

Why is There No Joy without Sorrow?

By Paul R. Blake

(A brother recently wrote to me of wonderful news that was followed the next day with sorrow that seemed to undo all of the earlier good. He was troubled by the activity of Satan that causes so much pain. A couple decided to obey the gospel, truly a cause for rejoicing. But before they were baptized, it came to light that he was involved in an unscriptural divorce. They chose to remain together rather than obey the gospel. I wrote what follows in response.)

The Adversary is truly the god of this world ruling in the hearts of men and spreading sorrow everywhere his slimy, stinking influence extends. Hell will be particularly hard on him, as he had aspirations of ruling and will instead find himself living eternally in Perdition with the results of his activity in this world. As one brother put it recently in a Bible class: "The Devil is not going to spend eternity in hell laughing."

The truly tragic aspect of all of this is the sorrow of billions of souls he hurts in this world. Please understand that he could not do any of this without human cooperation. Everyone can say "NO" to him, but they often choose to do otherwise. A great irony that they must be taught to face is this: they are choosing to spend eternity with the very being who led them into the choices that are causing them pain in this world.

There is no joy experienced in this world that the Adversary does not try to undo with sorrow. There will be no lasting joy in this life without sorrow, at some point, following soon after. Nearby, a young couple is rejoicing in the infancy of their second child, and the first is taken away by an unexpected illness. A teenaged boy with a brilliant mind and a full scholarship to a prestigious university is assaulted and beaten to death in a subway restroom. An evangelist spends a lifetime influencing others for Christ, and then destroys his work with a single act of adultery. A local church experiences growth and peace, and seemingly out of nowhere a trusted brother embraces error and leads away a faction. Why!? What beneficial lesson for us comes of this evil activity of our Adversary!?

Joy teaches us to press for heaven, and sorrow reminds us that if we do not, hell will not be a tolerable alternative. Created in the image of God and knowing good from evil, we strongly desire to hold onto joy and make it last, and we try to avoid sorrow, fending it off with all of our limited power. And yet, it is not about how long we make the joy last or how strongly we fight off the sorrow; it is about the grace with which we conduct ourselves in our joy or in our sorrow. Paul knew how to live with the jolting extremes of joy and sorrow: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12).

Joy does not stay for long and sorrow comes and goes, but what will remain in this world and for all of eternity is the honor and grace we manifested in both states. I recently learned of a WWII B29 bomber pilot who survived 32 missions only to be stricken in his old age with neuropathy. He conducted himself with the same honor in the midst of the disease as he did in the skies over Berlin. There is a reason why such a man would face his sorrow with grace: God gave him a long life when the rest of his squadron was killed over Berlin. He was not going to complain to Him when he goes the way of all flesh. Clearly, it's not about how much life we get to live; it's about how we live the life we are given.

Solomon told us that everything has a season, and joy and sorrow are not excluded from this. By definition, "seasons" come and go. Joy will not linger in this world, and sorrow will pass on as something else replaces it. There is only one place designed to maintain a state of unending joy -- heaven. There is only one place of eternal sorrow -- hell. Doing the will of God leads to the first; yielding to the tempting lies of our Adversary leads to the second. We cannot choose to have lasting joy in this world, but in this world we can choose to have lasting joy in the world to come.

Destroyed by Silence

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11).

History records a remarkable account of the destruction of an ancient town. The watchmen on the walls would call out whenever they thought they saw a foe approaching. Sensing that the people had begun to resent them for giving these false alarms, they decided to remain quiet. Regrettably, not long afterward the enemy actually did come. The city that could have been saved was assaulted and devastated, and nothing was left but smoking ruins. Later, someone erected a small memorial inscribed with the following epitaph: "Here stood a town that was destroyed by silence." (From Bible Illustrator)

Let us not be destroyed by silence, but boldly expose and reprove sin and error wherever it is found.

Boundaries

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

A report cites the findings of an interesting study done on school children. It states: "A group of educators decided to remove the chain-link fences from around the school playgrounds. They believed the fences promoted feelings of confinement and restraint. The curious thing they noticed, however, was that as soon as the fences were removed, the children huddled in the center of the playground to play. Conclusion: Children need boundaries."

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

A Moments Wisdom

- To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must put our own lives in order; and to put our lives in order, we must first set our hearts right with God.
- We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.
- Both tears and sweat are salty, but they render a different result. Tears will get you sympathy; sweat will get you change.
- Don't spur a willing horse.
- Instruction does much, but encouragement does more.
- A man in love mistakes a pimple for a dimple. You don't love a woman because she is beautiful; she is beautiful because you love her.
- Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, it's what you are expected to give -- which is everything.
- Wicked men obey from fear; good men, from love.