the carnal nature), and the “new man” (the spiritual nature). They are opposed to each other. The former obeys the dictates of “the flesh.” The latter obeys the dictates of the Spirit of God, and it is only as we yield to God that the victory is won by the Spirit. Paul writes:

“Put off the old man - your old self, which is corrupt because of deceitful desires, and *that you* be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man - the new self, which has been created by God in true righteousness and holiness.”  
(Ephesians 4:22-24)

Abraham, in his old age, was beginning to learn the lessons; and in the ultimate testing, he comes through triumphantly. When God told him to take Isaac and to offer him on Mt. Moriah, Abraham could have pressed the panic button. But he didn’t. He obeyed. He was learning to obey the voice of God, and not to resort to carnal reasoning or methods. He had learnt that God is able, God is adequate, and **no command that God gives is unreasonable**. And Abraham was now ready to offer up the “idol of his heart,” and to trust in the adequacy of God.

Step by step, God was rectifying his life, and preparing him to inherit the promises. God is committed to do this same work in you and me, dear believing reader. We may not be great men like Abraham, but we are nonetheless, precious gold in His loving and skilful hands.



## MOSES - THE BURNT-OUT BUSH

Moses, the man who could shake the calm of the mighty Pharaoh, and whose rod could part the Red Sea; the man who spoke directly with God, and saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and from annihilation in the Sinai; Moses the mighty custodian of the Law of God, could look back over his life and say:

“My life has been a training ground. I had to learn that it is not by intellect, nor by physical might and human energy, but by the Spirit of God, that I must triumph over failure, and do God’s will.

“By the will of God, I was born in a Jewish slave family, but was brought up in the household of Pharaoh. I was trained in all the wisdom of Egypt, so that I could have become a great leader, and even the Pharaoh. But I recognised I would always be a misfit in Egypt. I was a Hebrew, and I knew it. My people were Hebrew, and they were slaves, but they had the knowledge of the LORD God.

“I felt sympathetic, and knew I could not be a traitor to my people. I must do something, sometime, somehow, to relieve their misery. The time came when I murdered an Egyptian who was oppressing a Hebrew. I thought I could deal with the situation. But I couldn’t. When I discovered that my human activity had become known by the Egyptians, I panicked, and fled. What a failure! In a moment, everything came to an end. Why had I taken things into my own hands? I guess I thought I was adequate.

“Forty years, and with all my learning, I was in ruins, and in exile. I was a Prince of Egypt, but now I turned to looking after a few sheep. Would there be any comeback? Never! I had disqualified myself, so now I could forget Egypt, and the tribe of Jacob - and God. He would have no purpose for me after such a crime and disgrace. If I had waited, I could have become Pharaoh and released the Hebrews. But I acted with my mind “set on the flesh.” So I came to the end. I would be haunted by my failure for the rest of my life.

“Another 40 years went by, and then I saw “the bush.” This fascinated me, puzzled me; a bush that was burning and yet never burnt out. What type of bush was this? What type of fire was this? What type of phenomenon is this?

“It reminded me of my life; I had burnt out in a few minutes, but this bush kept on burning. It must be a special bush, I thought. But I had to learn the lesson that ANY BUSH WILL DO. It was God’s power that kept the bush burning. And God could take any man and fill him with divine energy, so that he would not burn out in a few minutes.

“Then God spoke to me, and told me to go to Egypt to bring the people of Israel, out of their captivity. My immediate reaction was ‘whom am I?’ I had no confidence in myself any more. I had burnt out long ago. I would settle for a retired life, resign myself to spend the rest of my days down near Horeb.

“But I looked at the bush, and at the divine energy, and it kind of staggered me; that God should still be interested in me. Why! I hardly knew Him; I was not even sure of His name, so I started to make excuses. - If I should go to the people and tell them that the God of their fathers has sent me to them - well, I don’t even know Your Name.”

“So, He told me His Name - ‘I AM - YAHWEH.’” I still argued. That was a lesson I had to learn - don’t argue with God, because He has all the answers. When I said the Israelites would not believe me, the LORD told me to throw my rod on the ground - it became a snake. It really scared me. And when the LORD told me to catch the slimy thing - well, that was about too much. But I had to catch it, otherwise I could never trust my eyes again. When it was in my hand, I tried to bend it; and it was my rod again.

“Then Yahweh told me to put my hand into my garment. When I pulled it out, it was leprous, soft and white. My heart shuddered - ‘I’m a leper!’ But, praise God, He told me to put my hand in the garment a second time. And it was okay again. Wow!

“Well, by this time, I was intrigued by the power of God, but I was not at all sure that I wanted to confront the powers of Egypt, even though I could perhaps turn them all into lepers. So I complained that I was not eloquent.

“It was hard for me to learn the lesson so soon, that the LORD can make a man dumb, or can release his tongue. And I didn’t realize immediately that my lack of eloquence was actually an asset. If I was fluent, I would probably be speaking all the nonsense that my tongue could frame. I had to learn the lesson that the “tongue set on the flesh” is a terrible fire, but the tongue controlled by the Spirit, is actually a sword of the Spirit. The LORD didn’t want eloquence, He simply wanted my tongue. The divine energy would do the rest.

“Then when I started asking for a helper to go with me, the LORD became quite angry, and I thought for a moment, the bush was going to burn me. But the LORD tolerated my obstinacy, and promised to send Aaron with me.

“Well what other excuses could I try? ‘I have married a wife.’ “I have bought some goats’ ? - No, they’ve been tried before. And besides, I dared not bring any more reasoning to this great I Am whom I was so quickly getting to know. There wasn’t anything else I could do – except obey. That was a big lesson I had to learn. God expects obedience. And when His power is available there is no earthly excuse we can bring up to show why we can’t obey.

“There were other times when I failed along the way, such as the time in the wilderness when I came to the end of my tether. I was fed up with these people. The LORD had empowered me all the way through all the trials and dangers. The people had seen the miracles of God, and yet they still complained. I became angry with them, and I complained bitterly to the Lord. I failed again! I burnt out again, this time, not with self-confidence, but with anger.

“The LORD had to teach me, that I was not the only one whom He could use to prophesy. He had given me a double portion of His Spirit, true, but He could raise up any number of leaders and prophets. So I had to learn the same old lesson - any bush will do, and I had to yield once again to the flow of HIS DIVINE ENERGY. And once more the LORD lifted me out of failure to serve Him again – until the end.”

“By faith Moses, when he had reached maturity *and* become great, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a *short* time. *He* regarded the contempt, abuse *and* shame *endured for* the Messiah as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking ahead to the reward.” (Hebrews 11:24-26)

## 5

### ISRAEL - THE WILDERNESS WANDERERS

Here was this captive nation that was miraculously delivered from the hand of Pharaoh. They had seen the Red Sea divide before them, and close behind them. They had seen water flow out of the rock to quench their thirst. They had eaten of the manna that God miraculously provided for them. They had seen many mighty works of God, but when it came to obeying the words of God, “Go up and possess the promised land,” this nation miserably failed because of unbelief.

