

Depression and the Christian

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

When providence appears to frown, most of us are apt to be depressed. It is true that some possess a more mercurial temperament than others, their feelings undergoing a change as frequently as the barometer does in fluctuating weather, one day in the mountain top, the next in the slough of despond. Yet, even those more stable and equitable are liable to be cast down in spirit when faced by a trying situation and everything seems to be against them. If it be human to err, it is equally human to be dejected when our circumstances are distressing and our experience be a painful one. We shall, therefore, raise the inquiry, "Is it *wrong* to be cast down?" That is a question which does not admit of an unqualified yes or no in reply. It depends upon the cause and occasion of such despondency, upon the duration thereof, upon the accompaniments and effects of the same.

If lowness of spirits were something sinful *per se*, then it would necessarily follow that God requires us to live as stoics in this world, uninfluenced, unaffected by whatever goes on either within or without us. It certainly is not wrong to be deeply concerned over our sins, nor to be affected thereby, for our Lord declared, “Blessed are they that mourn” (Mat 5:4). It certainly is not unlawful for us to take to heart the low state of Christ’s cause in this world. Nor should we be callously indifferent as we behold this pleasure-loving generation rushing madly unto a hopeless eternity. The Savior Himself wept over Jerusalem (Luk 19:41) as He contemplated its rejection of Himself and foresaw the fearful judgments shortly to fall upon it. But if I be gloomy and glum simply because my will has been crossed and my cherished plans thwarted, that is reprehensible. If I so mourn over my sins as to give way to a spirit of despair (instead of availing myself of 1 John 1:9), or if I so take to heart the sad state of Christendom as to become incapacitated for the performance of duty, that is blameworthy. It is wrong to allow any grief to mar my communion with God or prevent my rejoicing in Him.

Thus, it is the part of wisdom to investigate the cause of my despondency and inquire with the Psalmist, “*Why art thou cast down*, O my

soul? why art thou disquieted within me?” (Psa 42:5, 11). He desired to know the reason for his being dispirited. Often that is the first step toward recovery from such a state. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) said, “To search out the cause of our sorrow is the best surgery for grief.” When thoroughly disheartened, we need to take ourselves to task, and carefully examine and cross-examine ourselves. If it be only your pride or your self-confidence that be cast down, well and good. But if it be a delighting yourself in the Lord and enjoying fellowship in Him [that is cast down], then, unbelief lies at the root of your complaint. Even though the divine rod be upon you, the exhortation is, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Heb 12:5). Neither harden yourself against it nor be crushed by it. Suffer not a haughty spirit, which refuses to be humbled under the hand of God, nor give way to a despairing heart, which sinks beneath it.

It should be carefully noted that David did more than make inquiry. He preached to himself: “Hope thou in God” (Psa 42:5, 11; 43:5). Ah, that is what the despondent soul needs to do. Nothing else will bring relief to the heart. The immediate outlook may be dark, but the divine promises are bright. The world may be at its wits’ end, but the Christian need not be

so. The creature may fail you, but the Creator will not, if you truly put your trust in Him—as this writer has proved times without number. There is One who is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1) and He never deserts those who really make Him their refuge. Though faith and hope be distinct graces, the latter is never exercised when the former is inactive. That is clear from such passages as Romans 5:2 and 15:13. Faith looks upward, hope looks onward. Faith lays hold of the divine promises. Hope sustains the heart during the interval, enabling us to wait patiently for the fulfilment. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa 30:5).

“Hope thou in God.” Repining and murmuring will get you nowhere. Fretting and wringing the hands bring no relief either temporally or spiritually. The more pressing your situation or acute your circumstances, the better the opportunity for proving the sufficiency of God. Faith cannot be exercised when everything needful is at hand to sight. If it be for past follies that God is now chastening you, then hope in His *mercy*. If you penitently confess your sins, there is abundant mercy with Him to blot them all out (Isa 55:7). If it be over financial straitness and the drying up of accustomed supplies that you be cast down,

hope in God's *power*. If every door seems shut against you, and every channel of help fast closed, yet, nothing is too hard for the Almighty (Jer 32:17, 27), as Elijah proved in time of famine (1Ki 17 & 18). Hope in His *faithfulness*. Men may have deceived you, failed to fulfill their engagements, friends turned their backs upon you in the hour of need, but He, who cannot lie (Ti 1:2), is to be depended upon. Doubt neither His promises nor His lovingkindness.

“For I shall yet praise him, who is the *health* of my countenance” (Psa 42:11). That peculiar term suggests that David's soul being cast down was to be attributed partly to his physical condition—as is so often the case with God's people, for suffering of the body reacts upon the spirit. Spurgeon was evidently of the same mind, for one of his comments was, “My God will clear away the furrows from my brow, and the tear-marks from my cheeks, and therefore will I lift up my head and smile in the face of the strait.” Such is ever the blessed assurance of those who truly hope in God. They know that “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (Psa 34:19). When the fiery trial has done its work and your bonds are burned off (Dan 3:25), you will then thank God for the trials which are now so unpleasant. Then, confidently anticipate the

future. Whatever be the cause, heed that word, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7).

"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand" (Psa 37:24). Blessed assurance is that, and one which should be regarded in its widest scope. A good man may fall, as David did, in a most deplorable manner, yet, he was not cast down to rise no more, as are those abandoned by God, but was recovered by repentance. He may fall into various errors, but he shall not be suffered to make shipwreck of the Faith. He may, through trying circumstances, fall into a state of gloom, yet God will not cast him off. Sooner or later, he shall prove that God "comforteth those that are cast down" (2Co 7:6). The time of our distress is commonly that of God's gracious intervention, and it is then we should strongly endeavour to *expect it*. The objects of His tenderest solicitude are those in desperate situations, "Thou wilt save the afflicted people" (Psa 18:27). He who dwells in the high and holy place, dwells also in his children, "*to revive* the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15).

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