

Winners, Losers, and the Grace of God

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Our American culture today seems to be adopting a new belief that there are only two lots in life – winners and losers – and nothing in between. You are either number one, superior, or something less and inferior. You are either very good, or very bad, on the right team, or on the wrong team. There is no longer any middle ground. Sadly, all this current thinking could not be more antithetical to the Good News of Jesus Christ. God loves an honest, contrite heart no matter what we have done or who we are. He believes in redemption, forgiveness, and new beginnings – all of which require walking slowly and humbly from darkness to light, sinfulness to faith, loss to gain, and fear to love. Where God dwells, there are no winners and losers, just sinners, new creations, and forgiven people.

An American hero I miss is Chuck Colson, Richard Nixon's "hatchet man." An accomplished attorney, Colson became one of the principal architects of the Watergate break-in. Rather than fight, deflect, and deny the charges against him, he eventually bellied up to the bar of truth and accepted his sentence, spending a year in jail. In his former work, Chuck was merciless in defending and protecting President Nixon. Anyone who opposed or was disloyal to Nixon was attacked by Colson with vengeance. But, after being caught, in the middle of painful public trials, Colson's heart was opened, and he saw the errors in his way. Jesus entered his life, forgave his lies, crimes, and hatred, and gifted him with a new calling to help fellow prisoners know the redeeming love of God. Colson started a highly



Chuck Colson

impactful ministry called "Prison Fellowship," which led to the redemption and empowerment of thousands of lives around the world. Chuck Colson was neither a winner nor loser; he was simply a child of God, a sinner, through forgiveness, who had found a new life.

Truth makes a lot of people nervous, which makes many of us want to avoid it. However, the more we avoid truth, the more our lives become messy, dark, and full of discord. My former boss with Frontier Fellowship and a missionary veteran, Harold Kurtz, used to tell us that the sooner we admitted our errors, the faster we would be able to resolve problems, experience relief, and find growth in Christ. He had a famous saying that whenever we "laid an egg," we should take out a pen, write our name on it, and say, "this error is nobody else's but mine." I wish this kind of thinking was more pervasive in our world today. Harold was a World War II veteran with a very upright, respectful, and faithful heart.

I have a good friend who went through a traumatic time in his life. He was a member of one of my Bible studies. At the time, unbeknownst to me and other men in the group, our friend was suffering from a debilitating addiction to alcohol. Eventually, it overtook him. He lost all his money, savings and nearly lost his family of four children. Many friends and investors in his businesses were furious with him because of his poor and impaired decisions. Court cases were brought against him for money lost in the marketplace. But rather than complain and deflect, he stopped drinking, took full responsibility for his failures, and started driving a taxi to earn money for his family. For an entire year, each morning before he began his taxi runs, he would read from the Book of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount. He asked forgiveness from Jesus and an opportunity to begin a new life. Today, more than 10 years later, my friend is fully employed again in his business career, happily married, and reconciled with many of his friends. He could have easily slid into further darkness, but Christ saved his life and gave him a renewed vision for living. Was he a good person, bad person, or simply a sinner in need of redemption?

Most people who are swept into a “winners and losers” mentality are forgetting what Christ has done for them in their own hour of need. They often attack others because down deep they are still feeling bad about their own mistakes, and don’t want anyone to discover them. They are deflecting other’s attention on themselves. However, if you read the Bible carefully, you will discover that most of the great leaders in both the Old and New Testaments were people who made profound mistakes in their lives, but admitted them, and, as a result were given second chances, and renewed visions and callings by our Lord. They never thought of themselves as superior or more talented than anyone else. They had become servant leaders of our Lord.

All of us are sinners in need of help, fellowship, and love. We are neither black nor white. Our lives are a mosaic of different hues and colors. As followers of Christ, we are both redeemed and still sinning at the same time. In this light, we are called to be sympathetic and non-judgmental with our neighbors. We are called to bring hope and encouragement into other’s lives, knowing someone did the same thing for us. The less pride and greater humility we have in our lives, the more room for God we can enjoy. The Apostle Paul was formerly a violent, highly argumentative person, and a murderer before he became a witness for the Gentile world and the most successful church planter in Christian history. He wrote, “This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ came into the world to save sinners’ – and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15-16) Paul was powerful and effective because he was humble and non-judgmental.

It is counter intuitive, but the more we admit our weaknesses, the more God’s power and love

can work through our lives. Listen again as the Apostle Paul expounds even further on the virtues of humility: “Three different times I begged the Lord to take a thorn in my flesh away. Each time he said, ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That is why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:8-10) One of the most powerful and successful people in history was poor in spirit, meek, and exceedingly humble.



Paul in prison writing his epistles

Often it is difficult to accept the full measure of God’s forgiveness and grace in our lives. We want to feel so bad about what we have done wrong in our lives in hurting others and ourselves that we have great trouble receiving God’s love and forgiving ourselves. Yet, it is only through Christ that we can truly begin our lives over again and leave our troubles behind. His dying on the cross for our sins long ago is our only enduring and lasting hope today. It is the only thing which gave new life to the woman caught in adultery, the tax collector who stole from his friends, the rich ruler who oppressed his fellow countrymen, and the murderers who later became leaders. To all these people, Jesus simply said, “Repent and sin no more,” so that an entirely new life becomes possible.

Forgiveness is a gift. There is nothing we can do to earn it. God gives it freely to contrite, humble, and repentant hearts. Faith is all that is required. Through faith, any situation or anybody can be turned around. No one knew this truth better than King David who after his acts of murder and adultery asked God for forgiveness. David wrote, “Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against you, and you alone, I have sinned...Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” (Psalm 51:1-4a,7)



Never in the Bible does it mention anything about being winners or losers, good people or bad people. It simply says we are all sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and redemption, called to offer grace to one another. That beautiful truth is needed now and for evermore.