

## Steps To Denying Christ

Matthew 26:69-75

January 3, 2016

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As we face a new year, it is very much like facing a new day. We seek the Lord to know wherein we have failed Him, and by His grace we pray for renewed faith, love, and obedience to grow in overcoming those temptations, desires, sins, and stumbling blocks in the day or year before us. But always we rejoice that in the redeeming and restoring love of Jesus Christ who has neither left us nor forsaken us. What I would like for us to consider this Lord's Day is how we have denied the Lord in our desires, in our speech, in our silence, and in our behavior.

There is likely no more horrible thought for the Christian than to deny his/her beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, in the face of persecution. Perhaps you have wondered what you would do if you faced a similar situation as many faithful martyrs of Christ from the past faced. Would you deny the Lord to save your own life or would you stand firm to death professing the name and truth of Jesus Christ? None of us can know for sure how we would face such a situation should we be presented with it. But it is far more likely that if we take seriously every day the ways in which we may deny the Lord in our deeds, we will be far less likely to deny the Lord even if faced with death. For, dear ones, we do not have to be an atheist to deny the Lord, we can profess to know the Lord, but deny Him in our works, in our desires, in our plans, and in our words (or lack of words in certain circumstances). "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him" (Titus 1:16). To deny in this case means to contradict. It is to have a contradiction between what you profess to believe and what you practice in your life.

Perhaps one of the most notable cases of denial of the Lord is that of

Peter. Peter who had professed that Jesus was the Son of God. Peter who said he would never deny the Lord. Peter came to see exactly how weak he really was in himself, and who came to understand the restoring love of Jesus Christ.

Let us consider the following main points from our text this Lord's Day: (1) The Sins that Led Peter to Deny Christ (Matthew 26:69a); (2) The Sin Committed in Denying Christ (Matthew 26:69b-74); (3) The Grace to Persevere after Denying Christ (Matthew 26:75).

## I. **The Sins that Led Peter to Deny Christ (Matthew 26:69a).**

A. After all of the disciples had fled and deserted Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:56), Peter followed the multitude that had taken Jesus Lord to the palace of the high priest (John 18:15). Another disciple of Christ (possibly the Apostle John) that followed with Peter was said to be known by the high priest and used his influence to grant entrance to Peter into the courtyard (John 18:16). There is Peter just outside the room where the Lord Jesus is being interrogated, but Peter was not spiritually prepared to face the sifting of Satan that was about to turn him inside out. Peter did not deny Jesus because he planned to do so or because he wanted to do so, but because he had not prepared himself against doing so.

B. What were the sins that paved the way for Peter to deny the Lord?

1. **Pride** (Matthew 26:31-35). Peter did not view himself as vulnerable to such a fall. We must never look upon ourselves as beyond falling into a serious sin. We must take all sin in our life seriously (even the so-called little sins)—it is the little foxes that spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:9). Rather we should be humbled that we are capable of doing

so, but that it is the grace of God alone that restrains us and sustains us when tempted with such sins (1 Corinthians 10:12).

2. **Unbelief** (Matthew 26:35). Even after Christ (who cannot lie) prophesied that Peter would deny Him 3 times, Peter did not believe the word of God. When we do not receive the Word of God by faith but reject it because it is not to our liking or because it is hard to receive or because it humbles us instead of exalting us, we will foolishly walk into the trap of the enemy completely defenseless and without the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God).

3. **Prayerlessness** (Matthew 26:41). The sleepiness of the disciples is an outward picture of the prayerlessness of their hearts. For when we do not spend time with the Lord in prayer, we are like those who are asleep when it comes to the traps of the enemy. We do not see them. We are like those who are walking in our sleep. For it is by means of prayer that we become watchful and vigilant in regard to the temptations of the enemy. It is by means of prayer that our eyes are opened to see the schemes and traps of the enemy. It is by means of prayer that we are prepared to face the trials and temptations that await us. It is by means of prayer that God's grace is granted to deliver us from temptation and to commune with our Savior daily and throughout the day. Prayer is not only a means of grace to help us once we have found ourselves trapped and ensnared by the enemy, but even a means of grace to help us avoid so many of the temptations which lie before us ("And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" Matthew 6:13).

4. **Presumption** (John 18:10-11). The Lord had already prophesied that He would be taken captive by the Jews and that the hour of His suffering was now upon Him that He might save unworthy sinners. Peter disbelieved when he should have believed. Peter slept when he should have prayed. And he acted with the sword when he should have submitted to the will of God. Zeal that is without knowledge is

presumption in action. Heat without light is presumption. Leaning upon our own understanding rather than upon God's Word is presumption.

a. It is presumption to worship the Lord in a way that He has not authorized in His Word (man-inspired hymns, coming without due preparation, celebrating holy days like Christmas and Easter, and doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath).

b. It is presumption to marry those with whom you are not like-minded in the truth and then ask God to bless your marriage and to think that being like-minded is not really that important.

c. It is presumption to sow the seeds of corruption in your life and then expect that there will be a total and complete crop failure (with none of those corruptions bearing fruit in your life).