The history of Israel is the history of a people bent on backsliding. They provoked God, they forsook Him, they turned to worshipping idols, they refused to obey without grumbling, and they became stiff-necked and stubborn. And oh, didn’t they suffer because of their unbelief!

They provoked the LORD until He said:

“Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways. So I declared on oath in My anger; ‘They shall not enter My rest’.” (Hebrews 3:10-11)



So instead of entering the Promised Land, the nation was thrown back into the wilderness. But that was not the end of the story, or of the nation. God did not say, “I’ve finished with this nation. Let them become wandering vagabonds henceforth forever.” No! He gave them a second chance, forty years later, for God had planned, and God had promised. So in due time, He moved to redeem this nation from the Sinai.

If there is one lesson to learn from the nation of Israel, it is this. God does not cast his people away. He may chastise them; He may send trouble upon them; He may allow tragedies in their lives, but it is always with the view to rectify.



How many times Israel refused to obey! How often they went after idols, and forsook the Lord. How often they persecuted the prophets. How wilfully they rejected the Messiah and called for His crucifixion. And yet Paul writes:

“God has not rejected *and* cast away His people, has He? Certainly not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away *and* rejected His people whom He foreknew!” (Romans 11:1-2)

Even though the nation has been scattered for most of the last 1,900 years, God has not given them up, but is committed to their national RESTORATION, and to their spiritual RECTIFICATION.

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brethren, lest you be wise in your own estimation; a *temporary* hardening has happened to a part of Israel *which will continue* until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written:

“THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:25-27)



## 6. AARON GIVES WAY TO PRESSURE

While considering Israel, it is worth-while pausing to consider Aaron, the High Priest. The notable failure of this brother of Moses, was his yielding to the Israelites in the Sinai when they cried out to him: “Come make us a god who will go before us.”

Can you believe that Aaron who had witnessed the mighty deliverance from Egypt, would hearken to such demands and make a gold calf for the people to worship. What a leader was this!

Surely God would destroy Aaron, or at least dispense with him. But NO! God rectified him after his failure, and led him on and made him the High Priest of Israel.

“And you shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may minister as a priest to me.” (Exodus 40:13)

The history of Israel is given for our learning; but some-times, are we not as slow as the Israelites in learning to be victorious?

BUT GOD! Blessed reality. But God is committed to save us from our wanderings and to rectify us entirely.

“Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Master, Y’shua Messiah.” (I Thessalonians 5:23)



## DAVID - IN DEFEAT AND DESPAIR

He was the greatest king Israel ever had. Evidently he was too great, for he thought he could take to himself another man's wife, that he could dispose of her husband, and that he could get away with the results.

Here was this mighty man of valour, who as a youth had slain the Philistine giant; here was the chosen and anointed King of Israel whom God had empowered and blessed; but now the same man was defeated – defeated not by the Philistines, the Ammonites, or Syrians, but by his own lust.

Until this time he was a great man of God - a valiant, God-fearing man; a Moses, a Joshua, a Gideon. He was the one who had communed with the Lord, and had written:

“YHWH is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1)

But now, in a moment of weakness, he failed. While his own men were out fighting the Ammonites, David stayed at home in Jerusalem. In those days, the kings used to go out with the troops, to direct the fighting. But this time David stayed at home. Of course, he was a “big” king now, and fighting the enemies of the LORD was left to Joab.

So he stayed home. But at home, he had to fight another enemy, and he lost, and was left wounded for life.

David already had several wives, including a princess, but Bathsheba appealed to him. So he sinned, and she became pregnant. That, however, was not the end of the story.

To the “mind set on the flesh,” there was one answer — press the panic button! So he did, and made things a hundred times worse.

He summoned Bathsheba's husband Uriah under false pretences, and then sent an “execution order” by Uriah's own hand, to Joab, his commander.

“Now it came about in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he had written in the letter, saying. ‘Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die’.” (2 Samuel 11:14-15)

What treachery! What conspiracy! Was this the deed of a MAN OF GOD?

So to lust and adultery and treachery, he added murder. What a failure! This was not just failure, a mistake; this was cold-blooded wickedness. How could God forgive all this? How could David avoid ending up like his predecessor, King Saul, rejected and slain on the open mountain?

At first David thought there was no harm. When he took Bathsheba, he thought, “Her husband is away in the battle. And I am the king of Israel, and kings can take liberties.”

When Uriah was dead, David thought the situation could now be “regularized” and he would atone for any injustice by making Bathsheba his favorite queen. But David had to learn that even kings cannot do as they fancy. Tragedy after tragedy followed in David’s life thereafter.

Yet the LORD was committed to the rectification of David’s life. He would not leave him, nor forsake him, nor banish him, even though David had made such a terrible mess of his life, and his reign.

The LORD sent the prophet Nathan to David to lead him to repentance. Nathan’s account of the very rich grazer who took a poor man’s one and only pet lamb, cut it up, and served it as food for a wayfarer, is very touching. (Read the account in 2 Samuel 12). And it touched David on the right spot. He was furious because of the rich grazer’s treachery, and declared that the rich man should die.

Then the prophet of God threw his “javelin” right into David’s conscience by saying, “You are the man!”

“Nathan then said to David, ‘You are the man! Thus says the YHWH God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the YHWH by doing evil in His sight?’

“You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife; you have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife’.” (2 Samuel 12:7-10)

Conviction fell upon him like an ironsmith’s mallet. David collapsed in a heap of agony and despair. “I have sinned against the LORD,” he cried.

Yes! And how could he dare ask the LORD for forgiveness? What a wretched man he was! How unjust he had been. He should die, and go to hell, and toss and turn in agony, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, for ever and ever.

Not only had he sinned against Uriah, but also against Bathsheba, and against Israel, against himself, but also, and most of all, against God.

“I am the greatest sinner in Israel, if not in the whole world. How can God be merciful to me? How could God ever take me up again?” Listen to him cry in agony:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness; according the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Your sight. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your Face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean

heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.” (Psalms 51:1-4, 7-14)

Did God hear, and answer? Yes, for David cast himself on the mercy of God, and he was enabled to perceive the truth that “a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” (v.17)

Yes God raised David up again, and made him to triumph over his enemies once more. His future life, however was plagued with sorrows; his daughter Tamar was brutally ravished by her brother Amnon. Amnon in turn was murdered by his brother, Absalom, which led to Absalom’s estrangement to David for 3 years.

Later Absalom divided David’s kingdom and became his enemy, until he (Absalom) was violently killed. Oh the heartache and tragedy, and how David must have blamed himself. But God enabled him to rise up again, and to rejoice in the Lord, and to sing His praise.

