

Human Weakness

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From *The Messenger and News Review*, March 2003

The Desire of Ages, p. 353:

[Jesus] did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes.

This statement concerning Jesus' manner of work has been a guideline and a great comfort for me, because I know that I do have human weaknesses. In fact, I probably have a lot of them. But my intentions are not evil. It is not hypocrisy, unbelief, or iniquity that is my problem, but simply human weakness—which nobody should censure, because Jesus does not censure it.

Such an understanding leaves me in the comfortable position of never needing to be censured. And woe to anyone who might try to censure me—I would immediately silence them with the above statement!

But recently I began to wonder if I really understood it correctly. When I first began to doubt my understanding, I looked at the question of what human weakness really is. The following are some examples:

- fear,
- lack of knowledge,
- disease,
- not being able to endure the full glory of God,
- failure because of hunger or thirst,
- failure because of tiredness or exhaustion,
- failure because of desire for comfort and ease,
- losing track of things,
- forgetfulness,
- clumsiness,
- being unable to understand,
- slowness of speech,

- being unable to express oneself properly,
- misunderstandings,
- various habits,
- desire for worldly things,
- lack of patience,
- discouragement,
- outbursts of rage.

This is not a complete list, for there are many other forms of human weaknesses. But they are all an expression of our weak and sinful human nature. It should not be difficult for anyone to see these elements in their own lives. Is this what Jesus does not censure?

On the other hand, Jesus fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity. In this category I would list:

- lying,
- rebellion,
- evil intentions,
- known sin,
- adultery,
- stealing,
- murdering,
- idol worship.

I do not need to make this list longer, for the Bible gives us detailed information of the sins that should be denounced, censured, and rebuked, and which exclude us from heaven. See *1 Corinthians* 6:9, 10; *1 Timothy* 1:9, 10; *Romans* 1:18.

When I read of those sins in the Bible, I do not see myself in them, and I think that most of us would feel the same way. But I was not satisfied with this. I felt I was like the Pharisee who said:

Luke 18

¹¹ God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

The rich young ruler who came to Jesus would certainly

have agreed with me that there is nothing wrong with us. We simply have some human weaknesses. But just as the young man sensed that there was something wrong with his attitude, so did I.

So I considered human weakness once again, and searched the word of God to see how the Lord has dealt with it formerly. I discovered that the Lord, at times, has rebuked human weaknesses in the past.

Biblical Examples of Rebuke

When Abraham was in Egypt, he feared that the Egyptians would kill him, in order to take his wife, for she was a beautiful woman (Genesis 12:10-20). These fears were well-founded, and therefore quite understandable. Abram asked Sarai:

Genesis 12

¹³ Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.

This was not a direct lie, because Sarai was the daughter of his father, but he concealed that she was also his wife. This was an evidence of his weakness:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 131:

During his stay in Egypt, Abraham gave evidence that he was not free from human weakness and imperfection.

How did God view this imperfection? Did He censure His servant for this display of human weakness? He certainly did! Pharaoh said:

Genesis 12

¹⁸ What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?

And we also read:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 131:

But this concealment of the real relation between them was deception.

Another rebuke of human weakness, even clearer this time,

was given in the case of Moses and his brother Aaron. When they came to the borders of the promised land, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the people murmured once again (*Numbers* 4:1-13). It was hard for the two brothers to bear.

In their distress they turned to the Lord for guidance, but in carrying out the Lord's instructions, Moses manifested human weakness.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 418:

Wearied with the continual murmuring and rebellion of the people, Moses had lost sight of his Almighty Helper, and without the divine strength he had been left to mar his record by an exhibition of human weakness.

Would the Lord censure this? We read:

Numbers 20

¹² Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.

Before Israel's entry into Canaan they both died as the direct result of this exhibition of human weakness!

A third example is Elijah when he fled from Jezebel (*1 Kings* 19:1-9). This was also a manifestation of human weakness:

Education, p. 150:

There is warning also in noting the results that have followed upon even once yielding to human weakness and error...

