

THE GOSPEL OF THE SECOND CHANCE

There is no second chance for those who die rejecting Christ. Our Lord Himself put it plainly. "You . . . shall die in your sins. Where I go you cannot come. . . . For if you believe not that I am He you shall die in your sins" (John 8:21, 24).

Paul by the Spirit stated the same truth in relation to the second coming of Christ and the period which will follow it. "God shall send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Nevertheless, there is most certainly a second chance for the child of God who has failed. And failure is not final for the servant of Christ who has been disobedient and fruitless.

WE ALL FAIL

It is true that we all fail in some way or another - in our business relationships, or domestic relationships, or perhaps in our church fellowship. Sometimes failure is in our own inner lives. But failure should never paralyze us. The person who tries and fails has done better than those who have never really begun to live the Christian life or never commenced the service of Christ in complete dedication.

Failure, when it occurs, must be dealt with. None can enjoy the blessings of God to the full if he is failing in some way. God cannot use an unclean vessel in His holy service.

"Are the consolations of God small with thee?" (Job 15:11). That is a question of real import.

The three questions that follow suggest reasons that will lead to carelessness and failure: "Is there any secret thing with thee? Why doth thine heart carry thee away? And what do thine eyes wink at (overlook) that thou turnest thy spirit against God?" (vv. 11-12).

TRIUMPH AFTER FAILURE

It is remarkable to see the triumphs of God's grace in the lives of many of His servants who at first failed. God actually made them "more than conquerors" when they accepted the second chance He offered them. They excelled in the very matter in which they had failed.

Abraham's failure was in his faithlessness. When he was in Egypt he told Sarah his wife to say that she was his sister. Yet that was the very man who became the "father of all them that believe" (Genesis 12:11-13; Romans 4:11).

Moses' failure was in his self assertion. He slew an Egyptian who was smiting a Hebrew slave. As a result he had to flee from Egypt. In spite of this, when he took the second chance that God gave him, Moses became the meekest man on earth (Exodus 2:11-12, 15; 3:10; Numbers 12:3).

David's failure was in his lustful desires, manifesting themselves in his immoral act with Bathsheba. With God, however, failure is not final. God took David up again after he had repented thoroughly, as seen in the words of the fifty-first Psalm. David became a man after God's own heart, fulfilling all His will (2 Samuel 11:2-4; Psalm 51:1-4, 10; Acts 13:22).

Jonah failed in his refusal to preach to the people of the city of Nineveh. Later he cried out in despair from the belly of the great fish. "I will look again toward Thy holy temple," he said. Then it was that the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time. "Go unto Ninevah, . . . and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." He did just that and he became a most effective preacher (Jonah 1:2-3; 2:1,4; 3:1-5).

Young John Mark certainly failed God when he deserted his call to serve with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He returned home to Jerusalem even before the halfway mark was reached. It is encouraging to note, however, that years later there appears evidence that God had given

Mark another chance, and that Mark had triumphed. Unafraid now, he stood by Paul in Paul's Roman imprisonment. Still later, Paul wrote to Timothy from his final imprisonment: "Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (Acts 13:13; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11)

Peter's failure was in his denial of his Lord. His Master told him he would get a further chance. After the resurrection, Peter preached Christ on the day of Pentecost, to the conversion of 3,000 people (Luke 22:31-34; Acts 2:14, 41).

Failure is not final, for God will give His own a second chance, even those who deny Him.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY

According to a Jewish proverb there are three men who get no pity: "An unsecured creditor, a henpecked husband, and a man who does not try again." It is not that we should try once more in our own strength, for the arm of flesh will fail. We must rely instead on the strength which God supplies through His incarnate Son, and through His indwelling Spirit.

Deem not the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
For rising from its wrecks at last
To nobler greatness we attain.

God will make even the valley of Achor (where all was trouble and failure) to become a door of hope (Hosea 2:15).

THE POTTER'S HANDS

A perfect example of the theme "failure is not final" is seen in Jeremiah 18. When the prophet went to the potter's house he saw a vessel which was marred in the hands of the potter. But the potter turned the clay and shaped it again. "So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O House of Israel" (vv. 4-6).

There are three simple but important principles here:

1. If we are in the hands of the Master Potter, we are vessels for His fashioning and use.

Lie still and let Him mold thee;
O Lord I would obey,
Be Thou the skilful Potter
And I the yielding clay.

2. If we are unfortunately marred, we are still in the hands of the Potter. There is no complete rejection, for with God, for His own, failure is not final.

No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. - John 10:29

3. If we are marred, we are not discarded, but made again, to be vessels unto honor. We are given a second chance. There is no doubt about this fact. If we are usable we shall be used:

Make me and mold me After Thy will, while in Thy hand I'm lying still.

In the great list of the faithful in Hebrews 11 we read: "These all died in faith" (v. 13). But we have also seen that many of these lived, at first, in failure. For them, as for us, failure was not final. God gave them a second chance, and see how mighty they became!

For all of God's people, this is really good news, this "Gospel of the second chance." David Clifford