

I Know Not This Man

All of the gospel writers record this incident of Peter denying the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it shows all the hallmarks of having been openly confessed by Peter following the event and perhaps it was recounted personally to the gospel writers by him. It is an example of how the Bible does not hide the faults of believers but frankly admits the worst instances of remaining sin, shameful behaviour and dishonesty amongst God's people.

Our deceitful hearts

Peter did not merely deny His Lord, he denied Him repeatedly with oaths, cursing and blatant self-interest. We should not be shocked by the depths to which sinners can fall, nor the degree to which believers can backslide. Peter was a sinner as we all are. We may be saved sinners, as Peter was, but until the day we die no good thing ever will dwell or prosper in our flesh. May the Lord preserve us from ever saying to ourselves, "I could never do that".

Different kinds of wounds

We may consider it admirable and brave that Peter managed to get so close to the Lord as to be in sight and hearing distance of His trial. If the Lord could see and hear Peter, Peter could see and hear Jesus. He knew what was happening to his Friend. Let us grant what motivated Peter to come into the high priest's palace was not mere curiosity. Nevertheless, of all the cruelty visited upon the Saviour by His enemies that night surely nothing pierced Christ's heart more sharply than to hear His friend disown and deny Him with oaths and cursing.

A privileged companion

It is not my plan to condemn or decry Peter. We gain nothing from this account of the apostle's failings if we gloat, mock or imagine we are any different from him. Peter was a believer. He had seen and heard wonderful and amazing things from the Lord, things like; Lazarus walking out of his grave, countless healings and miracles, Elijah and Moses speaking with Jesus about His death.

It was only a few weeks since Peter had witnessed the Lord's glory in His transfiguration. It was only a few hours since Christ knelt in the garden and wrestled spiritually for Peter's soul. Shortly thereafter He healed the high priest's servant's ear and surely saved Peter's life. Now, the same Peter who publicly declared his readiness to die for his Lord had not the courage to speak up for Him to a child.

Denial upon denial

On three occasions Peter had an opportunity to bear witness to his Saviour. Each time he appears to aggravate his deceit. First, Peter denied knowing the Lord. In fact, he denied ever being with Jesus as a disciple and follower of the Lord. Then he reinforced his denial with an oath. Peter swore by the God of truth, making a solemn appeal to the all-knowing God, that he had never even seen the Lord before!

In too deep

The third time Peter denied the Lord was about an hour later, sufficient time no doubt to have fled the palace and quietly reflected on his lies and foolishness. This he did not do. He persisted in this place. The Holy Ghost tells us God will not allow us to 'be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape'. Peter had the opportunity to escape his tempters but he stayed and continued where he should not be.

Cursing

His third denial was confirmed with cursing, or what are sometimes called imprecations, meaning that Peter called for God's wrath to fall on him if he was not telling the truth. This is still a common means of cursing. People will say 'God blind me', or 'I swear on my child's life', or 'my mother's grave', or otherwise cry down God's judgment upon themselves with similar dreadful statements. It is hard to overstate the madness that rose in Peter's heart in this moment. The Lord had said, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not'. I am sure at the very moment Peter was calling down God's curse, the prayers of the Lord were flying faster to heaven for Peter's blessing.

When the cock crowed

Finally, we are told Peter 'called to mind' or remembered the words of the Lord. It was at this time the cock crowed. It may be obvious but in order to remember the words of the Lord it is first necessary to have heard them! Let us seek opportunity to bring souls under the sound of the gospel and the words of Christ. Let us also continue to listen even when we feel our hearts have grown cold. Who knows when the Holy Spirit might afterwards bring them to mind. Peter's conviction and remorse was immediate. When the Lord looked at him shame drove him from the palace where fear could not.

Discriminating grace

Peter's repentance was not like Judas's repentance: it was true, evangelical and earnest. In the moment of Peter's most appalling denial Christ looked at him and he looked at Christ. In that moment, looking to Christ, Peter understood his guilt and shame but also where forgiveness was to be found. In tomorrow's service we shall, God willing, develop this theme a little more.

Amen

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