

“Fickle Denial & Firm Trial” (Jn. 18:15-27)

1. Bold Back-stepping? (15-18)

- a. Back-stepping: “The best of men are men at best.” Here we see Peter deny Jesus (17) “I am not” His disciple.
- b. Boldness: Context necessitates we acknowledge that Peter could not have failed in this manner had he not first put his life on the line when he took up sword to fulfill his promise to Jesus (13:37). Furthermore, he followed only with John to Annas’ home where the entourage took Jesus. However, it was Peter alone who drew the sword and cut off Malchus’ right ear! It took more courage for Peter to follow than any other disciple as we will see (26). After all, some who believed in Jesus never publically claimed such because they feared the Jews. Even Nicodemus seemingly stayed covert till Jesus death (19:39). Therefore, we must not fail to acknowledge Peter’s love and intent to support Jesus. Could Peter’s denial have been a tactic to keep getting closer to Jesus for further instruction? “Treason is a matter of dates.” Subterfuge is legitimate in war. After all, he even went inside the courtyard and then to the fire where the arresting authorities/soldiers were among those keeping warm. What made such a denial necessary for Peter to advance was how the girl’s question was posed (17). It seems as if John (if indeed it was John) had no trouble getting in but she gave Peter the business.

2. Calm, Consistent, & Courageous! (19-24)

- a. Motive: Their motive was not justice but to employ all means necessary to convict and do away with Jesus. Here they deal with the ‘success’ of Jesus’ teaching revealed by the inquiry of His disciples firstly. They also try to prove heresies theologically in the first trials before the Jews (Sanhedrin), yet change their tactic before Pilate with charges of political sedition (Lu. 23:2).
- b. Mis-procedure (19). Right away, Annas proceeds to ignore protocol and demand Jesus account for His disciples and teachings.
 - i. It was not Jesus responsibility to answer as accusing witnesses were to be brought forth first and then defending witnesses.
 - ii. Such a trial (be it preliminary or not) ought not to have been at night.
 - iii. Jesus calmly and respectfully pointed out the correct procedure (21).
 - iv. His appropriate reply was met with another egregious violation viz. a blow to His face. They presumed authority and that they were above scrutiny and thus was a rigged kangaroo court – determining guilt before evidence, trial, or conviction.
 - v. If you have a legitimate case then why this behavior and why alternate charges?
 - vi. When Jesus doubled down (23), Annas realized they’d get nowhere at that time and place so he sent Him to Caiaphas (24).
- c. Maintaining:
 - i. When Isaiah foretold that the Servant would be silent before the slaughter we see that it spoke not of Jesus being totally mute but not offering a defense so as to escape His execution, for that is why He arrived. He could have had them so tangled and could have legally, artfully, legitimately, and adamantly prevailed – even in the rigged trials they put Him through. He instead chose not to defend himself but affirm who He was and what He had done e.g. Mat. 26:61-63; 27:12-14; Mk. 15:3-5. In fact He kept the focus on Him rather than His teachings and disciples (cf. vv. 19-20).
 - ii. Jesus maintained that He consistently taught in public and in the Temple! And after His arrest, maligning, slap or strike, mis-proceedings, and coming trials, torture, and crucifixion; He remained amazingly composed!

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- iii. Jesus was consistent and transparent while they were manipulating and maligning. They were not really interested in what He taught His disciples about the Kingdom. Jesus didn't nor couldn't articulate the explanations of the parables He gave to His disciples in their time alone together.
- iv. Nevertheless, the Gospel was preached openly and progressively. Beware of those who purposefully avoid clarity. Those preachers, teachers, and influential leaders who muddy the waters and avoid clarity on social, theological, and controversial matters are purposefully playing it safe and or deceptively concealing motives. Jesus, Paul, Peter, and legitimate teachers keep the Gospel clear, transparent, and consistent in conveying / disseminating the Word of Truth with integrity not gimmicks, hidden agendas, and impressive speech (cf. 2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Thes. 2:4; Gal. 1:10; 5:11).

