

The Sin That Makes God Cry



David Wilkerson November 1, 1984

No beating around the bush and no soft-pedaling. Let me give it to you straight. The sin that makes God cry is being committed daily - not by pagan workers of iniquity, but by multitudes of Christians! It is the sin of doubting God's love for His children.

Do you think it makes God sound too human and too vulnerable to say that He cries? Then ask yourself, how could a God of love not cry when His own people doubt His very nature? How could He not be grieved when His own children act as though He has forsaken them and left them to their own devices? Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, and according to the book of John He wept when those closest to Him doubted His love and concern. That was God incarnate at the tomb of Lazarus, crying over friends who would not take Him at His word.

Crying because their unbelief caused them unnecessary grief and sorrow. Crying because they failed to recognize who He was and rest in His promises.

Time and time again Christ's dearest associates on this earth doubted His love for them. Think back to the story of the disciples in a storm tossed boat that was apparently taking on water. Jesus was in the stern of the boat, sound asleep. Fearing for their lives, His followers shook Him awake and then accused Him of outright unconcern. "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38). How their accusation must have grieved the Lord! That was almighty God in their boat! How could God not care? But whenever men take their eyes off the Lord and concentrate instead on their circumstances, doubt always takes over. Jesus was astounded! "How can you be afraid when I am with you? How can you question My love and care? Have you no confidence in Me at all" (verse 40)?

Christians today grieve the Lord in this matter even more. Our unbelief is a greater affront to Him than the unbelief of Mary, Martha, and all the disciples, for our sin is committed against greater light. We stand on a higher mountain and see more than they could ever see. We have a completed Bible with a full and detailed record of God's trustworthiness. We have the written testimonies of almost twenty centuries of Christians, generation after generation of godly fathers who have passed down to us unshakeable proofs of God's love.

And that is not all. We have countless personal experiences that testify to God's tender love and affection for us. Is there a single Christian who dares to say he has not personally witnessed the Lord's loving intervention in the details of his life many times over? Yet we continue to doubt His love. When difficulties arise and the Lord seems to delay in aiding us as we think He should, we pout. We think nothing of going about the business of our everyday lives filled with doubts about His loving kindness. We doubt He is hearing our cry. We doubt He will do what is right. We doubt Him at every turn - and never once see the exceeding sinfulness of our unbelief. We refuse to admit that our accusing heart could be making God cry.

The Peril of Doubting a Father's Love

The story of Joseph and his brothers clearly illustrates the grief caused by unrequited love. This Old Testament story holds a potent message for New Testament Christians. Joseph is a type of Christ. His brothers are a type of God's chosen people on earth. (Remember that God promised Jacob, "Kings shall come out of thy loins" [Genesis 35:11]). Joseph's method of dealing with his brothers is a clear type of God's way of dealing with us today. This

story of one man's forgiving love for his sinful brothers is a beautiful picture of God's love and grace for sinful man.

To read the story of Joseph and his brothers is to recall one of the saddest tragedies in all God's Word. Here was a generation of chosen men who never could believe they were loved. The devastating flood of sin and sorrow caused by their skepticism should serve as a solemn warning to us all.

1. Doubting Their Father's Love Caused Joseph's Brothers to Fall Into Deep Sin.

Jacob felt a special love for Joseph, the child of his old age, and made special provisions to care for him. His older sons construed this extra attention to mean that their father loved Joseph more than he loved them: "And when his brothers saw that their father loved him [Joseph] more than all his brothers, they hated him" (Genesis 37:4).

Now the fact that Jacob loved Joseph so dearly did not mean that he loved his other sons any less. He had faithfully cared for and blessed all his children. They had all received the same loving guidance and discipline. Yet they became jealous over what appeared to be one brother's favored position. They thought there was inequity in their father's love. Joseph seemed to get everything his heart desired, including a fancy coat of many colors. He appeared to have an easier time of it than they had ever had. He was more blessed, more favored, more coddled - and it made them angry and jealous.

Have you ever been guilty of envying a brother in the Lord who seems to get everything he wants? His prayers seem to always be answered quickly. He never appears lonely, unloved, or unneeded. You see him cradled in God's loving arms, while you feel forsaken and alone. The roots of bitterness and jealousy begin to grow.

