

Futility

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That stubbornly prevalent component, or possibly even the essence of the human condition expressed by such words as uselessness, futility, frustration, vanity and emptiness, when found in the life of a believer, is understood, in the mentality of some institutionally brain-washed Christians, to be obvious evidence of a life lacking in victorious faith. But the apostle, Paul, had a much different perspective. As Paul saw it, as recorded in my NAS translation of Rom. 8:20, "...the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him, who subjected it, in hope."

A careful reading of the statement's context reveals that the believer is included in "the creation" and, with the Holy Spirit, experiences creation's futility. As I checked other translations and did my limited scholarly-best to ascertain the meaning of the Greek word translated "futility" in the NAS, to give it the full force of Paul's thought, I found that "frustration," "emptiness" and "vanity" provide a necessary elaboration, and if you feel like expanding your vocabulary, look up "vacuity," then add that to the gang of four above. By then we shall approach doing justice to what the apostle is conveying.

We are informed by this very heart of the chapter, which lies at the heart of the whole epistle, that the Way to glory is paved, to a large extent, with frustration that is too deep for words. From the Holy Spirit, from the spirit of the children of God, and from all creation, what we hear is a wordless "groaning." As light is found within the bowels of darkness; as strength is perfected in weakness and wisdom in the foolish things of this world, so glory is contained in vanity until the time of its final, full unveiling.

Frustration---rather than being the enemy of "the freedom of the glory of the children of God,"---is the very womb in which it is conceived, grows and shines forth. And, consistent with our analogy, it is a bloody process. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Rarely have wiser words been penned. According to Romans 8, God willed all the internal and external circumstances and pressures of life, with that divine precision of His, to bring us all to the end of ourselves while, adding insult to injury, arranges for someone to come along testifying

how he got the victory, and how it surely will work the same for you in your situation---BUT IT DOESN'T.

Yet you're bound and determined to keep a positive attitude of faith and to "keep on keeping on." Someone gives you "a word from the Lord," and hope comes alive again. You draw a promise from the daily promise box and find reason to be encouraged. Over night, there's a new spring in your step, when suddenly you turn a corner and WHAM--like you've been hit with a baseball bat, you're flat on your emotional face again.

Dare I say, without you frothing at the mouth and (as my friend Jan Antonsson says), pulling your hair out at the roots while you go screaming into the night, that what I'm describing is well within the boundaries of "the normal Christian life," and even, yes, "the victorious Christian life."

Maybe you're thinking, "Man this guy must be a real loser the way he writes." Well, I will confess that, as the world would judge, I've had more than my share of grandiose, even awesomely pathetic foul-ups. But I've learned this: The real issue is God's success by the Way of futility, and I can testify to THAT. Oh, I've known "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" and, guess what? They go hand in hand until there is no longer any need for futility, for we shall "know as we are known," that is, we shall know that we ARE God's success; we ARE God's glory. In us God has hit the mark.

I hope you will ponder, and ponder deeply, the following, so that you will not fail to appreciate the intrinsic value of futility. There is no frustration like the frustration of unrequited love. To be love itself, as God is, and to experience the futility of loving perfectly and fully without anything approaching a worthy return, is as painful to God as His heart is big.

To love all-out and get crucified for doing it sums up futility, frustration, emptiness, vanity and vacuity. God planned that this should be so, that He should endure such humiliation and rending-of-heart.

Then, and only then, does perfect love shine in all its glory.

You are in the communion of the frustration of God, and He of yours. This is "the fellowship of His suffering." This is "being made comfortable to His death." But, we endure by "the power of His resurrection," even when the flesh laughs painfully at the very thought of the possibility resurrection.

I've learned something from observing customers of mine during times I've made a living as a salesman when I wasn't preaching full-time. I've noticed that some people are much more inclined to a positive view of life than others, and it gives them, in this case, advantage over their competition in business. They expect to succeed. They think success. They "know" they're going to make it and that they can handle anything that comes their way.

You'd probably just get a blank stare from them if you tried to engage them in some serious discussion about the place of futility in life. But there's no place for that in the kingdom of God. All merely natural confidence has to die, and for some of us, it requires severe dealing from the Lord to transform natural hope into Spirit-infused hope.

The hope that comes out of the grave in the power of the resurrection is utterly different than the kind that is huckstered by a lot of preachers today. It's hope that has undergone crushing and come out without any soulish power left in it. Many preachers are simply religious versions of those who teach seminars on cultivating a success-attitude. Trust me; it is a primary aspect of that wood, hay and stubble that cannot survive the fire of God.

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