

TESTIMONY OF PETER SOTO

Growing up my knowledge of God was that He was holy, righteous, jealous, perfect, angry; and, that he would punish sin, because he is a just God. Therefore, I needed to act accordingly; whcih meant, know and obey the Ten Commandments. Or else, I'd experience His righteous indignation. Which, could include Old Testament curses such as enemy attacks, poverty, sickness, and even death.

Although I knew that God was a forgiving God, my understanding was that His forgiveness was conditioned upon continual confession, and repentance. Repentance to me meant living a totally transformed life (not ever sinning again). Which, at that young age, I realized was impossible for me to achieve. Every time I sinned (I thought) was a loss of my salvation and I was in danger of eternal hell fire. My knowledge was that there was no gaurantee of heaven, no being "sealed by the Spirit for redemption." For me it was a cycle of being a sinner, confessing and forsaking my sins (repenting) asking God to forgive me through his Son Jesus Christ, accepting Him as my Savior and Lord. That is, until I sinned again--and do that ritualistic process all over again--at "alter call" every Sunday.

During this same time, as a kid, I wanted to play all kinds of sports, but being raised by a single-mother on Wel-fare, we couldn't afford it. Cleats, uniforms, and admission fees were just too expensive for my mom to purchase.

Moreover, I was heartbroken. I missed my dad terribly. He was deported to Mexico when I was eight years old. My mom and I would pray for his return. ('Til this day-he never returned) And, slowly I began to question God's legitamacy, in His concern for me and His ability to answer my prayers.

For these and ohter reasons, I gave up on God, Church, Scripture, and prayer. And, over time I drifted to the street life. Which, included smoking tobacco, marijuana, and methemphetamines, abusing beer, malt liquor and liquor; theft and rober robberies; pornograhpy, fornication, and violence.

TESTIMONY OF PETER SOTO (cont'd)

But, on the flip side of that, I felt accepted, respected, and loved by my peers--whom I looked up to and desired to emulate. I felt a sense of belonging, comraderie; and that, it must be destined for me to be a gangster. So, I adopted the principals, mentality, and core values of the criminal lifestyle. And, I felt proud in who I had become. I loved the feeling of being fearless and not afraid to die.

At the age of 20 years old, in a hot-blooded rage I murdered a man in broad daylight in a public park. I was arrested the same day. I confessed to the crime, and pled "no contest" to first degree murder (29-years-to-life in state prison) in exchange for my younger brother to get a lesser sentence, (11 years in state prison).

While in prison my violent behavior progressed:(I became worst because I lost all hope of ever getting out or of being of value to my family). So, I broke the law continually without remorse and assaulted an inmate with a weapon. And, added 12 years to my 29-to-life-sentence--totaling 41 years to life. Eventually, I determined within myself that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in prison; and, that I was going to force correctional officers to use lethal force on me while I ragefully stabb someone to death. Or, to inject a good enough amount of heroine to overdose and die.

But, one day while listening to a message by Billy Graham, I heard him say, sternly, with a loud voice and conviction, he said, "God loves you!!! God loves you with an everlasting love... It doesn't matter what you've done. He still loves you... You may have given up on yourself but God has not given up on you!!! He's calling you to come back to Him. He loves, loves loves, YOU! And. And when she said all that, I felt an overwhelming emotional powerful force (which was the love of God) speak to and awaken my spirit. And, I broke down and cried and cried and asked God to forgive me and save from my self-destructive ways. And, I prayed the salvation prayer.

TESTIMONY OF PETER SOTO (cont'd)

That was November 3rd, 2013. And, ever since then, I've never looked back; I'm a changed man, a new creation in Christ Jesus. Now, I understand that the penalty and punishment for my sins was poured out on God's Son. And, that infact, I am declared righteous by faith in Christ Jesus. This is my new identity. I have been reborn and am sealed by the Holy Spirit, unto eternity. My eternal life has already begun. When I confessed with my mouth the Lord Jesus and believed in my heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). Therefore, Satan can no longer use religion to deceive me anymore, nor question or challenge my identity in Christ.

That man "Krazie" (my old nick name) is dead. Never to be alive again. And, I thank God for Bible studies such as Crossroads Prison Ministries because they have allowed me absorb correct doctrine, and have a firm foundation in the basic principles of Scripture such as the unadulterated gospel. Which, is vital in holding fast to my new identity, having assurance of salvation, putting my trust in the cross, Jesus and the Holy Spirit; not in my own works.

Over the last few years I've seen God building up my faith, patience, and character. For example, through challenging and difficult times such as the pandemic I've realized the importance of maintaining a confident expectation of good. Whereas in the past I focused on the negative and the worst outcome. In addition, I've developed a strong devotion to studying God's Word. It's a good habit that I value above all good habits. And, this study time, day after day, has prepared me, I believe, for my college studies. To explain, since I was so used to delving into God's word, I applied that similar studiousness to my academia. And, I thus reaped the benefits.

I earned my A.A. degree in Communication Studies and I was top of my class--the Valedictorian (Summa Cum Laude). All the glory of course goes to God.

TESTIMONY OF PETER SOTO (cont'd)

That graduation ceremony can be viewed on YouTube by searching "Inmates earn college degrees from behind prison bars"-Bakersfield College-2019- KernValleyState Prison@ 23ABC News.

Now, due to my good behavior, prolonged rehabilitation efforts, and a 10 year-nondisciplinary period I earned an override to this prison in Lancaster which is the only prison in the state that has an in-person bachelor's degree program in the state. So, God willing, I'll earn a bachelor's degree in the near future- as God continues to open up doors for me. Honestlt I couldn't have done any of this withou God's intervention on my life. And, today, I go to chapel well actually it's the chowhall at this prison where I get taught the Word of God by Dr. Timothy Emerick and have the privilege of learning God's Word fromhis perspective with his weekly handouts that are centered on the kingdom of God and Jesus has already done for us at the cross, when He rose, a ~~when~~ He ascended, and when The holy Spirit was poured out. He speaks about how faith sees the answer, and don't just meditate on the word of God, but SPEAK IT! To set our face on God and demonstrate a perfect allegiance to Him, and not to be double minded. Fear is a demonic spirit that will attack you if you allow it. In summary, Dr Emerick is showing us how we are equipped in Christ. And, therefore we need to walk that out as we hear the word of God, speak the word of God, and move.

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