

The Fallen Saint Restored

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Edited by
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Preface

In many ways Peter is a man's man. His strong macho and go-for-it approach to life appeals to the masculine integrity. His tendency to brash verbosity and do-now-think-later mentality is less desirable but perhaps not less applicable. In short, this working-class Christian, struggling against sin and failure has a story to tell that we all can relate to.

In the story of Peter, we learn two important lessons.

First, sin is ruthlessly destructive. The warnings of sin in the Scripture are so numerous and diverse that we cannot miss them. And yet we tend to focus on the details of individual biblical characters and fail to see the general truth: the proneness of men to fall into sin. Lot sacrificed his family on the altar of the worldly prosperity, which he lost in the end (Genesis 13:10ff).

David's opportunistic manipulation of Bathsheba, (2 Samuel 11:3ff, 12:10), resulted in the subsequent murder of Uriah and the untold pain it brought with perpetuity into his home.

Samson lost his life because of his folly (Judges 16:4ff). We read also of Solomon, who sacrificed his integrity on the altar of political favour (1 Kings

11:1-3). All these, and many more men and women, display the weakness of the flesh with shocking clarity. They all experienced the agony and emptiness of sin.

The second lesson we learn from the life of Peter is that the Gospel graciously restores. All of these mentioned above realised experientially the preserving and restoring grace of God. The life plunged into sinful despair can be re-made. The years that the locusts have eaten can be restored (Joel 2:25). The one who has fallen and felt the pain of sin can be made an instrument to strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:32), and to teach transgressor their way or to convert sinners (Psalm 51:13).

Dr. Reynolds wrote his *Fall and Rise of Peter* in the form of thirty "meditations," each one considering a different aspect of Peter's sin and restoration. These meditations are filled with insightful and pointed thoughts concerning this part of Peter's life and provide a rich reserve of Christian counsel. They are as convicting as they are comforting. Reynolds brings the fallen Christian from the depths of sin and despair to the heights of victory in Christ. He encourages us with the power of the resurrection, the same power that drew Peter back and raised him up and drove him forward.

I believe there is a need for these meditations in the world as we know it, where sin is so popular and accessible and yet so destructive. My prayer in preparing these meditations is that the Spirit of God will both warn the Christian to *"take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12) and comfort those who have been *"overtaken in a fault"* (Galatians 6:1).

Also, Reynold's meditations is an excellent place to begin reading the puritans and get a feel for puritan writing. In editing these I have tried as far as possible to maintain the Puritan style of thought and writing. I have modernized the wording in places and for clarity of thought on occasion modified the structure. I have also included some biblical references and the section heading which were not in the original edition. I first edited these for my congregation Victoria, BC, in 2009.

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Biographical sketch of Reynold's life

Dr. Reynolds was born in 1599 in Southampton, England. He received his BA degree at Oxford in 1618. In 1622 before studying for his Masters, Reynolds became a chaplain to the King, and preacher at Lincoln's Inn, London. The puritanical inclinations of Dr. Reynolds were well known; his character of piety and decorum were evident even in his college years.

Although Edward Reynolds is known as the Bishop of Norfolk, this was a position he accepted in the final fifteen years of his life and ministry. In 1631 he took the position of rector of Braunston, Northamptonshire, where he remained for almost thirty years.

He was a Presbyterian by conviction held a reputation of moderation in his church polity. This was evidenced in his role in the Westminster Assembly. He was the only member to sit on all three of the major committees on the Confession of Faith, and with his moderate spirit provided balance in the discussions.

Meditations on the Fallen Saint Restored

1. The folly of pride and presumption

Pride and presumption have been, in the godly as well as the ungodly, the forerunners of a fall. The first man, Adam, and the first apostle, Peter, both fell by these. Had Adam given less heed to a weaker sex and Peter to the presumption of a weak confidence, the one would not have plunged humanity into the depth of wickedness, or both themselves into the depth of sorrow. High conceits and resolutions built on shallow ground can promise nothing but ruin on the head of him that builds them.

2. The weakness of presumed strength.

What can we expect from Peter but a triple denial of his master among his enemies, when he dares deny the truth of Christ to his own face? He that will venture to deny the truth of Christ's Word will quickly, under temptation, deny the profession of his truth.