3. Fluctuating Faith (25-27)

a. The Threat Is Real

- i. Twice more, Peter is confronted squarely if he indeed was one of Jesus followers. In fact, Malchus' relative confronted Peter! He was there when Peter cut off his cousin's or brother's ear!
- ii. Perhaps (but maybe not) Peter's initial denial was subterfuge not just to save his skin but to further support Jesus – or why didn't he just flee like the rest of them? But at the “fire of coals,” it was as if he was taken off guard. The Synoptics report that he vowed his disassociation and even cursed at the accusation. Some commentators point out Ps. 1:1, 4 in relation to Peter's experience. Taken together with Lu. 22:31, we can see that were it not for Jesus' intercession and atonement for us, we, like Peter, could and likely would deny Him. Perhaps you have already done so in a milder manner. Perhaps I have done such.
- iii. We must avoid presumption of our “faithfulness” and realize we are likely much less courageous than was Peter. Would you have followed Jesus and those who arrested Him all the way to the house of those who wanted Him dead? Furthermore, would you gladly be imprisoned for preaching the name of Jesus? Perhaps some of us have chosen to remain silent before accusers – not because – we are being true to the mission – but because we are avoiding being cancelled. →
- iv. However, we are to be bold like Peter was after the resurrection. Jesus even admonished them (before His death and resurrection) to fear not death or persecution as He sent them out as sheep among wolves (Mat. 10).

b. The Judgment Is Certain

- i. Proverbs warns of a fear of man which is indicative of a lack of faith in God (29:25). We will not answer to man on Judgment day but to *the* Man! See Mat. 28:18; Jn. 5:27; Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 1:8; 1 Pet. 3:21-22. Jesus stood before His accusers in multiple courts but all will stand before Him in the holy court. Rev. 19:11-16 → “When the Man Comes Around” Johnny Cash.

c. Cross-Examination

- i. Although Peter failed – as we all do – he was restored graciously by another “fire of coals” made by Jesus (Jn. 21:9). There, Peter was not so boisterous as before (Mk. 14:29), but humbled and ready to obey with a better understanding of his own sinful nature (15-17), thus ready to lean fully on Christ and become a stalwart for Christ.

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- ii. Incidentally, the incident attests to Jesus’ credibility when He foretold both that Peter would deny Him and that he would be restored (Lu. 22:31-34).
- iii. We too must examine ourselves e.g. 2 Pet. 1:10; Ro. 12:3, or we will easily fall prey to pride, presumption, complacency, etc.
- iv. Jesus was assessed by all types and mostly not very prudently.
 1. His rivals plotted against Him as He was a threat to their perceived power.
 2. The mob was easily swayed by emotional accusations as politicians use such platitudes to do such today.
 3. Pilate was indifferent and simply wanted to avoid trouble.
 4. The Disciples fled.
 5. Judas betrayed.
 6. Peter denied.
 7. We can grow cold with our fickle faith of convenience. James Boice comments and then quotes Matthew Henry, who employed the event of Peter’s denial by the fire of coals as an application of warning to all of us. “Do you think that you do not need to learn? If that is the case, then you of all people need to, for John has undoubtedly intertwined the story of Peter’s fall with the story of the Jewish and Roman trials to show that even the followers of Christ are not free from guilt in their relationships to him. True, they do not hate him, like Caiaphas. They are not indifferent to him, like Pilate. Yet they deny him many times, as Peter did. Why is this? No doubt because we are too fond of the world and too enamored of its company. Matthew Henry once wrote, ‘Those that warm themselves with evil doers grow cold towards good people and good things, and those that are fond of the devil’s fire-side are in danger of the devil’s fire.’”^{2 1}
 8. I have wondered to myself and even aloud to some of you, how more than a few of my superiors have denied basic Gospel principles, values, motives, attitudes and perverted its virtues. It could have been avoided and could be corrected if they self-examine. Will we pretend that the LORD cannot see everything and then not judge it? Job. 28:24; Ps. 33:13; Lu. 8:17.
 9. Only Christ is faithful. When asked if Peter was with Jesus, in his weakest moment he declared, “I am not” (Jn. 18:17). However, when they came to arrest Jesus, He stepped forward and said, “I am He” v. 5. Hence, Peter later would include the following in his epistle: “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:23-25).

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5 (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 1181.

¹ Boice, J. M. (2005). [*The Gospel of John: an expositional commentary*](#) (p. 1412). Baker Books.