

“HE WENT OUT”

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE TO DENY SELF, TAKE UP ONE'S
CROSS, AND FOLLOW CHRIST

By Arlen L. Chirwood

One of the best illustrations given in Scripture to show the downward path which it is possible for a Christian to take — ultimately leading to a place of rejection and shame rather than to a place of glory and exaltation with Christ in the kingdom — is the recorded actions of the Apostle Peter immediately preceding Christ's crucifixion.

“But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace...

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, ‘Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.’

But he denied before them all, saying, ‘I know not what thou sayest’...

And again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the man’...

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, ‘I know not the man.’ And immediately the cock crew.

And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, ‘Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:58a, 69, 70, 72, 74, 75).

Christ, following the last supper, after He and His disciples had gone out onto the Mount of Olives, informed them that they would *all* “be offended” during the next few hours because of Him. And from that time until the time Peter is seen *weeping bitterly* because of his offense, there are *seven steps* recorded in Scripture showing how Peter allowed himself to be brought into this condition (Matt. 26:31-75).

(The word “offended [Gk., *skandalizo*]” has to do with *something causing opposition, causing one to stumble, which can result in a fall*.

This is the same word used in Matt. 13:21, which, according to Luke 8:13, can result in *a falling away, apostasy*. The words “fall away” in Luke 8:13 are the translation of *aphistemi* in the Greek text. This is the verb form of the noun *apostasia*, from which we derive our English word “apostasy.”)

Step One: Peter would not accept Christ's statement concerning that which the disciples were about to do, as he had previously refused to accept Christ's statement on another occasion and had to be rebuked by the Lord (Matt. 16:21-23). Peter then

made his boast that he would *never* allow opposition to cause him to stumble, resulting in a falling away (*cf.* James 4:13-15).

And in response to Christ's subsequent statement that Peter would deny Him three times that very night, Peter responded, “Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee”; and the other disciples responded likewise. But during the next few hours, “all the disciples” would *forsake Him and flee* (Matt. 26:33-35, 56).

(Peter used emphatic forms of negatives in the Greek text in both his responses to Christ. In essence, he said, “I will never, no not ever, be caused to stumble”; and “I will never, no not ever, deny you.”

“Likewise also said *all the disciples*.”)

Step Two: Following the disciples' boast that they would never allow opposition to bring about a falling away or never themselves deny the Lord, Christ took Peter, James, and John into the Garden of Gethsemane. And once in the garden, He told them,

“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.”

However, when Jesus went aside to pray, rather than watching, the disciples *fell asleep*. The Lord then had to rebuke them for not *watching* and *praying* that they “enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:36-41).

Step Three: Judas had betrayed Christ to the religious leaders of Israel; and he then led “a band of men and officers,” dispatched by the religious leaders, into the garden to take Christ. Seeing them, Peter drew his sword and resorted to *the arm of flesh, to humanistic means*, to accomplish his previous boast.

The battle was to be spiritual, as it is to be today; but Peter tried to force his will on others through physical means (the day when Christ will take the sceptre and physically “strike through kings” was future then and remains future today [Ps. 110:1ff; cf. Ps. 2:1ff]).

Peter, in his vain, fleshly effort, cut off an ear of one of the high priest’s servants; but Jesus, completely rejecting his actions, told him to put up the sword, and He then healed the servant’s ear (Matt. 26:47-55; Luke 22:50, 51).

Step Four: The previous actions of Peter and the other disciples — *boasting* of that which they would do (though the Lord had told them otherwise), *sleeping* when they should have been watching and praying, and Peter *resorting to the arm of flesh* as he sought to carry out his previous boast — led the disciples into doing exactly what they had previously stated would not occur.

Then, when Jesus was taken by the multitude, climaxing their actions, “*all the*

disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matt. 26:56).

Step Five: Peter then began to follow Christ “afar off.” He had taken the sword, and it was about to result in his ruin. He had resorted to the man of flesh and was in the process of reaping that which he had sown (cf. Matt. 26:52; Gal. 6:7, 8).

Because of his previous actions, the closeness which had been his in the inner circle with James and John was now gone (cf. Matt. 17:1; 26:37, 58).

Step Six: When Jesus was taken into the high priest’s palace for questioning by the religious leaders, Peter, following Him “afar off,” remained *outside* in the courtyard. Rather than *identifying himself with Christ on the inside*, he sat down with the enemy on the outside (Matt. 26:69; Luke 22:54, 55).

Step Seven: Peter’s past actions had now led him to the final point in his fall. When accused of being one of Christ’s disciples, Peter *denied his Lord* on three separate occasions, followed by the cock crowing a second time, just as Christ had foretold.

And the Lord, being led at that moment past Peter unto “the hall of judgment” (John 18:28), turned and *looked* upon Peter, awakening him to the stark reality of that which he had done (Matt. 26:34, 69-74; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61).

(The Lord’s look in this passage was far more than a brief glance. The word used in the Greek text [*emblepo* (an intensified form of the Greek word for “look,” *blepo*)] points to Christ fixing His eyes upon Peter in *an intently searching manner*. Peter came under *scrutiny* for his actions, causing him to remember that which had previously occurred.

Peter then “went out, and wept bitterly” [Luke 22:62].)

Peter, because of his past actions, found himself *outside* in the place where, instead of joy, there was *sorrow*; he found himself in the place where, instead of *light*, there was *darkness* (Matt. 26:31, 40).

Peter, because of his past actions, rather than remaining with Christ *on the inside*, where there was *light*, found himself *on the outside*, in a place of *darkness*. Peter found himself *in the outer darkness* (cf. Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully...

If we suffer [‘patiently endure’], we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (II Tim. 2:5, 12).

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