David had learnt that God does not banish His people when they fall. Indeed this truth came home to him while Absalom was banished from the kingdom, through the words of the wise Takoan woman:

“For we shall surely die and are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one may not be cast out from him.” (2 Samuel 14:14)

If God had not banished David for his wickedness, how could David continue to banish Absalom from his presence? He perceived the truth, anew; God desires our rectification. What God had done in David’s life, He was longing to do in Absalom’s life also. And in your life and my life too!

*Jesus, the very thought of Thee, with sweetness fills my breast;  
But sweeter far Thy face to see, and in Thy presence rest.  
O hope of every contrite heart! O joy of all the meek!  
To those who fall, how kind Thou art! How good to those who seek!*

8



## **IMPETUOUS PETER**

Failure in the Lord’s people is not confined to the Old Testament. The history of the early Christians reveals the trials, the disappointments, the defeats and failures of some of the greatest.

Peter was the foremost of the Lord's disciples, and the one who swore that he would never forsake the Lord. But he did!

The words of Jesus to Peter show that our Master is not taken by surprise when any of His followers bungle in their efforts to follow the Saviour. The Lord knows, and He plans also to raise them up again.

“Simon, Simon! Look, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ And he said to Him, ‘Master, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!’ And He said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me’.” (Luke 22:31-34)

These words also show that Satan is sometimes the cause of failure in a believer's life. And if Satan is behind many a defeat, how we should be all the more concerned to lift up, and to restore a brother, or sister, who has been overcome in any way; and also to watch lest we ourselves become his victims too.

Peter was rather impetuous, wasn't he? Quick to give his advice, and to assert his leadership ability. No doubt, he considered himself the Master's right hand man.

During his “training period” he made a big blunder by advising the Lord against going to Jerusalem.

“Get behind me, Satan,” was the Lord's reply. What a rebuke! But Peter had to learn the same lesson that you and I have to learn; the mind set on the flesh, is enmity to God. Y'shua must have really shocked Peter by His rebuttal.

“Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me; for you are not mindful of the things of God, but of the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23)

This big blunder had come only a short time after the Master had encouraged Peter, and said to him, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

Well, maybe Peter thought the Messiah had promoted him, and made him His #1 Shareholder in the kingdom - so Peter should have some right in planning things, and helping the Master to keep from making any “mistakes” - like going to Jerusalem to suffer and die.

But Peter's mind was set on man's interests, not on God's. How was he going to be a successful “partner” for the Messiah?

Well, he had more to learn, and so Y'shua immediately began to teach Peter, and **all** His disciples, the principle of “THE CROSS.”

“Then Y'shua said to His disciples, ‘If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it’.” (Matthew 16:24-25)

So Peter grappled with that unwieldy principle, and decided, “Okay, I'm willing to die also. Let's all go to Jerusalem and die with Him,” just like, pessimistic Thomas had suggested on another occasion.

Peter was impetuous, and assured his Master in no uncertain terms:

“I will lay down my life for You.” (John 13:37)

“Master with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death.” (Luke 22:33)

Again he was silenced by the Lord’s words:

“I am telling you the truth, a cock shall not crow until you deny Me three times.”  
(John 13:38)

Peter had to learn that he could not trust himself, or his own resolutions, just like we have to learn that good resolutions are not enough. If we trust in “the flesh,” and the “mind of the flesh,” we will fail.

And one other lesson Peter had to learn is that when the Master says we must take up the cross daily, and follow Him, it is not merely a matter of “giving our bodies to be burned,” but of [dying to self](#), and [embracing the life of the Spirit!](#)

Peter had to learn that “the flesh,” even though it might embrace a Roman cross, could not please God. It was the spiritual man, whose mind is stayed upon God, that alone could embrace the “cross life” the Lord was talking about.

Peter, at first, was sure that his “flesh” could follow the Messiah. And when the test came, he failed. Of course! While he had confidence in himself he could not help but fail. So he denied the Lord thrice; and oh the pang of regret when the cock crew, and when the wordless glance of the Master pierced his heart.

What a failure! Not only had his impetuous tongue said the wrong things and got him into trouble in the past, but now it had done the thing he had thought impossible. He had denied his Lord.

Now everything was over. Now they were condemning the Lord of Glory; and they were taking Him to Calvary, to die - and [Peter was not going along with Him.](#)

For three days, what torment! What tragedy! What failure! There would be no remedy, no comeback, no hope. His life was shattered, ruined, wretched. The words of the Master kept coming back to his mind.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail: and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32)

But his faith had failed. Failed so terribly. Now Peter, the “stone,” to whom the Lord has entrusted the keys of the kingdom, the Lord’s “right hand man,” was a write-off. He could never continue the work of the Messiah. He could never be entrusted with anything, anymore. Then the angel’s message came –

“Go, tell His disciples and Peter, He is risen, and He is going before you into Galilee.” (Mark 16:6-7)

Yes, the Master had promised to restore His disciples.

Was He not the Good Shepherd? Had He not given His life to save the sheep? And would He not lift this sheep out of his pit of self-pity? He surely would, and He surely did!

It was there in Galilee that the Master spoke the word of rectification to Peter, and then charged him to “take care of My sheep.” (John 21:15-17)

“Peter, you have learnt the lesson. Now don’t forget. YOU must also become a shepherd. You must give your life for My sake, and for the sake of the brethren. Now you are rectified, strengthen and rectify your brothers also.”

This is one of the ways in which God causes our failures to work together for His good in our lives. Out of our own experience of failure and restoration, we can help bear the burdens of others, and to lift their discouraged heads up to gaze into the face of JESUS - Y’SHUA.

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (I John 3:16)

**9**

**PAUL -**



### **THE PERSECUTOR - TURNED - PREACHER**

He could never forget it, all through his life. He had been the persecutor of the Way. He had raided the believer’s homes and dragged them off to prison, and had had them terribly beaten.

At that time Paul, of course, was not converted. He was the self-righteous Pharisee who considered himself a worthy servant of God. And he thought he was doing God a favour by persecuting the followers of Christ.

He was utterly blind to the truth. He was stone-deaf when it came to hearing God’s words. He himself was captivated and bound by chains of ignorance, bigotry and unbelief. And I don’t think there has ever been a greater shock than the one Paul received on the way to Damascus, when he discovered that the Y’shua whom He persecuted, was actually the Living God. That shock must have registered 9.9 on Paul’s “Richter scale.”

Can you imagine the collapse of this self-styled “servant” of God and his world of religiosity? How is it that God had not struck him down dead? How could God have mercy on such a ruthless wretch? How could God have mercy enough to rectify the life of this “chief of sinners?”

It was God’s grace! And Paul never forgot it.