Beloved, this is dangerous ground. The moment we believe our heavenly Father loves us less than He loves someone else, we open ourselves to all kinds of evil. Whenever we complain about our circumstances - whether aloud to another or silently in our hearts - we accuse God of neglect. We say, "I try so hard to do what is right, but the desires of my heart are never met. Other Christians have such an easy life! Look at him; look at her; everything seems to go so well for them. They're not one bit better than me. Why are they so favored, while I'm left out in the cold?"

This is the very attitude that brought so much trouble to Joseph's brothers! Doubting their father's love opened the floodgates of wickedness. Bitterness and rebellion rushed in. Their hearts became saturated with hatred and jealousy. The desire for revenge built a fire in their souls.

Please keep in mind that though they had sinned impetuously in the past, Joseph's brothers had not been willfully evil men. These were the "kings out of Jacob's loins!" - the fathers of nations. During their stay in Haran, they had been enticed into the ways of the world. Jacob came to them - and warned them, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments" (Genesis 35:2). Obediently they surrendered their idols and watched as Jacob buried them under an oak tree in Shechem. They then followed their father to Bethel and witnessed how God terrorized the wicked cities surrounding them, so that no enemy dared to pursue them. At Bethel they worshipped at the altar Jacob built.

But deep in their hearts they were thinking, "We are not loved in the same way as others. Our father is not equal in his affections. We have been neglected and slighted." This feeling grew unchecked. Finally something snapped in them. They changed. Their language and their motives became perverted. An inner ugliness developed. They decided to take matters into their own hands. By this time they had lost all concern for the grief their actions would cause their father. Instead, they became totally consumed with the desire to avenge the wrong they thought had been done to them.

What a small, easy step it is from doubting a father's love to taking matters into our own hands - but what a tragic one! For the moment you force things according to your will - you expose your heart to an avalanche of evil.

The first thing that changed in Joseph's brothers was the way they talked. Listen to them - it's unbelievable! "Come, let's slay him.... No, cast him into a pit.... Better yet, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and make a little money for our trouble!" Listen to them haggling like slave traders over the price of their own brother: "Ten pieces of silver is not enough - nor fifteen. Give us twenty!" Their hearts swelled with contempt and betrayal. And out of those corrupted hearts burst a stream of wicked words. They now spoke the language not just of doubt but also of the world.

Show me a Christian who begins to doubt God's love and decides to take matters into his own hands, and I'll show you a Christian whose conversation is becoming corrupted. Almost overnight there will be a noticeable change. The

more he doubts, the more unholy his speech will become. It is absolutely shocking to hear the way some Christians talk. Once they spoke with godly awe and reverence. Once they uttered words of faith and joy. Once they spoke softly, with speech that edified. Now they speak bluntly, irreverently. Their words betray what is in their hearts - fear, unbelief, and despair.

Unholy speech is a sure sign of a hardened heart. Joseph's brothers became insensitive to sin! Corrupted conversation led to criminal behavior. First they talked like the wicked; then they began to act like them as well. Before long, they became cold, calculating criminals. They lost all sense of guilt for sin. Not only did they sin - not only did they cover it up - but they went about their business as though nothing had happened! After selling their own brother into slavery, after lying blatantly to their father, they calmly went back to tending sheep.

For twenty long years they put their evil deed out of their minds and went on with life as usual. For twenty years they carried that dark sin in their souls. For twenty years they lived a lie. For twenty years they went about in a stupor, still doubting they were loved, still thinking they had a right to take matters into their own hands. For twenty years they sat at their father's table watching his grief, yet not once did they feel the need to confess and make things right. Their consciences were seared.

How low we go when once we doubt our Father's love. How corrupt we become - how insensitive to sin! Malachi the prophet warned the children of Israel concerning the hardness of their hearts. Like Joseph's brothers, the Israelites had fallen prey to doubt and had wound up calloused to their sin. The book of Malachi begins, "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" (Malachi 1:1,2). Incredible! They dared to tell God, "We see no evidence in our lives that You love or care for us!"

