

Friday, February 5, 2016 - How Satan Uses Discouragement against Us...

The Christian who has not become discouraged in this life, at least once, is most likely walking around oblivious to the world around them. Our day is filled with discouragement on every hand. All of us at one time or another will face major disappointments, setbacks and tragedies. Since such occasions are inevitable in our own lives, let us look to the word of the living God.

The greatest problem that we face in this generation is the moral and spiritual erosion of the people in this great land in which we now live. One of the greatest challenges that a Christian must face is being faithful to God while living in a non-christian society. Even though we live in this world we must not be of the world (John 17:16).

Discouragement comes when we lose our courage to live for God, regardless the cost. We are to be set apart from the world, to be counted among the saved. Satan uses our greed and selfish desires to entice us with the things of the world and thus we become discouraged because whatever level of 'success' we attain, it is never enough.

Many pursue the material wealth of the world. A Christian understands that there is great emptiness to be found wealth. When the queen of Sheba came and saw the extent of Solomon's wealth the Bible says she was "overwhelmed" (1 Kg 10:5). Solomon's yearly accumulation of gold alone amounted to at least 25 tons (1 Kgs. 10:14). His assets at one time included 1,400 chariots, 12,000 horses, dinnerware made from pure gold, real estate encompassing entire towns, as well as other property where gold and silver were mined (1 Kgs. 10:21, 26-29). Solomon truly knew wealth. However, as is the case with many wealthy people, Solomon discovered a hollowness or emptiness to his wealth.

The message of Ecclesiastes is as applicable to the 20th Century man as it was in the Old Testament era. It speaks of what life is all about. May I remind you that the purpose of life has not changed from the time of creation until the present, nor will it change until the Lord calls a halt to the whole process we call life. So the book of Ecclesiastes is eternal in its message. Ultimately, Solomon is going to say all of the things of this life fall into relative insignificance when compared to the one eternal issue of what life is really all about, which is fearing God and keeping his commandments.

There is nothing inherently evil about wealth. Solomon's wealth was from the Lord (1 Kgs. 3:13). Solomon said that wealth attained by the Lord's hand is the best, "The blessing of LORD makes <one> rich, and he adds no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22). The Bible is clear that the emptiness of wealth comes from a wrongheaded obsession toward the accumulation, and preservation of wealth (1 Tim. 6:10-19; Mt. 6:24-33).

Solomon, in chapter 4, explores the realm of advancement or power. In verse 13, he writes: "Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more." He won't listen to the counsel of his advisors. Later he adds in verse 16: "There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this is also vanity and grasping for the wind." You can climb the ladder of success and build yourself up, but guess what? Someone else will be right behind you. People start giving him allegiance, and you fade out of the picture. He becomes the chief executive, and then someone else is right behind him, and soon he is replaced by another king, or emperor, or president. People come and people go and power shifts. Searching for meaning and purpose through advancement and power is all too familiar to people in our culture and generation. Look at the political arena. A man is elected to a local office but soon begins craving a state office, then a greater state office, then a federal office,

and finally President. The lust for power often causes one to 'sell their soul' for that next taste.

Why is power and prominence so empty, void and vain? Solomon points to the fact that one who arrives at the top doesn't remain there. Some one or some group is determined to dethrone him. Even if men fail in their efforts, God, because of man's pride and arrogance, will bring him low. Those whose goal in life is attaining and exercising power do not enjoy the respect, favor and good will of others. Instead, they create resentment and bitterness toward themselves.

The New Testament reveals the life of Jesus filled with obstacles and tragedies, yet he refused to be discouraged. The writer to the Hebrews admonishes us, "For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." (Heb. 12:3).

The Apostle Paul wrote of his afflictions which could have caused him untold discouragement: From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? (2 Cor. 11:24-29).

Christians become discouraged because they focus on the wrong things. Our eyes should be focused on Jesus. He is the originator and concluder of our faith. Focus on him. When my eyes are on him, I see one who willingly exchanged the joy of heaven for the shame of the cross so that we can be saved. I see that he is now raised from the dead and seated in supreme authority at the right hand of my God. At the throne of God he is both willing and able to help us with our problems. But if I take my eyes off Jesus and begin to focus them on myself. I will quickly become discouraged since I so often fail even to carry out the noble ideas that I have. I slip and fall. I say things that should never be said. So if I focus on me I'll be like Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus to see the waves of the sea, down I will plunge.

Christians become discouraged because we lose perspective. We sometimes think we have really been through a great difficulty when it isn't all that bad. God reminds the Hebrews, "You have not yet resisted to blood-shed, striving against sin." They had been through some things. But it certainly could be worse. It helps us, just to put things into perspective. What you have been through hardly compares with what others have gone through to live for God. Think of them and take hope.

Finally, we become discouraged because we lose sight of God's hand in the affairs of this world. If we are among the beloved of God, we will be chastened by him. His chastening serves both to punish wrong done and to prepare us for greater things in the future. When we are fruitful branches in Christ the vine, God prunes us so that we may bear more fruit (John 15: 1-5). He causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). It may well be that those very problems that I am letting get me down are really love acts from God to get me ready for greater works that lie ahead. If I can see the hurt, the difficulty and the disappointment as chastening from God, getting me ready for bigger and better things in his service, then rather than being discouraged by them, I am motivated to look for the lesson to be learned and grow through the problem.

The next time you feel discouraged, don't feel that you are alone and that no one else ever feels that way. Instead turn back to Hebrews 12, read it, pray to God to help you apply its truths to your own life and then start growing through your problems instead of shrinking through them.