Another “chief of sinners” whom God saved and rectified many centuries later, was John Newton, the slave trader, who later wrote the famous hymn:

*Amazing grace, How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now I’m found.*

***Was blind, but now I see.***

I can imagine Paul and John Newton having a friendly argument over the title, “chief of sinners,” - not that they would be proud to own the title but because they had been objects of the most amazing grace. I can imagine them both trying to out-sing each other on that moving stanza above.

What a wonderful work God did in both their lives, not only at the beginning but all the way through. It was not “saved by grace” and then “rectified by self-effort.” Every step of the victorious Christian life is by God’s grace.

Paul wrote:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, not yet I, but the grace of God *that is* with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

John Newton also wrote:

“’Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

This is the lesson we all must learn - it is GOD’S GRACE, God’s power that must keep us from failure.

***Grace! ’Tis a charming sound, harmonious to the ear:  
Heaven with the echo shall resound, and all the earth shall hear.  
Grace taught my wandering feet to tread the heavenly road;  
And new supplies each hour I meet while pressing on to God.  
Grace taught my soul to pray, and made my eyes overflow  
’Tis grace had kept me to this day and will not let me go.*** - P. Dodbridge

In our difficulties, on the rugged narrow way, we have the promise of the Lord:

“My grace is sufficient for you.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

It means, to use our earlier expression - “Our adequacy is Christ, the power of God, living in us richly by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul had to learn, as we all must learn, to draw upon that grace, that adequacy, in all things. To the Corinthians he wrote:

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me — to keep me from exalting myself!” (2 Corinthians 12:7)

The “thorn in the flesh” is said to have been a weakness in this mighty servant of God. What the weakness was, we are not told. Some suggest it was a physical ailment, such as bad eyesight. Maybe. But Paul says it was a “messenger of Satan to buffet me.”

Maybe it was some besetting form of trial or temptation. We don’t like to think of this noble apostle having any fault, but being in the body, and being in the forefront of the spiritual warfare, it is impossible that Paul should not be buffeted, and any weaknesses exploited by Satan. And if the Lord Jesus was tempted again and again, is it possible that any servant of God should not face temptation?



Whatever it was, Paul had to learn that sometimes weaknesses may not be removed. They would have to be endured and overcome by the grace of the Lord.

Whatever it is in our lives that is liable to be attacked, that is open to Satan's exploitation, that makes us discouraged, or that makes us prone to fail, it can be adequately dealt with by the grace of the LORD.

And beloved, when the pressure is on, when you are being bombarded by discouraging circumstances, and when Satan's fiery missiles zero in on your vulnerable areas, don't think it strange! And don't press the panic button! Peter says:

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon you to test you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4:12)

You are not the first servant to be tempted and tested; you are not alone in facing the angry billows that roll over the soul. You have not won a ballot to be buffeted like no one else before. The dice has not been cast so that you, like Jonah, must be cast overboard. Paul makes it clear:

“No temptation has seized you that people do not normally experience. And God is faithful; He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

The Master will provide a way out. His grace is adequate. He wants you to look to Him, and to draw upon His divine enabling.

*Oh here comes JESUS, walking on the water*

*He'll lift you up, and help you to stand.*

*Oh here comes Jesus,*

*He's the Master of the waves that roll,*

*Oh here comes Jesus; let Him take your hand.*

The apostle Paul certainly had his share of fiery trials and persecutions. You might say he was always getting into trouble. Just read 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 and you will get some idea of his troubles. He was scourged, not once, but five times. He was beaten with rods, not once, but thrice. He was shipwrecked, not once, but thrice. Besides that he was beaten times without number, and thrown into prisons on many occasions.

Another man may have counted himself a big failure, and certainly Satan must have accused him constantly, saying that it was all his OWN foolishness that had brought the troubles upon him. If he hadn't upset authorities, he could have avoided many of the troubles, and been more of a success.

But no! This man did not count troubles as failures. He did not consider Satan's apparent victories as his failures. He knew that the victory is the Lord's.

When he was stoned and left for dead at Lystra, he did not bemoan the fact and count it as the end. He did not decide to pack up and go home, and regard himself forever after as a missionary casualty. Not this man. Any type of failure was a hurdle to jump, and he could do it in the strength of Y'shua. If his body was a hindrance, then he would buffet it, but press towards the goal he must. And whatever circumstances came along, he was

absolutely confident that God would work them together for good - for God's good, as well as his own.

Paul did not consider himself perfect, but he was certain he must forget the past and press on. If there was any past failure, he could confess it to the Lord. If there was any past success, praise God; but that was not the goal. The ultimate goal was still ahead.

“Not that I have already obtained *this*, or have already been perfected, but I press on so that I may take hold of that for which the Messiah, Y'shua, took hold of me. Brethren, I do not consider that I have taken hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Y'shua.”  
(Philippians 3:12-14)

There was one time when Paul may have been severely tempted to think he had made a big mistake. When he was passing through Caesarea, the prophet Agabus proclaimed that Paul would be bound at Jerusalem. The local believers as well as his companions therefore began to beg Paul not to go to Jerusalem. It was the consensus of opinion that he should not go. But he refused, saying:

“What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Master, Y'shua.” (Acts 21:13)

The result of his decision - call it determination or stubbornness as you will - was more than two years in prison in Caesarea, and the rest of his life in prisons in Rome. What a waste of precious years it must have seemed. Had he done wrong in not hearkening to the pleas of the believers? Dared he believe that HE alone was right, and all the others were wrong? Or had he mistaken God's will? Had he been foolhardy and unwise? Had he failed after all, and was now paying for his self-confidence?

There will be times like this in all of our lives, beloved, when it seems we have mistaken God's will and have acted in “the flesh” instead of “the Spirit.” At such times we need to trust God to overrule. If we **have** made a mistake, we can be assured it has not taken the Master by surprise.

And He has not lost His power to rectify. He is still adequate to meet our needs and He is still determined to conform us to His image, whether by a direct route, or by any diversion that we may have taken, by mistake.

Was Paul right or wrong in persisting on going to Jerusalem? That is difficult to answer, but what is certain is that it was ordained for Paul to bear the Saviour's Name before gentiles and kings, and to suffer for the His sake. (Acts 9:15-16). From prison Paul could write:

“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel, so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Messiah has become well-known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren trusting in the Master because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the Word of God without fear.”  
(Philippians 1:12-14)

God has His own wonderful ways of working all circumstances, even our real or imagined mistakes, into a network of purpose and perfection. That's grace, amazing grace!

## 10

### GOMER - THE SHAMELESS HARLOT

One of the most touching examples of the compassion of God for those He loves, is seen in the story of Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim.

Hosea the prophet was commanded to take a harlot to be his wife. He took Gomer, whose life graphically pictured the tragic "harlotry" of the nation of Israel. Israel was regarded as God's "wife," but she was forever forsaking the Lord. (See Hosea chapters 1, 2, & 3).

