

DIVINE FAVOR AND HUMAN FAILURE

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples...” (1 Corinthians 10:1-6 NKJV)

A Christian father and mother went shopping in a mall and took their 6 year old son with them. The boy made a nuisance of himself wanting this and that, running off, playing hide-and-seek, making noise and interfering with other shoppers. As they were driving home, the boy could sense his parent’s displeasure. He said, “When we ask God to forgive us when we are bad, He does, doesn’t He?” His mother replied, “Yes, He does.” The boy continued, “And when he forgives us, He buries our sins in the deepest sea, doesn’t He?” The dad replied, “Yes, that’s what the Bible says.” The boy was silent for awhile and then said, “I’ve asked God to forgive me for failing to be good at the mall, but I bet when we get home, you’re going to try to dig up those sins that God has buried, aren’t you?”

We have all failed at being good all the time, haven’t we? But in order to have God’s forgiveness, we have to face our failures and receive God’s forgiveness. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, the apostle Paul was writing to the Christians in the city of Corinth to correct some of their failures. He reminds them that God’s people in the Old Testament were favored by God but, although favored, they failed the God Who favored them. The Corinthian Christians had also been greatly favored by God but there were some in the church whose practices did not match their profession. Paul is making a comparison between them and the ancient Israelites. Notice the favors that the Israelites enjoyed:

I. THE FAVORS THE JEWS ENJOYED.

“Brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that **all** our fathers were under the cloud, **all** passed through the sea, **all** were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **all** ate the same spiritual food, and **all** drank the same spiritual drink.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

There are three categories of favors or privileges with which God blessed the people of Israel. They all experienced:

1. *Divine Protection* - “Brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that **all** our fathers were under the cloud...”
2. *Divine Preservation* - “...**all** passed through the sea, **all** were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
3. *Divine Provision* - “... **all** ate the same spiritual food, and **all** drank the same spiritual drink.”

To favor means to give special regard to; to treat with goodwill; to show exceptional kindness to someone. When God appointed Moses to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, Moses wanted to know that he had God’s favor for the journey before he would commit

to the undertaking. Therefore, Moses had a talk with God and it is recorded in Exodus 33:13-17 as follows:

“Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight...”

The word “favor” is from the Hebrew word that is also translated “grace.” God assured Moses that he and the Israelites would be graced by God’s favors throughout their journey. This Paul emphasized to the Christians in the church in Corinth. Think with me about these three categories of blessings these people enjoyed.

A. Divine Protection - “Brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that **all** our fathers were under the cloud...”

The cloud – called the “Shekinah” – was the visible symbol of the divine presence and protection. This “cloud” went before them by day to guide them, and by night it became a pillar of fire to give them light. (Ex.13:21-22) It was a covering, a shelter from the rays of the sun. Numbers 10:34 tells us that “The cloud of Jehovah was upon them by day.” The cloud was a symbol of divine protection.

B. Diving Preservation - “...**all** passed through the sea, **all** were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...”

Exodus 14:21-22 records the walk between the walls of water: “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

God made a passage-way through the water, holding back the sea until they had safely passed through. He made a way where there was no way. In doing so, He preserved Israel while the Egyptian army of Pharaoh drowned.

C. Divine Provision - “... **all** ate the same spiritual food, and **all** drank the same spiritual drink.”

The idea is that all the Israelites were fed with food given directly by God. What was that food? It was called “Manna.” We read in Exodus 16:15 “When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.” In Exodus 16:35 we are told that “The

people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.”

Also, they “all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” The miracle fountain of water from the rock is to be regarded as representing Christ and of the blessings that come from Him. The Messiah is often referred to as a Rock in the Old Testament scriptures. God had told Moses to strike the rock and water would gush out: “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” (Ex. 17:6) That water followed them throughout their wilderness journey.

In writing to the Corinthian Christians about their forefathers, Paul was equating the divine favors of the ancient people with the divine favors that all New Testament believers enjoy. The Corinthians, as well as ourselves, have been similarly and continuously blessed by God. We too, are being protected, preserved and provided for by God on a daily basis. The psalmist wrote, “Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah.” (Psalm 68:19 NKJV) “Selah” means, “Pause and think about that!”

We must understand that God's blessings come by degrees. The more we please God, the more we will be blessed by Him. Also, it is important not to think of His favor in material or worldly terms. God's favor most likely will be given in spiritual blessings more than in material blessings. He does desire to favor us with His blessings. We find these words of promise in the book of Isaiah 30:18 – “Therefore, the Lord longs to be gracious to you.” The word “gracious” used in that verse means “to show favor.” In essence, this verse is saying, “Therefore, the Lord longs to show favor to you.” God favors whoever He sees fit. We grow in favor as we faithfully live for the Lord.

However, this should not be looked upon as some sort of secret formula for getting everything we want. For purposes of His own, God sometimes takes those He loves through special trials. Job is the primary example but similar instances happen in the lives of many. However, if we continually draw closer to the Lord, we will come to dwell in His favor and in His favor is life. “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Do some receive more favor from God than others? Yes! Take the virgin Mary for example. An angel appeared to her and said, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:26) After all the missteps I have made in my life I am still blessed. Just to think that God favors me - what a confirming and comforting truth that is! I want His favor, I need His favor, I must have His favor!

