

Discouragement

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Discouragement can be consistent with the highest degree of grace, and it is not always a sign of a carnal heart.

Scripture: Job 3:20, Psalm 34:17, Matthew 5:11, 2 Corinthians 4:8

Topics: "Spiritual Depression", "Faith And Doubt"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin discusses the misconception that discouragement is inconsistent with holiness, emphasizing that even the most devout individuals can experience heaviness and depression while still maintaining a high degree of grace. He challenges the notion that discouragement is solely a sign of a carnal heart, highlighting that it can stem from various sources such as physical, mental, and spiritual factors both internally and externally. Baldwin delves into the different forms of discouragement, including physical depression and mental/spiritual despair, showcasing that enduring seasons of depression does not negate one's faith or salvation.

Transcript

Another favorite saying is that discouragement is inconsistent with holiness, and that if such a spirit overtakes you you do not have the experience; and this is said without the least qualification or explanation. Before we could concede such a claim we would want to know several things, especially, What do you mean by discouragement? It would be interesting to take a vote of the holiness preachers who read these lines and see how many can truly say that since they professed the experience of holiness they have never felt discouraged with their success in the work of the Lord and almost decided to quit.

On the contrary we claim that heaviness and even awful depression are perfectly consistent with the highest degree of grace. These depressions may come from various sources as we shall soon see.

Our vacillating feelings are a poor gage with which to measure our grace. They run all the way from the melancholy to the hilarious without the slightest movement of the will, and at times they refuse to be controlled. We weep brokenheartedly over the grave of our loved ones, and laugh joyously over the successes of our friends. The whole earth turns blue when our nerves are depressed, and yellow when our liver or stomach is disordered, and it sparkles with sunshine and throbs with delight when our blood courses naturally and our nerves lose their strain. In which case have we the most grace. I do not know, but one thing is sure: He who keeps the victory in his soul in the midst of depressing circumstances and torturing pain is a conqueror, whether critical men write his name high or low.

"There are some herbs, you know, whose virtue consists chiefly in their fragrance, but some of them are quite scentless and uninteresting till bruised; then they shed their perfume all around. Thus it is with many a Christian. The fragrance of his piety is never diffused abroad until he is well bruised."-- (Caughey).

The feeling that is commonly called discouragement may arise from various causes, physical, mental, and spiritual within ourselves and from outside causes; it may come from our circumstances, our health, our surroundings, our associates, or the enemy himself; it may be consistent with a high degree of grace or it may be fatal to grace; and for any person to apply the same rule to every case is a failure to obey the command to rightly divide the word of truth.

Then, besides, various persons have various ideas of what discouragement is. If definitions were asked the answer would range all the way from the feeling of heaviness that always accompanies temptation to the melancholia of insanity. The Standard Dictionary defines "discourage" thus: "To damp or destroy the courage or depress the spirits of; lessen the self-confidence of; dispirit; dishearten; deter. To destroy or attempt to destroy the confidence in; try to bring into disfavor, etc."

Let us examine a few of the experiences which are sometimes labeled "discouragement," and see how far they can be justly called carnal, or rather be sure signs of a carnal heart.

1. Physical depression. Some persons who have always enjoyed uninterrupted health think it strange that any one should be depressed under physical disability. Then there is another class of persons (but it is not a very large class,) who declare that they feel spiritual exaltation and enjoy constant communion when they are sick. But by far the greater number of persons testify that during seasons of bodily pain they feel depressed and downhearted; and this is especially true in diseases of long continuance. Take the man who is naturally ambitious and active, steal away his power to labor and yet leave him with the unbounded desire for accomplishment; now let his indisposition continue indefinitely and it is nothing short of a miracle if he should continually feel exalted in soul. We wanted to say that it would be a miracle even in the realm of miraculous grace -- a supreme miracle. Such things are not only possible but they do occur; but, commonly, the victim must endure seasons of awful depression. We once knew a saintly old minister, superannuated (he has gone to glory now,) whose seasons of depression because of his lost physical powers were deep, and at times touching. Let those who will doubt the dear old man's salvation, but please excuse us.

Even Wesley says: "Faith no more hinders the sinking of the spirits (as it is called) in hysteric illness than the rising of the pulse in fever." And may we say that judging by the common experience of sanctified people, one is just as much a matter of grace as the other. A greater than Wesley speaks of Christians who were "cast down, but not destroyed."

2. Mental and spiritual depression. A saint of God has spent months, it may be years, on a certain piece of work, feeling all the time that he was laboring to the glory of God; at the end of this time he sees, or fancies he sees, his labor all go for naught -- there is a possibility that he may have to think twice and it may be pray three times before he can shout over the loss. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord;" but any person can easily read between the lines that this saying was wrung from a heart crushed with sorrow, and verging on despondency. A voice from the ash heaps of blasted hopes; bitterly sorrowful indeed, but faithful in despair!

A faithful minister labors for months, perhaps the whole year, and sees but little, or nothing, accomplished; the enemy has scaled the walls and entered the flock; the minister himself, although all his labors have

been in love and with tearful eyes, is accused by the very persons his heart longs to bless; at conference a committee insists on his removal, and attempts to tarnish his reputation as a minister of the gospel. Of course, we understand that under such circumstances the persecuted man of God should have grace enough to shout for joy and triumph as though nothing had happened! But do sanctified men always do it?

We canonize a Luther, a Wesley, a Roberts, a McCreery, who stood true to their convictions amid false accusations, but assist in crushing the man who dares to be as true as they ever were. My brethren, some of these men are serving on your own home charges, and ye know them not. "Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers" (Matt. 23 :29-32.) Who but the recording angel can tell the mental and spiritual anguish of these same righteous men? Yea, who but the Infinite can tell the mighty anguish of heart which tore away the life of the Son of God Himself -- when He was so used!

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