

The Double Cure

“. . . be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power”

Every Christian believer knows about sin. It's a word that we tend to use quite a lot, in spite of the fact that the 'world outside' doesn't use it. Except perhaps in the phrase 'living in sin' and then normally in mockery of the out-of-date idea that there is anything wrong with unmarried couples living together.

But for Christians it tends to be a jargon word, essential because it is right at the heart of our spiritual experience. For most of us, our earliest encounters with the good news of Jesus have had a lot to do with our sense of guilt and a need for forgiveness, then finding that real forgiveness and beginning to experience more of the power of the living God in our lives.

But still the word remains a difficult one to communicate. So much hangs on that initial experience of forgiveness! It is very difficult to communicate the love of God to people who do not acknowledge fixed standards of right and wrong and therefore have very little sense of guilt about wrongdoing of any sort. Most people are more concerned not to hurt anyone else than they are about breaking any moral code, whether religious or not.

Over the years, I have picked up a little understanding of Greek, the language in which the New Testament was originally written and the common language of the Roman Empire. Especially as most of them came from 'Galilee of the Gentiles', Jesus and the Twelve would have been fluent in Greek as well as Aramaic (the current language of the Jews at the time) and some of them would also have understood ancient Hebrew, the language of most of the Old Testament. Looking at some of the Greek words used in the New Testament can often be quite useful . . .

. . . like the word that is translated 'sin' in our Bibles. It comes directly from archery and is the word used for missing the target, not getting a bulls-eye. Just imagine for a moment that we didn't have the word 'sin' – how would we translate that word from the Greek? Perhaps the closest we could get would be 'failure' – does that surprise us?

When we begin to see that the Lord Jesus paid the price for our **failures** and died so that we might be set free from **failure**, the whole picture starts to change. We move out of religious words and into real practical daily experience. Perhaps our friends will also begin to understand in a new way the relevance of the message which we have been trying to share with them?

Apart from anything else, perhaps we may be a bit surprised to think that **failure** is such a serious problem. Maybe we have seen that we have received forgiveness for the bad things we have done, but is failure really that bad? Do we really need forgiveness for our failures?

Think of that familiar verse: *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (**Romans 3:23**). Isn't that all about failure? Failure to meet God's standards, failure to meet the standards and expectations of other people – and our own expectations of ourselves!

Let's substitute 'failure' for 'sin' in another well-known passage:

*“If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all **failure**. If we say that we have no **failure**, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our **failures**,*

he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our failures and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not failed, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:7-10)

“Well”, you might say, “it was bad enough that I needed forgiveness for the wrong things I have done. Now you have added all my failures, I feel really bad about it!”

Actually, the situation is the exact opposite! If Jesus only paid the price for the bad things that I have done, then I am left feeling guilty about all my failures and there is no remedy except either trying to make up for them or trying to forget them – or both! But, if *“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all failure”*, then we have a remedy and can experience God’s forgiveness – for our failures!

Many of us struggle with a low self-image, and that often has much to do with how we see ourselves failing over and over again. We compare ourselves with others, with God’s standards and our own expectations of ourselves – and the comparison is not good! We find it hard (maybe almost impossible) to see how anyone could possibly love us, especially not a righteous God. Maybe we try hard not to fail but find that we trip up repeatedly, perhaps on the same issue time after time.

So, now we have the first part of the answer: **Forgiveness for failure**. There is only one condition attached to that forgiveness, according to that passage in John’s first letter . . .

Confession! It sounds religious, doesn’t it? It isn’t! The Greek word means ‘to say the same thing’. Think of an example. We have failed in some way or perhaps done something which we know was wrong, so we feel bad about it. The inner voice of the Holy Spirit is telling us that we have ‘missed the target’. If we argue with that conviction and try to pretend that everything is OK, it doesn’t get any better, does it? The Lord is saying to us “You have gone wrong” and we are trying to convince him (and ourselves!) that there isn’t a problem. Result: a sense of guilt and we don’t seem to be able to get through to God in prayer. The Bible seems to have become a closed book; we get little or nothing from reading it.

What has gone wrong? The Lord is saying something to us and we are disagreeing with him. He says we have gone wrong, we say it’s all OK. If we go on like that, our situation can become spiritually dangerous. The Bible calls it ‘hardening our hearts’ and the result is that eventually we can become unresponsive to the Holy Spirit.

Fortunately, the solution is simple: we just need to agree with what the Lord is saying to us! If that inner voice of the Holy Spirit tells us that we have gone wrong, we can ‘say the same thing’ (= ‘confess’) and the result is forgiveness! Instantly! Burden gone, cloud lifted, guilt removed, fellowship with God restored! “. . . and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (= failure)”.

But what about the ongoing problem? The release of forgiveness is great and gloriously liberating, but are we stuck with just going round and round on a cycle of failure – confession – forgiveness – and failure again?

There is a second part to the answer, and it is all to do with the fact that we are **in Christ**. **1 Corinthians 1:30** tells us that it is our Father God who has joined us to his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Romans 6**, Paul applies that truth to the whole problem of recurring failure.

