

## ***THE END OF GUILT***

The King, who alone has the power to pardon us, carries with Him the power of redemption. Peter's experience and interaction with Jesus Christ is a powerful study of guilt and God's response to it. From the first time they met, it laid between them and overshadowed their relationship. On the boat, after his initial reluctance, Peter obeyed instructions and hauled in a miraculous catch. Embarrassed over his previous unbelief, he basically asked Jesus, "What do you and I have in common? I am just a sinner". Jesus knew that Peter would fail Him a little and love Him more, so He responded by offering him a course on discipleship and turning the world upside down. The One who knows the future does not call us to be disciples, unless He knows that we are capable of it.

Now imagine Peter listening to Jesus pray. He is praying that Peter's faith will not fail after he has been sifted by Satan and that he will return (was he going somewhere?) and strengthen the brethren. It was being prophesied that he would fail. Peter is understandably upset. He has stuck by Christ through criticism, persecution, lies, and a few attempts at murder. He has declared that he would never turn away. That he would be there whenever Jesus needed him. We still make those kind of commitments. When they were accosted in the garden, in his enthusiasm to prove his loyalty, he single handedly attacked the entire arresting force. Imagine the sigh of Jesus as He leaned down, picked up the ear, and fixed the mess Peter had made of things. Imagine Peter's discouragement. Imagine ours.

The worst experience of Peter's life would had to have come in the middle of the "trial" of Jesus. Three times he was given an opportunity to declare his loyalty. Three times confusion and fear prompted him to disclaim association with Christ. When the rooster crowed, a battered Jesus looked up and locked eyes with Peter across the courtyard. Peter knew that Jesus knew what had just occurred. Weeping bitterly, he fled from his failure, putting on a staggering load of guilt even as he ran. There was no one to tell him that even when we mess up and stand aside watching God pay the price for our mistakes, the look in His eyes is not one of anger.

After the resurrection, we find the disciples out fishing. Feeling unworthy and unsure of their calling, even though they had known power, they have gone back to the familiar. Jesus did not call them for three years only. He called them for a lifetime of service. After a miracle to convince them that it is indeed He, Jesus calls them to the shore for a feast. This is where the story really becomes powerful. Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. We don't know what passed between them in their first reunion, but this one is chronicled in a little more detail. Peter responds in the affirmative and is told to feed the sheep of Jesus. The same question is asked again and the same exchange is made. When it is repeated a third time, Peter becomes upset. It seems as though Jesus is not listening or was mocking him.

It is easy to relate to Peter's anger. As if the guilt was not bad enough, was the master going to ignore and embarrass him now? We also feel inadequate when we do not accomplish all that we promised God we would do for Him. We feel defeated because there are things in our lives that seem to overshadow and control us. The guilt of the past just weighs us down. And God does not even seem to hear our prayers or explanations.

Which is fitting, because we don't seem to listen either. We missed the parable about guilt. The one where the prodigal son was afraid to come home. His guilt was overwhelming. Until he realized who he was and that his mistakes had not ended his status as a son. How he was related

to his father had not changed. The most important part of this story is the one who told it. Jesus used it as an allegory of how He, as the Father, responds to the guilt of His children. And to pleas for forgiveness. Whether the father is natural or divine, repentance is a cause for celebration.

The only reason Peter was not rejoicing is that he had momentarily missed the significance of what had just happened. He had denied Christ and his love for Him three times before the crucifixion. Three loads of guilt, canceled out by three affirmations of love. God's forgiveness was exactly equal to the guilt Peter carried. With a God like that, it's small wonder that Peter found the strength to live and die for Christ. When we discover that attribute of God for ourselves, then we can believe Romans 8:1, which assures us, that there is therefore now no condemnation.

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Have you ever been embarrassed by your initial unbelief in the face of God's promises?
2. Do you believe that if God calls you to do anything for His kingdom, you will be capable of it?
3. If you were Peter, would you have been offended by Jesus praying for you? Does it offend you now when others pray for you or do you ever stiffen up in indignation at their assumption that you need grace or would benefit from the blessing of God on your life?
4. Have you ever tried to do something for God and come away feeling that you did more harm than good to the cause of Christ? What did you do at that point? Have you tried again since?
5. How often, intentionally or not, do we deny association with Christ? When someone tells a dirty joke, then mockingly asks if it bothers us, what do we say? What if churches in general are being discussed derogatorily around us? What if the existence of God is being questioned? Or a brother or sister in the Lord being made fun of? What do we do? If we sit in silence, is it the same as denial? How easy is it to come face to face with God afterwards?
6. When we mess up in one area, why do we often feel we have to give up our whole walk with God and go back to life before Christ?
7. Does God's call on anyone's life ever end, except by death? Does failure end our status as a child or a disciple of God?
8. Have you ever felt as though God was punishing you by not hearing your prayers? By not listening to your declaration of love to Him?
9. Have you ever felt unworthy, after failure, to even be considered a child of God again? How long did it take you to "come to yourself" and realize that your relationship to God had not really changed?
10. Can you think of any time in your walk with God where you failed Him, but then you were allowed to make restitution for that failure?
11. What do you think is meant by Romans 8:1 concerning condemnation?