5. These sins prepared Peter to deny the Lord, and they will likewise prepare you and me to deny the Lord. Dear ones, let us not be so foolish as to miss the obvious in Peter's fall. Let us be wise and learn by his fall how to avoid denying the Lord in our lives.

## **II. The Sin Committed in Denying Christ (Matthew 26:69b-74).**

A. As we ponder Peter's fall, let us note the degrees of his fall.

1. **IN THE FIRST DENIAL OF PETER**, Peter denied the Lord by saying to the young woman, "I know not what thou sayest" (Matthew 26:69-70). Peter responds by saying (in effect), "I don't know or understand that of which you are accusing me." Rather than flat out saying, "I have never been with the man nor am I His disciple", Peter rather seeks to avoid the accusation by claiming ignorance. But our text states that Peter nevertheless "denied" the Lord in avoiding the truth rather than clearly testifying of his relationship to the Lord.

a. How many times do we see mighty acts of courage in the saints, just to see them fall in fear (for example, when Elijah stood courageously before king Ahab, the priests of Baal, and the people of

Israel on Mt. Carmel in challenging Israel to serve the Lord and to depart from idolatry just to flee in fear a few hours later when queen Jezebel threatened his life). Previous acts of courage do not guarantee future acts of courage. We are all so vulnerable and weak. In any given situation, any of us like Peter might fight at the sound of the thunder, but fall in fear at the sound of a leaf. That is why we are warned to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation tomorrow in spite of the victories that have been witnessed today.

b. I would also have you see from this first denial by Peter that it was not an explicit statement on his part that was called a denial. Peter did not say to this young girl, “You are wrong, I have never been with this man, Jesus. I have never even seen Him. I simply came out of mere curiosity to see what would happen to Him.” Peter simply said, “I don’t understand what you are saying.” And yet the Scripture says Peter denied the Lord. Peter’s denial of Christ was evidenced in his unwillingness to stand for Christ and to identify himself as a willing and loving disciple of Christ and His truth.

(1) How many times, dear ones, have we and do we deny the Lord by our silence or by our unwillingness to identify ourselves with Christ and His truth.

(2) Perhaps we fear that we will be branded in some way as a fanatic. Perhaps we fear that we will not have the right words to say. Perhaps we fear that we will be isolated from others.

2. **IN THE SECOND DENIAL OF PETER**, he falls into the sin of denying Christ to a more aggravated degree when another young girl points the finger (as it were) at Peter and says, “This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth” (Matthew 26:71). I would suggest the second denial is more aggravated for several reasons.

a. **First**, Peter did not flee the temptation he found himself in by leaving the palace of the high priest so as to avoid any further opportunity to deny the Lord in that situation. He did not

recognize his weakness or perhaps even his sin. Our text does say that Peter went out “into the porch” (Matthew 26:71), but he did not leave the palace of the high priest until after the third denial.

(1) Dear ones, it is important when facing temptations to flee them if at all possible. Many times we may not be able to do so because it involves our job or our school. But if we are able to flee temptation and do not do so, we are flirting with a fall. This particularly applies to pornography or immorality that may be seen in movies, on websites, at the beach, or read in novels.

(2) Paul tells Timothy, “Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). The best way to avoid temptation is to avoid putting yourself into tempting situations. If we are to pray, “Lead me not into temptation”, then we must certainly not lead ourselves into temptation.

b. **The second way** in which Peter’s second denial was more aggravated than the first denial was that Peter did not give heed to an obvious warning: “and the cock crew” (Mark 14:68). The Lord had prophesied that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock had crowed twice (Mark 14:30). Peter should have recognized the direction he was headed in light of this clear warning, and yet it would appear he was oblivious to the warning of the Lord. Here was a warning sign that should have been like red flashing lights and loud whistles in alerting Peter to the dangerous situation he was in. But he continued in it.

(1) So many times, dear ones, the Lord gives us warning signs before our eyes, in our ears, or within our conscience that we are walking into a field of dangerous landmines as it relates to temptation. And yet we, like Peter, do not heed the warnings of the Lord.

(2) Husbands and wives, if we allow ourselves to become discontent with our spouse and focus upon his/her weaknesses with much complaint to ourselves and to others, we will soon be looking to find in others what we think we are missing in our spouse.

Discontentment in our lives should be like a warning sign that we are headed for dangerous temptations. For we will seek to fill our discontentment with what pleases us.

c. **The third way** in which Peter's second denial was a further aggravation was that it was the second time this sin was committed within a relatively short period of time and without repentance for the first time it was committed.

(1) It is a grievous sin to deny the Lord, but it is far more serious to do so again and again without confessing it as sin, looking to Christ for forgiveness, hating the sin, sorrowing over the sin, and endeavoring new obedience. Sins not repented of immediately will likely lead to further sin.

