

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus  
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## Mark 14:27-31, 66-72 “Lessons from Peter’s Failure”

Intro. In our text today we have an account of the time Peter denied he even knew Christ. In this we see the honesty of the Bible, and another proof of the inspiration of the Bible. If the Bible were merely a work of man, surely the gospel writers would have concealed this shameful story, especially Mark who became an associate of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). But this story was told by all 4 gospel writers! This emphasis upon that story must have a reason. I believe the main reason for including this story is that we might learn from Peter’s experience. He is a warning to all of us. After all, if an apostle who walked with Christ and saw His miracles denied his Lord, what might we do in similar circumstances?

Indeed, we *should* learn from the mistakes of others. One day I played in our annual church golf tournament. We divided into teams and played captain’s choice. Each team member plays from the best previous shot or putt. Well, my team was on the green with a 25-foot, downhill putt. The first team member putted the ball past the hole and off the green! The second member putted the ball well past the hole. It was my turn. I did not learn from their mistake. I putted the ball at least 6 feet past the hole as well. Then, after 3 strait putts well past the hole, the final member of our team, put the ball—well past the hole. None of us seemed to learn anything from the mistakes of others! In spite of our best intentions, we all made the same mistake.

Well this morning, I want us to learn something from the big mistake Peter made. So I am going to review the story of Peter’s denial of Christ, and then draw some lessons from this story. I believe you will see that the message today is very practical. It reveals the truth of human weakness, and how we can have forgiveness, restoration, and overcome sin in our lives. Furthermore, as we live in a society that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, let us remember the failure of Peter and learn how to avoid denying Christ as he did.<sup>1</sup> So let’s see first of all:

### I. THE SHAMEFUL DENIALS OF PETER

Now to give you a little background, the failure of Peter was:

A. Predicted by Christ – In fact, Jesus said in v.27, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...” So Jesus first made a prediction regarding *all* of the disciples. They all would fall away<sup>2</sup> and forsake Him. Jesus not only predicted this because of His divine omniscience, but also because of prophecy. For He then quoted Zechariah 13:7, “I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”

Then in v.29 Peter spoke up and said, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” Then, after such an affirmation of his supreme loyalty to Christ, Jesus gave a clear prophecy

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<sup>1</sup> Mark wrote his gospel especially for the Romans. About the time he wrote his gospel Christians began to face serious persecution in Rome, which would test their faithfulness to Christ.

<sup>2</sup> James Brooks says *skandalizo* in this case means “fall away,” as in 4:17; 6:3; 9:42-47 (p.231).

concerning Peter. He said in v.30, “Assuredly, I say to you that today<sup>3</sup>, even this night, before the rooster crows twice,<sup>4</sup> ☞ you will deny Me three times.” “You” is emphatic in Greek, as if Jesus pointed His finger at Peter (cf. v.67). The reference to the rooster crow first served the purpose of showing how quickly Peter would break his vow. In essence He was saying that Peter would deny Him *before* the break of dawn the next day.<sup>5</sup>

Peter could hardly believe what he was hearing. In v.31 he repeated his insistence of loyalty even after the prophecy of v.30. He said, “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” Peter insisted that he would never deny Him, even if his loyalty cost him his life! I think Peter really was sincere when he made that vow. He meant every word of it. Peter could not think it was even possible that he could ever disown his Lord. And he did not stand alone in his confidence. The other disciples were of the same opinion. In the last of v.31 Mark reports, “And they all said likewise.”

Yet in spite of his promise, we see that denial was indeed:

B. Practiced by Peter - I say practiced, for this was not one slip, but Peter denied Christ several times on 3 separate occasions during that night! How many times have we made promises to the Lord, only to find that we quickly break our promises! Why is that?

Well let’s see what happened. After Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled the scene, just as Jesus and prophecy had predicted. But v.54 says, “But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest.” The nighttime Jewish trial took place, not in the official hall of the Sanhedrin, but at the High Priest’s house. Peter wanted to find out what would happen, so he followed the crowd at a distance. He certainly loved Jesus, and he was concerned about Him. I wonder if he even hoped that he would have enough courage to testify on Christ’s behalf.

