

## #234 "Pride Comes Before the Fall"

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*"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."*

*-1 Corinthians 10:12*

No man is above frailty, the prospect of failure, and the reality of stumbling. Pride ignores this fact, while faith humbles itself before the fear of God, yearning and longing for His enabling, empowering, and sustenance for life in Christ on this earth. He is our food, our life, our daily bread, and our means to accomplish anything eternal for Christ. Without a daily leaning upon Christ and turning to Him quickly when we do stumble, we will fall further and further into the depths of despair of sin. Let us take heed lest we fall, and we would do well to be mindful of the following Scriptural account of the disciples, particularly Peter, who learned this lesson concerning pride the hard way.

When Jesus said in Matthew 26:31 that all of the disciples would be scattered, Peter in particular didn't take that very well. He boldly said to Christ in v. 33, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Then, even after Christ spelled out that he would deny Him three times in v. 34, he said again in v. 35, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." Peter obviously had an overconfidence in his ability to face trial and temptation and stand. He could envision all of the other disciples failing Jesus in a time of trial, but he could not see himself doing that. He was sure that he would stand. But this was not just Peter's sentiment. In v. 35, we see that all of the other disciples said the same thing, too (v. 35). They thought they were ready to acknowledge Christ to the end, even dying with Him. Yet when Jesus was arrested, they left Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). Indeed, the struggle that was in Peter was also in them, for every man must battle the frailties of the flesh (John 2:23-25).

It is easy at times to believe that we are above particular sins or behaviors or to take a false confidence in our ability to persevere. It can be tempting to rank ourselves compared to other Christians rather than looking to Christ. It was Peter's problem also, but in the end, it was a learning experience for him. It ought to be a poignant lesson for us as well. In John 21:15-17, we see how Christ restored Peter. In making obvious allusion to Peter's three-fold denial by asking him three times if he loved Him, Christ tenderly but pointedly confronted Peter's failure so that Peter could learn from it and be able to stand in the future. We do not grow from places of pride, but we learn when we are humble, which may require, like it did Peter, our first being humbled. In considering this passage, we should pay particular note to the fact that Jesus asked Peter in the first of the three questions if he loved Him more than these? What "these" refers to is critical. Around Peter are several other disciples, some fish, his boat, and his breakfast. Though certainly we should love Jesus more than our earthly things such as our food or livelihood, it would seem that Jesus had something deeper in mind. In fact, it is likely that He was referencing Peter's earlier statement when he said that these other disciples might fall but that he would not. So Jesus was asking Peter tenderly but bluntly, "Do you still believe that you are really so much better, stronger, or faithful than these other disciples?" It is truly humbling to realize that we are

not as wonderful or invulnerable as we might like to think we are. If we are put in just the right situation with just the right amount of variables, we, too, could say or do things that we never thought we would. We need to take heed lest we stumble badly and fall flat on our faces. We can thank our Savior, however, that He is there to tenderly restore us as we come, like Peter, with broken hearts of repentance (Matthew 26:75). **God's goal in trial is never to break us beyond repair but to fix what needs fixing and to restore what is already broken.** Finally, let us note Peter's answer to Christ's questioning, for it reveals a new and more proper perspective. Peter responded to Christ's question of "Do you love Me?" by saying, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." There was no longer any confidence in self, no talk about dying with Christ or standing with Him until the end. His confidence was in Christ's hold upon His heart, upon the eternal omniscience of God, and upon Christ's ongoing work within Him. Peter's failure allowed him to see just how weak his flesh really was so that he could learn to put his confidence where it should have been all along, in Christ Himself.

Since God hates pride and arrogance (Proverbs 8:13), He must work these things out of our hearts, but He will do it purposefully and tenderly such that He will restore us. He left Peter with three commands to tend and feed the flock of Christ. Peter could shepherd God's people because He learned that He was but a vessel for the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. That place of humility is a place of great freedom, the only hope for peace as we live the Christian life. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), for we do not need to earn Christ's love. We don't need to compete for His affection or prove our worth. He just wants us to find in Him our all in all, our life, and our boast. With Him as our confidence, we can endure to the end.