Hear God's rebuke in the following words:

1 Kings 19

9 What are you doing here, Elijah?

In other words:

Prophets and Kings, p. 168:

I sent you to the brook Cherith and afterward to the widow of Sarepta. I commissioned you to return to Israel and to stand before the idolatrous priests on Carmel, and I girded you with strength to guide the chariot of the king to the gate of Jezreel. But who sent you on this hasty flight into the wilderness? What errand have you here?

Should the Lord have had more sympathy for this manifestation of human weakness in His tried servant?

The list of God's censuring human weakness continues. Here is David's experience:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 656:

David had displayed noble traits of character, and his moral worth had won him favor with the people; but as trial came upon him, his faith was shaken, and human weakness appeared.

The results of this weakness were terrible. It cost the lives of many human beings, and God rebuked him for it.

Although Job stood faithful to the Lord in the worst crisis of his life, even he was censured (*Job 38*).

Did Jesus Censure Weakness?

But the most surprising fact of all is that even Jesus appears to have censured human weakness, although we have generally assumed the contrary. Let us look at the example of John the Baptist, as he was languishing in prison.

The Desire of Ages, p. 214:

From the free air of the wilderness and the vast throngs that had hung upon his words, he was now shut in by the walls of a dungeon cell.

The life of John had been one of active labor, and the gloom and inaction of his prison life weighed heavily upon him. As week after week passed, bringing no change, despondency and doubt crept over him.

This despondency was certainly a manifestation of human

weakness, and as such it was more than understandable. There was also the human weakness of fear.

The Desire of Ages, p. 216:

There were hours when the whisperings of demons tortured his spirit, and the shadow of a terrible fear crept over him.

Another weakness was bitter disappointment.

The Desire of Ages, p. 216:

John had been bitterly disappointed in the result of his mission. He had expected that the message from God would have the same effect as when the law was read in the days of Josiah and of Ezra (2 Chronicles 34; Nehemiah 8, 9); that there would follow a deep-seated work of repentance and returning unto the Lord. For the success of this mission his whole life had been sacrificed. Had it been in vain?

Is it not understandable that, under these circumstances, he had questions, if not doubts, about his mission?

The Desire of Ages, p. 216:

Had he been unfaithful in his mission, that he was now cut off from labor? If the promised Deliverer had appeared, and John had been found true to his calling, would not Jesus now overthrow the oppressor's power, and set free His herald?

In this situation, John even had the integrity not to...

The Desire of Ages, p. 216:

...discuss his doubts and anxieties with his companions. He determined to send a message of inquiry to Jesus. This he entrusted to two of his disciples, hoping that an interview with the Saviour would confirm their faith, and bring assurance to their brethren. And he longed for some word from Christ spoken directly for himself.

But the answer Jesus sent back was...

The Desire of Ages, p. 218:

...a gentle reproof to John.

Matthew 11

⁶ Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

One of the strongest rebukes that Jesus ever uttered was given to Peter when he tried to shield Christ from His impending sufferings. It was a lack of understanding that led Peter to say in love:

Matthew 16

²² Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!

In very strong terms, Jesus rebuked this misguided effort:

Matthew 16

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.

When the disciples revealed human fear in the storm on the lake, Jesus rebuked them with the words:

Matthew 8

²⁶ Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?

With all these evidences before us, are we still convinced that Jesus did not censure human weakness? Do we still feel that Jesus would not rebuke us? Speaking for myself, I am totally stripped of my assurance that Jesus would not censure me!

All excuses for human weakness are finally shattered when we look at our great Pattern.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 480:

Our Redeemer manifested no human weakness or imperfection.

This in itself is a strong rebuke of any manifestation of human weakness.

A Contradiction?

But now we have the problem of an apparent contradiction. Let us take a closer look at our first statement:

The Desire of Ages, p. 353:

[Jesus] did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly de-

nounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes.

There is another way of looking at this statement which resolves this apparent contradiction, and at the same time takes away the barrier of self-protection which we have used to shield ourselves in the past. In order to understand this statement correctly, we need to ask the question,

What is the connection between human weakness and hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity?

Our previous understanding of this statement is based mainly on the assumption that these two categories have nothing to do with one another. However, they are closely connected. Obviously, the deeper problems are hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity. But these problems have a tremendous ability to hide themselves in human nature. We do not dream that they are there—but they are! And they find expression in human weakness. We could say that human weakness is a mask that covers hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity. Not that this is done intentionally, but it is a self-protecting mechanism of our human psyche.

