
Why Are So Many Christians Failing God?

By David Wilkerson

September 16, 1991 "Help, Lord: for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Psalm 12:1).

A seventy-five-year-old retired official of a large Pentecostal denomination was arrested recently in Houston, Texas. He was charged with soliciting a prostitute. He confessed he had been doing this for nearly forty years; yet in all that time he had never shed a tear of grief. At one time he had been a faithful servant of God - but for the past forty years, he had lived a lie. He failed God, ceasing to be godly.

I received a heartrending letter not long ago from a woman whose pastor had left his wife and run off with the woman's daughter. The pastor left behind two teenage children, a bewildered congregation and a youth group that was angry and confused. He had seemed so holy, so dedicated - but he threw it all away for lust. Here was another once-faithful man who took a fall.

In the past few years the sins of well-known ministers have made headline news. Yet these failures are taking place not just in the ministry, but everywhere - in both pulpit and pew. As a result, many once-faithful followers of God have quit on Him. They have given up and now live in absolute misery and despair.

Scripture prophesies all this: "For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The Day of the Lord shall not come until first there is a great falling away of those who knew God.

Here at Times Square Church, the pastors grieve over those who once sat in our congregation but no longer come. These believers were making spiritual progress and were an important part of God's family. We loved them; they seemed so faithful to God.

But now they are gone! Some have returned to their old sinful habits. Others do not go to church at all. At one time they could not wait for our meetings to start. They were excited about the singing, worship and preaching. Now they are cold, as if they had never known the truth. They are no longer holy nor faithful to God.

Somewhere along the way they were overwhelmed by satanic attack. Sin entered in, and they failed God. Yet they did not have to give up there - they could have pressed on in the Lord. But instead, they threw up their hands and quit, saying, "I can't make it! I'm not spiritual enough to continue. I'm not a normal Christian - something is terribly wrong with me. I'm too weak and worldly, too enslaved to my old ways to change."

In the Psalms, David looked at all the failures around him. Lovers of God, who once were recognized as holy and faithful, were falling left and right. David was smitten by the sight of so many people leaving God, and he cried out, "Help, Lord! The godly are quitting, the faithful are disappearing. They're failing you and falling away!"

God has always had - and always will have - a holy remnant who are faithful to Him. But so many in Israel were falling away that it broke David's heart. He wondered aloud to God, "What is going on? Why are so many once-godly children of God quitting and falling back into sin?"

Here are three major reasons why Christians today are turning their backs On God:

1. Christians Are Giving Up Because They Are Ignorant of The Great and Tender Mercies of God!

Recently, while I was asking the Lord for a heart-searching, the Holy Spirit gave me an unusual word - and I didn't want to hear it! He said, "David, you are in bondage - a very subtle bondage that only the Spirit of God can reveal to you. Many Christians are under this bondage, and most of your staff and congregation as well...

"You are bound to a very limited vision of the Lord's ocean of tender, loving mercies! You have endured much guilt, condemnation and fear, because you have not allowed the Holy Spirit to reveal the greatness and vastness of My forgiving, healing, reconciling mercies. You do not know Me for My tenderness!"

God showed me that this is a root cause of why so many give up and fall away. When sin strikes... when Satan comes in like a flood, and suddenly you're caught in a demonic snare... when you fall into some old habit or sin... the devil creates a bondage!

First, the guilt comes flooding in. Then fear fills your heart. A sense of total failure and helplessness overwhelms your soul. And at this point, most believers run out of grace - because their view of God's mercy is so limited!

Satan comes to you and says, "You've reached your limit. You've confessed your sin time after time. There is no way God will forgive you now, because you've sinned against the light. If you return and confess once more, you'll turn around and sin all over again. So quit now - stop trying to mock God!"

The devil will create in your mind the bondage of a narrow, restrictive vision of the Lord's mercy and grace. He does not want you to see God's ocean of mercy; he wants you to see only a trickle! Oh, you can believe God will forgive you two, three, perhaps even seven or ten times - but no more.

Because of our ignorance of the forgiving, restoring power of Christ's love, we are destroyed. We run out of mercy for ourselves because we are horribly bound by a limited vision. Our eyes have not yet been opened to the greater vision - the endless mercies of our tender Father!

We are so bound by a false, limited view of God's mercies, we find it almost impossible to believe or accept what James said about our Lord: "We... have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful" (James 5:11, NAS).

Do you know what this verse means? I doubt any of us has the full revelation of its meaning. You have to have a wide, unlimited vision of the mercies of Jesus Christ to understand this: it means, "God is easily crushed by our troubles and hurts. He feels our pain and our failures, and He is kind and compassionate to us. He loved us even when we were His enemy! And now, even when we offend Him, He is quick to help, restore and forgive us.

The word "mercy" means this: "kind and compassionate treatment of an offender under one's power." You see, God has the power to damn us to hell every time we sin. But that is the meaning of His mercy: that He has us under His control and can do with us as He pleases. And it pleases His tender heart to be compassionate, pitiful, loving and kind toward those who have failed Him the most.