(2) How often does a disagreement with your spouse that has led to heated words lead to a much bigger argument because we did not deal with the sin we had committed in the first argument? Instead of dealing with one problem at a time, we are adding layer upon layer of problems.

d. **The fourth way** in which Peter's second denial was a further aggravation of his sin was that Peter explicitly declared, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:72). Whereas he first denied the Lord implicitly by avoiding the accusation (claiming he did not understand the question), now he explicitly denies Christ by disassociating himself from Him and saying (in effect), "He is a complete and total stranger to me."

(1) Dear ones, what begins implicitly by way of denial of the truth will inevitably lead to an explicit denial of the truth if the sin is not repented of.

(2) Self-deception in our own hearts begins by denying the truth and lying to ourselves and to God, so that we then believe a lie. This often occurs in placing our pleasures over God's expressed will in His Word. We want what we want more than we want what God wants—so God turns us over to self-deception.

e. **The fifth and final way** in which Peter's second denial was a further aggravation of his sin was that Peter swore an oath in defense of that which he knew to be a lie: "And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:72). He called God to be a witness to what he was claiming—he called God to witness his lie.

3. **THE THIRD DENIAL OF PETER** is sets up another degree of denial in that he added to his sin of denial a curse (Matthew 26:74). He "began to curse" which would mean that it was not merely a single curse, but a stream of curses that flowed from Peter's lips. We do not know who or what Peter cursed, whether Christ, whether God, whether the one who accused him, or whether some part of creation. It is so evident that Peter has now fallen into a most grievous sin against the Lord and His truth. He has clearly denied any relationship with the Lord at all. Here is a sin that we must consider among the most heinous that might be committed against our blessed Savior. What is to become of Peter? Has he committed the unpardonable sin? Let us see.

### **III. The Grace to Persevere after Denying Christ (Matthew 26:75).**

A. I would simply have you see in this verse that Peter was brought to see how he had denied the Lord, and it broke his heart when he realized it. Luke 22:61 adds an important point of information when it says that after Peter had denied the Lord the third time and had heard the cock crow the second time, "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." The Lord graciously brought Peter to repentance (and pursued Peter with restoring love in John 21 where 3 times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these other disciples?").

B. Dear ones, note a clear distinction at this point between Peter



who denied the Lord three times and Judas who betrayed the Lord. Was the sin of denial any less heinous than the sin of betrayal in and of itself? I do not think so. Yet Peter was granted repentance and perseverance in spite of his grievous sin that Judas was not granted. Why? To what must we credit Peter's perseverance?

1. Both Peter and Judas were members of the visible Church. Both had presumably been circumcised and baptized. Both were apostles. Both had miraculous abilities.

2. Dear ones, we must attribute Peter's perseverance not to his own strength and ability, but to God's eternal election and to Peter's being graciously included within that Covenant of Grace in a way in which Judas was never included. One of the benefits and blessings purchased by Christ for all those who are united by faith to Christ in the Covenant of Grace is that of perseverance in trusting in Christ to the very end in spite of their many failures and sins. Peter was never accepted before God on the basis of his own faithfulness or obedience, but only on the basis of Christ's faithfulness and obedience. And so is everyone who sees his own guilt, corruption, sin, and the hell that he deserves, but who looks in faith alone to Christ as his only righteousness, as his only holiness, as his only merit, as his only life, and as his only salvation.

C. It may be asked, "What does it mean that if we confess Christ before men, He will confess us before God and if we deny Christ before men, He will deny us before God" (Matthew 10:32-33)? Dear ones, to confess Christ implies true faith in Christ, and to deny Christ implies the absence of true faith in Christ.

1. Peter's recovery by Christ is a token of our recovery by Christ from all of the times we have implicitly and explicitly denied Him in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Ultimately, our recovery is due to Christ and His obedience and not to our own.

2. Consider the words of the Lord to Peter in Luke 22:31-32.

Dear ones, there are these denials/contradictions in the life of every Christian because we have not yet been perfected in holiness. We are forgiven. We are being sanctified, but there is coming a time when all the sinful contradictions in our life will be destroyed. Praise the Lord. The test of a Christian is that he/she hates and despises these sinful and wicked denials and contradictions in his/her life and desires and earnestly prays to be delivered from them (even if no other human sees them—God sees them, the angels see them).

Dear ones, your assurance that you will face death (and even persecution) in not denying Christ is that you are now putting to death those denials/contradictions daily in your life through your union with Christ, and living in the power of Christ's resurrection. Let me die the death of the righteous (like Rev. Donald Cargill, Scottish faithful witness and martyr for Jesus Christ, who wrote the following in his dying testimony for the cause of Christ, July 27, 1681).

This is the most joyful day that ever I saw in my pilgrimage on earth. My joy is now begun, which I see shall never be interrupted.... I have been a man of great sins, but he has been a God of great mercies, and now, through his mercies, I have a conscience as sound and quiet as if I had never sinned.... My preaching has occasioned persecution, but the want [lack] of it I fear will occasion worse.... I have not an ill conscience in preaching truth, whatever has followed: and this day I am to seal with my blood all the truths that ever I preached....

May our testimony ever be like that of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26.  
Amen.

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