Peter had not yet learned not to contradict his master, though he once got rebuked for it with the designation of "Satan." Weak man! Do you not see

how you have already begun to deny the Lord, and even when you seem most fortified and resolute to defend him? You deny him if you deny his Word.

Why would you either doubt Christ's word when he told you "all should be offended" (Matthew 26:31) or else should have such confident presumption in your own strength and uncharitable conceit of your brother's weakness? God, who has out of true weakness ordained strength, does in Peter's case, out of presumed strength foretell weakness.

He who can make the mouths of babes and sucklings (Psalm 8:2; Matthew 21:16) to confess him, can suffer the mouth of Peter to deny him. This shows the dependence that both the strong and the weak have on God's goodness. The strongest apostle is not able to confess Christ without his sustaining grace and with the same grace the weakest infant is able to cry "hosanna."

3. The blending of flesh with faith

Charity requires us to believe that it was Peter's love and faith that motivated his promise to defend Christ. Such was his love for Christ, the fruit of the words of eternal life and the power of the living Son of God that he could do nothing but follow

and enjoy Christ, even unto death. But in the same soul and even in the same action there was a mixture of faith and flesh. The desire and purpose came from faith; the self-confidence and resolution came from flesh.

Self-dependence and pride, or any other carnal affection which is deeply rooted in the nature of all men, are often found in the most holy actions of men. It was faith that made Peter go down into the water, but it was flesh that made him sink (Matthew 14:30). Faith made him zealous in Christ's cause, but flesh drew his sword at Malchus's ear (John 18:10). Faith made him follow Christ, but flesh made him follow afar off. Faith made him accompany Christ to the garden, but flesh made him sleep. Faith made him promise perseverance, but flesh made him peremptory in that promise. In a word: faith made him resolute to confess, but flesh to contradict his master.

Vows and promises given without God's provision cannot but prove dangerous to the strongest faith. God must give us perseverance before we promise it; it is not in our power, though it is our duty, to perform it. Though Peter may, by virtue of Christ's promise, be sure not to fall into hell, he cannot be sure by that same promise not to fall into temptation. Though he can be sure that faith will

have the last victory, he cannot be sure that faith will have every victory. Though faith cannot die and be finally dried up, yet it may ebb and flow. Though even now in the mind of Peter, faith can look undaunted on the nails of the cross, yet presently it may be affrighted at the voice of a maid. He who has given faith to us, is the only one who can give life and action to our faith. Christ is both the originator and the object of our faith; by his power it works and on his merits it relies. When he is pleased to withdraw himself, when both the object and mover of faith is absent, faith will be inoperative.

As we cannot see the sun without the light of the sun, so neither can we believe in Christ without the grace of Christ. Lord! Let me never barely promise, but let me pray, and let my purpose to die for Christ be seconded with the supplication that I may not deny him. Whenever I have an arm of confidence to lift in defence of the truth let me have a knee of humility to bow before the throne of Grace. Lord, give me what I may promise, and I will promise what you require.

4. The error of self-sufficiency

Were the other disciples not taught from the same mouth? Did they not with the same faith receive what they were taught? Why then should Peter distrust their weakness and yet presume on his own strength? Though he feels himself chief in following Christ, may he not also be chief in falling from him?

Such is the nature of greatness, that it thinks itself secure from danger, and apprehends spiritual immunity in temporal honour. How erroneous is the frailty of man's nature! How ready we are to trust on the arm of the flesh, confidence, free-will, and supremacy, even against divine predictions of danger. There is no greater cause of weakness and ruin then to think oneself sufficiently armed with the arm of the flesh.

5. The weakness of human resolutions

One would have thought that Peter, upon the warning of a denial, should have begun to tremble, and not to boast; to arm himself and not presume, to suspect his strength, and not to promise. But a double warning (Matthew 26:31,34) finds in Peter a double presumption which makes him confident, believing that even naked and empty human nature, with such an invincible resolution, if lacking

courage, would have enough shame to persist. If the resolution is broken it would imply a weak and inconsistent spirit more faithless in the execution of the promise and impotent in its contempt of death than the courage and honesty of Peter could admit to.

It is the justice of God to give man over to fainting and falling when he relies on himself. One tear or sigh, though signs of weakness, could have prevailed more to strengthen Peter's faith, than so many fruitless boasts, the gildings and flourishing of a rotten confidence. A little pebble stone will overturn and sink Goliath, when all the armour of Saul will more hinder than profit in such a conflict (1 Samuel 17:29ff).

