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PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA  
[www.schultze.org](http://www.schultze.org)

## On Coping with Failure

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

*My sin is ever before me.*—Psalm 51:3

Let's talk about failure today. Failure comes to us in two distinct packages. It comes to us as human error and it comes to us as failing God, which we call moral failure.

**Failure, that is human error, is something we have to learn to live with.** Many of us fail somewhat, somewhere almost every day, no matter how hard we try not to. Because of Adam's sin we were born as imperfect human beings. We came into this world flawed, both morally and physically. Many of us are born with genetic limitations that make us more prone to failure than others. The only one who never failed is Jesus. The rest of us have to put up with it. Failure is an inescapable fact of life.

So then if we are not wise, failure on the human level can ruin every day of our lives. It can lead to chronic depression, to a serious inferiority complex or it can even invoke within us withdrawal and anti-social complexes. If we don't learn to deal with failure, failure will take us prisoner. We will miss what we are here for. So, how we put up with failure sets the stage as to how we make it through in life: happily or miserably. As failure can influence us negatively, so it can also influence us positively. Failure can help us as a spiritual barometer to check the depths of our faith or to let us know if we are still in the faith. That is good. It also increases our yearning for heaven. That is also good. Here are some suggestions as to how to cope with it.

**1. Accept Failure.** To accept failure, you learn to live with it with the same ease as you accept the seasons. That is, do not accept failure as a curse or as something evil or to be ashamed of. Like gravity, failure is morally neutral. Make no big issue out of it when you forget a birthday, miss an airplane, flunk a test, wreck your car, or fail to balance your checkbook, even if this all happens on the same day. Don't let yourself be intimidated by failure, don't downgrade yourself because of it. Whether you fail a lot or a little in a given day, do not be overly happy or sad about it. Abide in Christ, where peace flows like a river. Be glad that your name is written in the book of life. Failure is not your enemy. It is *how* you treat it that makes it your enemy or your friend.

**2. Know That Since God Is Not Bothered By Your Failures, Neither Should You Be.** Remember again, I'm talking here about human failures. Don't be bothered by things that don't bother God. Almost everybody was bothered that

Moses married an Ethiopian woman. But it did not bother God! The disciples were bothered by a woman who anointed Jesus' feet with ointment worth a whole year's salary. But it did not bother Jesus! Jesus does not want us to be bothered by the things of the earth.

We need to get on the same frequency with Jesus. Martha was not on the same frequency with Jesus, but Mary was. She wanted to feast on the meat of which Jesus' disciples knew not (John 4:32). Martha was thinking in earthly terms. She thought more of *her* gourmet meal than *His* gourmet meal. Only Jesus' meal had eternity in it (Luke 10:38-42).

When you become more concerned about failing Jesus than a college examination or your family's expectations, you are facing the throne. *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God* (Col. 3:2, 3).

Somehow, too many of us go through life being bothered by the wrong things. We are striving for *unattainable* human perfection with all our might, instead of striving for *attainable* moral perfection: that is, loving God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. God keeps no records of human failures and successes. He takes no pleasure in human accomplishments. What we brag about or are discouraged about in human error has no impact on eternity. Holiness of life is what God's kingdom is all about.

## **The Only Thing That Bothers Jesus Is Sin.**

### **1. Sin Must Be Acknowledged.**

*For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me* (Psalm 51:3).

We need to take sin seriously. Sin is what should bother us, because sin cuts us off from God. After David committed adultery, he said, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation* (Psalm 51:12). He knew his sin had put a wall between himself and God. When Jesus took our sins upon Him on the cross, He was forsaken of God. That is why He cried out: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matt. 27:46).

Once David sinned, he could think of nothing but his sin - *it was ever before him*. With sin ever before him, he became dysfunctional. He could not go to work, he no longer could govern, and he could no longer meet family needs. He was undone. Isaiah's response to God's holy presence in the Temple was similar: *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips* (Is. 6:5).

When most of us sin, we carry on as if nothing happened. It does not undo us. It does not bother us as much as a computer breakdown. We are deceived

about the weight of sin. We are deceived about the consequence of sin even once forgiven. *Every* sin has a consequence. Beyond separating us from God, we immediately become dysfunctional for God. We stop redeeming the time. As long as we have sin in our lives, the devil has his foot on our neck. Anytime we sin we lose something that was ours to keep. When we sin, we move from getting great rewards to lesser rewards or to no rewards (Rev. 22:12). When we sin, God may trust us with less in ministry or He may cut short our ministry or He may bring us into suffering and pain that could have been avoided had we been faithful (2 Sam. 12:10-14). Shame on us if sin does not slay us; if we can live with it; if we can go out of the door of our home with it; if we can go to work and to church with it!

## 2. Sin Must Be Repented Of.

But *having sin ever before us* must not last long. After all we have to go to work, we have to get our groceries, and we have to go to church. We should not take sin with us to all these places. We must deal with it where it has been committed - *presto*, that is promptly. We must confess it and repent of it. Confession without repentance falls short of restoration with God. No sin is forgiven without repentance, deep regret and a turning away from it. Jesus said: *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish* (Luke 13:5).

But we must be careful not to over-repent. We must not go on and on with it, rolling around in sackcloth, pouring dust and ashes on our heads. We must not allow the devil to rub *in* what God wants rubbed *off*. Confess, repent, get off the ground and go on with a new anointing God has waiting for you. The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. Abiding in Christ is still there for you. Jesus will welcome you back as the prodigal was welcomed back. He has a new robe for you, new shoes, and a ring of His covenant for you. He will make a feast for you and invite all the angels in heaven to join in with it. Oh, my friend, Jesus said: *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Jesus loves to forgive, because He loves to save. Come back to Jesus, fall on your face to worship Him and say to Him: *What saith my Lord unto His servant?* (Jos. 5:14). And He will say to you: I have given you land to conquer, now get with it and conquer it step by step (see Joshua 7).

Human error must be accepted as the seasons. But sinning is not acceptable. It must bother us. It must be dealt with. Remember this: **All sin is failure, but not all failure is sin.**

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 1: 24, 25).