The High Priest’s house where they took Him was a rather large house. An arched passageway led from the heavy outside gate into an inner courtyard, surrounded by various rooms of the house.<sup>6</sup> It was a cool night in early spring, so they had an open fire going in the courtyard. Peter joined a group there who were warming themselves. The fire no doubt illuminated Peter’s nervous face just a bit. Then a servant girl<sup>7</sup> looked intently (*emblepo*) at Peter and spoke up, charging that he was with that Nazarene, Jesus<sup>8</sup> (v.67). Evidently, she had previously seen him with Jesus.

Peter was caught off guard. He was not prepared for this. He had hoped to just mingle with the crowd unnoticed. The unexpectedness and boldness of the servant girl’s incriminating statement caused him to become frightened. Perhaps he panicked. Since he was among the enemy, he decided to take the easy way out and say in v.68, “I neither know nor understand what

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<sup>3</sup> The Jewish day began at sundown, which is why He said “today”.

<sup>4</sup> In the other gospels (Mt. 26:34; Lk. 22:34) it is reported that He said, “before the rooster crows.” Thus, many manuscripts of Mark indicate that the cock crowed after Peter’s 1st denial. Yet, there is no contradiction if the gospel writers were reporting the rooster crowing *time*, around 3-4 AM, rather than Mark’s report of a specific timeline of rooster crowing (see Ironside, p. 217).

<sup>5</sup> In an experiment scientists found that roosters would start to crow two hours before the onset of light (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130318-rooster-crow-circadian-clock-science>).

<sup>6</sup> The apostle John was able to get inside the courtyard easily, because he was known by the High Priest. But John 18:16 indicates that John had to act on Peter’s behalf in order for Peter to get in. While John evidently went on in, Peter stayed out in the courtyard.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, this is a word (*paidiske*) that could be used for a slave, as in Acts 16:16; Gal. 4:22.

<sup>8</sup> So translated in NIV, ESV. The Greek word order is “of Nazareth Jesus.” Contrast Mark 1:24 and Luke 4:34.

you are saying.” He lied and pleaded ignorance. Many since then have used that tactic! ★The chief and foremost of our Lord’s chosen disciples was thrown down, not by the threats of armed men, but by the saying of one powerless servant girl! That made his conduct all the more reprehensible.

In the last of v.68 we see that Peter left that place and went to the porch (*proaulion*). No doubt, he felt quite uncomfortable there in the courtyard, and he wanted to get away. After all, it was he who had cut off the ear of Malchus, the High Priest’s servant! John tells us that at least one of his relatives was in that crowd (Jn. 18:26).

We are also told in v.68 that the rooster crowed the first time. That should have served as a warning to Peter. The Bible teaches that we are to flee temptation, and Peter should have recognized his own weakness and left. I believe that God can use even a rooster to warn us. Indeed, God will often warn us when we are going down the path of sin.

Well, if his intention was to leave, we see in v.69 that he was interrupted by the servant girl and others who charged him with being one of those who had been with Jesus. Again, Peter hopes that denial will spare him any trouble so in v.70 he evidently kept denying<sup>9</sup> that he was with Jesus. Meanwhile, the news of Peter’s presence probably was circulating among those in the courtyard.

The third challenge was made more confidently. In v.70 we see that a group of bystanders said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.” He begins with “surely” or “truly” (*αληθως*) and brings up supporting evidence, “he is a Galilean.” Peter’s accent gave him away. He was like a Georgian among a group of New Yorkers! A comparison of the Gospel accounts shows that some people were talking *to* Peter; others were talking *about* him. Accusations were flying in from every side. Peter was like a scared cat surrounded by a pack of dogs. This was enough to get anyone excited, especially excitable Simon! So Peter panics. According to v.71, at this point Peter did not utter profanity. Instead, he began to pronounce a curse on himself<sup>10</sup> if he was not telling the truth. He must have said something like, “May God do this or that to me if it be true that I even know this man Jesus!” He also affirmed his statement with an oath.<sup>11</sup> But while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed again [add audio?].