The children of Gomer were all named so as to give a warning or message to the house of Israel. The continued harlotry and chastisement of Gomer was a warning that God would also chastise adulterous Israel. Hosea says:

"Lest I strip her naked and expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, make her like desert land, and slay her with thirst. Also, I will have no compassion on her children, because they are children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them. She will seek them, but will not find them. Then she will say, I will go back to my husband, for it was better for me then than now!" (Hosea 2:3-5,7)

And after describing the means of punishing his wife, the prophet says:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak kindly to her." (Hosea 2:14)

Hosea would not "put away" his unfaithful wife, but would win her back, restore her and make her faithful. And God would do likewise to His "wife," Israel.

"And I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice. In lovingkindness and in compassion. And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know YHWH. And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion. And I will say to those who were not My people; 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'" (Hosea 2:19-20, 23)

Oh what a picture of abounding grace; grace that surpasses all our sin. Paul explains about this Godly action:

"So then, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation to all men, so also the result of one righteous act was *that* justification of life *was made possible* for all men. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One, many will be made righteous. The Law entered so that the transgression would increase, *that is, become more apparent*; but where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace would reign through righteousness *bringing* eternal life through Y'shua the Messiah our Master." (Romans 5:18-21)

To show grace, to cleanse, to forgive, to rectify and to perfect, is just like God. How wonderful that He is not a man, but a loving, gracious Creator who truly cares for people in need.

Do you see then why Y'shua the Messiah did NOT tell the Pharisees to stone the woman taken in adultery? Do you see why He went out of the way to rescue the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands? Do you understand why the Messiah allowed the immoral woman to pour perfume on his feet, and to wet His feet with her tears, and to wipe His feet with her hair, and to kiss His feet without ceasing? (Luke 7:36-50)

### **A MULTITUDE OF WITNESSES**

We have considered a few of the great servants of God ... Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul and the rectifying grace of God in their lives. But the list is endless, for God does not reserve His grace for a select few of His people, but for EVERY one of them.

Throughout the Old Testament, throughout the New, down through the church age, and throughout the world today, a multitude of believers have testified to *the grace* of God, and that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:6). Multitudes can testify, "Praise God. He lifted me. He did not DISPOSE of me, but RECTIFIED me. I failed Him, but He never failed me."

One lesson we must learn is that when the grace of God lays hold of an individual, it will never leave him, but will perfect that which concerns him.

## **11**

### **COME, LET US RETURN TO THE LORD**

"Come, let us return to YHWH, for He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know YHWH. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth." (Hosea 6:1-3)

The message of Hosea strikes at the sins of the people of the northern kingdom of Israel and indicts them in no uncertain terms. The northern kingdom (also called Ephraim) is likened to a harlot, and to an adulterous and idolatrous wife. (chapter 2-3).

Israel was also like a stubborn heifer (4:16).

Ephraim was joined to idols (4:17).

He had multiplied altars for sin (8:11).

Israel was unfaithful, disloyal (2:1-13)

She had devised evil against the Lord (7:15).

Ephraim was surrounding Yahweh with lies, and Israel was full of deceit (11:12).

If ever there was a hopeless nation, it was the northern kingdom of Israel with its capital at Samaria. If ever there was a nation that should be disposed of, it was this kingdom of Ephraim. And indeed God warns that He would chastise and punish the nation. He says:

Ephraim would become a desolation (5:9)

They would be torn in pieces as by a lion (5:14)

They would reap the whirlwind (8:7)

And fire would consume its cities (8:14)

The LORD even says:

“I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more.” (9:15)

And yet, in the reasoning, and the warnings of the LORD, we can sense the yearning of God for the restoration of His people. Yahweh says:

“When Israel was a youth I loved him; and out of Egypt I called My son.” (11:1).

And in the depth of compassion, He cries out:

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.” (11:8-9)

And all along, the prophet Hosea is crying to the people to turn to Yahweh.

“Come, let us return to YHWH. For He has torn us, but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.” (6:1)

“Therefore, return to your God. Observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually.” (12:6).

“It is time to seek YHWH, until He comes to rain righteousness on you.” (10:12)

“Return, O Israel, to YHWH your God .... Take words with you and return to YHWH. Say to Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously that we may present the fruit of our lips.” (14:1-2)

And once they set their eyes in the right direction, they find that God, like the father of the prodigal son, is waiting with arms wide open to receive them. How God delights in mercy!

“I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily and he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.” (Hosea 14:4-6)

Oh what a tender, compassionate God!

I'm writing now, particularly for any reader who has failed, or who feels estranged from God and His people. You may have failed in any one of a hundred ways. You may have sinned against Yahweh the LORD. You may have made a mistake or a blunder. You may have fallen into a pit, or got caught in a snare.

You may be discouraged, you may feel you are right out of the way. You may even feel you are lost. But now is the time to seek the LORD, to return to Yahweh and find peace and the rest and assurance in Him.

You may have been offended and stumbled by Christians or other people, but now I beseech you, turn your eyes away from people and turn your eyes upon the Messiah Jesus.

So what if other people have hindered you, harmed you, or harassed you! Will you even now allow them to rob you of your peace, of your joy of salvation? Are those people the ones with whom you have to deal, to receive the compassion of the Lord? No! Return to Y'shua. It is HE who was wounded you. And it is HE who will bandage you up.

Did you once know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Will you cast your memory back to the times of joy you experienced in His Presence?

Remember how you appreciated the Saviour, and rejoiced in Him? Remember the fellowship you had with spiritual fellow-believers. Remember how you delighted in the Word of God, and in prayer. Now make up your mind to return to the Heavenly Master today.

Y'shua Himself told the story of the prodigal son. (Luke 15). This son, you will remember, went astray. He left his father's home, taking his inheritance. He reached a distant country, and there squandered his wealth with loose living. When he came to the end of his "good time," he was desperate, and ended up feeding pigs.

In this pitiful condition, he remembered his father, and how even his father's servants were living well, while he was dying of hunger. He decided to return to His father, and ask him to make him a hired servant. When he arrived home, the father was waiting, not to make him a servant, or to humiliate him further, but to restore him to his place as a beloved son

Was the Lord Jesus telling YOUR story also? Are YOU the one HE is anxiously waiting to restore? Then return now without delay!

You may not regard yourself as a prodigal son, in such depths of sin. Well, whatever your condition, whatever your need, take encouragement from that story. If the Lord received the most wilful sinner, will He not receive you?

But my beloved friend, don't excuse yourself, or your sin. If you have made a mistake, if you have done wrong, if you have failed miserably, or if you have committed the most grievous sin, confess it to the Father and ask His forgiveness and cleansing.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Not only will He forgive you, and cast your sins away, but He will restore, and heal you.

"Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possessions? He does not retain His anger forever.

"Because He delights in unchanging love, He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19)

"Come, let us return to YHWH for He has torn us, but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him." (Hosea 6:1-2)

What comforting words! Does it not make your steps quicker, and cause you to run back to the loving arms of the Heavenly Father?

