



Stumbling Blocks on the Christian's Path

Disappointment With God

Many church people seem to be saying with their actions what they would never admit with their mouths. Even the expressions on their faces suggest that they are unhappy and bored. Their behavior makes it difficult to believe that their faith gives them any real satisfaction. How can others be expected to trust a God who hasn't lived up to the expectations of His followers? One answer offered by the Bible is that some who claim to be followers of Christ are not authentic. For a while they look genuine. But they are not (Matthew 7:21-23; 13:24-30; 1 John 2:18-19). The infiltration of impostors, however, is not the whole story. The Bible does not hide the fact that real people of faith also have been disappointed with God. Both Old and New Testaments give examples of people who were distraught and even angry with God because He allowed them to suffer circumstances they expected Him to protect them from (Numbers 14:1-4; Psalm 73).

Distraction

Under pressure, and even in times of prosperity, real Christians can be distracted from the confidence that their ultimate well-being doesn't lie in the hands of other people or circumstances. Because of ever-present diversions and distractions, the Bible urges the people of God to renew their minds continually by remembering what God has done for them (Romans 12:1-2). The Scriptures urge believers to keep their hope and faith alive by stirring up the memories of what they already know (see 2 Peter 1:1-15). The reason is clear. A lack of basic Christian behavior can often be attributed to a critical lapse of memory (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Dangerous Relationships

Jesus was known by the company He kept. He ate and drank with people other religious leaders wouldn't think of associating with. But Jesus did not eat and drink with such people because He was attracted to their way of life. He did it to be the best friend a sinner ever had. With the wrong motives, the relationships He cultivated would have been dangerous. Without His strong and loving purposes, the accusation that He was a *"friend of sinners"* would have been more damaging. His own apostle Paul would later write, *"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning"* (1 Corinthians 15:33-34 NIV). Even the wise King Solomon paid dearly for such forbidden relationships (1 Kings 11:1-13). The resulting confusion caused him to act like someone who had never known God (Ecclesiastes 1-12).

Unchanged Tendencies

Genuine Christians have made decisions of faith that signal a change of direction in their thinking about God and themselves, but they have not overcome their struggle with self-centeredness. Neither are they morally superior to non-Christians. Their capacity to be self-centered remains unchanged (Romans 7:14-25). The downward pull of desire remains as predictable as the law of gravity. When real Christians stop living under the influence of the Spirit and the Word of God (Galatians 5:16-26), it becomes as natural for them to revert to self-interest as for a kite to drift slowly to earth when the wind stops blowing.

Self-Reliance

The God of the Bible asks His people to trust Him on His terms rather than their own. He urges them not to rely on their own understanding but to use their best judgment and sense of reason to rely on Him. He invites His children to let Him live His life through them. Those who forget this principle of God-dependence fail in practice to distinguish themselves as genuine Christians. Even the original disciples of Christ learned about the danger of self-reliance the hard way. On the night of Jesus' arrest, one of

His closest followers, a tough-minded fisherman named Peter, announced that he was ready to follow his teacher to prison or to death (Luke 22:33). But within a few hours, he found himself denying repeatedly that he even knew the man from Galilee. His mistaken confidence was recorded for our warning.

Prayerlessness

Look-alikes have a reputation for being hypocritical in their prayers (Matthew 6:5-8). People of genuine faith use prayer, not as a means of impressing others but as an honest means of giving thanks, confessing sins, and asking for direction and help. They know that prayerfulness is not optional for anyone who wants to develop a personal relationship with God. When followers of Christ do not show their dependence in prayer, they can end up acting like anyone else (James 4:1-6). Jesus warned His disciples about this likelihood on the night of His arrest. Pausing from His own struggle in prayer, He urged, *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41). They didn't understand. They slept instead of praying, and within a few hours all had abandoned Him.

Carelessness

King David was a man of authentic faith. By his love for the law of God, he distinguished himself as someone committed to avoiding moral and spiritual failure (Psalms 1; 119:11). The Bible itself acknowledges that he was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). His record of spiritual accomplishments, however, did not keep David from becoming an adulterer and murderer. One night, as others fought his battles, and as he stood in apparent security on his own palace rooftop, David used the power of his office to pursue another man's wife. In an unguarded moment, David discovered the meaning of the statement, *"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

An Unexamined Heart

As a teacher of the heart, Jesus reminded us that unexamined motives can result in complicated forms of self-deception. Many years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah acknowledged the dangers of "inner darkness" when he wrote, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). Modern psychology has confirmed our tendency to avoid emotional pain through subtle forms of transference and denial. It has documented habits of the heart by which we attempt to blunt the pain of real or false guilt. Psychology, however, cannot change the heart. We all have reason to join King David in his prayer: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psalms 139:23-24).

An Unseen Enemy

The people of Christ have a spiritual enemy who is attempting to confuse them and neutralize their impact. This adversary is fighting a war of attrition. There are many casualties. Countless numbers of real Christians are rendered ineffective by one who is far more subtle and clever than they think. While he can't make Christians sin, he and his demons are constantly looking for weaknesses that give him an inroad into the lives of genuine believers (Ephesians 4:27; 6:10-20). Like a predatory animal, he looks for vulnerable prey (1 Peter 5:8).

A Lack Of Accountability

People don't develop into spiritually mature persons by doing what comes naturally. Neither do they grow in Christlikeness by being left to themselves. Even the strongest Christians were never meant to go it alone. Jesus taught His disciples not just to make converts, but to train them thoroughly in His ways (Matthew 28:19-20). A few years later, the apostle Paul likened followers of Christ to a human body where all members are dependent on one another (1 Corinthians 12). While many in our day have developed a spirit of independence, such an attitude does not reflect the original intent of Christ for His church. He made it clear that He calls people not only to Himself, but also to one another.

Source Unknown