

Faithful, Not Flawless

By: David Burruss

When I first became involved in ministry, I struggled with the thought that I had to be perfect. It felt like walking on eggshells, and that pressure eventually spilled into my daily life. After all, I was the preacher. Wasn't I supposed to lead by example? But preachers are people too. We are tempted. We fall short, the same as anyone else. Perhaps you have felt this same weight, whether you stand behind a pulpit or simply teach a class or lead your family in faith.

Scripture never asks anyone to carry that weight, and it never promises that faithful service requires flawlessness. Paul understood this better than most. He had planted churches, faced beatings, shipwrecks, and imprisonment, and yet he wrote candidly about his own struggle with sin. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Romans 7:18). A man used mightily by God still wrestled with the gap between what he wanted to do and what he actually did. If Paul needed grace daily, so do the rest of us who serve Him now.

James gives a sober warning to those who teach: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). That verse is often quoted to explain why teaching carries weight. It is rarely quoted alongside the very next line, where James admits, "For we all stumble in many things" (James 3:2). The stricter judgment does not fall on people who never sin. It falls on people, period, because no teacher escapes the human condition. James includes himself in that "we." He was not describing a category of especially weak Christians who happened to teach. He was describing everyone who teaches, including himself.

This is where the blood of Christ becomes so necessary, and so precious. John writes, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Notice the tense. Not "cleansed us once," but an ongoing cleansing for those who continue walking in the light. The very next verses make it plain that this promise is for people who still sin: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

Walking in the light does not mean walking without fault. It means walking honestly before God, refusing to hide sin, and continuing to seek Him even after failure. A Christian who stumbles and gets back up, confessing and repenting, is still walking in the light. A Christian who never stumbles because he has stopped trying is not somehow further along than the one who struggles daily and keeps returning to God. There is no such believer, in any case. Every faithful Christian is simply one who keeps walking, not one who never trips.

The writer of Hebrews offers a striking comfort for anyone who feels isolated by their weakness, especially those in positions where failure feels more visible. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). Christ does not look at a struggling preacher, teacher, or elder with disappointment reserved for lesser Christians. He looks with the understanding of one who was tempted in every way, and who now sits ready to extend mercy rather than withhold it.

None of this excuses sin or lowers the standard of holy living. Peter still charges shepherds to be "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3), and that calling matters. But an example is not the same as perfection. An example is someone worth watching precisely because you can see them fail, repent, and keep following Christ anyway. Timothy was young and likely felt unqualified for the responsibility given him, yet Paul told him simply to "be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul never told him to be flawless. He told him to be faithful, visibly and consistently, in the ordinary substance of a Christian life.

I no longer carry that early fear the way I once did, and I hope you won't have to carry it either. It was never yours to bear, and Scripture never asked you to. What God asks is a heart that walks in the light, confesses honestly, and keeps returning to the mercy secured by the blood of His Son. That is not a lower standard. It is the only standard any of us has ever been able to meet, and it is enough, because His blood, not our record, is what makes us clean.