6. Resolutions without vigilance

Great promises require great cares. He who has engaged himself so deeply in any service must needs be very vigilant. How is it then that, after so many promises, we find Peter sleeping when Christ is sweating (Matthew 26:39-40)? How is it that the garden of Gethsemane should be the bed of so secure a rest which was the theatre of so exquisite and inimitable an anguish? Can he follow Christ the whole night in his judgement that cannot watch

one hour for his comfort? Can he command his life to be laid down for Christ's truth that cannot command his eyes to be witnesses of his sorrow?

So long as we are out of the view of danger, we can make large promises of our strength to face that danger. But when it draws near and creeps upon us, we begin to look differently both on it and ourselves and become either desperately fearful or supinely stupid, like untoward and forgetful children who never fear the rod till they feel it.

7. Lack of self-denial

I cannot wonder that Peter should fall into temptation when he cannot endure to watch with Christ. He must learn more to deny himself before he can take up his cross. The nights of the resolved martyr must be spent in the study of patience and not in the security of ease. He must first be a persecutor of himself and exercise a holy cruelty on his own flesh, by crucifying the lusts thereof before he is able to overcome the wiles and the inventions of his tormentor, in holy and undaunted patience.

The soul must first be raised to heaven before the body can be willing to go down into the earth. If Peter had watched and accompanied Christ, he

might have received further encouragement in his resolution to die for him (Matthew 26:40). He might have learned from the extremity of his anguish, if not to hate life, at least willing to embrace the present opportunity to glorify God by death. How often the love of our flesh and ease deprives us of occasions to do well. Every man would love God more if he could love selfless (Colossian 3:5).

8. The beginning of backsliding

It is not surprising Peter would follow Christ afar off when he followed him so sleepily. We cannot hope to hear courage from the tongue, when the feet begin so soon to play the cowards. It is not likely that Peter will come near to Christ at Golgotha when he follows him afar off in the judgement hall. If he is not willing to own Christ, he will be quick to deny him.

The beginning of Peter's backsliding is seen in how he followed Christ. To follow Christ is a work of faith, but to follow him afar off is nothing else but little by little to go back from him (Matthew 26:58). In this we see how the preparations for Peter's fall follow each other; after sleeping he followed afar off. From that he comes to sitting still, and not in private prayer, but in public to warm himself at the

fire where his conscience is hardened. He who prefers the company of blasphemous and wicked men to the sweet company of Christ cannot be far from denying him.

The man who can be induced to forsake Christ by the enjoyment of any temporal benefit or the opportunity of any sensual or worldly delight is at the door to apostasy and backsliding.

9. The wiles of the Devil

The devil has a kind of method and air of modesty in his temptations. He knew that he could not draw from Peter such a blasphemous denial with the first fiery dart of temptation. Peter would have at the first trembled at such a suggestion. And therefore, like a strategic general, he ranks his forces so as that the first temptations, like weaker soldiers, fall and make way for the stronger, which are the old experienced and sturdy fighters. The former temptations serve only to weaken Peter, the latter to overthrow him.

At first the devil tempts us to small sins, to indulge a little of our corrupt desires to wear out some of our vigour. This he does to manipulate our thoughts and causes us to think that we will be able

to hold out for the better when the temptation is more robust. But when he has brought us this far with the small sins, he has gotten the advantage of us. Having gotten the door opened he lets in ugly and horrid temptations.

Sin has its several ages and growths. First it is conceived and shaped in the womb of desire, then it is nourished and fed by the embraces of the will, and with this it grows into a strong man and takes over our little world, invading all the faculties of the soul and body, which are at last made the instruments of Satan to act at his will. Satan at the first leads us downward towards hell, by steps and stairs, which, though they go lower and lower, yet seem to have firm footing with the ability to go back when we want. But we find the way more and more slippery and the enemy ready at hand to push us down into the dungeon of unrecoverable misery, if God's mercy did not pluck us as a brand out of the burning (Zechariah 3:2).

Peter at first only sleeps, which seems only to be the demands of his nature. Then he followed afar off; that may have been excused by the drowsiness of his sleep. Then he sits down at the fire which may be excused by the coldness of the air. But then came the denying, swearing, cursing, and had not Christ looked at him, the next step in this

regression would have been the jaws of hell. But it was the great wisdom and mercy of Christ to acknowledge the estate of ignominy and misery.

