

Overcoming Past Failures

By, Bill Franklin

Dr. David Shaw

Failure is inevitable for everyone. Few of us have lived long without saying “if only” or “I regret that I ever did that.”

Paul is a noteworthy example of one who failed. As a non-Christian, he confessed...“formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent” (of Christians). 1 Timothy 1:13.

As a believer, he entered into a different kind of struggle wherein he frequently failed. In Romans 7, Paul said the following, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out...but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.” (Romans 7:18, 19, 21).

But this lesson is not so much focused on the ongoing internal battles with indwelling sin as on those vocational, domestic, relational, decisional, and emotional failures that have brought debilitating consequences to our lives. These consequences have altered our present and future dreams and are frequently filled with shame, guilt, and hopelessness for the present and the future.

The Scriptures offer life-changing solutions to these difficulties. They can be better understood by answering the following four questions.

1. Did God have anything to do with my past failures?

Some would answer “no,” reasoning “I did it to myself. God did not force my hand into making the bad choice that I made. God has nothing to do with bad choices.

Others would answer “yes,” saying, “God was there ultimately orchestrating the good and the bad. After all, God is the origin, the agent, and the goal of all things and is always present even when failures are taking place.

Psalms 106 and 107 are very informative in that they help us see God’s eternal purposes and imminent presence in our failures. *“He looked upon their distress...He heard their cry...He remembered His covenant.” (Psalm 106:44-45) They cried because of their past failures.*

Overcoming the past with Eternity Past

People who have failed say: “I don’t know where to begin.” Notice the text above: HE LOOKED...HE SAW...HE REMEMBERED. You must start where God starts. **GOD ALWAYS STARTS WITH HIMSELF.** The covenant is mentioned in Genesis, but it was

made in the councils of eternity before time even began. Listen to Spurgeon: “*His choice of His redeemed was made deliberately, and the promises made to them were given in full foresight of all our unbelief and lukewarmness and backsliding and selfishness and folly. The Lord is not deceived in the subjects of His grace.*

_____ (Insert your name) every failure, every sin, lie, pornography, and adultery) was the reason for the Lamb being slain before the foundation of the world. Because what the Father promised to the Son in eternity past, when you cry to him in the present for deliverance from past failures and sins, He must justly and longingly forgive and renew and restore your life. He will not break His covenant with you in Christ.

Question: According to Romans 11:36 and Revelation 13:8, what was happening to your life before you were ever born?

2. What do I do with lingering guilt, which seems to paralyze me day after day, for what I’ve done in the past?

What is a good definition of guilt? An excellent definition of guilt is given by one of the criminals who hung on a cross beside Jesus. He said to the other criminal, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” Luke 23:40-41. Here is authentic guilt.

Overcoming Lingering Guilt with Gutsy Guilt

A graphic illustration of lingering guilt and its solution is given to us in Micah 7:7-10. Micah confesses he had fallen, but vs. 8 “when I fall, I shall rise again.” His fall happened because he had sinned against the Lord. Piper calls Micah’s response “gutsy guilt.” Micah is sitting in a darkness characterized by God’s indignation and his own guilt and he embraces both saying, “I WILL BEAR THE INDIGNATION OF THE LORD.” This is the way the OT preached the gospel. Someone (Christ) is pleading for Micah.

There are no sins that God will not forgive. And in his time – until He pleads my cause and executes judgment for me (Micah 7:9) – He will radically set me free for a successful and bountiful future.

Question: In what ways does guilt over my past failures hinder my progress in the future?

3. How do I live with the consequences of my failures?

David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11-12) brought severe consequences (2 Samuel 12:14)

Overcoming Penal Consequences with Corrective Consequences

Although David's sin has been forgiven, there remains the "disciplinary consequences."

- (1) To demonstrate the exceeding sinfulness of sin
- (2) To show that God does not take sin lightly even when he lays aside his punishment
- (3) To humble and sanctify the forgiven sinner

Hebrews 12:3-11 makes it clear that painful discipline comes from a Father's heart of love. Our Heavenly Father is determined to have His sons look like and live like their Heavenly Father.

The Big Idea

We must not equate forgiveness with the absence of a painful impact.

QUESTION: What is the difference between legal condemnation and the feeling of penal condemnation associated with God's fatherly discipline? If I live in accepting understanding of that difference, how can that affect my life and my experience of the joy of my salvation?

4. **How should I therefore live in the future so as to glorify God and to finish well?**

Much help is found in the Book of Joel in 2:25. God says: "*I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts has eaten...You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you...You shall know...that I am the Lord your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.*" (Joel 2:26-27).

Joel experienced years of Divine Retribution. Martin Lloyd-Jones captures the essence of restoration by saying: "*If you really believe what you says about the past, if you really do bemoan the fact that you have wasted so much time in the past, the thing to do is to make up for it in the present. Is not that common sense? Here is a man who comes in utterly dejected and saying: 'if only – the time I have wasted!' What I say to him is this: 'are you making up for that lost time? Why are you wasting this energy in telling me about the past which you cannot undo? Why don't you put your energy into the present?'*"