

## **A Word About Recovery**

Today as we witness the moral failure of believers — and ministers — the question is often asked, "Can a person ever recover and come back to a place of usefulness with God?"

The answers prevalent in the Body of Christ seem to take two extremes. On one side there are those who pass sentence and decree an absolute no to any prospect of restoration. On the other side there are those who desire to sweep the issue under the rug and give a quick restoration to the fallen minister after a simple apology.

Both extremes are wrong. From the examples we see in the New Testament, believers and Church leaders were restored, but only after a considerable period of time and observation.

Paul believed in restoration for believers, including ministers. He says, "*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use...*" (2 Timothy 2:21).

The key word in this scripture is "meet." It is the Greek word *euchrestos*, and it means "useful." Paul instructed Timothy to teach God's Word to his congregation so the members would no longer be vessels of dishonor but vessels of honor.

This means, if they would eventually become "useful," they must have been "un-useful" at the time Paul wrote.

We find an example of restoration to the ministry in the life of John Mark. In Acts 13:13, we see that John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip. Later, Barnabas wanted John Mark to join them again (Acts 15:37), but Paul disagreed.

The Bible says, "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder..." (verse 39). Restoration of John Mark was such an issue it caused Paul and Barnabas to part from each other and go their separate ways.

However, over a period of many years, Paul watched Mark purge himself and become a vessel of honor. In Second Timothy 4:11, Paul describes Mark as "profitable to me for the ministry." This is the same word *euchrestos*. Paul now calls Mark "useful" to the Lord's work.

The word *euchrestos* is used again in Philemon 11 of a runaway slave named Onesimus. He stole money from his master, Philemon, and ran away to Rome. He ended up in prison with Paul and received forgiveness. After quite a long time, he was ready to be released from prison and return to Philemon's home.

Paul sent a letter with him addressed to Philemon. In it, he said that Onesimus was now "profitable" to both Paul and Philemon.

To me, these examples of restoration make the scriptural position clear. If a Gospel deserter and a thief can become useful to God after public failure, there is hope for all of us!

God has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit to enable us to become "useful" to the ministry once again. We, too, can cleanse ourselves and become vessels of honor, "meet for the master's use."

Bob Yandian

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