

Spiritual Depression-Its Causes and Cures

-A study through D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sermon series-

Chapter 12 - The spirit of bondage (Romans 8:15-17)

“These Epistles which we have in the New Testament are full of doctrine and of theology and yet it would be very wrong to say that the collection of New Testament Epistles is a textbook of theology. It is not. The astounding thing is this, and it is important to bear in mind, that these pronouncements and doctrines are always introduced with some practical object in view, with the pastoral element right in the very forefront. These letters are practical letters written primarily because the Apostle was concerned to help people to actual enjoyment and out-living of the Christian faith which they had believed and accepted.”

One of the causes of “spiritual depression” for the believer is allowing a spirit of _____ (slavery) to rule leading them back into fear. In the context Paul is here dealing with the practical Christian life. He is helping the saints to know how to live in light of the glorious gospel that they have received.

“What is the cause of this discouragement in this case? It is nothing less than the problem of living the Christian life, the problem, if you like, of dealing with sin....These people to whom he is writing have been converted and have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, but now they are up against the problem of living this new life which they have received, in a world that is antagonistic and utterly opposed to them...It is a fight, it is a battle; there is sin without and within...”

“What is the essence of this problem? It is that there is a failure on their part to realize certain truths concerning the Christian life...it is ultimately, a failure to understand doctrine, or, if you prefer it, it is, ultimately, another failure in the realm of faith.”

Paul clearly exhorts the believers to not allow a spirit of bondage to _____ over them but we must be clear about what this spirit of bondage is.

“What does he mean by this ‘spirit of bondage’? He means the danger of having a ‘servant-spirit,’ a serf-like spirit and attitude. The slave attitude generally arises from the tendency to turn the Christian life and the living of the Christian life into a new law, into a higher law.”

The “spirit of bondage” is a spirit where the only focus of the Christian is the law. This is a different form of legalism. This is not a legalism that is an attack on justification. This is a legalism that is an attack on _____. Those who possess this “spirit of bondage”, although saved, are only looking at the law and their moral responsibilities and do not keep their gaze fixed on Christ. Their focus is simply on what I must do and this attitude leads them into both bondage and fear. As with all of the Christian life balance is needed.

“They think of the Christian life as a great task which they have to take up and to which now they are to apply themselves...holiness becomes a great task to them and they begin to plan and organize their lives and introduce certain disciplines in order to enable them to carry it out...the cultivation of holiness and the spiritual life is a whole-time occupation, and that you must devote yourself exclusively to it and have your rules, etc., to enable you to live it.”

The Apostle Paul is constantly dealing with this in the Scriptures. One example that Lloyd Jones mentions is Colossians 2:16-23. People are always trying to make Christianity into a set of rules (extra rules), not necessarily to attack salvation but to distort what it means to be a _____ Christian.

“A kind of monasticism was coming in, in a most insidious manner. It is no longer present among us in that particular form, but the tendency, the temptation is still there.”

This “spirit of bondage” brings with it only negative consequences, such as _____. How does this “spirit of bondage” produce fear? There are four different types of fear this spirit can produce: a wrong fear of God, a fear of the greatness of the task, a wrong fear of the devil, and a fear of indwelling sin.

1. *“There is a right fear of God, and we neglect and ignore that at our peril; but there is also a wrong fear of God and that is a craven fear...these people, I suggest, tend to develop this kind of wrong fear. They regard God as a task-master, they regard Him as Someone who is constantly watching to discover faults and blemishes in them, and to punish them accordingly.”*
2. *“Having outlined the task to themselves, they now begin to fear it. That is why they think it can only be lived if one segregates oneself from the world, and that a man cannot possibly be in business, or engaged in any profession and live the Christian life...They have no joy in it because the gigantic nature of the task is something that fills them with a spirit of fear, and they are in trouble about themselves and the possibility of ever really living this life as it should be lived.”*
3. *“There is a right fear of the devil...But, on the other hand, we must not be subject to craven fear of the devil.”*
4. *“They spend their time in denouncing themselves and in talking about the blackness and darkness of their own hearts. Again we must keep the balance.”*

“In other words I can sum it up like this, this spirit of fear which results from the spirit of bondage in this type of Christian is ultimately a fear of themselves and a fear of failure.”

This spirit of bondage and the fear it produces are a cause of spiritual depression but what is the cure for this particular problem? As always, the answer involves both _____ and _____. The first thing we must remember is that the Christian has been given the Holy Spirit.

“What is the antidote to this condition?...It is that we must realize the truth concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian...You must realize that you are not living by yourselves-he says in effect to these Romans- ‘You have been thinking of this task of yours as if you alone, by yourself, had to live the great Christian life. You realize that you are forgiven, and you can thank God that your sins are blotted out and washed away, but you seem to think that that is all and that you are left to live the Christian life on your own.’”

“Do we realize that as Christians we have within us the self-same Holy Spirit that was in the Son of God when He was here on earth? The Father gives the Spirit and it is the same Spirit that was in the Son that is given to us. The Spirit that enabled Him will enable us. That is his argument.”

The believer must also remember that the Holy Spirit he has received has brought with Him _____ with God, made him a co-heirs with Christ, and has given him the _____ of future glory.

“This eternal everlasting God has become our Father and the moment we realize that, everything tends to change...that is our relationship to God and the moment we realize it, it transforms everything. Henceforth, my desire is not to keep the law but to please my Father.”

“The way to get rid of the spirit of bondage and fear, is to know that if you are a child of God, you are destined for heaven and glory, and that all the things you see inside yourself and outside yourself cannot prevent that plan from being carried out...There is nothing that is so calculated to promote holiness as the realization that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, that our destiny is certain and secure, that nothing can prevent it...Do not worry about what you feel. The truth about you is glorious...Take you full salvation and triumph and prevail.”