

## What happens when we fail? (Accepting and practicing grace)

It's something we don't want to talk about too much but...we all know failure. You probably know the feelings of guilt, shame and the like. Since feelings are not always a good measure, it's important for us to look at how God treats our shortcomings and how he wants us to treat others when they fail. We will take a closer look at this starting off with a transliteration with comments I wrote. It's based on John 8:1-11 (and the context in which this passage is written) and I have taken a creative approach in order to emphasize some of the details in the story.

### Not high, not stoned, but forgiven (based on John 8:1-11 and the context)

There's a lot of commotion about Jesus these last couple of days. Here's this man who's teaching people stuff that does not comply with the Pharisaic principles. Word goes around that He is doing miraculous things. "Who is that man and where does his authority come from?" the people ask. Some say He is the Christ, others say He is a demon possessed lunatic. But He just doesn't seem to stop and He will probably appear again in the temple courts. The religious leaders think it's time to put this Man to a test, a very hard one.

#### The scheme

Jesus reappears the next day and starts teaching the people present in the temple courts. But there are the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who are out to trick Him into making a wrong statement. And boy do they have a good scheme. Here they have this woman who was caught in adultery and He has to tell them what should happen in this situation. If He would tell them to stone her (the requirement of the law), He would lose a lot of, maybe all of His followers. But if He would instead let her off the hook by condoning her sin, He could not be the Christ, for God does not contradict Himself. "What do You think should happen Teacher?" A dilemma one can conclude.

#### The law

But let's start with the adultery part. It is impossible to commit adultery without another party involved. So where is that other party, that man? The teachers of the law and the Pharisees claim the law as their basis, but here is the first flaw in their reasoning. Leviticus 20:10 says: "*If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbour—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.*" But Jesus knows who He is and whom He is dealing with and what their intentions are. So He doesn't try to go into futile debates, because that is what they want. No, Jesus knows better and wants them to realize the truth (about their own sinfulness) by letting them answer the questions themselves.

#### The ground for accusation

Jesus just bends down and starts writing in the ground. Imagine that. It looks like as if He is totally ignoring them! But this is prophetic communication. What does Jesus write on the ground? Jeremiah 17:13 "*O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.*" He hopes they get the point that they themselves are sinners and do not practice the law in the right way.

#### One Judge

They keep on questioning Him but Jesus is not impressed. He says: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." And He calmly continues to write (their names) on the ground. Wow, this is amazing! One by one they start to feel that they are not worthy to throw the first stone. First the older ones realize that they are not without sin and later on the younger ones too. They all leave the scene, not being able to carry out the judgment. But Jesus stays. Is He without sin? He must be the only one worthy of judging her. What a certainty He has about His identity: the One who is worthy of carrying out the judgment.

### **Forgiveness frees**

He asks her: "So where are these men that wanted to stone you? Has no one condemned you?" Baffled by His approach she says that no one has condemned her. Jesus replies: "*Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.*" There is so much in this last statement.

First of all Jesus did have the right and the authority to condemn her, being without sin and being the Son of God. But He chooses not to, because He knew He would be the One taking the punishment for her sin upon Himself. He was the Substitute.

### **Love motivates**

Secondly, He says this in the second part of His statement: "(...) *Go now and leave your life of sin*". He does not say: "Oh, it's alright, it doesn't matter what you do anyway. Go your way and have a nice life." He tells her to leave her life of sin. He communicates an enormous amount of trust that she will obey Him. Put yourself in the position of this woman. For we all know we sin, so we can empathize with this woman. Imagine that you have just escaped certain death. You were expecting to die a horrible death and you know that you deserved to die because of your actions. And here is this Man, who saves you from death. Wouldn't you experience the purest of all mercies? Wouldn't you feel God's amazing grace that takes away the sin? Wouldn't you be willing to change the course of your life?

That is why Jesus has this enormous trust in her. Because of the grace He has just shown. Just like the woman, we all have a record, a basis for accusation that testifies against us. But Jesus has taken that away. Colossians 2: 13b-14 "*He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*"

### **Love changes**

When we realize the severity of our sin, that we face the death sentence, we will also be ready to receive the deep and unfailing love of God. And this love will empower us to love Him back (that means obedience). The love of God, in Jesus Christ, transforms our beings. It doesn't only pardon us, but it changes the very course of our lives. Let us realize the truth about our hopelessness without Christ and receive His grace so that we will live in the peace with God (Romans 5:1-2 "*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*") and that He will change us because The Holy Spirit is the One working in us: 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 "*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*"

1. Could you name some things you've gathered from this story about God's forgiving response when you fail?

### **What about the others?**

The first part was about how God treats us when we fail: accepting grace. This second part is focused on how we treat each other: practicing grace. However, we must realize that we cannot practice this "neighbour love" unless we have God's love (described in part one) in us. As a faucet is useless unless it's connected to the water control system, we are unable to love the ones around us like we love ourselves unless we receive the love of God.

2. How do you apply the "judge not" principle mentioned in Matthew 7:1-6 to your life?

3. How do you practice Galatians 6:1 (do you have experience in this)?