

On a personal note...

"The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant."

Psalm 25:14

Have you ever had the experience of feeling really close to God and seeing His peace and joy in your life and then all of a sudden having those wonderful feelings disappear? Why is that?

To help you understand, let me ask you this. Why is it that you feel hungry even though you ate a meal several hours earlier? You might think that's a silly question, but please don't because there are spiritual truths to be seen by the answer.

The human soul, just as the human body, needs continual nourishment. What makes you feel full and satisfied tonight is not going to leave you feeling the same way tomorrow. Your body needs constant refueling, and so does your soul. You may feel on top of the world after spending several hours in some spiritual activity like prayer or Bible study, but unless you remain involved in the Lord's work those good feelings that come from serving the Lord will diminish and then disappear. And even worse, you'll find that not only have you lost those good feelings but you have also lost the desire to do what is right.

Let me explain why that is so. Every believer has two natures - a spiritual one which he received at his spiritual birth and a carnal one which he received at his physical birth. These natures are in conflict. Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh..." which simply means that when a believer attempts to obey God, his fallen nature will fight against his doing so.

Let me give you an example. Every believer has been commanded by Jesus Christ to reach people with the Gospel (Mark 16:15), but when the believer goes to carry out this command he will find that something inside him just doesn't want to do it. If he ignores those feelings and obeys God, he will be rewarded by the Lord with good feelings. And if he makes it a regular habit to share the Gospel with others he will find that it becomes easier and easier to approach others until he reaches the point where he no longer experiences a battle. Instead, he wants to do what at one time was very hard to do. This is the difference between being an immature believer and a mature believer. There is a time period involved in reaching maturity, so the believer shouldn't be discouraged by the battles he sees raging within himself - they are a natural part of growing to maturity.

Now if some cannot relate to what I'm explaining then that is indicative that such a person has never served the Lord. There is no such thing as serving the Lord without battles.

Unfortunately many believers have a concept of serving the Lord that is far removed from how the Bible presents it. Their idea of serving the Lord simply involves living what they consider a good life, not realizing that a believer is not living a good life unless he is actively involved in reaching people with the Gospel.

There are millions headed to a Christless eternity because they have never heard the message that salvation is free and undeserved. Unknowingly they are trying to pay for something that has already been paid for. The Lord Jesus Christ paid our way to heaven by dying for our sins on a cross and offers everyone the gift of eternal life. He said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus did not say "whosoever believes in Him AND follows Him," or "whosoever believes in Him AND turns from sin;" He said the only condition to receive forgiveness for sins is to believe in Him. What fantastic News!

God never intended for us to keep this Good News to ourselves. God has called us to be a light in this world. Jesus said people don't light a candle and then hide that light under a bushel (Matthew 5:15). The believer who thinks he is living a life that is pleasing to God, but is not dedicated to spreading the message that faith alone in Christ saves a person from hell is hiding his light under a bushel basket. And because he isn't giving light to those whom Satan has blinded (Second Corinthians 4:4), not only is he unacquainted with the battle between the two natures, he also knows nothing of the suffering that comes from the persecution that comes to those who are being faithful. Second Timothy 3:12, says that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Are you experiencing persecution? If not, it is because you are not living godly and I pray that you would open your eyes to your true spiritual condition.

God has called us to a battleground, not a playground! The Apostle Paul exhorted the young man Timothy to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (Second Timothy 2:3).

When I was seventeen I went to a Bible camp and it was there that I trusted Christ as my Savior. It was also at that time that I decided to devote my life to God's service. I knew that whether I served the Lord or not I would still go to heaven but I wanted to have rewards when I got to heaven. I also wanted God's friendship and I could clearly see that the Bible says that to be a friend of God we must obey Him (John 15:14).

There were many people at the camp that had been there in previous years and I heard literally dozens of them give their testimonies explaining that when they had been at this camp in years past they had made the decision to serve the Lord, but one thing or another had caused them to fall away, so they wanted to declare publicly that they wanted to rededicate their lives. Some were even doing this for the third and fourth time.

I remember listening intently and determining that I was not going to join the ranks of those who had tried and failed. I determined that I was going to come back that next year and have made it!

I must tell you I had no idea what I was in for. My whole world fell apart, I

contemplated suicide, and I asked the Lord to take me home. It was the worst year of my life.

I had no idea how hard it would be. Lest I discourage anyone, let me plainly state the reason that serving the Lord was so hard for me was because I fought the Lord at first. I wasn't willing to accept His will for my life and even though I was faithfully sharing the Gospel and reading the Bible I was still being rebellious. And boy, did I suffer! But one night in April (I was a believer of eight months) I was reading something about the love of God and for the first time it dawned on my pitiful soul that everything that God had done in my life was because He loved me. That was the turning point in my life. I stopped fighting and then everything started drastically changing. My night of sorrow ended and my morning of joy had come (Psalm 30:5).

I hope and pray that you won't be foolish like I was and fight the One Who loves you so dearly.

I learned many lessons that year. One was that we are NEVER to think that we are above anything. I thought I was above falling away from the Lord, but when I found myself in the heat of the battle I understood why there are so many deserters in the Lord's army.

Maybe you've read the story of the children of Israel and wondered how they could have worshipped a golden calf after all the miracles they saw when God brought them out of Egypt. Besides the plagues that He brought upon the Egyptians, He opened up the Red Sea so the children of Israel could pass through on dry land.

After seeing with their own eyes all these great and glorious miracles they were anxious to serve God and stated, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8), yet instead of doing what they said they would do, they bowed down before a gold calf when Moses was on the mount talking to God. So instead of reading of triumph, you read of tragedy; instead of victory, you read of vice.

What could have one of the greatest periods in Israel's history instead became a national tragedy. After the incident of the golden calf the children of Israel committed one sin after another and became so bad that they started blaming God instead of themselves for their circumstances. And when it came time to go into the land of milk and honey that God had promised them, they wouldn't. They refused to go to battle and claim the great things God had for them because they refused to believe God. So instead of being blessed by God, they were cursed. They had to wander in a barren wilderness for forty years until all the soldiers had died who had refused to go to battle.

Do you think that if you had been in Israel's shoes you would never have done what they did? If so, then the words of the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 10:12, apply to you. He said, "Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Because all believers have old natures they are capable of committing the same sins that the children of Israel did.

Paul compared serving the Lord to a runner running a race. He explained that those believers who continue being faithful to God are going to receive the reward of an incorruptible crown (First Corinthians 9:24,25). Did Paul have the

assurance at this time that he would remain faithful for the rest of his life? Let's look at First Corinthians 9:27, for the answer. He wrote, "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." Paul had a fallen nature like the rest of us and he knew that if he were to let up in his service to God that his carnal nature would start dominating his life. Let us have the same realistic view of ourselves.

God has given us everything we need to live a victorious Christian life; we have His Spirit and we have His Word. His Word is food for our souls and we are dependant upon it for our spiritual growth. Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (First Peter 2:2). Remember, the time you spent reading the Bible yesterday is not meant to be today's spiritual food, you are continually to feed upon His Word day by day. Let us not be like the children of Israel in the prophet Hosea's time who would have spurts of goodness but never would continue being faithful. The Lord said to them, "...what shall I do unto you? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away" (Hosea 6:4).

You who have served the Lord know by experience how wonderful it is and how wonderful He is. May I encourage you to remain faithful so you will get a full reward (Second John 8).

For you that haven't yet tasted of the abundant life, I encourage you to feast daily!

"O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusts in Him."
(Psalm 34:8)