10. Giving Satan the advantage

It is no wonder then that Peter is tempted to forsake his master when he is following afar off. How can he do anything else but stumble and fall if he hides himself from the Sun of Righteousness and is absent from the light of the world. How can he not fail and fall if he wanders out of the way of life, goes beyond the voice of the Word of Truth which alone can direct and lead and instruct in holiness and security.

He who testifies his faith by following and yet reveals his flesh and weakness by following afar off shall be sure to meet with such an enemy as hates his faith and takes advantage of his weakness. Our faith provokes him to enmity and our weakness invites him to assault. If Peter had remained in the company of Christ, Satan would not have dared to tempt him into a triple denial in the presence of such power. Or if Satan would have been so impudent, or so adventurous as to throw at Peter such temptations in the presence of his maker, yet we know Peter would have been directed with

more light and assisted with greater strength to resist such an assault.

But Peter had left the company of his maker! We know the devil never overcomes any who is not first overcome by self. What danger is there in fighting where there is no danger in falling? Or what difference is there between an unopposed security and an assaulted strength, except that the strength is more glorious and the security is safer. He is not far from Satan's temptations who is a far off from Christ's presence and assistance. There is none nearer the fury of a strong and bloody malice, than a weak and struggling Christian.

11. The power of Satan's weak instruments

I have never read of more dangerous falls in the saints, than were Adam's, Lots, Sampson's, David's, Solomon's and Peter's, and in all of these, either the first enticers or the first occasioners are women. A weak creature may be a strong tempter. There is nothing too impotent or useless for the devil's service.

We know it is the pride of Satan to imitate God. As God magnifies His power in bringing strength out of weakness, so also the devil labours to gain the

glory over a strong enemy with the temptation of the weaker sex (1 Peter 3:7). The purpose of the devil's assault is the despair of his enemy. He gets Judas to betray his master that he may get him to hang himself, and he had the same intent in Peter's denial. What is there so suited to drive a man to despair than an apprehension of the greatness of his sin? And what could more aggravate this sin than the fact that it was the voice of a maid that proved to be stronger than his faith in Jesus to sustain him? The devil tempts us that he may draw us into sin; but he tempts us with weak instruments that he may drive us to despair.

12. Sinners: Satan's servants

Woman was the first sinner (Genesis 3:6,12), and we see in the two greatest falls, Adam's and Peter's, woman is made the first tempter. In this we see that the sinner is the slave of the devil to serve him. Satan uses sinners as tempters.

13. Sin and the fear in sin

Peter has no sooner denied his master, but he goes out further from him. The action of the foot bears witness to the apostasy of the tongue. But why

should Peter leave for fear of further examination, having had already cleared himself and satisfied his examiners?

There is no security to be expected from denying the Lord. If Peter thought to find ease and safety by denying Christ, he soon discovered that he was more fearful than before. Peter tried to escape from the hands of men by running into the wrath of God. He who hides from danger in the hedge of wickedness will meet with the serpent instead of safety. Peter left the fireside company because he became suspicious of their fury and persecution. He sat boldly among them while he was in danger, but he has no sooner made his apology and he goes out into the porch.

The same fear that befell Peter here in denying his Saviour, befell Adam in the garden after denying his maker. The next thing we read of them is their fear and flight (Genesis 3:10 *cf.* Matthew 26:71).

14. Tempted, and then accused by Satan

Is the nature of women more inquisitive or more malignant, that amongst so many other servants a woman should begin the second accusation? The devil will double a weak temptation, if it has proved prosperous. The first maid tempted Peter by

questioning him, the second by accusing him to the other servants. Those who are apt to tempt are apt to accuse; these are the devil's two instruments as he works the ruin of mankind. He first tempts a man to sin and then accuses him before God. He is both the tempter and the accuser (Revelation 12:10). After he has tempted a man to sin, he then accuses him to the brethren without and his own conscience within. Brethren, when you feel an assault, begin also to feel the accusation and learn to prevent the devil's malice by resisting the temptation.