Why do you hesitate my reader? Do you feel no-one loves you, no-one cares for you? Well I do! I'm writing this message, because I care for you. It's true, some people may like to see you grovel in the dust for ever, but I'm writing because I long to see you restored to your Father.

If I could talk with you personally, I would tell you the same things and I would pray with you and plead with you to **trust** the Lord, and to run into His arms. And in fact, right now, as I'm writing this message, I'm praying that it will be used to help every needy reader - to help YOU yield your life to the Saviour.

Far more important than my care and concern, though, is the care and love of the Lord Himself, for you, dear reader. And if the Master loves you so much, what does it really matter what others think, or say, or how they regard you, or whether they don't care for you at all? It is not as though we have to get some critical or self-righteous Christian to recommend our "case" to God. Oh no! Jesus knows, Jesus cares, Jesus saves, Jesus restores, Jesus rectifies and Jesus is the One who will perfect that which concerns us. So look up to the Lord Jesus. Look full into His wonderful Face.

It may be that some reader is saying, "But I am afraid that if I yield to the Lord Jesus, I may fail again. I've tried before, but keep on failing. So it is no use trying again."

I'm not asking you to TRY. I'm asking you to TRUST and that's what the Saviour is asking you to do. As pointed out, you can do nothing but fail by your trying – human effort. But if you TRUST the Saviour, He will be your victory. He will do the work in you. He will keep you. His grace is fully sufficient for your need, and is far greater than all your sin and shameful past. You can succeed and win the victory through Christ. Read the following hymn, and let the Messiah strengthen you to believe, right now.

*Soldier, soldier, fighting in the world's great strife,  
On yourself relying, battling for your life;  
Trust yourself no longer; trust to Christ - He's stronger;  
I can all things, all things do through Christ, who strengthens me.*

*In your daily duty, standing up for right,  
Are you sometimes weary; heart not always light?  
Doubt your Saviour never, this your motto ever:  
I can all things, all things do through Christ, who strengthens me.*

*If your way be weary, He will help you through -  
Help you in your troubles and your pleasures too.  
Say, when Satan's by you; say, when all things try you:  
I can all things, all things do through Christ, who strengthens me.*

*In a world of trouble, tempted often to stray,  
You need never stumble; Satan cannot stay,  
He will tempt you vainly, if you tell him plainly  
I can all things, all things do through Christ, who strengthens me.*

*Jesus' power is boundless, boundless as the sea;  
He is always able, able to keep me,  
Power bring from my weakness; glory from my meekness:  
I can all things, all things do through Christ, who strengthens me.*

- R. Hudson Pope

If you come to the Master, and yield yourself whole-heartedly to Him, He will teach you and show you anything that is lacking in your experience. But remember, right at the beginning; be determined not to neglect the reading of the BIBLE and REGULAR PRAYER. These two things YOU must continue in. Many a failure has sprung from the neglect of these two “means of grace.”

Now don't hesitate further. The Lord of Glory is waiting to turn your mourning into joy, and to give you a garment of rejoicing in place of your cloak of heaviness.

Pray to the Heavenly Father right now, expressing the following points:

1. CONFESS any failure or sin in your life.
2. ASK the Lord for forgiveness, cleansing, healing, restoration, rectification.
3. SURRENDER your life anew, and wholeheartedly, to Him, and make Jesus, the MASTER of your life.
4. Ask the Father to EMPOWER you by His Holy Spirit to live as His true disciple.
5. Ask the Saviour to KEEP you. Express your faith that He will do this, for He has promised.
6. Ask the Father also if there is ANYTHING you should do, to complete your surrender to Him. For example:
  - a. Are there any relationships you need to put right? Are there any apologies you should make?
  - b. Are there any steps you need to take to “burn your bridges behind you”?
  - c. Are there any activities you have been engaging in, or any relationships that you now need to curtail?
  - d. Is there any restitution you should make?
  - e. If there anything on your conscience worrying or convicting you, tell the Master about it.

Be determined to do just whatever the Master wants you to do. Now I leave you with your Heavenly Master, praying that the next hour will be a blessed time as you wait upon Him. May He graciously set you free.

*Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,  
Jesus, I come! Jesus I come!  
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of my sickness into Thy health,  
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,*



*Out of my sin and into Thyself, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of my shameful failure and loss,*

*Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!*

*Into the glorious gain of Thy Cross, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of earth's sorrows into Thy balm,*

*Out of life's storm and into Thy calm,*

*Out of distress to jubilant psalm, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of unrest and arrogant pride,*

*Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!*

*Into Thy blessed will to abide, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of myself to dwell in Thy love,*

*Out of despair into raptures above,*

*Upward for aye on wings like a dove, Jesus, I come to thee!*

*Out of the fear and dread of the tomb*

*Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!*

*Into the joy and light of Thy home, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

*Out of the depths of ruin untold,*

*Into the peace of Thy sheltering fold*

*Ever Thy glorious Face to behold, Jesus, I come to Thee!*

## 12

### FOR THOSE THAT ARE SPIRITUAL THE MINISTRY OF RESTORATION

There's a special verse in the Bible - a special command, for spiritual people. Yes, it is a command! But it is distasteful to "the mind set on the flesh." It is irksome to the carnal Christian, for his mind is not "set on the spirit." And besides, not being spiritual, he would not know how to obey the command anyway. It is in Galatians.

"Brethren, if a man is caught in any trespass - in any sin, you who are **spiritual, restore him in a spirit of gentleness**. But watch yourself, lest you too be tempted! Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law - *the teachings and commands* - of the Messiah." (Galatians 6:1-2)

Today, throughout the world, and just outside the confines of the church, are scores, hundreds, thousands of people, many of whom were once sincere believers, who have failed in their Christian lives. Some of them have drifted away from the church. Others have been cast away - disposed of, as it were, and relegated to the tunnels of darkness they have created for themselves. "Backsliders," they are sometimes called. We "good church people" are inclined to shake our heads, and tut-tut our tongues like the ratchet on a wheel of fortune. "It's terrible," we say, "It's really terrible - these people who make a

profession of faith, and after a while they've backslidden and gone back to the world. Tut tut tut."

And yet we don't really care. The only concern we show is our tut-tutting. A spiritual man does not tut-tut. He prays, and then he follows the example of the Messiah and goes after the lost sheep.

"Oh ho!" you say, "I thought the lost sheep are the sinners, the unconverted - all those who are going to Hell!"

No, you're wrong! Those on the way to the eternal fire are the lost **goats**, (see Matthew 25:31-46). The lost sheep are those who belong to the fold, but have somehow lost the track and got caught in a thicket. Sometimes they have fallen and broken a few bones, and they need a shepherd to help them get out of their pit. They usually can't do it on their own.

