

What if You Falter?

Exodus 32 and 34
May 2, 2010

It was while Moses received detailed laws and regulations from God on the mountain that the Israelites chose to place their faith in a manufactured idol. If you read from chapter 20 all the way through to our lesson passages you'll see that God instructed Moses in the well-known ten commandments, but also in various other laws concerning how God's people were to relate to Him and to each other. God elaborated on His law, showing the people how to apply it in certain situations. He also gave ordinances for observing special days and memorials. It was after this that Moses descended from the mountain the first time and, upon hearing everything God had spoken, Israel responded that they would do everything God required. Moses then anointed the Israelites with sacrificial blood to consecrate their oath. Finally, Moses returned to the mountain with 70 elders, and these men beheld God's glory.

The point in summarizing all this is that the Israelites' rebellion in idolatry took place after they had heard the terms of God's covenant and agreed to it. They still bore the stains of the anointing blood on their heads and clothing as their hearts turned away from the God who had redeemed them out of Egypt and was so very near to them. It was during Moses' second meeting with God that their wickedness boiled over into idolatrous fervor. And here's a very sad detail: One of the first things God told Moses at this time was to collect gold from all the Israelites for the purpose of adorning the Tabernacle and its sacred furnishings. But the gold that should have been offered as a sacrifice to God's glory was instead being used to fashion a crude representation of Israel's need for false worship. Does this help magnify the cause of God's rage against His chosen nation?

Even in their sin, because of Israel's repentance and Moses' intercession, God was willing to stand by and renew His covenant. The people's idolatry could not prevent God from raising up the nation through which all the people of the world would be blessed. God had an earlier covenant to fulfill as well - the one He made with Abraham to make from him a people as vast as the stars in the sky. God's plan for our redemption is greater than our sin, greater than our mistrust, and greater than the idols to which we turn in fear and ignorance. He will fulfill His covenant in the earth, and we are the people through whom this will take place.

I. How We Falter: Ex. 32:1-4

Two servicemen returned to base on Saturday night after a week's leave. They had lived it up wildly during the week and had done everything a serviceman could do on leave. On Sunday morning they went to chapel only to discover the chaplain was preaching on the Ten Commandments. As they were slinking out the door after the service, one was heard to say to the other, "Well, at least I ain't made no graven images lately!" In one sense he had made a graven image, not one made of wood or stone, but one conjured up in his mind! He was worshipping the false god of pleasure and bowing down to it. D. James Kennedy

Today's idols are more in the self than on the shelf.

Goudzwaard's three basic Biblical rules:

1. Every person is serving god(s) in his life.
2. Every person is transformed into an image of his god.
3. Mankind creates and forms a structure of society in its own image.

That for which I would give anything and accept nothing in exchange is the most important thing in my life. Whatever that is is my god (cf. Isa. 44:6-20).

II. When We Falter: Ex. 32:30-34

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman told of a distinguished minister, Dr. Howard, from Australia who preached very strongly on the subject of sin. After the service, one of the church officers came to counsel with him in the study. "Dr. Howard," he said, "we don't want you to talk as openly as you do about man's guilt and corruption, because if our boys and girls hear you discussing that subject they will more easily become sinners. Call it a mistake if you will, but do not speak so plainly about sin." The minister took down a small bottle and showing it to the visitor said, "You see that label? It says strychnine -- and underneath in bold, red letters the word 'Poison!' Do you know, man, what you are asking me to do? You are suggesting that I change the label. Suppose I do, and paste over it the words, 'Essence of Peppermint'; don't you see what might happen? Someone would use it, not knowing the danger involved, and would certainly die. So it is, too, with the matter of sin. The milder you make your label, the more dangerous you make your poison!"

III. Although We Falter: Exodus 34:6b-9

Thomas Edison's manufacturing facilities in West Orange, N.J., were heavily damaged by fire one night in December, 1914. Edison lost almost \$1 million worth of equipment and the record of much of his work. The next morning, walking

about the charred embers of his hopes and dreams, the 67-year-old inventor said: "There is value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Now we can start anew."

Will Rogers' stage specialty used to be rope tricks. One day, on stage, in the middle of his act, he got tangled in his lariat. Instead of getting upset, he drawled, "A rope ain't so bad to get tangled up in if it ain't around your neck." The audience roared. Encouraged by the warm reception, Rogers began adding humorous comments to all his performances. It was the comments, not the rope tricks, that eventually made him famous.

The great inventor Charles Kettering suggested that we must learn to fail intelligently. He said, "Once you've failed analyze the problem and find out why, because each failure is one more step leading up to the cathedral of success. The only time you don't want to fail is the last time you try." Here are three suggestions for turning failure into success:

1. honestly face defeat; never fake success.
2. Exploit the failure; don't waste it. Learn all you can from it; every bitter experience can teach us something.
3. Never use failure as an excuse for not trying again.

You may not be able to reclaim the loss, undo the damage, or reverse the consequences, but you can make a new start--wiser, more sensitive, renewed by the Holy spirit, and more determined to do right.