How terrible! Peter is acting and talking like an unbeliever. Peter did just the opposite of what he said he would do. Here we see this same Simon Peter so entirely overcome by fear that he actually disowns his Lord and goes out into the darkness of the night weeping. He was one who had enjoyed special privileges. He declares that he does not know the one who had healed his mother-in-law, taken him up onto the mountain of transfiguration, and saved him from drowning in the Sea of Galilee! And he not only disowns his Master once, but does it three times! And he not only disowns Him simply, but does it with the pronouncement of an oath and a curse (verse 71)!

Before we judge Peter too severely, we need to examine our *own* lives. How many times have *we* denied the Lord in some way? Perhaps a gang at school or work says something ugly about Christ or His people, and you slip away and act like you do not know Christ. Or perhaps you have found yourself in a situation where you are pressured into compromising your moral convictions, and you yield to the pressure and act like you don’t even know Jesus. And how many times have we had a good opportunity to share the Gospel with others, and have remained

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<sup>9</sup> Imperfect tense unlike v.68.

<sup>10</sup> See how the word is used in Acts 23:12, 14, 21.

<sup>11</sup> “Swear” is the general word for giving an oath, to back up the alleged truth of his statement.

silent? Paul expressed this human problem in Rom. 7:19, “For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

Now we need to learn lessons from Peter’s sin, and hopefully avoid the same mistake. So notice next of all:

## II. THE SPIRITUAL DECLINE OF PETER

How could a man who obviously loved Jesus come to deny Him the way he did? Though Peter had his faults, he also had his strengths. On one occasion he was the first to step forward to confess that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God (Mt. 16:16). How could he now be the first to deny Jesus? The explanation is found in our text. The spiritual declension of Peter followed 3 tragic steps, and we need to be aware of these spiritual dangers, lest we fall as Peter did. First of all, there was:

A. Pride - In vv. 29 & 31 Peter boasted before others of his devotion to Christ, even unto death! But was his boast even well founded? While he was the one who stood forth to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in the next moment he was speaking the words of Satan, discouraging Jesus from going to the cross. On the one hand Peter walked on the water, but then he plunged into a failure of his faith. ★ In light of his past failures, how could he be so sure that he would not fall at this impending trial?

We need to keep in mind that “pride goes before ... a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Pride is a dangerous thing in the life of a believer. Sometimes when God blesses you, and people praise you, watch out! You are in spiritual danger.

Another problem that led to Peter’s fall was:

B. Presumption - Peter presumed that he could control his sin nature. Yet that very night he would discover that he was as weak as water in his own human nature. He would discover the truth of what Jesus warned a few moments later in the last of v.38, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” You see, even if you are a Christian, you still have the sin nature within you. Jer. 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it.” There is far more wickedness in all our hearts than we are prone to admit. We never can tell how far we might fall once we face temptation. There is no degree of sin into which the greatest saint may not run if not upheld by the grace of God, and if we do not watch and pray.

The seeds of wickedness lie hidden in our hearts. They are like weeds in a garden. They only need time and moisture to spring up. The Word of God contains many other examples of the potential weakness of true believers. The stories of Noah, Abraham, and David will supply us with sad proof that *no one* is so strong as to be beyond the danger of falling. Let us not forget this.

Peter also presumed spiritual strength. He thought that he could live the Christian life simply by sheer determination. Why, Peter thought he was so strong that he didn’t need to heed the Lord’s appeal in v.38, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” Did Peter give heed to Jesus? No. Instead, he went back to sleep. Peter was so confident that he was strong, he did not need to pray, yet he denied Christ before the break of dawn.

Even so, you and I should not imagine that we are too spiritually strong to fall to temptation. 1 Cor. 10:12 says, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” This problem of presumption especially applies if you have been a strong Christian for a while.

You may begin to believe that you don't need to pray. You think you do not need a daily quiet time. You can do just fine on your own. Illus.: It's like riding a bicycle. Once you learn how to ride, you don't have to give any thought about it; you just do it. And once you've been a Christian for a while, you may think you can just live the Christian life without much prayer or dependence on God [Illus.#C-3298]. Yet none of us is so strong that you don't need to keep seeking God in prayer and in His Word. We will only be safe from temptation when we replace self-confidence with a humility which knows its weakness and which depends not on itself, but seeks the help of Christ. Proverbs says, "He who trusts in himself is a fool" (28:26).

