

## TWO OPPOSITE PROBLEMS: DISCOURAGEMENT AND PRIDE

### Introduction

- A. Text: **1 Thess. 5:14**.
- B. Different people find themselves facing different kinds of spiritual problems.
- C. God's word contains exactly what every person needs to hear, no matter what kind of problem he faces.
- D. Two of the most basic problems in our spiritual lives are *discouragement* and *pride*. Each of these is the opposite of the other.
  - 1. We find it difficult to "face [our] lives realistically and still cling passionately to Christ" (Larry Crabb).
  - 2. We tend to be either "realistic and disillusioned" or "believing and defensive" (Larry Crabb).
- E. How can we deal honestly and humbly with reality in our lives and not fall into the pit of despair? Is there any way to avoid the problems of pride and discouragement?

### I. DISCOURAGEMENT

- A. Discouragement is the problem of not having enough confidence — we are *less* sure of our relationship to God than the facts warrant. Cf. **1 Jn. 4:17-19**.
- B. Discouragement involves a failure to deal adequately with God's mercy and grace.
  - 1. We can know that we have eternal life - **1 Jn. 5:13**.
  - 2. God is greater than all, and nothing can snatch us out of His hand - **Jn. 10:28,29**. Cf. **1 Jn. 4:4**.
  - 3. In our relationship to God, whatever we *need* to do, we *can* do — through Christ - **Phil. 4:13**.
- C. If our problem is discouragement, the Scriptures assure us of God's love, mercy, and help.

### II. PRIDE

- A. Pride is the opposite of discouragement. It is the problem of having too much confidence — we are *more* sure of our relationship to God than the facts warrant. The proud person is under the delusion that he's doing better than he actually is. Cf. **Lk. 18:11,12**.
- B. Pride involves a failure to deal adequately with some parts of the truth about ourselves.
  - 1. The proud person "lives on the surface," never confronting the hard realities of ongoing sin. Contrast the courageous honesty of a David - **Psa. 19:12-14**. Cf. **Psa. 139:23,24**.
  - 2. We maintain the illusion of a wrinkle-free life by simply not looking at certain parts of the evidence - **Rev. 3:17**.
  - 3. We are warned to serve God with deep reverence, knowing that He is "a consuming fire" (**Hb. 12:28,29**).
  - 4. We are exhorted to work out our own salvation with "fear and trembling" (**Phil. 2:12**).
- C. If our problem is pride, the Scriptures warn us to sober up and realize our weakness and vulnerability to sin - **1 Cor. 10:12**; **2 Cor. 13:5**; **Eph. 5:15,16**.

### III. THE ANSWER TO BOTH PROBLEMS: CONTEMPLATION OF THE CROSS

- A. Without the gospel of Christ, our thinking will inevitably swing between discouragement and pride.
1. "To know of God without knowing of man's misery causes pride. To know of man's misery without knowing of God causes despair" (Blaise Pascal).
  2. "Show a man his failures without Jesus, and the result will be found in the roadside gutter. Give a man religion without reminding him of his filth, and the result will be arrogance in a three-piece suit" (Max Lucado).
  3. "There is nothing on earth that does not show either the wretchedness of man, or the mercy of God; either the weakness of man without God, or the strength of man with God" (Blaise Pascal).
- B. The cross both *humbles* us and *encourages* us.
1. "O God, our Father, as we read Your word, humble us at the sight of Your holiness, and then comfort us with the memory of Your mercy. Humiliate us with the realization of our sinfulness, and then uplift us at the sight of Your love. Help us in Your word to know our sin and to find our Savior" (William Barclay).
  2. How can we understand the cross and ever be *proud* or *self-righteous* again? Cf. **Rom. 5:6-8**; **Gal. 2:20,21**.
  3. How can we understand the cross and ever *doubt our safety in God's love*? Cf. **Rom. 8:31-39**.
- C. In Christ, arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy.
1. It is simply not possible to serve God faithfully if we don't have a chastening remembrance of our unworthiness and our neediness before Him.
    - a. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (**Mt. 5:3**).
    - b. If necessary, God will see that we are reminded of our own weakness - **2 Cor. 12:7-10**.
  2. But no less important is the fact that in Christ we are forgiven! Cf. **1 Cor. 15:9,10**.
- D. The cross enables us to see people (including ourselves) in a new way, in the light of God's truth - **2 Cor. 5:14-17**.

### Conclusion

- A. Almost every difficulty we face in life results from some mistake in the way we "see" reality.
- B. The gospel liberates us from the problems of sin by replacing darkness with light, falsehood with truth — in Christ, we are enabled to see things as they really are. Cf. **Jn. 8:31,32**.
- C. In Christ, we can set things right because we see things right! Cf. **Col. 1:28**.
- D. *No truth clarifies our vision any more powerfully than the story of the cross.* In the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, we learn *who God is, who we are, and what our relationship to God can be.*
- E. Whether your problem is discouragement or pride, you will find healing truth at the cross of Christ!