So this is where the spiritual people must come in. They have a responsibility. Peter was told to "shepherd My sheep." (John 21:16), and I'm sure Y'shua was not saying that Peter would be the only shepherd the flock would ever know throughout its long history. Peter himself writes:

"As a fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of the Messiah, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you; shepherd the flock of God that is under your *care*, serving as overseers, not under compulsion, but voluntarily; and not with a greed for money, but with an eagerness *to serve*; and do not be as masters over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (I Peter 5:1-4)

To shepherd the flock, also means to pastor the flock. Many Christian leaders are called Pastors; that's because they are supposed to be shepherds.

Alas, the "pastoring" by some, is the delivering of a sermonette on Sunday morning to feed the flock, and then feeding their own souls on T.V. dinners the rest of the week. Oh, of course, I know I should not say things like this, but really! The Chief Shepherd is going to come very soon, and HIRELING SHEPHERDS are not going to get an unfading crown of glory.

There's so many sheep caught in the thickets, but we pastors! What do we do? Well I could make a list of the things "we spiritual pastors" do:

1. We visit homes of the "good" church people, and drink lots of tea and coffee.
- 2.. We try to encourage the members who are rather weary of our sermonizing, to come to the church more often, so that we don't have so many empty pews pondering our pleasant philanthropeze.
3. When one of our sheep goes astray, we say, "Oh well, as long as there are not too many losses like this, our church budget should not suffer too much."
4. We give the lost sheep a certain amount of time to find his way back, and then if he doesn't, we give him up for dead.
5. If one of our sheep commits a grievous sin, we accuse him, abuse him, judge him, deal with him, humiliate him, expose him, expel him, and then excommunicate him (that

last word means, we don't communicate with him any more). And all this to one of the Messiah's blood-bought lambs.

6. We conveniently forget that God loves every one of His children, and His heart is aching for the wandering son to return. So we seal up our tender compassions, and make hollow and self-righteous excuses for our neglect.

Well, lot's more we do. But what we **don't do**, is even more telling.

1. We never think that a lost sheep may be in a life-or-death-struggle, and that we should leave the 99, and go after the missing one.

2. We never seem to think we are responsible for the lost sheep – that we ARE our brother's keeper.

3. We never seem to recognise that our own powerlessness, and prayerlessness, and carelessness, can have a very detrimental effect upon the church, and that we may indirectly, if not directly, be a contributing cause of the backtracking of some of the pilgrims.

4. We never like to search our hearts, to see if we have been a stumbling-block, and helped to drive precious souls away from the Lord.

5. We never like to go out of the way to restore a fallen saint. Like the high priest, and the Levite, we may give the wounded man a disdainful, or per chance a sympathetic glance, and then pass by on the other side of the road. But we don't like to kneel with him to pour in the oil, and bandage his wounds.

6. We never like to remember our own background, and that we ourselves were "born in sin"; that we have been lifted out of our horrible, miry pit; and that our legs are still very much made of clay!

Oh no, beloved brother, beloved sister; if we are spiritual men and women, we have a spiritual work to do – to tend the flock. Paul puts it this way:

"Messiah in you, the hope of glory, whom we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect, *mature and complete* in the Messiah. For this *reason* also I toil, striving according to His power which mightily works within me." (Colossians 1:28-29)

If only Christians, who call themselves believers, would recognise that God is committed to rectification in the lives of all His people, it would help to break down our false pretences and fleshly pride, and also the impregnable barriers that we have built around the "church."

Instead of the church appearing like Fort Knox, it should be beckoning to "whoever will may come." It should be a haven for weary souls. It should be "home" for the prodigal son. It should be a fellowship where sinners are received with sincerity, just as the Saviour received them. As the old time gospel song says:

*"Christ receives sinful men; even me, with all my sin."*

You know, the Lord is saving **only** sinners. That may seem a shocking statement. "What about all of us good people"? you ask. No! Sorry! The Lord Jesus said:

“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17)

That’s why Saul got saved.

*“It is a trustworthy statement, and worthy of full acceptance, that Messiah Y’shua came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”* (I Timothy 1:15)

Why does Paul say, “I AM chief? Why doesn’t he say, “of whom I WAS chief? It is because he recognises that “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” (Romans 7:18)

We are all sinners at heart, and it is only the grace of God working in our lives, and rectifying our lives, that makes us worthy of a place in His church.

Now what’s that I hear? Is it some tut-tutting by some of my “spiritual” readers?

“Don’t forget, brother,” some will say, “that the Lord’s church must be holy. Sin must not be tolerated. Remember Ananias and Sapphira, who dropped dead because they lied to the Apostles. And don’t forget that Paul commanded that the man living in immorality be put out of the Corinthian church.”

Yes, brother, I remember those two cases very well, and there is indeed a message in both instances. You are correct, the Lord’s church must be a holy church.

The Lord YHWH says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (I Peter 1:16)

And one important lesson we must learn is that holiness is not a cloak of spirituality. It is not merely morality, or an effort at good living. Holiness is the essence of God’s life and character. So to be holy is to partake of His divine nature - to imbibe the character or essence of what God is. Holiness is Godliness. To be holy is to be Godly. It is to share the character, the feelings, the vision, the compassion, and even the “anger” of God. It is to be “spiritual.” Certainly only a spiritual man could be “angry in a Godly way.” And only a spiritual man can be compassionate in a Godly way.

It is not human compassion, it’s not human love, or human anger that people need. They need holy, Godly pastoring, if God’s desire is to be achieved in their lives.

## **THE TWO THAT DROPPED DEAD**

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:3). Whether they were born again believers, or “nominal believers,” we are not told. That they had ulterior motives seems quite apparent. Their act of bringing part of the sale price to the Apostles was a pretence, probably part of a plot. And in striking these two people dead, the Messiah was demonstrating, right at the beginning of His church, that He would not tolerate hypocrisy, and plots to “use the church” for personal gain. The church might be a cradle, but it would not be a casino.

Now, if God still demonstrated in the some way today, I’m afraid the main work of the church would be undertaking - burying the dead.

It is not that God is more tolerant of evil today than He used to be. It is only that judgment does not fall on the unrepentant so soon - because God is seeking to bring them to repentance and to rectify their lives.

But while we think of Ananias and Sapphira, let us think about our own claims! Those two said they had surrendered all. So do we! We often sing it so heartily, don't we?

*“All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give.*

*I will ever love and trust Him,*

*In His presence, daily, live*

*I surrender all, I surrender all,*

(You know how fervently we sing it)

*All to Thee my blessed Saviour, I surrender all.”*

Then why don't we drop dead if we don't surrender all? Because the Master is giving us a CHANCE TO PAY OUR VOWS. And until we do, we had better not look down our noses at others, and condemn them.

### THE CORINTHIAN CULPRIT

I use that title, because it typifies the general attitude of the “good believers” against one who has done wrong. Now there's no doubt about it - sin is sin; immorality is immorality, quarreling is hatred, and pride is abomination (especially the religious type that robs God of the glory that should be ascribed only to Him).