Back in the 1980's there was a young pastor in Texas who was leading one of the fastest growing churches in America. He was successful and apparently strong. But everything came crashing down when his church discovered that he had a 4-year adulterous affair with a woman in the church. Someone asked him what happened. He acknowledged he became overconfident and quit having his quiet time with the Lord. [Dr. David L. Allen]. Don't presume your spiritual strength.

Now notice what happened to someone who is overconfident in the flesh. Peter started going downhill in v.47. When Jesus was arrested, we read, "And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear." Which disciple is it that does this? John tells us; it was Peter! Here is Peter, walking in the flesh instead of the Spirit. He is resorting to violence. When you get away from God you will become hateful and hurtful to other people.

Now notice v.54. It says, "But Peter followed Him at a distance." Peter is still following Jesus, but at a distance.

Could that describe quite a few people here today? You love Jesus, and you are still following Jesus, but yet you are doing so at a distance. Perhaps you used to read your Bible most every day, but not now. Perhaps you used to come to church just about every Sunday and even at other times. Perhaps you used to sing in the choir, or come to visitation, or teach a S.S. class, or serve on a committee, but now you are one of those distant church members. Watch out! Like Peter, you could be in danger of a great fall.

There was a third factor in the fall of Peter:

C. Peer Pressure - Instead of standing with Jesus, Peter started standing with the wrong crowd (cf. Ps. 1:1). And they turned on him. As accusations were coming at him one by one, and then from every side, it was too much for him. At each accusation Peter denied he even knew Christ. In that situation he couldn't stand being the only believer in the group. He couldn't stand the peer pressure.

What made the problem worse was the fact that Peter was pressured from an unexpected source. If the soldiers had charged him, perhaps he would have resisted them with bravery. But when a servant girl spoke to him, he just couldn't handle it.

Now we are all susceptible to peer pressure, and this is especially true of young people. You are very concerned about what other people will say, especially those in your peer group. Social Media has become a new source of peer pressure. So you need to be careful about who you hang out with. If you go socialize with a group of unbelievers, you will probably give in to the peer pressure, and act like you are not a follower of Christ, or even deny Christ!

So we see the problems that we need to avoid: Pride, presumption, and peer pressure. Well, in spite of the warnings of these spiritual dangers, we may fail like Peter did. So let's conclude by considering:

### III. THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES WE SHOULD PRACTICE

Peter committed a great sin; his life was scarred. But God worked to convict him of his sin, and correct him, and restore him. Let's see how *we* can be corrected and restored. First of all:

A. Learn and Remember God's Word – Learning God's Word can help *prevent* sin. Jesus was victorious over temptation by quoting Scripture (Mt. 4:4-10; cf. also Psa. 119:11). But at times, we ignore God's Word and sin anyway. Peter heard the warnings of Christ, but he denied Him anyway. That is one big problem that we all have: we know more than we obey. However, if you do sin, it helps when we know God's Word, and allow the remembrance of God's Word to convict us that what we are doing is wrong. In v.72 we read that "Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him." That remembrance brought conviction into his life, and that started the process of correction. It was not primarily the crowing of the cock that convicted Peter; it was the remembering of Christ's words. It is always the Word that penetrates the heart and brings about true repentance.

So be sure to spend time reading your Bible. Come to Bible study. Come to the preaching services where you can learn the Word of God. If you do so, then God will bring scriptures to mind as you face temptation and trials, and also to correct you when you have done wrong. Furthermore, you should:

B. Deal with Your Sin – Peter could have dismissed his sin with all kinds of excuses. He could have rationalized away his sin. But in the end, he didn't do that. Even so, when you fail the Lord, don't excuse your sin. Don't cover your sin. Don't deny your sin. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covers his sin shall not prosper." Instead, the first thing you should do is:

1. Acknowledge Your Sin - John tells us that Christ looked at Peter from a distance when Peter denied him. That look pierced his soul, and led him to acknowledge his sin, and see it in its utter blackness. You might as well acknowledge your sin because God knows all about it.