Again, like the brothers of Joseph, their doubt led them into all kinds of evil and backsliding. God said to them, "You abhor my name." In other words, "You have changed. You have an inner loathing toward Me. You think you are not loved, so you secretly hate Me!"

Worst of all - they were blind to their offense! God said to them, "You say, wherein have we polluted you? How have we despised your name?" (Malachi 1.6,7). These poor, backslidden creatures didn't begin to realize how far they had wandered from their earlier devotion to God. They continued to give Him lip service but they were only empty shells. Doubting God's love for them, they lost their love for Him and turned to materialism and worldly pleasures. They became weary of God's narrow way, bored with worship, tired of service, disillusioned with God Himself!

If only we could understand the heartache we cause God when we question His love! Perhaps you would not dare to voice such doubts aloud, but do you ever think, "Where is the evidence that the Lord loved me? Where is the answer to my prayer? Nothing changes. If You really love me, Lord, then prove it!"

Wake up! Throw off all such evil thoughts. If you continue to doubt God's great love, you will end up the very same way as Joseph's brothers and the Israelites - disillusioned with the things of God, weary of serving Him, bored with waiting for His answers to your prayers. You will take matters in your own hands and end up in a disaster.

2. Neither Their Doubts nor Their Sins Could Stop Joseph From Loving His Brothers.

God used a crisis to reveal to Joseph's brothers how much they were truly loved. It was a crisis of hunger. "And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the store houses.... When Jacob saw there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons ... get you down thither, and buy for us And Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy corn" (Genesis 41:56; 42:1-3).

Twenty years had passed since their crime. Joseph was now Prime Minister of Egypt. For seven years he had stored grain in preparation for famine. Jacob's sons supposed they were going to Egypt just to get corn. But God had bigger and better ideas: He sent them there to get a revelation of love! They were going to learn what the grace of God is all about. They were going to experience mercy, pardon, and restoration. Deserving nothing but judgment, they were going to receive pure grace.

Keeping in mind that Joseph is a type of Christ, I find it impossible to read this part of the story without tears. It is such a beautiful picture of the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ for all those who have failed Him.

Twenty years of sin and subterfuge had kept the brothers out of touch with Joseph. They probably assumed he

was dead by this time. When they arrived at Pharaoh's court and came before Joseph, they did not recognize him, but he knew them immediately (Genesis 42:8). There they were, all bowing down before him just as he had dreamed. Was Joseph angry with them? Did he want to get even? Would he make them pay for their sins? Never! The Bible says his bowels yearned after them. His heart filled with compassion at the sight of the brothers he loved so dearly.

Why, then, did he speak sharply to them (Genesis 42:7)? Why did he accuse them of being spies? I once thought Joseph was getting a bit of revenge. But that was not his motive at all. He was merely following God's directions. These proud men were not yet ready for a revelation of grace and mercy. First they needed to see the exceeding ugliness of their sins. They needed to face their guilt and shame. They needed to come to an end of themselves - so that there was nothing left to help them but mercy.

It is impossible to understand God's grace until we come to the end of our own resources. God showed this truth to Joseph, and Joseph put his brothers in prison for three days - not to punish them, - but to give them a chance to face the truth about their sin. It was the law at work, showing them their evil natures. And it worked. "They said one to another, We are truly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us: And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter" (Genesis 42:21,23).

Joseph could not stand to see his brothers in such distress. "He turned himself about from them, and wept" (Genesis 42:24). Why did he weep? Not simply because of the long separation nor because of their predicament - but because his brothers were still consumed with deep bitterness. They still held a grudge against God, and until that was dealt with, they were not in a position to understand or accept love and forgiveness.

Joseph discerned the state of their hearts and created a crisis to bring their bitterness and disillusionment to the surface. He told his servants to fill his brothers' sacks with the corn they had come to purchase and to secretly put their money back in their sacks. Then, without revealing his true identity, Joseph released his brothers and sent them back home. On their journey, one of the brothers opened his sack and discovered the money. "And he said unto his brothers, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their hearts failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?" (Genesis 42:28).

They went on home with double sorrow. Now it was all out in the open. "After all these years," they thought, "God is going to make us pay for our sins!" Not only did they believe they were unloved, but they were also convinced God was seeking revenge. Before long, their grain ran out and they were forced to return to Egypt once again. Trembling, they went back to try to explain their innocence. But they knew it was hopeless. They fully expected judgment and wrath at the hand of Pharaoh's overseer.

Why did these men expect the worst from Joseph? Because they did not know anything about who he was and what was in his heart. When we expect the worst from God, is it not because we don't really know Him? Is it not because we have no revelation of His loving heart? Our fear is caused by ignorance of the sweet mercy and grace of our Lord.

The brothers were taken totally off guard by what happened when they approached Joseph. Rather than accuse them or judge them, he invited them to "Come and dine." "He said to the ruler of this house, Bring these men home, and kill the animals for food, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon. And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house" (Genesis 43:16,18).

Doesn't their blindness make you want to shout, "Foolish, silly men! Why are you so afraid? Why do you keep expecting judgment when all Joseph wants to do is shower you with love and restore your relationship to him?" I wonder if the angels and the mighty hosts of witnesses would like to shout the same thing at us - "Foolish Christians! How can you be so blind? Why are you always worrying about judgment? Can't you see how much the Lord loves you? Can't you hear His invitation to come and dine? Don't you understand that there is no wrath in Him toward those who are His children? There is absolutely nothing to fear. All He wants is for you to trust Him and rest in His love!"

Do you want to see a picture of the heart of our Savior - even toward the sinful chosen? Here it is: "And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there" (Genesis 43:30). The literal Hebrew says, "His heart passionately longed after them." A Contrite Heart - the Key to a Restored Relationship

The brothers were now in Joseph's house, eating and drinking in his presence. But "Joseph sat by himself, and they by themselves" (Genesis 43:32). We dare not pass lightly over the significance of this statement. These men were rejoicing in Joseph's presence without being fully restored, without really knowing him, without a revelation of love and grace. Our churches today are filled with praising people who eat and drink in the Lord's presence - but with a gap between. They have not yet received a revelation of God's infinite love. The grudge - the sense of being unloved - still rages in their hearts. This is the case of all Christians who go to God's house, sing, worship, and praise - and then go home to the same old lie: "God doesn't show me any evidence that He loves me. My prayers go unanswered. He doesn't really care about me the way He cares for other Christians."

For Joseph's brothers, there was one final step to take before they could be given a full revelation of love. Such a revelation is given only to those who are broken-hearted and contrite. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalms 51:17). The brothers were not yet broken-hearted. As they feasted at Joseph's table, we read that "they drank, and were merry with him" (Genesis 43:34).

These men had acknowledged their sin, but they were not yet broken in spirit - not contrite over their sin. Until they were completely broken, totally at the end of their bitterness and human resources, Joseph could not reveal his love to them. So Joseph put them to a final test. He commanded his steward to slip his personal silver cup into Benjamin's sack before they returned to Canaan. The brothers were hardly out of the city when Joseph's men overtook them and accused them of stealing the cup. They were so certain of their innocence that they said, "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves" (Genesis 44:9).

Can you imagine that moment when Benjamin's sack was opened and the steward held up the missing cup? "Then they tore their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city" (Genesis 44:13). They came to Joseph's house and "fell before him on the ground." At first reading it sounds as if Joseph was playing another cruel trick on his brothers. But that was the farthest thing from his mind. The motivation behind his seemingly strange actions was nothing but love. He created a crisis in order to break their spirits, humble them, and empty them of all bitterness and hate, so that they would be made ready for the revelation of who he really was.

Listen to the change in their attitudes: "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants" (Genesis 44:16). There was no more fight in them. No more pride. They were exposed, humbled, broken - ready to do whatever had to be done. In other words, at last they cried out from the depths of their hearts, "We give up! We surrender!"

Now comes the revelation of what it means to be FAMILY! "Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me, and there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren" (Genesis 45:1).

The world knows absolutely nothing of this revelation of love. It is reserved for family only. "Out, all you Egyptians. Out, all you worldly. This is just for family!" Scripture tells us that Joseph "wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard" (Genesis 45:2). The world can hear about God's love but only family can experience it. Only the family of God is dealt with in such love and mercy.

What was the response of Joseph's family when they saw him openly weeping? "And his brothers could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence" (Genesis 45:3). Take a good look at those troubled, trembling men who can't even look their benefactor in the face - and you will probably see a reflection of yourself as you stand troubled in the Lord's holy presence because of past sin.

I hear the loving words of Jesus in what Joseph said to his distraught brothers: "Come near to me... and I will nourish thee... lest you come to poverty" (Genesis 45:4-11). Then "Joseph kissed all his brothers, and wept upon them" (v. 15).

What a glorious scene! I love it because I've been there. I've stood where these men stood when my "Joseph" revealed His love to me. I, too, know what it means to sin against my Lord. I know what it's like to feel forgotten and unloved. I've been perplexed by the way God works. I've sinned by doubting His love. At times I've taken matters into my own hands when I thought God was too slow or unconcerned. I've hidden things in my heart and covered up sin. I've known what it's like to think God was angry with me and that when things went wrong, I was paying for sins. I've looked into the future and feared wrath and judgment because I felt so sinful and unworthy.

But thank God for the day the Holy Spirit broke me and showed me the loving heart of God! Instead of the judgment I so deserved, I heard Him say, as He said to betraying Peter, "Come and dine!" He invited me to come and feel His arms around me, His tears on my neck, and His tender kiss on my cheek. I heard Him say, "I am Jesus, your Brother. God sent Me before you, to preserve you and save your life by a great deliverance. God has made Me Lord of all. Come to Me; tarry not!" Now I know He loves me, failure and all! Now I know He will take care of my future.

He forgave all my sins. He put no guilt trip on me. He never spoke a harsh word. His bowels yearned after me from the moment I strayed from Him. He wept because of my blindness and my needless sorrow and despair. Beloved, neither our sins nor our doubts can hinder God's love for us. Praise Him for the revelation of Christ's love for His own!

Unfortunately, the story of Joseph's brothers has a sad ending.

3. These Men Never Did Believe They Were Loved!

In spite of everything that happened, Joseph's brothers continued to doubt his love. It broke Joseph's heart. For seventeen years they lived with Joseph in Egypt and he provided for all their needs. Then Jacob their father died. No sooner were they home from the funeral than their old doubts came rushing back. "And when Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will probably hate us, and will certainly retaliate against us for all the evil which we did unto him" (Genesis 50:15) How could they talk like that, after all Joseph had done for them? Hadn't they learned anything about his love?

Fearfully they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Forgive us our sins, for we have done thee evil.... And Joseph wept when they spake unto him" (Genesis 50:17). Can you imagine how it must have crushed Joseph to know that in spite of all his efforts his brothers still doubted his love? I can almost hear him saying, "Could it be that they have never really believed? Have they carried a load of guilt and sorrow all this time? How could they see me in such a terrible light? How could they ever think I would hurt them? What more could I have done to let them know how much I love them?"

This is the same sin that makes God cry. In spite of all He has done for us, we refuse to believe He really loves us. Christ died to pay for our sins. He freely forgave us, yet we keep begging for forgiveness. He offers mercy, love, grace, provisions, security and still we harbor lingering doubts. Still we dig up our past sins. Still we imagine God will retaliate - maybe even hate us. How tragic!

It is a solemn thing to hear Jesus say, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke.18:8). To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe that He loves us - to believe that He cares - to believe He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. It is to know that He ever lives to make intercession for us, that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and that He came not to condemn us but to save us. Do not let it be said of you, "There is a Christian who never accepted or understood the love of Christ"

What could be more tragic for the brothers of Joseph than this: After a revelation of Joseph's perfect love and forgiveness, after being totally reconciled - they still think of themselves as their brother's enemies. In Joseph's mind they were faultless; in their minds, they were still enemies! We can hardly imagine anyone being so dull!

Dear hearts, hear the loving Word of God:

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled [accepted] in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight" (Colossians 1:21,22). "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

That is God's heart toward you. A heart of mercy and forgiveness and love. If you cannot believe that and rest in it, you are even now sinning the sin that makes God cry.

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