No One Had a Greater Vision of the Holiness of God Than Jeremiah. Who can read the prophet Jeremiah

without knowing his grief over the treachery, rebellion and backsliding of Israel? No one spoke against Israel's failings more than this man. But Jeremiah also had a corresponding vision of God's tender mercies.

That's the trouble with much holiness preaching today There is a thundering against sin without an accompanying view of His mercy and grace. Beloved, that's dangerous! When I was a young pastor, I got so angry at sin in the church that the message Of God's wrath was the only tune I could play. But a violin with one string doesn't make very good music!

Listen to this almost unbelievable passage from Jeremiah:

"And the Lord said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.

"Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and... ye have not obeyed my voice....Turn, O backsliding children... for I am married unto you" (Jeremiah 3:11-14).

God is saying here, "Oh, My children - you don't have to quit or give up! When you sin, remember how tender, merciful and forgiving I have been through the ages. All I ask is that you confess your sin and your failure. You are still Mine. I'll forgive you, restore you and bring you back.

You probably find it hard to accept forgiveness when you have sinned so often and against all the light you have received. Instead, you walk right out the door and say, "How can I ever go back, when I've heard so much and yet failed Him so grievously?" That is exactly when you need a vision of the unlimited mercy of God, lest the devil tear you apart!

When Satan comes to you with his lies; remind him of Peter, who sat under the anointed ministry of the Lord Himself and failed Him miserably. Peter swore at God, betrayed Jesus, ran away and said, "I don't even know the man!" And the everlasting tenderness of our Lord Jesus found Peter in his broken condition, forgave him, restored him, and set him in the pulpit on the day of Pentecost.

In his agony, David said, "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). And that's exactly what this narrow, limited vision of the mercy of God does. It keeps you focused on your failure, instead of on the greatness of God's mercy and grace. Satan does not want us to have the peace of God, but a dread and horror of a God who is angry and vengeful, waiting to damn and destroy. That is not what our God is like!

The Bible says this of Him; "Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness (Jeremiah 3.22, NAS). If you have failed God or are on the brink of falling, He wants to prepare you for the attack that is going to come!

During Nehemiah's restoration in Jerusalem, the Levites spoke to the crowds of how merciful God had been to them (see Nehemiah 9:16-21). These people repeatedly had sinned against God - after He had restored them countless times. Talk about sinning against the light! Yet here is a God who is caring, loving and tenderhearted to those who had been set against Him. They came back to Him, and He undertook for them all the way through.

Is Satan whispering that you are too backslidden, rebellious and bound by sinful habits to be what God wants you to be? Remind him of God's great mercies to His children in the past, who sinned just as you did. Remind him that the Bible says the Lord is "a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not" (Nehemiah 9:17).

When the devil tries to tell you God has run out of patience with you, remind him of God's great patience with sinful Israel: "Many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies" (9:28). "Yet many years didst thou forbear them... for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God" (9:30-31).

2. Another Reason Christians Are Quitting On God Is Because They Have Condemned Themselves Out of the Joy of the Lord
The Bible says the joy of the Lord is our strength. Without it, we have no power to stand. Beloved, we must be on guard - because guilt and condemnation over sin absolutely destroy the joy of the Lord!

Many Christians are in this bondage right now. They can't accept full and free pardon; they believe they have no right to be joyful. When the Prodigal Son wasted his inheritance and came home in sorrow and shame, he wanted to stay outside his father's house, grieving. But his father freely forgave him, killed a calf and called for a joyful feast.

You see, God has only one way to deal with a repentant child who returns. It is this: "Accept My love and forgiveness - and let everybody rejoice! My child is back!"

Now, if you still cling to your sin - if you refuse to lay it down and return to the Lord's fullness - you have no right to have the joy of the Lord. In fact, the Bible says you will have a troubled countenance.

When Judah sinned, God said, "I will take from them the voice of mirth [laughter], and the voice of gladness" (Jeremiah 25:10). Punishment for sin is the loss of all joy: "The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning" (Lamentations 5:15).

The Christian who has something to hide actually can't hide anything! The change is written all over his face. It is evident in his walk, talk and appearance. If you ask him, "How are you doing?", beware of the answer, "Well, so-so - I'm just barely making it." He has no shout, no sign of victory - only a look of despair and sadness and dejection. You see, there can be no joy or vibrancy where sin is lurking!

But if you hate your sin and have repented of it, you must not allow the devil to rob you of your right to rejoice and be glad! Accept God's forgiveness, and don't be condemned out of your right to worship and praise Him. God's great desire for you, if you have failed, is to make you strong at your weakest point. Then He wants to anoint you with the oil of gladness!

The Bible says Jesus was "anointed with the oil of gladness" (Hebrews 1:9). Some picture Jesus only as weeping in the Garden, shedding tears of blood.

Yes, He did spend nights in agony, praying all alone. But I believe when He came down from those quiet times with God, He had a laughter in His soul.

He could clap His hands and dance and praise His heavenly Father!