2. Experience Godly Sorrow – In the last of v.72 we read, "And when he thought about it, he wept." These were tears of sorrow over the sin he had just committed. No man will ever conquer his evil as long as he has a careless, casual attitude about sin. He has to be broken down into penitent sorrow before he will gain victory over sin. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation...." Until there is true sorrow over what you have done, you will not truly repent. When was the last time you wept over the sin you had committed?

At this point I want to bring up something else. Let us learn from these verses that backsliding brings saints into great sorrow. Who can conceive the shame, confusion, self-reproach and bitter remorse which must have overwhelmed his soul? The experience of Peter is only the experience of all God's servants who have yielded to temptation. Like Peter, Lot, Samson, and David found that when you backslide from God, you reap a bitter harvest in this world.

3. Repent of Your Sin - Judas was remorseful, but Peter repented. That is the real test of a genuine believer. I do not believe that Peter ever denied Christ again, even in the face of imprisonment and torture as we see in the book of Acts. Later, Peter remained true to Christ even

as he faced death by crucifixion. A Christianity that overlooks repentance and talks only about faith will never promote a permanent and thorough moral reformation.

4. Receive Forgiveness - Knowing the love and grace of Christ kept Peter's sorrow from turning into despair. On the other hand, Judas "went out and hanged himself." What made the difference? Because one saw his sin only in the light of an awakened conscience, but the other saw his sin in light of the loving look of a pardoning Lord. Judas could have been forgiven, even of such a great sin, if he had repented and believed in the forgiveness offered in Christ. But Judas probably doubted that Christ would ever forgive him. Because Peter went out repenting, the Lord met him and forgave him and restored him.

The Lord Jesus will do the same for us. Even though you have a significant failure in your past, God can forgive you, restore you, and use you in a wonderful way. So let us take comfort in the thought that the Lord Jesus does not throw off His believing people because of failures and imperfections. He takes them, with all their blemishes and defects, and, once joined to him by faith, will never put them away. He knew what they were before conversion—wicked, guilty and defiled; yet He loved them. How knows what they will be after conversion—weak, erring and frail; yet He loves them. Let us remember that our Master in heaven bears with our infirmities. He is never tired of forgiving. Let us try to be the same. We ourselves are all, more or less, weak.

Finally:

C. Don't Trust Your Own Strength, but Seek the Power of the Holy Spirit - Peter demonstrated that good intentions were not enough. Human will alone was inadequate. We need a greater power than our own to resist temptation and stay true to the Lord. We need to trust in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. You see, it was only after the day of Pentecost, when Peter received the Holy Spirit, that Peter was as bold as a lion. He even boldly preached the gospel before the same Sanhedrin that crucified Jesus!

Illustration: The great preacher D.L. Moody once asked his audience, "How can I get the air out of this glass? One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter the glass." After many impossible suggestions, Moody smiled, picked up a pitcher of water, and filled the glass. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then went on to show that victory in the Christian life is not by "sucking out a sin here and there, but rather by being filled with the Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

If you want sin out of your life, the way to do it is not to simply try to remove the sin. If you merely reform, you will leave a vacuum in your life (cf. Mt. 12:43-45). Instead, fill your life with the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ, and you will be much more successful at keeping sin out of your life.

I have already shared the problem of sin in Romans 7:19, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." Then he gives the solution in chapter 8, especially v.4. The controlling influence and power of the Spirit of Christ can set you free from the power of sin.

Conclusion: In the Gospels and the book of Acts we see that Jesus restored a man who had denied Him 3 times. Do you realize that Jesus can forgive and restore you, regardless of what you have done? Will you seek His forgiveness and restoration?

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #2233* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

Many are like Peter. You want to be a good Christian, and yet so often you fail. You wonder what's wrong. Well today you have heard that good intentions are not enough. You need more. You need to deal with your sin and failure by acknowledging it, being sorry for it, repenting of it, and receiving forgiveness by faith. Then, don't rely on your own willpower to resist temptation. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some of you need to confess Christ as Savior, and follow Him in baptism. Not doing so is a form of denial. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33, "...whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Will you confess Christ today? If you won't do that before a friendly audience, you surely will not do so before nonbelievers.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2024; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 5/20/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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