15. The Strategy of Satan

We can see here the method of Satan. His first temptation is by one maid, the second by many servants who stood by. The weaker he finds us the greater force he uses against us. He uses the first attempt to weaken us and the second to wound us. Just as in the keeping of a city, the enemy sends in the spy to observe the fortifications, so Satan sends in the small temptations to find where our weaknesses are. Then he rushes us with the multitude of his armed and able servants, who would certainly take us and spoil us if there were not a stronger than he to overcome him and secure us.

Meditations on the Recovery of Peter

16. The Faith of following Christ

The form and manner of Peter's second denial as it is variously recorded in the gospels is nevertheless related. One writer records the words *"I know not the man"* while the other records the words *"I am not of them."* One might think these are two separate denials, but they are not (Matthew 26:72; **Luke 22:58).

Can a man know Christ and not follow him? No. We see here the mystery of faith in the fall of Peter. No man knows Christ unless he follows him and to whom Christ has united himself. If it is true that we are not one with Christ, it is also true that we do not know him, because knowledge consists in union with Christ. It is for this reason that the philosopher said, the soul, in understanding a thing, is made the very thing which it understands. In this sense we call the image of our face in the mirror, the face itself, or the impression in the wax, the seal itself.

Likewise, there is no union of Christ and us, or no dwelling of Him in us, or engrafting of us into Him, without that faith whereby we follow Him. This makes us to be so nearly one with Him that the name of Christ is sometimes in Scripture taken for the church of Christ. And therefore, only to those

that believe He has given to know Him. Christ is not truly apprehended either by the fancy or by the understanding. He is known by possession. It is an experiential and not a speculative knowledge that knows Him. He only understands Christ who has experienced him. We see Him in His grace and truth, in His Word and promises, not in a carnal or physical manner. Pilate knew Him in this manner and Judas also. A true believer can see and know Him better in heaven, than the Romanist can by the hands of the priest in the transubstantiated bread. Let the faith of the Romanist have the assistance of teeth and jaws; ours, though toothless, eats Him with less injury and more nourishment.

17. The Mercy of God

The increase of the enemy's temptation accumulates with Peter's sin. When Peter is pressed a second time and with stronger opposition, he comes up with a naked and empty denial, which is in effect an implied confession. In this second denial, to make it more credible, he must make himself more impious and to save face with men, he not only denies but renounces faith in God with oaths and curses. In all of this Christ is witness, not only to his lie, but his open revolt.

How deep the dye of sin and the degree of corruption that faith exists alongside of. Yet that faith, although smothered, was preserved by the prayers of Christ. Had the same action of malice against Christ that Peter displayed come from an unregenerate heart, it would have been the irremediable sin against the Holy Ghost. But this sin in Peter was preceded by fear and weakness, it was the sin of a believing and faithful heart.

In this the Christian learns both to despair of his own strength and not to despair of the mercy of God, which can keep faith in that heart. The mercy of God can raise a man up to martyrdom who had so deeply plunged himself into apostasy. He that suffered Judas to be the subject of His judgement raised Peter from a sin which was in itself as great as Judas', to be a preacher and witness of His mercy.

18. The folly of sin

How leprous and spreading sin is and how weak and impotent is human nature. A double temptation is not enough on Satan's part, after a double denial. The devil goes further in tempting and the poor disciple goes further in denying.

Peter's was a curse greater than any curse, even an anathema, to wish separation from the presence of God. I never remember any curse that did not proceed from love and fear. With Peter it is a love of self and a fear of death.

How strong and violent are passions, whether holy or natural. How secure on earth and negligent of his eternal estate can they make Peter, to avoid the displeasure of mortal man? It is the misery and error of our corrupt nature to shelter ourselves under sin from danger and to think ourselves secure there where it is violently wicked.

19. A Compassionate Saviour

Peter not only deserved a curse, but he provoked it. Behold the mercy of a provoked God! Though Peter, in conviction, may have asked for a stone to fall on him and grind him to powder, yet Christ gives him the bread of eternal life, and the wine of repentant tears. Though he gave a serpent to sting him to death yet Christ, the compassionate Saviour gives him the voice of the rooster, the sight of the brazen serpent to recover his wounds (Numbers 21:9). Peter provided the whole load of sin for Christ to carry to the cross, and Christ threw on him the burden of mercies to sink him deeper and

deeper in the waters of repentance and admiration than he knew before the temptation.

