All the disciples, without exception, forsook Jesus at the moment He was arrested. Two of them, however, soon recovered their courage enough to return and follow their Master as He was being led away to judgment. One of these was Simon Peter, always original both in good and evil. We are told he followed Jesus “at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome” (Mt. 26:58). The other man, according to most interpreters, was John. He is not named but is simply described as the other disciple. Since John is the one giving us the account, it is almost certain that he is the person alluded to. “Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest” (Jn. 18:15b). This person is well-known and unnamed. We meet him often in the fourth Gospel. His conduct is so outstanding that if he was anyone else besides the evangelist, he would certainly not have remained nameless in this narrative. For this scene is given to us in such minute detail that even the name of the servant whose ear Peter cut off is not too insignificant to be recorded (Jn. 18:10).

These two disciples, though very different in character, seem to have had a friendship with one another. On various occasions, other than the one mentioned here, we find their names mentioned together in a way that suggests they had a special relationship. At the supper, when the announcement about the traitor had been made, Peter gave the disciple whom Jesus loved a sign that he should ask Him to whom He was referring. Three times between the resurrection and the ascension these two men were linked together as companions. They ran together to the empty tomb on the resurrection morning. They talked confidentially about the stranger who appeared in the early dawn on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. They were on their last fishing trip when John recognized the Risen One and said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” Shortly after this, they walked together on the shore and followed Jesus. Peter followed because he was commanded to. John followed because of the voluntary impulse of his own loving heart. An intimacy that was cemented by such sacred times together was likely to be permanent. Later we find the two disciples still companions after they had begun their duties as Apostles. They went up together into the temple at the appointed time for prayer. There, they got into trouble because they healed the lame man at the temple gate and had to appear together before the ecclesiastical tribunal. They were tried by the very same men, Annas and Caiaphas, who sat in judgment of their Lord. In this situation, they were companions at the bar, just as they had been before in the palace of the high priest.
This friendship between these two disciples is not at all surprising. They had belonged to the inner circle of three whom Jesus honored with His confidence on special occasions. So they had plenty of opportunities to become close, having been placed in circumstances that brought them together as spiritual brothers. And even though they had their characteristic differences, they were well-suited to be special friends. It was obvious that both men were original and forceful in character. They had more common sources of interest than with the more ordinary members of the apostolic band. Even their differences, rather than keeping them apart, would draw them together. They were made in such a way that they complemented each other. Peter was more masculine than John in temperament. Peter was a man of action; John, a man of thought and feeling. Peter’s role was to be a leader and a champion; John’s, to cling, and trust, and be loved. Peter was the hero, whereas John admired heroism.

The way these two friends behaved during this crisis was similar yet, at the same time, dissimilar. They were alike in that they both expressed a high degree of concern about the fate of their Master. While the rest of the Apostles completely left the scene, these two followed to see the end. The course of action they took probably grew out of the same motives. We are not told what these motives were, but it is not difficult to guess. First, they both had a bias for action. Neither Peter nor John had natures that were listless and passive, especially while such serious events were going on. They could not sit at home and do nothing while their Lord was being tried, sentenced, and treated as a criminal. If they cannot prevent His final sufferings, at least they will witness them. The same burst of energy that made these two disciples run to see the empty tomb three days later now compels them to turn their steps towards the judgment hall to witness the transactions there.

Besides the things that were going on in their minds, we perceive something of a daring spirit at work in the behavior of the two disciples. We learn from the book of Acts that when Peter and John appeared before the council in Jerusalem, the rulers were taken back with their boldness. Their boldness, then, could have been predicted because of the way they behaved during this current crisis. It is true that, by that time, they had experienced a great spiritual change, as had the other Apostles. But still, we cannot fail to recognize their true character. The Apostles had demonstrated the potential they had to become spiritual men in the days when Jesus was discipling them. Now they had grown to maturity. It was a brave thing for them to follow the band of men who had taken Jesus prisoner, even though they followed at a distance. The fundamental character of a martyr is in any man who could do that. Cowards would not have acted this way. They would have eagerly taken advantage of Jesus’ permission to flee and comforted their hearts with the thought that they were only doing the duty that was required of them, that is, if they were only thinking about their own safety.
**Peter and John’s Motives and Actions**