However, many Christians do not appreciate and appropriate the favors and blessings that God bestows upon them. Such was the attitude of many of the Christians in the church in Corinth. The loose lifestyle of the Christians in Corinth belied their blessings. Their behavior denied their beliefs; their conduct corresponded with the conduct of the culture around them. Therefore, Paul's usage of the ancient Israelites was a powerful model for these Corinthian

believers. The Israelites were favored by God but they failed to live up to their blessings and God judged them. Paul intended that this model serve as a corrective to the Corinthians and to all who afterward would call themselves Christians.

II. THE DISFAVOR THE JEWS INCURRED.

“But with **most** of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples...” (1 Corinthians 10:5)

Many of the Christians in Corinth were like the ancient Israelites: They were favored by God, but they failed to live for God; they were blessed but they were backslidden; they were privileged but they were perverse. What was said of their Jewish forefathers could be said of them: “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with **most** of them.” Their condition was parallel to that of the ancient Jews.

Why? Notice the lifestyles in the culture around them. Just a glimpse of the Corinthian culture will suffice to show the environment to which many of the Christians in Corinth had succumbed. Paul wrote two letters to the Christian community in Corinth. The first Epistle reflects the conflict between the church and the Corinthian culture.

Corinth was the site of a great temple dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite where there more than one thousand temple prostitutes. Sexual license was the rule rather than the exception in Corinth. But the problems of sexual license were not just limited to prostitution. Fornication and prostitution were accepted throughout that culture, and Paul's denunciation of these sins of the flesh in 1st Corinthians 6 went against the grain of the vile culture of Corinth.

The Roman sage Seneca wrote, "Is there any shame at all for adultery now that matters have come to such a pass that no woman has any use for her husband?" He goes on to write, "Chastity is simply a proof of ugliness." He continues, "Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands, and leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to be divorced?" (On Benefits 3.16.2). Consequently, when Paul quoted from Jesus that the wife should not leave her husband nor the husband divorce his wife (I Cor. 7:10-11), he was teaching something novel to Corinthian society.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul writes, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!" In chapter 6 he writes, "Flee sexual immorality." (v.18)

Therefore, the situations which Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians were ones with which the Corinthians were familiar. They may well have wanted to continue a basic part of social life that they had engaged in before their conversion.

Drunkenness was rampant in Corinth. Wine flowed as freely as water. All the heathen temples, of which there were hundreds, used alcohol to induce fantasies and euphoria in the minds of the worshipers. With this background connection between drunkenness and religion, we should not be entirely surprised to find the Corinthians getting drunk at the Lord's Supper

as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:21.

The city was known all over the ancient world as a center of wealth and luxurious lifestyles. Horace, the Greek writer said, "Not everyone is able to go to Corinth", due to the expensive living standards that prevailed in the city.

"You're a Corinthian!" If you had heard that exclamation in New Testament times you would know that the person who said it was very upset. To call someone a Corinthian was insulting. Even non-Christians recognized that Corinth was one of the most immoral cities in the known world.

A statement by Paul in writing to young pastor Titus gives us a glimpse into the general culture of the Greeks in Paul's day. He quotes Epimenides as saying, "One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies." (Titus 1:12) 1 Corinthians 10:7 sums up what Paul observed daily during the 18 months he ministered there: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (1 Corinthians 10:7).

The believers in Corinth lived in a culture similar to ours. Their culture, like ours, was diverse ethnically, religiously, and philosophically. It, like ours, was a culture of anti-God lifestyles. Many of the Christians in the church in Corinth were caught up in that Christless culture. Consequently, when Paul cited the example of the ancient Jew's backslidden condition, he did so in order to confront the Corinthian Christians with their own worldliness. Notice how Paul used the example of these Old Testament Jews to rebuke these New Testament Christians:

A. His Witness Against Them. "Nevertheless, with *most* of them God was not pleased..."

Paul is saying, "God was not pleased with His ancient people whom He had redeemed and, he is not pleased with some of you whom He has redeemed." He went on to write, beginning in verse 6 of this 10th chapter: "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction..." (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

Let us ask ourselves, "Is God pleased with me or displeased?" Have I capitulated to the godless culture of our day or am I living a counter-cultural, Christlike lifestyle?" Paul anticipates the answer that some of the Christians would give to those questions and so he has a warning for them.

B. His Warning to Them.

Some would answer quickly and flippantly, "Sure, I'm pleasing God, after all I am a good church member. I may dabble a little in some of the more mild forms of worldliness, but I'm

not a heathen!" Then comes Paul's sobering warning. He says: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) He knew that, as Proverbs 16:8 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

John Bunyan, author of "The Pilgrim's Progress" also wrote these words:

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride.
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

The humble person is the person who is always on guard lest he fall into temptation and incur the displeasure of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

C. His Wisdom for Them.

Paul not only gives a word of witness and warning, but he also gives a word of wisdom. He writes: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

Why did the children of Israel incur the displeasure of God? Because they yielded to the temptations that were all around them in the heathen cultures of the nations through which they passed on their journey to the Promised Land. Paul wrote in verse 6 of chapter 10 saying: "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did." (1 Corinthians 10:6) They desired evil. Why? Because they were tempted by evil! None of us know of what stuff we are really made until we are tried and tested by temptation.