20. The use of means in our recovery

One would think that such a great recovery should be affected by the hand of some glorious ministry - perhaps the voice of an angel or a prophet. But see a miracle in weakness! A rooster is made the forerunner of repentance, as it were, to the look of Christ. God, who can work without means, does in his wisdom make use of the basest of means, and can open the mouth of the beast for the conversion of man (Numbers 22:28).

How careful we ought to be in the use of means when God seldom works without them! How humble in the use of prayer, when the means themselves do not work without God. The ordinary course of nature and the most accidental occurrences in the world are sanctified to the good of the elect and are the instruments of God in their salvation.

21. The voice of the rooster

Why would Christ, to do this great work of repentance, use the voice of a rooster? There is mystery in the instruments Christ uses. He can give sight to blind men by spit out of His mouth on the clay to show that the virtue of Christ's mouth on the clay vessels of mortal man has force in opening the eyes of the ignorant and impenitent (John 9:6).

In the voice of this rooster, Christ gives Peter an example to follow as well as an occasion to repent. Christ tutors him here in the execution of his apostleship as well as converts him from his backsliding. A true minister that loves Christ and his sheep must have the wings of a rooster to rouse up from false security both himself and then waken and strengthen others. He must have the watchfulness of a rooster to be ready to discover and warn of danger. He must have the voice of the rooster to cry aloud and warn the Christian of sin. He must have the hours of the rooster, to preach in season and out of season.

22. Our Dependence on Christ

Who would think that a weak rooster would be able to do more with Peter than prophets and apostles with other men? Who would think that the sound of

the rooster's crow would be heard so deep as the confines of hell? But these weak means were quickened and seconded by the look of Christ.

Christ first turns and looks back in mercy at Peter, before Peter can turn in sorrow and repentance to him. Even the Christian would lie still in the depth of sin wherein he has been plunged, if that power, which in wisdom suffered him to fall, did not in grace and pity raise him up. Peter cannot remember the words of his master until Christ remembers the misery of his disciple.

23. The continued mercy of Christ

We see here the greatness of Christ's grace! One would think that Christ would have been so pre-occupied with the plight of his present condition, the sense of his Father's desertion and the knowledge of his approaching suffering. And yet when he was overtaken in his own sorrow and weakness, he had time for the work of power on behalf of his disciple. The righteous justice of God and the unjust cruelty of his enemies were not able to drive Christ from the exercises of his mercy. He who came to suffer all this for men does in the midst of his own suffering remember men. He honours the scorn and buffeting of his judgement,

with the restoration of a fallen disciple, and the nails an ignominy of the cross with the conversion of a reviling thief.

24. Reading the face of Christ

As Peter, having heard the rooster crow, looked at the face of Christ it seems to me he saw a conflict of affections. There saw an angry and upbraiding face against Peter's revolt. He saw also, it seems to me, a pitiful face commiserating his frailty, and yet another face of mercy converting him and a gracious and favourable face inviting him to return.

If it were the face of anger, we see then the faith of Peter and of all the godly, which through the clouds of Christ's displeasure can discover the comforting light of the gracious Saviour, as well as through his veil of flesh discern the power and majesty of God. Remember the woman in the Gospel who could interpret the odious name of "dog," uttered from the mouth of Christ, to be a test of faith and not a rejection (Matthew 15:26). In this Christ was hiding his mercy rather than denying it.

If it were the face of grace and invitation, we see the nature of sin which makes a man afraid even of an appeased God. We see also the nature of

repentance, which when the soul is invited to the rivers of joy, will first drink of those bitter tears which makes the heart of sinners heavy. If it were a pitiful and commiserating face that Peter saw in Christ, we see how it works the like qualities in Peter who begins to lament himself, what was first lamented by his Saviour. Lord, never let the face of Christ be turned back from me, but be always pleased to look on me, whether in tender displeasure or in a pitiful mercy so that I may be driven by sorrow out of myself to look by faith to Christ.

25. Happy tears and the words of Christ

The beginning of Peter's repentance is a remembrance and an application of the words of Christ. How powerful is temptation that it can banish out of our minds the truth of God or our own danger. He that is too mindful of his safety will be too unmindful of his faith. A sanctified memory, whether in retaining divine truth or in presenting our own sin is an excellent preparation to repentance and like a steady wind, draws together the clouds which will afterwards produce those happy tears (Mark 14:72).