We believe the conduct of these two men sprang mainly from their deep love for Jesus. When the first wave of fear passed, their concern for personal safety was overshadowed by a greater concern for the fate of the One whom they truly loved more than life. The love of Jesus compelled them not to think about themselves but about Him whose hour of sorrow had come. First, they slowed their pace. Then they stopped. Then they looked around. As they see the armed band getting closer to the city, their hearts are pierced, and they say to themselves, “We cannot leave our dear Master in His time of danger. We must see the outcome of this painful event.” And so, with spirits full of anguish, they left for Jerusalem, Peter first, and then John.

The two men were companions up to this point. But they were much different after they arrived at the scene of the trial and suffering. John clung to his beloved Lord to the very end. It appears that he was present during the various interrogations to which Jesus was subjected and heard with his own ears the judicial process (he gives such an interesting account of it in his Gospel). When the sinful sentence was executed, he was a spectator. He stood at the foot of the cross where he could see everything and where he could be seen and spoken to by His dying Master. From his vantage point, he saw, among other things, the strange phenomenon of blood and water flowing from the wound made by the spear in the Savior’s side. He carefully records this in his narrative. There he heard Christ’s dying words. One of them He addressed to his mother, Mary, and John. To her He said, “Woman, behold your son” (Jn. 19:26). To him, “Behold, your mother” (Jn. 19:27).

So John was consistently faithful throughout. And Peter - what about him? Note this! What need is there to tell the familiar story about his deplorable weakness that raised its head in the hall or inner court of the high priest’s palace? Do we need to rehearse the time when he gained entrance through the street door with the help of his brother John and first denied his connection to Jesus to the young girl? Need we review his repeated denial to other people and the addition of a solemn oath? Or, do we need to revisit him when he is irritated by the repetition of the charge against him, and perhaps by his consciousness of guilt, when he denied Him a third time? This final denial was not with a solemn oath but with the degrading addition of profane swearing, “I do not know this fellow you are talking about!” (Mk. 14:71). Finally, he heard the cock crow and caught Jesus’ eye. He remembered the words, “The cock will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me” (Lk. 22:34). Then he went out to the street and wept bitterly!

We are not told what happened to Peter after his tears. In all probability, he went back to his lodging - humbled, dispirited, crushed - and remained overwhelmed with grief and shame until he came to his senses on the morning of the resurrection when he learned the good news.
This difference in behavior between the two disciples corresponded to a difference in their characters. Each one acted according to his nature. It is true that the circumstances were not the same for both men. They were favorable for one and unfavorable for the other. John had the advantage of having a friend in the court. Somehow he was known to the high priest. This relationship gained him entrance into the judgment chamber and gave him personal security without any risks. On the other hand, Peter had no friends in the court. It might not have been unreasonable for him to fear the presence of personal enemies. He had been obnoxious in the garden, engaging in rash behavior. So he might have been worried about facing the consequences for that one act. These fears would not have been groundless. We learn this from John. One of the people who charged Peter with being a disciple of Jesus was a relative of the man whose ear had been cut off. He brought this charge against Peter, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” (Jn. 18:26). Therefore, it is very likely that he was conscious of having committed an offence that was resented by others. This would have made Peter anxious to avoid being identified as one of Christ’s disciples. His untimely courage in the garden helped make him a coward in the yard outside the palace.

