

SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION – ITS CAUSES AND CURE

CHAPTER 6 – VAIN REGRET

1 COR 15:8-10 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me

I. LOOKING AT THE PAST

‘If only’—that is their cry. But they did not believe; and looking back at the years spent out in the world not understanding these things, they are full of vain regrets for what they might have been, for how they might have grown in grace and for the point at which they would have arrived by now. They look back in that way to the past and they regret it and bemoan it: they look back at the joys they might have had, the years of happy joyful experience they might have had. But it is too late, the opportunities have gone. Why were they so foolish; how could they have been so blind? Why were they so slow? They heard the gospel; they read good books; they even felt something at a certain point but nothing came of it and the opportunity was allowed to go. Now at long last they have understood, and are obsessed by the thought—‘if only’

A. Regret vs Misery

B. Laborers in the Vineyard

II. COMMON SENSE

There are some people who seem to think that it is wrong for a Christian ever to use common sense. They seem to think that they must always do everything in an exclusively spiritual manner.

A. You can’t change the past

To be miserable in the present because of some failure in the past is a sheer waste of time and energy. That is obvious. That is common sense... We must never for a second worry about anything that cannot be affected or changed by us.

B. Dwelling on the past causes failure in the present.

It is always wrong to mortgage the present by the past, it is always wrong to allow the past to act as a brake upon the present. Let the dead past bury its dead. There is nothing that is more reprehensible, judged by common canons of thought, than to allow anything that belongs to the past to cause you to be a failure in the present. And this morbid concern about the past does so. The people I am describing are failing in the present. Instead of living in the present and getting on with the Christian life they are sitting down bemoaning the past. They are so sorry about the past that they do nothing in the present. How wrong it is.

C. Make up for lost time

If you are suffering from this condition take yourself in hand and examine yourself from an ordinary common sense point of view. You are behaving like a fool, you are irrational, you are wasting your time and your energy. You do not really believe what you are saying. If you bemoan a wasted past, make up for it in the present, give yourself entirely to living at this present moment.

III. SCRIPTURE

A. Paul’s Example

What matters first of all if you are a Christian is not what you once were, but what you are. Does that sound ridiculous? It is so perfectly obvious that what matters is not what you were but what you are. Yes, how obvious when I put it like this, but how difficult to see it sometimes when the devil attacks us. The Apostle said that he was ‘not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the Church of God’, but he goes on to add: ‘But by the grace of God I am what I am’.

What does it matter what I was? 'I am what I am.' Put your emphasis there. Do not be for ever thinking about what you were.

B. When < If

It is not the mode or manner of conversion that matters, what matters is the fact that you are saved. But people will sit down and worry about how they came, the time, the mode, the manner, the method. It does not matter at all; what matters is that you are in. And if you are in, rejoice in it, and forget you were ever out.

C. Preoccupation with Self

I Corinthians 4:1-4

He is the Judge and you have no right to waste His time or your own time and energy in condemning yourself. Forget yourself, leave the judgment to Him; get on with the work. This whole trouble is due to this morbid preoccupation with self in the matter of judgment. Not only that, it is indicative of a proneness still to think in terms of what we can do. This kind of person comes to us in apparent modesty and says, 'If only I had come sooner what a lot of work I could have done'. In a sense that is quite right, but in another sense it is quite wrong, and utterly false.

D. Occupied with _____?

i. The veil has been lifted for believers (II Corinthians 3: 16-17)

IV. GRACE

A. The laborers in the vineyard

That is the whole point of the parable. God has a different way of looking at things. He does not see as men do; He does not compute as they do; it is all grace from beginning to end. The last people got a penny exactly as did the first; they were given the same wages as the first....So stop looking at what you have not done and the years you have missed and realize that in His Kingdom it is His grace alone that matters. You who have come in last may find yourselves first one day to your own amazement, and like the people in the parable at the end of Matthew 25, you will ask: 'When did I do this, when did I do that?' He knows, He sees, His grace is sufficient.

B. Ecclesiastes 11:6

In the evening, the evening of your life, withhold not your hand in this marvellous Kingdom of grace. It is supernatural. You may find on the Judgment Day that you have a much bigger reward than those who were saved in their youth'. What a glorious gospel. Youth is the great word today—Youth. The question of age is irrelevant in God's kingdom and it is unscriptural to emphasize it as we do. 'In the morning sow thy seed'; yes, but with equal force I would say, 'In the evening withhold not thy hand'.

C. Joel 2:25

And then, remember what is perhaps one of the most comforting and wonderful things that is found anywhere in Scripture. It was spoken to the prophet Joel as he was given that great vision and understanding of the coming of Christ, the Christ that was to come. This was the word he was given to utter: 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten' (Joel 2. 25). He has promised to do it; He can do it. The wasted years, the barren years, the years that the locusts and the canker-worms and the caterpillars and all these other things have devoured, until there was nothing apparently left, of them He says: 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten'. If you think of it in terms of what you can do with your strength and power, then time is of the essence of the contract. But we are in a realm in which that does not matter. He comes in and He can give us a crop in one year that will make up for ten—'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten'. That is the character of our Master, that is our Saviour, that is our God. I say, therefore, in the light of this: Never look back again; never waste your time in the present; never waste your energy; forget the past and rejoice in the fact that you are what you are by the grace of God, and that in the Divine alchemy of His marvellous grace you may yet have the greatest surprise of your life and existence and find that even in your case it will come to pass that the last shall be first. Praise God for the fact that you are what you are, and that you are in the Kingdom.