Therefore, Paul's words of wisdom for them and us are about withstanding and overcoming temptation. He says:

1. Temptation is Real.
2. Temptation is Realized by all. It is "common to man."
3. Temptation can be Resisted. "God is faithful.... he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

How would Paul advise believers to respond to life in such a city? This is what he wrote: "Whether ... you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor.10:31). If everything we do is with the glory of God in mind, we need not fear falling into temptation, incurring the displeasure of God or of failure in our Christian life.

CONCLUSION

Max Lucado, in the introduction to the book of 1st Corinthians, in *The Inspirational Study Bible*, writes the following:

"An Indian was walking up a mountain when he heard a voice. "Carry me with you," it requested. The Indian turned and saw a snake. He refused. "If I carry you up the mountain

you will bite me.” “I wouldn’t do that,” the snake assured. “All I need is some help. I am slow and you are fast, please be kind and carry me to the top of the mountain.” It was against his better judgment, but the Indian agreed. He picked up the snake, put him in his shirt, and resume the journey. When they reached the top, he reached into his shirt to remove the snake and got bit. He fell to the ground, and the snake slithered away. “You lied!” The Indian cried, “You said you wouldn’t bite me.” The snake stopped and looked back, “I didn’t lie. You knew who I lost when you pick me up.”

Lucado continues, “We hear the legend and shake our heads. He should have known better, we bemoan. And we are right. He should have. And so should we. But don’t we do the same? Don’t we believe the lies of the snake? Don’t we pick up what we should leave alone? The Corinthian Christians did. One snake after another had hissed his lies in their ears, and they had believed it. How many lies did they believe? How much time do you have? The list is long and ugly: sectarianism, disunity, sexual immorality. And that is only the first six chapters. But first Corinthians is more than a list of sins.... Paul initiates the letter by calling these Christians “brothers.” He could have called them heretics or hypocrites or skirt-chasers (and in so many words he does), but not before he calls them brothers. The letter.... Is not just for Corinth. It is for all who have heard the whisper and felt the fangs. We, like the Indian, should have known better. We, like the Corinthians, sometimes need a second chance.”

The God of the Bible is the God of the second chance. Ask Jonah; ask Peter – and many another who has failed. The pathway from Eden’s gateway to everyone’s doorway is strewn with wreckage. Written across the pages of human history is the word “Failure.” However, written also in large letters, by the hand of God, is the word, “Forgiveness!”

There has been only One in human flesh Who has never experienced failure. He is described as being “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” in Hebrews 7:26. Of course, the writer is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. All others have “sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

C. S. Lewis, in his book the Screwtape Letters, vividly describes Satan's strategy. He wrote: “He gets Christians to become preoccupied with their failures; from then on the battle is won by Satan.” But I have good news for you! Failure need not be final or fatal! God has made provision to correct and cancel out our failures.

The only people who will be in heaven are former failures who availed themselves of God’s forgiveness. Nowhere are the terms of forgiveness made plainer than in 1 John 1:8-10 where we read:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

Our heavenly Father is the God of the Second Chance. All of us need a second chance. There is a story about a fellow who got a second chance that has encouraged me and I hope

it will encourage you as well. It has been told and retold but perhaps the ending is not known by all. Here is the story:

In 1929, Georgia Tech football team played the University of California in the 1929 Rose Bowl Game. In the game, a player on the California team picked up a fumble and got confused and ran almost the length of the field in the wrong way. A teammate tackled him just before he would have scored a touchback against his own team.

At halftime, all the players went into the dressing room and sat down wondering what the coach would say. This young man sat by himself. He put a towel over his head and cried. When the team was ready to go back on to the field for the second half, the coach stunned the team when he announced that the same players who had started the first half would start the second half.

All of the players left the dressing room except this young man. He would not get up. The coach looked back as he called him again and saw that his face was wet with tears. The player said, "Coach, I can't do it. I ruined you. I've disgraced the University. I can't face that crowd in the stadium again." Then the coach put his hand on the player's shoulder and said, "Get up and go back in. The game is only half over. We've got a chance to correct any mistakes that we made in the first half."

That player's name was Roy Riegels. He is usually known as "Wrong Way Riegels." However, what is not generally known is that the mistake he made in running the wrong way and the second chance that he got changed his life. The next season Roy Riegels, was named on the 1930 All American football team.

When I think about this story, deep inside I say, "What a coach!" and when we read in the Bible about Jonah and David and the stories of others like them, I thank God that He gives us a second chance. Our Heavenly Father waits for us to seek His forgiveness. He says that He will "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). And He assures us that He is not going to go fishing for those sins that He has buried!

JdonJ

OPTIONAL

The story is told in Spain of a father and his teenage son who had a relationship that had become strained. So the son ran away from home. His father, however, began a journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office 800 "Pacos" showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers.