

When Giants Fall

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We all have Christians whom we admire. Perhaps some of them are preachers, writers, elders, Bible-class teachers, family members, or just fellow Christians who serve as role models to you. These are the people who seem larger than life. Those who fit this description probably come to mind pretty easily. While we all know there's no such thing as a "perfect" Christian, these particular people seem almost flawless. These are your spiritual giants. They stand for truth. They say courageous things. They have model marriages. They have well-oiled ministries.

But there's a good chance that the day is coming (if it hasn't already happened) when at least one of these giants will disappoint you.

Perhaps someone you thought was a true "bulwark of the truth" will start teaching something patently false. Maybe he/she will go through an "evolution" or "restudy the issue" and will change course. Maybe he/she will get swept up in a heresy or dangerous movement, or maybe he/she will leave disillusioned after falling in with the wrong crowd.

Perhaps one of your role models will have an affair or fall prey to some other sexual sin. Almost at the blink of an eye, his/her name will no longer be associated with integrity, but

with scandal. His/her marriage will be destroyed and the church will be disgraced.

I have known many giants throughout the years, and some of them have fallen due to almost every kind of sin imaginable. Some fell because of alcohol, uncontrollable spending habits, living a double life, marital infidelity, pedophilia, a massive ego, drug use, voyeurism, etc. It seems the most common catalyst for most of these sins was pride or arrogance. (I read somewhere that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”¹)

Out of all the people you admire in the church, whether one of them will fall is most likely not a matter of *if*, but *when*. Someone’s giant—a man or woman who is thought of as being almost incapable of wrong—will fall away tomorrow. Someone will have an affair. Someone will leave the faith. Someone will get hurt. And when it happens, it will shake the ground on which you stand. Are you ready for that day?

Here are some things to keep in mind when giants fall:

1. Your faith must not be placed in men but in the truth of God’s word.

Brother Jones may have been the one who taught you the gospel. Sister Smith may speak all over the country and may have authored 5 books. Brother Johnson may be a brilliant blogger and witty thinker. Sister Williams might be your own mother and closest confidant. But Jones, Smith, Johnson, and Williams didn’t sanctify you—*God did*, and He accomplished this through His living word (John 17:17). For that reason, we must always remember that the only person who will not disappoint is Jesus (Heb. 13:8). Don’t ever forget this. Every other spiritual role model is just a fallible human, and thus needs the blood of Jesus just as much as you do.

Trust in God. Don’t build your house on the faith of someone else, however strong you think he/she is. Otherwise, when giants fall, so will you.

2. Don’t ever stop examining the Scriptures daily to see if someone’s words are true (Acts 17:11).

Sometimes we become so impressed with our spiritual giants that we let our guard down. They “passed the test”—now we feel we can trust every word they say. Yet it is a recipe for danger if we ever stop comparing their words with God’s word. Our giants are still

human—and humans are always apt to miss the mark.

Almost every Christian I know has at least a basic awareness that they need to ‘vet’ any new preachers or writers before they start listening too closely. But what about those who we have already marked as “safe”? Do we stop scrutinizing their words in light of the gospel, or do we always take their words as gospel? Remember, no Christian is unsinkable—even the ones we trust implicitly.

Don’t ever stop testing everything (1 Thess. 5:21). No giant should be given that kind of power over your heart. Both Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned us that there would be wolves who would try to snatch us from the Lord (Matt. 7:15-20; 24:4-5; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 2:4; Eph. 4:14; 5:6; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:1-3; 3:17; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 19:20).

I’m convinced that many wolves don’t know they’re wolves—they’ve just been honestly deceived themselves. After all, haven’t you ever met a dog or cat that thought it was a human? If so, why can’t there be wolves who think they are still faithful Christians? The words of your spiritual role model will only be true to the degree that they accurately capture the teaching of the Bible.

3. Knowledge is an inadequate safeguard against apostasy.

This is perhaps the biggest reason why news of a fallen giant is so shocking. We think to ourselves, “But they knew better than to do that!” How could someone whose mind is so brilliant—whose knowledge is so impressive—commit such a sin?

This may seem counter-intuitive, but there is very little correlation between holiness from sin and knowledge of theology. In my experience, brand new Christians don’t sin any more than those who have been Christians for 50 years. (In fact, it is not uncommon for them to sin *less*.) Some of the most despicable sinners are those who could run intellectual circles around me. But remember, even Satan has a good handle on Scripture (Matt. 4:6).

Paul accurately observed, “knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:11). Book knowledge will always be a false hedge against apostasy. Don’t misunderstand: knowledge is a tool to help us better obey and love God. It is the means by which we learn how to love and serve God more effectively (Psa. 119:11). But knowledge must never be separated from the *heart*. Our knowledge of the truth is only as good as our willingness to obey it. When the heart goes, no

amount of logic and reasoning with the Scriptures will rescue someone who has fallen into sin (Heb. 6:4-6).

4. Sin must never be underestimated.

Perhaps the one thing that every fallen giant has in common is that they didn't expect it to end this way. Eve just took a little bite (Gen. 3:6), Lot's wife just took a little look (Gen. 19:26); Uzzah just took a little touch (2 Sam. 6:1-11); the bridesmaids enjoyed just a little neglect (Matt. 25:1-11; Ananias and Sapphira told just a little lie (Acts 5:1-11). But these stories are in the Bible to remind us there's no such thing as "just a little sin."

You must never think that you are a strong enough Christian and thus can "hold your liquor" when it comes to sin. You have been snookered if you think you're too strong to fall. "Deceptive" is one of the primary ways the Bible describes sin (cf. Rom. 7:11; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Tim. 2:26; Titus 3:3; Heb. 3:13; 1 John 3:7).

As we become increasingly aware of God's will, we become increasingly aware of the sin all around us (Rom. 7:13; cf. 7:7-9). If our theology motivates us to downplay the seriousness of sin, our theology is wrong. It shouldn't be any surprise to us that when our fidelity to Scripture deteriorates, so will our morality. There should be no point in the life of the Christian when sin shouldn't be absolutely abhorred (Rom. 12:9).

The fact that even a strong leader in the church or a respected role model can fall prey to sin should be a sobering reminder to us: Sin is deadly not only to those who are weak but also to those who are strong. It is naïve to think we can ever become immune to the allure of sin. Don't ever let your guard down.

5. Be kind.

While this article is about protecting yourself from the disillusionment of a fallen giant, it is important that we understand *the former giant's* own need for grace. Ephesians 4:29 sets the tone for the relationship we are to have with fallen giants: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Of course, Christ doesn't forgive those who are unwilling to receive forgiveness. But He is our Savior of grace. Depending on the situation, sometimes God's grace is a *rebuking* grace, at other times it is a *patient* grace, still, at other times, it is a *gentle* grace (cf. Jude 22-23). But no amount of disappointment will ever justify unkindness towards someone else. How

would you want faithful Christians to treat you once you have been overcome, and repented of, sin (cf. Matt. 7:12)?

Conclusion

Giants will fall. Don't think *your* spiritual role models are somehow different from the fallen giants of others. Satan is active. And if he can trick giants, he can trick you. We are engaged in an invisible real war, with real casualties. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). You will never achieve a high enough rank in the Lord's army that you can take off your spiritual armor (Eph. 6:13-18).

Footnotes

1. Just kidding, I know that's Proverbs 16:18.