Once we understand this principle, we can go through the examples of human weakness mentioned above, and we will see that each time there was a deeper problem behind it.

In the case of Abraham, his concealment of the true status of his sister was a lie, or in other words, hypocrisy. This is what the Lord censures.

Behind the human weakness of Moses and Aaron was unbelief and even self-exaltation.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 417, 418:

Moses manifested distrust of God.

Moses and Aaron had assumed power that belongs only to God.

Elijah's deeper problem was also unbelief,

Education, p. 150:

...the fruit of the letting go of faith.

The same could be said of David, and of others who manifested human weakness.

Job's problem was not a failure to stand firm in the contest between Satan and God. He passed this test, as the Lord Himself testified.

Job 2

³ ...there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity.

¹⁰ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

But there were other things which Job needed cleansing of, and which would help him not to manifest human weakness any more.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1141:

The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed, not only for himself, but for those who were opposing him. When he felt earnestly desirous that the souls that had trespassed against him might be helped, he himself received help.

The example of Job reveals to us how deep the work needs to go, in order to cleanse us from all hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity.

John the Baptist received a mild reproof, because of his lack of faith, not because of his human weakness. It was mild because, under the circumstances, his faith was relatively strong. Furthermore, it was all that was necessary to bring John's thoughts back onto the right track.

With Peter the real problem was self-pity and self-exaltation.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 525:

Self-pity, which shrank from fellowship with Christ in suffering, prompted Peter's remonstrance.

Peter also desired a kingdom in which he would play a prominent role in a leading position. This is iniquity, and Jesus' censure was directly aimed at this spirit.

The disciples' problem during the storm on the lake was that they showed unbelief by trusting solely in their own power to save themselves.

The Desire of Ages, p. 336:

How often the disciples' experience is ours! When the tempests of temptation gather, and the fierce lightnings flash, and the waves sweep over us, we battle with the storm alone, forgetting that there is One who can help us. We trust to our own strength till our hope is lost, and we are ready to perish.

This spirit must be rebuked if we want to become like Jesus.

Co-operating with Jesus

The apparent contradiction is solved, but we still need to understand the words:

The Desire of Ages, p. 343:

[Jesus] did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes.

If hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity are the root cause of the manifestation of human weakness, why does this statement make a difference between them? Can censuring human weakness be avoided, when hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity are fearlessly denounced?

In order to understand what Jesus really did when He denounced one and not the other, let us take a look at the usual procedure when we try to remove a speck from our brother's eye. Here we are dealing with things that belong to the category of human weakness, but which do not touch the deeper, underlying problem. We complain about the weaknesses of others, and nag our fellow believer with our criticism, until they lose patience with us and turn away. This kind of work is

legalistic and superficial.

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 123:

The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.

When Jesus rebuked the people, He did not dwell on human weakness, for he knew that they would use these weaknesses only to hide their real problems. He looked deeper. He went to the root of the problem. He did not criticize at their weaknesses, but went to the core of the problem—and this really helped the people.

I pray that the Lord will help us to understand His work!

How, then, shall we cooperate with Jesus?

Let us recognize that human weakness is only the symptom of a deeper problem, which the Lord wants to reveal to us. We should not excuse the manifestation of human weakness in our lives, for the Lord wants to make us like Jesus. We need to avoid using our weakness as an excuse for not doing our duty, or failing to advance in Christian perfection. The Lord asks us to unite our weakness to His strength.

The Great Controversy, p. 469:

Here is where Christ's help is needed. Human weakness becomes united to divine strength, and faith exclaims: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57

It is living faith that helps us to overcome the manifestations of human weakness.

Education, p. 253:

Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness.

As we become aware of the manifestation of human weak-

ness in our lives, let us ponder this promise:

The Ministry of Healing, p. 182:

Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.

Armed with this promise, we can come to Him in prayer and faith. Jesus earnestly invites us:

Matthew 26

⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Jesus knows that our human nature is weak. But by watching and praying, we can avoid manifesting human weakness and marring the work of God.

Our High Calling, p. 14:

Earnest, persevering prayer, uniting our human weakness to Omnipotence, will give us the victory.