In the Corinthian church, this man was living in sin. He was living in an adulterous relationship, and that with his father's wife - probably his step-mother. He was guilty, no doubt about it, and so we call him the “culprit.”

“Well, what else can we call him?” you ask.

“Well, what about . . . ‘a defeated believer in need of rectification’?”

“You're excusing his sin, then!”

No, not at all! This is his true condition. So he must be brought to repentance and encouraged to turn to the Saviour again, who alone can accomplish rectification in him.

It was to create an awareness and conviction of his sin, so that he recognises his deplorable condition, that Paul told the elders to remove him from their midst, that is, from church fellowship.

That did not mean that they should no longer love him, and should spurn him and treat him as an enemy. It does not mean “excommunication” - that is reserved for avowed heretics.

That a remedial discipline is in view here, is clear, for Paul says the purpose is so that his spirit should be saved. It was to be short-term discipline for long-term rectification.

It was within two years that Paul wrote again to the Corinthian church and told them:

“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather **forgive** and **comfort him**, lest somehow

such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to **reaffirm** your **love** for him.” (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

So it's clear that the intention of discipline is not to “punish him” or to “dispose of him,” but to rectify. He was ultimately restored to fellowship, because it was clear that he had repented.

Should discipline be used in the church today? Yes, but always with the VIEW TO RESTORE AND RECTIFY the erring believer. And it must be a spiritual type of discipline, not carnal.

If a person is found to have done something wrong, if he is taken in a fault, if he has sinned, then first the command is:

“You who are spiritual, **restore** such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” (Galatians 6:1)

If after several genuine attempts to restore have failed, and the person is still going on in sin, then the second command is:

“Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.” (I Timothy 5:20)

Then if the person is still determined to cling to his sin, the third command applies; and disciplinary action should be taken.

“...that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst.” (I Corinthians 5:2)

In all such attempts to restore, and in any necessary disciplinary action, loving concern must be shown. Never must an attitude of “disposal” be shown, but always the action must be taken with a view to the person's rectification - and it must be impressed upon that person's mind that we are praying and longing for his rectification. **Always the aim must be to SAVE a person from sin, not to drive him into further sin.**

No believer must become “a loss” to God. If a person has to be disciplined, and put out of the church fellowship, it does not mean that he should no longer attend meetings, or that he is no longer welcome to listen to the preaching of the Word. He should not, of course, take part in the “breaking of bread,” while his life is not right with the Lord.

How long should an erring believer be disciplined? No longer than necessary. There should be constant prayer for that soul, that the Lord will meet with him and restore him. He must NOT be “given up,” otherwise the purpose of the disciplinary action will not be achieved.

If a church disciplines a member by putting him out of fellowship, and then does not show any love or concern for his well-being, and if that person then simply decides to join some other church, the discipline again, has failed to achieve the rectification that is needed.

You may feel you have got rid of a “bad apple,” but that's the “disposal” attitude.

The Scripture says:

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26-27)

You could compare the erring member to an aching tooth. Now will you be happy while your tooth is paining?

“Ah!” you say, “the bad tooth! We must pull it out!”

No, my friend, you only pull the tooth out as a last resort. If you pull out many of your teeth, you will soon be full of false teeth. And if your church refuses to accept that members do need some “dental treatment” other than disposal, it is likely to be full of false teeth too.

How we need spiritual maturity, wisdom and care in tending to the flock. Scripture is not silent regarding what our attitudes and behaviour should be towards those who stray or get caught in thickets.

“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back; let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20)

“Therefore, straighten and STRENGTHEN THE DROOPING HANDS AND THE FEEBLE KNEES [Isaiah 35:3], and make straight *and level* paths for your feet, so that *the lame limbs* may not be dislocated, but rather healed.” (Hebrews 12:12-13)

If a church member goes astray, and becomes contentious, and is going against the Word of God in any way, Paul says:

“And if any one does not obey our instruction in this letter take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but **admonish him** as a brother.” (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

So there again, we are not to dispose of him, but to admonish with the view to his rectification. And in seeking to restore a believer, we must never take a holier-than-thou attitude, or a I-have-never-done-such-a-terrible-thing attitude. Rather, we must get alongside our brother and testify of how the Lord has moved into our lives with His grace and power.

We must never take a Mosaic attitude that merely says, “You have sinned. Repent or else.” Rather we need to show the fallen believer **HOW he can experience the victory of the Lord**. After all, we don’t want counterfeit victors in the church, do we? - that is, believers who are “good” because they fear they’ll be thrown out if they’re not. That’s like having a mouth full of false teeth.

The true church is not a “religious club.” It is a fellowship of believers who are growing up ...

“... in all *aspects* into Him, who is the Head - the Messiah, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by that which every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Backsliding is very sad, and “grievous sins” (and all sins) are evil and destructive. But what is somewhat more grievous than a backslider, is a “good believer” who doesn’t pray or care to restore a backslider.

And there are **four types of immorality**:

The **thinking** of immorality.

The **committing** of immorality.

The **condoning** of immorality.

The **failure of believers to seek the restoration** of a fellow-believer, such as the “Corinthian culprit,” who has fallen into sin.

To tut-tut is to fail. To judge and condemn is to fail.

But TRUE LOVE NEVER FAILS (1 Corinthians 13:8)

“You who are spiritual, restore him in a spirit of gentleness. But watch yourself, lest you too be tempted! Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law - *the teachings and commands* - of the Messiah.” (Galatians 6:1-2)

## **A FINAL WORD OF WARNING AND EXHORTATION**

While the Heavenly Father is seeking the rectification of backsliders and errant believers, the Scriptures give many warnings against hardening the heart, and deliberately continuing in sin and unbelief.

“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where their fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways’.” (Hebrews 3:7-10)

The Scriptures record some notorious disasters which were the result of the hardening of the heart towards God.

Pharaoh hardened his heart again and again until it brought about his total ruin. (Exodus 14:16-30)

King Saul disobeyed God and refused to repent. He consulted a witch instead of returning to Yahweh. His disastrous end is recorded in 1 Samuel 31:4.

King Solomon, who had been so endured with wisdom from God, and had a prosperous reign for 40 years, ended up as a great tragedy due to his love of foreign women which caused him to build temples to their detestable idols. (1 Kings 11:9-11)

The apostle Paul warns about those who have become shipwrecked in their faith.



“This command I entrust to you ... fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.” (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

### **Beware of the love of money**

“If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:8-10)

### **Cast off the entangling sin, by looking to the Saviour**

“Therefore ... let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and leeches onto us. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and love heart.” (Hebrews 12:1)

### **Present your body as a holy sacrifice to God**

“Present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

### **Treasure God's Word in your heart**

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word. With all my heart I have sought you; do not let me wander from your commandments. Your Word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:9-11)

**AMEN!**