26. The abuse of God's mercy

What was it that Peter remembered? It is not stated. Perhaps he considered how he stood naked and open to the flames of hell, or how he exposed himself to the scourges of an inward tormentor, to the scorching of his conscience, or to the fearful judgment and revenge of him whom he had just denied. He went out and wept bitterly. It was fear that made him fall but not fear that made him repent.

It was the merciful prediction of Christ that he remembered how he abused that gracious caution that should arm him against temptation. It was this that made him go out and weep. The abuse of God's mercy, the grieving of God's Spirit, the undervaluing of God's truth wounds the soul of a repentant sinner more than the pricking of conscience or the flames of hell.

27. The power of an omnipresent Christ

What makes the repentant sinner to turn and go out into the court after he has seen the look of Christ or remembered his sin? What makes him run from the fountain of mercy? Did he mistake the look of Christ, which was suited to draw and unite

him again, not to drive him away? Did his sorrow drown his faith and make him forget the glorious confession of Christ who alone had the word of eternal life (John 6:68)? Did he forget that Christ had the balm to cure his grief, and the blood to blot out his sin (Psalm 51:1)? Did he forget that Christ could have at once been a comfort and restored him to his former joy and grace? Why did he not run into the embrace of Christ?

We see here the mystery of Peter's recovered faith. In turning from Christ, he acknowledged his faith in Christ and was reinvested with the honour of a disciple although he seemed more to forsake, than to follow the Lord. His repentance did in action confirm what his faith did in words once confess: that Christ was the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16). We see in the departure of Peter an article of his faith, the Divinity of Christ.

If Christ had not been outside where Peter wept as well as being inside where the Jews blasphemed him, Peter would again have denied him and not returned to him. That which is now a mystery would have been another revolt. But Christ was with Peter, and it was faith that could from outside look through the walls of the judgement hall and there through the infirmity of a buffeted and condemned

body, discover the glory of a merciful and reconciled God.

It is nothing but faith that can look from earth into heaven, and when it is absent from Christ, not only groan after him, but grasp and lay hold of him. The omnipresence of Christ gives the believer who has an interest in him a omnipresence also. As Christ is in heaven by his presence, He is on earth by his power. So, a believer, though he is in his body on earth, yet is in heaven by faith. It is in the nature of faith to give a kind of presence to things most remote and distant; it can even converse and lay hold on Christ, though he be in heaven.

28. Shame and the recovery of faith

But this raises another question, though Peter can find Christ by faith outside the hall, is there no comfort to be found in his sensible presence? Does faith make sight a vain and fruitless exercise? Does the blessing of believing take away the joy of seeing Him? Was the womb not blessed that held Him and was there not some blessedness in the eyes that saw him and the arms that embraced him (Luke 1:28)?

Was it further temptation that made Peter flee as a burnt child from the fire? Was the voice of the maid able to drive him from the Son of the Virgin, or the challenge of the servant from the presence of the Lord? Was that look not able to confirm him, which was able to convert him? Did Peter fear the fall from the Rock, his Saviour because he had before fallen from the sand? What presumption! Did Peter flee from that place of blasphemy because it was the place where Christ suffered from the base reproaches of wicked men? Could the air of that place be so infectious? Was the blasphemy of a Jew more potent to pollute than the grace of Christ to sanctify the high-priest's hall? The presence of Christ could make that place a heaven which the Jews had made a hell.

It was neither the vileness of the place or the threat of the servant that made Peter flee; they might tempt, but they could not wound. If the Lord gives strength the adversary cannot make to fall. The adversary may beckon him to turn, but he can with a finger be sufficiently armed against the torments of a devil, much more against a maid.

Such is the recovery of faith. Like bodily health, it recovers by degrees, from weakness to strength, from fear to confidence, and dares not trust in Christ without some trembling. Peter is assured of

Christ's love and yet he is ashamed of his own sin. Shame is ever sin's companion. It is for this reason that he cannot look on the face of Christ whom he had denied. He could with the publican beat upon his breast and pray, but he could not look toward heaven, to the face of his master (Luke 18:13). He could pray to Christ, but he could not accompany him. It is the modesty of nature that makes a man better able to deliver his mind in absence rather than in presence. So, the shame makes Peter more confident outside the judgement hall rather than within.