Yes, we experience the grace of God when we are forgiven and it is great. So, Paul asks, should we just go on failing so that there is lots more of God’s grace flowing? No, there is another solution, he says: We were joined to the death of Jesus, our old life is over, we

died to sin/failure and were joined to the resurrection life of Jesus. So we are set free from 'slavery to sin' – that never-ending cycle of failure – and can live lives that are pleasing to God. Amazing!

And, if (when?) we fail again, our Father's forgiveness is still there as soon as we acknowledge our failure. But we are no longer trapped and enslaved by sin and failure. As a friend of mine has neatly put it: Now, it is not impossible for me to sin but it is possible for me not to sin.

There is not enough space here to follow this up with the full attention which it deserves but the New Testament (and especially Paul's letters) are full of the fact that we are **in Christ**, that our old life is over and gone and that we have a new 'resurrection' life. Here are a few more passages to get you started:–

Romans 6, especially verses **3-4, 11, 15-16**.

1 Corinthians 15:21 *"I die daily."*

Galatians 2:20 *"it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."*

Galatians 6:14 *"But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."*

Colossians 3:3 *"For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."*

1 Peter 2:24 *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."*

This truth is right at the heart of spiritual maturity. If you read right through Paul's letter to the **Colossians**,, you will see his passion for believers to move on to more maturity, and how deeply that spiritual growth is connected with our 'taking on board' the fact that we have been joined to the Lord Jesus.

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Although we have been looking a little at what Paul wrote, Jesus himself taught his disciples about this. Amazingly, before he was crucified, he told them about the need for anyone who wants to follow him to 'deny himself and take up his cross.' The cross at that time was hated and feared as the barbaric form of execution used by the Romans. It was very definitely NOT a religious symbol!

This was as if Jesus had talked about taking up your hangman's noose or your electric chair! Luke even quotes Jesus as saying 'take up your cross **daily**'! He was effectively telling anyone who wanted to follow him that their life would be forfeit every day. See **Matthew 16:24-26, Mark 8:34-36, Luke 9:23-25**.

But this is far from negative! Jesus (echoed by Paul later) says that the one who loses his life (literally, 'soul') for his sake will find it and save it, in contrast to someone who tries to hang onto his own life/soul, who will lose it. The cost seems high but the rewards are higher!

Our 'soul' is not just some ethereal part of us that continues after death. It is our personality, our mind, our will and emotions – the things that make us the people that we are. Our character, our humanity, our individuality. All parts of us that are dear to us and define us. And Jesus says that we need to be prepared to see that all go for him. But then he tells us that, if we do, we shall really save it all – and more besides!

We need to note what the Lord Jesus says in all these passages: this is necessary for **anyone who wants to follow him**. Not just for special people in some sort of specially

important Christian work. All of us who want to follow him, whoever we are, whatever job we do, young, old, whatever education or training we may or may not have had.

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In January 1956, five young men went to a remote part of the Amazonian jungle to try to contact a tribe who had never heard of Jesus. The tribe had a reputation as bloodthirsty killers, but the five felt that the Lord was calling them to take the good news to them. They made what seemed like friendly contact but then were all killed the next day. They had given their lives for no apparent result, but later contact with the tribe eventually saw many of them come to a real faith in the Lord Jesus.

Seven years earlier Jim Elliot, one of the five, had been reading those words of Jesus and summed them up like this: **“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”** Yes, Jim died in January 1956 but back in 1949 he had already seen that following Jesus is truly an exchanged life. Yes, there is a cost, but the benefits far outweigh it, both now and in eternity. He expressed it in this poem, written a year earlier – at the age of 21!

*What is this, Lord Jesus, that Thou shouldst make an end
Of all that I possess, and give Thyself to me?
So that there is nothing now to call my own
Save Thee; Thyself alone my Treasure.
Taking all, Thou givest full measure of Thyself
With all things else eternal –
Things unlike the mouldy pelf by earth possessed.
But as to Life and godliness, all things are mine,
And in God’s garments dressed I am;
With Thee, an heir to riches in the spheres divine.
Strange, I say, that suffering loss,
I have so gained everything in getting
Me a friend who bore a Cross.*

Jim Elliot, 9th October 1948 (see * below)

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Yes, it is ‘by his doing’ that we are joined to his Son the Lord Jesus, but none of this happens automatically. We need to respond and, as we do, we will find the results.

If we want to step out of the seemingly endless cycle of sin/failure into the release of a life that pleases our Father, then we need to know and take hold of the fact that he has already joined us to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus – and count on it! (**Romans 6:11**)

As we start to embrace the fact that following Jesus means daily denying ourselves and taking hold of this death, we will find the true fulfilment that he promised.

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(* You can read more about the 5 martyrs of Ecuador in *Through Gates of Splendour (1956)* and about Jim Elliot’s life in *Shadow of the Almighty (1958)*. Both by Elisabeth Elliot, Jim’s widow.)

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