Peter and John: The Key Differences
Even when we make allowance for the circumstances, we think the difference in the behavior of the two disciples was primarily due to a difference in the men themselves. Even if Peter had not been guilty of a lack of wisdom in the garden, we fear he would have denied Jesus in the courtyard. On the other hand, when we think of John being in Peter’s position, we do not believe he would have committed Peter’s sin. Peter’s temperament made him susceptible to temptation. John’s, however, was a protection against temptation. Peter was frank and extroverted. John was dignified and reserved. Peter’s tendency was to befriend everybody, while John knew how to establish personal boundaries. It is easy to see the kind of impact this distinction would have on anyone who was placed in Peter’s position. Think of John in Peter’s place. How would he have acted? Picture, for a moment, certain people walking about the court who possessed neither authority nor influence. They question John about his relationship to Jesus. He is neither afraid nor ashamed to acknowledge his Lord. Nevertheless, he turns away and does not answer them. They do not have a right to question him. He has no sympathy with the spirit behind their questions. He feels that it will not serve any good purpose to reveal his relationship to Jesus with these kinds of people. Therefore, he is like his Master when confronted with false witnesses: He remains quiet and withdraws from the people with whom he has nothing in common. He has no respect for them.

Peter, on the other hand, does not have the capacity to protect himself from the inconvenience of being interrogated. He does not have the dignified cautiousness that John has. He cannot seem to keep inappropriate company at arm’s length. He is too frank, too open, too sensitive...
to public opinion, and cannot seem to discern its quality. If a servant girl asks him a question about his relationship with the Prisoner at the bar, he cannot brush past her as if he didn't hear her. He is compelled to answer her. And because he instinctively feels that the bent of the question is hostile to his Master, his answer has to be a lie. He is unable to see that this encounter with danger came about because he was getting too close with the people hanging around the palace. So the foolish disciple must get even more involved in the net by mingling confidently with the servants and officers who had gathered around the fire which has been kindled on the pavement of the open court. Naturally, he does not have a chance of escaping here. He is like a poor fly caught in a spider's web. When these men use a rude tone (the tone of insignificant court personnel) and charge him with being a follower of the Man whom their bosses now have in their power, he cannot do anything other than blunder out an unpleasant, base denial. Poor Peter is obviously not equal to the situation. It would have been wiser for him to have stayed at home and restrained his curiosity until the end. He, like most men, would learn wisdom only by bitter experience.

The contrast we have made between the two disciples suggests this thought: *Growth in grace may be different for different Christians!* Neither John nor Peter was mature yet, and their immaturity was revealed in different ways. Peter's weakness was to be found in his tendency to be friendly with everyone, but without discernment. John, on the other hand, was not in any danger of being on friendly terms with each and every person. No, it was too easy for him to distinguish between friends and foes. He could take a side and keep it. He could even hate with an intensity that bordered on fanaticism, but he could also love with beautiful womanly devotion. Remember his proposal to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritan villages! That was a proposal that Peter could not have made. He did not have it in his nature to be that destructive toward another human being. So far, his good nature was something to be commended, even though, in other respects, it opened him up to temptation. The faults of the two disciples were opposite. Consequently, growth in grace would naturally assume two different forms in their respective experiences. In Peter, it would take the form of concentration; in John, of expansion. Peter would become less loving; John would become more loving. Peter would progress from showing indiscriminate goodwill to having a moral compass which would help him distinguish between friends and enemies, the Church and the world. On the other hand, John's progress became apparent when he stopped being a bigot and developed the same spirit of cordiality, humanity, and sympathy that Jesus had. When Peter became mature, he would not care as much about the opinions and feelings of men as he did right now. John, again, would care much more.

We would like to add a final word on the question, “*Was it right or wrong for these two disciples to follow their Lord to the place of judgment?*” In our view, it was neither right nor wrong, in and of itself. It was right for one who was able to do it without spiritual harm. But it was wrong for someone who had reason to believe that, by doing it, he was exposing himself to harm. The last
case was Peter's, and the first seems to have been John's. Peter had been adequately warned about his weakness. If he had taken the warning to heart, he would have avoided the situation where the temptation occurred. By disregarding the warning, he chose to run into the tempter's arms. And, of course, he fell. His fall is a lesson to all who do not seek the counsel of God or regard the counsel that is given. They try to accomplish things that are way beyond their strength.