29. Enjoying the benefits of the presence of Christ

After his denial Peter did not see Christ until his resurrection and then it was Peter who received such an invitation (Mark 16:7). There was none so forward and hasty to get to the garden. Was it grief over Christ's misery or his own sin or was it fear of the majesty of Christ's face or weakness in his own heart that drove him from the judgment hall to weep? Surely perhaps it was all of these. He departed from the face of the Lord and from the company of his tempters, provoked also by the shame of his fall, the experience of his fragility. He departed from the committing of more sin and the

sight of more misery, because he did not know if he could find more mercy or be able to bear more sorrow.

But when Christ, through the power of his resurrection, had clothed himself with glory, and when by the angel's message, Peter was unclothed of fear, there was none more eager to enjoy the benefits of the real presence of Christ. He ran and entered the sepulchre, not hoping to see a weak and captive body, but a conquered and deceived grave, as he found it to be. He found there only the relics of weakness and the witness of power (Luke 24:12).

What was it that made Peter rise and run with such haste to the grave of Christ? When nature is raised up from her ruins and decay, when the conscience is cleansed from the guilt of sin and of the burden of sorrow, when a fallen saint has regained his measure of grace and tranquillity, he is so much the more eager in heavenly pursuits. The remembrance of those past sins which had so disadvantaged his progress, and wounded him, now only serve to spur him forward in his way.

The very sins of the Christian, contrary to the barrenness of their own nature, are, by the mercy and wisdom of God made fruitful and of use to the

Christian. The devil, in wounding the Christian, therefore wounds himself. Though the fiery darts of the devil may at first find an entrance, yet when they come to the bottom of a faithful heart, they find there a rock of salvation from whence they are driven back into the face of him that threw them. When the devil batters any one virtue in a saint, he does nothing else but pull out a stone of his own building. Though he breaks David's bones, though he sifts Peter's faith, yet both, when they are restored, will be like a broken bone - stronger, and, like wheat that is sifted - finer. The restored saints will also by instructing and confirming others, draw more men from Satan than he had drawn graces from men before.

30. A Prayer: Grace to stand or grace to weep...

Peter had expected great security in the denial of his Saviour, and the upshot of it all was: he turned as it were into the valley of Megiddo, his head into a fountain of water and his soul is even drenched in whole floods of sorrow (2 Chronicles 35:22). Sin is not only deceitful in depriving us of those hoped immunities which we seek for in sin, but it is also fruitful in the ample increase of evil. It not only deprives us of comfort, but it heaps misery on us.

Sin is like a great thick cloud which not only comes between the Sun of Righteousness and us, hiding the light of his countenance from us, but it also showers down on our deceived souls' whole storms of woe and shame. There is ever a weeping that follows sin. Either such a desperate weeping as has that dreadful concomitant added to it; gnashing of teeth, or such a repentant weeping as is sealed up from the mouth of Christ himself with a blessing until the day of redemption (Matthew 8:12).

Blessed indeed are the tears of a converted rebel, and happy is the very misery of a mourning offender; for as water boiling and overflowing puts out the fire, which at first caused it to boil, so the tears of true repentance serve to extinguish those flames and terrors of conscience and to blot out those burning sins which first caused them to run over, by the means of Christ's grace.

Lord, give us in the first place thy sustaining grace which may preserve us from the danger of great and scandalous offenses. But if thy wisdom finds it otherwise requisite, to punish our presumptions with a temporary desertion and withdrawal of thy power yet never deny us that restoring grace which may re-establish us in thy favour. Give us, if not the grace of standing, yet the grace of weeping; that, though we cannot be innocent, we may be repentant.

Quotable Quotes

"Every man would love God more if he could love himself less"

"If he is not willing to own Christ, he will be quick to deny him."

"We know the devil never overcomes any who is not first overcome by self"

"The devil tempts us that he may draw us into sin; but he tempts us with weak instruments that he may drive us to despair."

"Such a recovery of faith proceeds by degrees, from weakness unto strength, from fear unto confidence"

"Though the fiery darts of the devil may at first find an entrance, yet when they come to the bottom of a faithful heart they find there a rock of salvation from where they are driven back into the face of him that threw them."

"There is ever a weeping that follows sin. Either such a desperate weeping as has that dreadful concomitant added to it; gnashing of teeth, or such as repentant weeping as is sealed up, from the mouth of Christ himself, with a blessing until the day of redemption."