

**WHEN A GOOD MAN STUMBLES**  
**June 3, 2012 –Communion Sunday –Romans 6: 1-11**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

When a good man stumbles, when something happens to bring someone down, it is always interesting to me as a pastor how others react to it...how the person themselves reacts to it...and how our Lord Jesus Christ reacts to it.

First. When a good man stumbles other Christians all around them may be most unhelpful. They want to know all the gory details, instead of entrusting everything into the Lord's care. Even people's thinly masked concern can just be gossip masquerading as love. Everyone has an opinion, speculates on things they do not know, repeats stories they should know are either false or gross "enhancements" of the truth, draws conclusions that they have no right to draw. It is not so important what HAS happened as what CAN happen through the grace and mercy of a loving Savior. No, when a good man stumbles what they need are people who will speak a kind word, reserve judgment, believe the best not the worst, remain circumspect, exercise self restraint and not repeat the story, send a kind note and, most importantly, pray. The Bible says: *"Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right."* (1 Corinthians 13: 6) That's what a good man needs when a good man stumbles.

Second. When a good man stumbles the one who stumbles is their own sternest critic. It becomes harder, when it should be easier, to come to church. Why would one avoid the very place where they may receive grace and mercy? There is within their mind an endless looping tape of condemnation –I have failed, I am fallen, I have sinned, I am no good, this is impossible, there is no way to return from this, it is hopeless. I have fallen and I can't get up. There is no need for other people to beat up the stumbling man; he does a superior job of it himself. This interior condemnation does not come from God but it is the voice of evil seeking to tear the good man down even further, seeking to rob him of his Savior who will restore him if he but invites Jesus in. No, what a good man needs when a good man stumbles is to listen to the voice of Jesus, not the internally condemning voice within their head. It ain't over 'til GOD SAYS its over. The Bible says: *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8: 1) The voice of Jesus, the endless looping tape of the love and grace and mercy of God, that's the tape a good man needs to play when he's falling. That's what a good man needs to hear when he stumbles.

Third. When a good man stumbles he needs to focus his heart and his mind and his soul upon Jesus. As our scripture from Romans notes: *"The death HE (Jesus) died he died to sin, once for all, but the life HE lives he lives to God."* (Romans 6: 10) Jesus is in the forgiveness business. He went to the cross and died to put to death everything that might cause us to stumble or fall; He triumphed over darkness and condemnation; He defeated sin, as it says, *"once for all"*. The sin we committed before we knew Him as Savior He nailed to the cross; dead, vanquished, gone forever. The sin we shall do in the future (Do you think when He called us as His own that the Lord God who knows everything did not know that we would stumble????) our Savior Jesus nailed to the cross, blotted it out, *"once for all"*. When Jesus cried out from the cross, *"It is finished"* He meant that all sin, every sin we have done or shall ever do, was nailed to the cross on Calvary and washed away by the precious blood of Jesus. It is finished, it is forgiven, ONCE, once on Calvary; and it is finished, it is forgiven for ALL, for all who are in Christ and all our sins over ALL of time. Do you really think that the Potter who made us from the clay cannot take us and reshape us through our fallenness into a vessel useful for His Kingdom? Do you not see how God can use our spiritual victories, yes, but can also use our failures for the glory of His Son Jesus, just as well? Do you not see how everything in life, good and bad, rising and stumbling, blessing and trouble,

cannot be used by the hand of a loving God to take and to reshape us into a thing of grace and mercy? **Sin Happens. That grace may abound the more.** Sin is dead and nailed to the cross that like HIM, like Jesus, we may live our life to God. When a good man stumbles it is hard for him to look others directly in the eyes. But if they do they will see Jesus staring back at them, his eyes filled with grace and mercy and compassion. That's what a good man needs to see when he stumbles.

See, the church is not in the condemnation business; the church is in the restoration business. The church is not in the judgment business; the church is in the forgiveness business. The church is not in the finger-pointing business; the church points to Jesus, who will lift a man up when a good man stumbles, who will forgive all our sin, once and for all, and raise us up in that day to sit with Him in heaven. The church is in the business of reminding us that there is no Calvary in life we cannot come back from, raised up by the power of the resurrection. When we have stumbled and we have been restored, and that is the very definition of being a Christian, then we understand that stumbling in life is just an opportunity for God's grace to abound all the more. It is the very essence of the gospel.

Perhaps some of you have heard that our former and beloved Associate Pastor, Tom Hamilton, resigned as pastor from the Canonsburg UP Church last week. Tom's ministry and compassion here made such a difference—he visited and he cared for and he prayed for us and he officiated at our funerals and he spoke words of gospel strength and truth from our pulpit. Nothing takes one iota away from that. He was a source of spiritual leadership and served as our pastor during a key time of transition and we owe him a deep debt of gratitude. Nothing erases that. He is my friend and colleague in ministry. Nothing changes that. The circumstances of his resignation are not important; they will remain unclear and are not our business anyway. But there is one thing, one thing above all, that is clear and remains constant, in times of victory and in times of stumbling. There is one thing that is clear –

**When a good man stumbles he need not fall.** For our Savior Jesus, will come, and lift him up, and put him back on his feet again, and dust him off, and restore him by the grace and the mercy and the love He always brings into the world, if we but pray and ask Him in...(See, this is not a sermon about Tom; this is a sermon about his Savior, Jesus...)

This communion table is the definitive sign that God's grace triumphs over every stumbling in life, through the death Jesus died...ONCE AND FOR ALL...Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*