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CHRIST AND HIS CONCERN FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ” Mark 16:7

Recently I came across an article over the internet which stated this: *“Our need to maintain social approval is actually making us lose what is best about ourselves - our individuality.” Depending upon our value system and the kind of people whose approval we seek, the above statement may be true. There is an old saying that advises **“to thy own self be true.”** But the question is: *Can we be true even to ourselves, as well as God, if we are at the same time seeking the acceptance of others?**

It is normal for us as human beings to want to be accepted amidst the people, with whom we live, work, and associate with the most. But are we being true both to ourselves as well as the people whose acceptance we seek? And along with that how does this desire of acceptance affect our relationship with God? Because in order to be accepted by some people you will probably most often find yourself making compromises on things that offend God.

PETER’S DENIAL OF THE LORD

I have chosen this passage in Mark’s Gospel for a purpose. Because at the time these words were uttered by the angel, Peter’s reputation among the disciples was not held in the highest esteem, due to his *“denial of Christ”* in the courtyard, just prior to Christ’s crucifixion. Mark, himself, told us about this incident (Mark 14:66-72).

Now exactly, why the angel chose to single out Peter, while the rest of the disciples were mentioned only as a group, surely must have been due to their knowledge of his denial. The disciples might have been hesitant to relay Christ’s invitation to Peter had the angel not mentioned Peter’s name and thus would be in doubt as to whether he would or should be welcome in such a possible gathering.

It is remarkable that Peter is singled out in this manner. It was proof of the kindness and mercy of the Lord Jesus. This invitation does not infer that Peter had lost his title as a disciple. Before his fall, Jesus had prayed for him that his faith should not fail (Luke 22:32); and we also must remember that at the time of Christ’s trial and crucifixion, Mark also said, *“And they all (disciples) left him and fled”* (Mark 14:50). None of the disciples could have boasted of their courage in such an hour...because they **all** failed our Lord in this most anguishing and excruciating hour.

But I believe Peter is mentioned not only so the disciples would know that he would be welcomed by our Lord, but that Peter himself would have no doubt as to Christ’s grace and forgiveness. This message sent to Peter was to comfort and console him in his sorrow. After all he had been listed among the top three disciples and had been given many advantages to witness things that the other disciple had not seen. Yet, in spite of the favored status, he had let His Lord down. But Jesus wanted him to know...all was forgiven. This message was one of comfort to the fallen...not only to Peter, but to all of us - who have failed the Lord on various occasions and in various ways.

If there ever is a crucial time in a Christian’s life - it is when they have blown it. Mistakes happen and will continue to happen as long as we live within this flesh of ours. I do not say this to justify our errors and mistakes but I say it in order for us to get a grasp on our *“fallen nature.”* I believe this is the reason Peter wrote in his own Epistle the following words: *“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* What Peter is doing is stating the problem and the condition that many in the world find themselves...more like a victim of a roaring lion who has only one aim: *to devour.*

The one Apostle who had once been in the grip of that “roaring lion” thus counsels his readers to: *“Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”* 1 Peter 5:8-10

CHRIST JESUS IS IN THE RESTORING BUSINESS

The evidence of this fact that Christ is in the restoring business is found repeatedly in the Gospel. We see it when Jesus told the story of the “good shepherd” that left the ninety-nine and went in search of the “lost sheep.” Jesus is as concerned about the one as he is of the ninety-nine. Sometimes people expect the Lord to come looking for them and thus never return. They forget he already has made the journey when he left His throne in glory and came to earth “to seek and save that which is lost.”(Luke 19:10).

The story Christ told of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31), ***is all about the failure of the one son who took his inheritance and spent it all.*** He would have fed his belly with the slop that the pigs eat...but had second thoughts, and thus “came to his senses” and thus decided to return back home. Once the boy came within his father’s eye-sight we are shown how the father rushes out to greet his son upon his return. **Please note...the father waited for the son to return.** The question is, how do we get people to return to the place where they truly belong?

I believe the only way that can be answered is by the individual themselves. They must see the error of their ways; they must come to their senses. And they must have the humility to admit their sin as well as to make such a confession as the prodigal did. Remember what the lad said. *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”* (Luke 15:21) Please note the humility with the confession.

OUR LORD’S CONCERN FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

We see our Lord’s concern for the individual when he told the multitude about the little sparrow (Luke 12:6) in which He said that it took five sparrows who sold for two pennies, *“...yet not one of them is forgotten by God.”* Again, the Holy Scriptures reveal God’s concern for the individual. God’s love is not about numbers as much as it is about individuals. If there is one thing that I think is being lost in the church world is this aspect of the Gospel. We seem to be so consumed with large numbers that we have forgotten about human and spiritual needs.

This thought has been burning in my soul of late and is the motivation of this newsletter. I know we have a missed up world. I know there are a lot of pressing needs. I know that the local church has a lot of pressing needs; needs of adequate funds, needs of volunteers to help handle the work load; Missionaries that need to be supported and buildings that need repair or to be enlarged.

But we must not forget that the mission of the church is the individual; individuals which are in crisis; that one lone person in a rest home or hospital bed; the child that lives in a one-parent home; the man or woman that everyone has forgotten in a jail cell; the single person that has no person to confide in as to their hopes and dreams. Yes, and then there is the homeless on the streets that littered the yard where they slept last night as well as neighborhood.

This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2). We are told when Jesus said these words that it was because He had looked upon the multitudes because they had followed Him from place to place. When He saw their anxiety to be instructed and saved. He was moved with compassion on them - He pitied them because they fainted – The word used here refers to the weariness and fatigue which results from labor and being burdened.

It was this kind of world and environment He bade them come as individuals unto Him. *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”* Christ is still calling individuals such as you and I to respond to this kind of invitation. How is your day? Do you need to kneel at His altar and respond to this invitation? Do it and you will find rest for your soul. Amen