Throughout Scripture, God pours out His oil of gladness on those who have learned to hate their sin

and love His righteousness. That's what the Word says of Jesus: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Hebrews 1:9)

Throughout the Bible, joy is associated with hatred for sin and a love for righteousness: "But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice" (Psalm 68:3). "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Psalm 32:11). "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee" (Psalm 70:4).

People who have laid down their sins and are walking with the Lord may still have a struggle that is yet unsettled. But there is such a drawing toward the Lord in them, such a hunger, that the outcome is inevitable: an outbreak of joy! True heart confession and a reaching open up rivers of praise and a fountain of thanksgiving.

Suppose Jesus appears in the flesh, dressed as an ordinary man, and sits next to you. You're sitting there wounded, a defeated Christian, wearing a look of gloom, guilt, condemnation and fear. You do not recognize Him, and He begins to talk to you:

"Do you really love the Lord?" He asks.

You probably would answer, "Very much so!"

"You've sinned, haven't you?"

"Y-yes," you say (hoping He's not a prophet who can read your mind!).

"Do you believe He forgives any and all who confess and turn from their sin?"

"Yes, but... I'm sorry, sir. I believe I've hurt my Savior - I've truly wounded Him."

"Why haven't you appropriated His forgiveness? If you've confessed, why haven't you received it?"

"I've done it so many times!"

"Do you believe He will forgive 499 times - if each time you confess and repent?"

"Yes."

"Even murder? adultery? homosexuality? drugs? jealousy? hatred?"

"Yes."

"Do you hate your sin? Do you still want Him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then why are you letting the devil rob you of the victory of the Cross, the power of the blood of the Lamb? Why aren't you appropriating His joy and looking up?"

Beloved, you don't have to quit, and you don't have to give up your joy in the Lord. You have a right to praise Him - to sing, shout and be happy in the Lord - because you have a Father who forgives!

3. A Third Reason Why Many Are Falling Away Is Because They Are Trapped in the Bonds of Bitterness, Full of Unchecked Anger. "Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy?" Proverbs 27:4, NAS).

A spirit of anger is destroying Christian lives and marriages everywhere. This is happening because anger is not considered a serious sin, like drugs, alcohol or adultery. It is taken lightly - but not so in God's Word.

The Bible makes it very clear that anger is so dangerous we dare not go to sleep without dealing with it. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

In this verse, Paul ties anger with the direct work of the devil. He is saying, "Your anger is from Satan. If you don't rid your soul of it before you retire, you will open up your heart to a stronghold from hell!"

"Anger is a flood", and with it comes an unrestrained flow of harsh, ungodly words. Anger swamps its victims. (The Hebrew word means to inundate or swallow up.) It is a spirit out of hell - and I believe floods of anger, wrath and jealousy are sweeping multitudes to destruction.

We do not think seriously enough of the danger of anger. Paul said it should be put away immediately and dealt with unmercifully. If we do not rid ourselves of it - if we continue brooding and sulking - we will grieve the Holy Spirit:

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:30-32 NAS).

Paul commands: "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth" (Colossians 3:8, NAS). Anger jealousy, malice, bitterness - these are not root sins. They are all fruits of a deeper sin - signs of a heart abounding in transgression: "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22, NAS).

If I am overwhelmed with anger, something is wrong between the Lord and me - and I can give the devil an opportunity to speak through me. When you're angry, you're going to speak thoughts that are not yours. You'll pour out a flood of bitter words, yet in your mind you say to yourself, "Where is this coming from? This is not me!" You'll be like a bystander - because you've given place to Satan!

Jesus said anger can send you directly to hell. He spoke clearly of how anger causes harsh, unkind, killing words that destroy and bring damnation:

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca' [empty-head] shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matthew 5:22, NAS)

Many Christian married couples right now are headed for a fall. Eventually they will become hard and cold, because they keep stirring up the pot of anger. Just when they seem to have everything settled, up comes another "But" - and they throw up some past shortcoming or failure. Here comes Satan again, stirring up the past!

Scripture tells us, "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man but any fool will quarrel" (Proverbs 20:3, NAS). And "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1). Let it go! Let it die! Don't keep digging things up. You are giving an opportunity to the devil himself to move in and take control of your marriage! These are not innocent lovers' quarrels, but demonic attacks. And if you give in, they will harden you and put you on the path to hell!

Yet if you will admit your sinful anger and see it for what it is - demonic - and repent and ask for deliverance, you will find all the mercy and healing you need. Your tender loving heavenly Father can bring you through - and He will restore all that the cankerworm has eaten.

Dear saint, did you fail the Lord today, last week, a month ago? Yet you know that today you love Him more than you ever have? God sees your heart. Bring your sin and failure to His altar and say, "Jesus,

take it. I appeal to Your tenderness and forgiveness."

He wants to heal you, restore you and give you back the joy of the Lord. David said, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. Give it back to me - I claim it!" God wants you to be able to stand up today with His joy.

Lord, forgive us our anger, malice and bitterness. Open our eyes and help us to see how loving You are. Give us an expanded vision, an unlimited perspective of our tender, loving, heavenly Father - and bring us into the fullness of Your joy!