

Tuesday's Touch ...#40

...from Pastor Ed ...October 27, 2009

Sickness, Healing, and the Flesh - Part 3 *Mental Affliction*

My spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is distressed. Psalm 143:4

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God... Psalm 42:5

...we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. 1Corinth 1:8

The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a contrite spirit. Psalm 34:18

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5

We continue our consideration of dealing with the reality and struggle of being new creations in weak vessels of clay which have not yet been redeemed (2Corinth 4:7). We have seen that we are called to remember that God is a loving Father and is sovereign in the life of every believer. He both has his purpose in all our afflictions and is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Rom 8:28, Isa 63:9 Heb 4:15). He is the source of all healing whether by 'natural' means, medical science, or miraculously (Ps 103:3). In all instances and circumstances we are called to walk in the Spirit and to restrain the sinful tendencies of the flesh (Gal 5:16; Rom 13:14). When sinful fruit is manifested in our life we must own and confess it regardless of the particular "stressor" which precipitated it. If I curse someone out, it is just as much a sin whether it be the result of something they did, or my not getting enough sleep, or a bout with depression. Now this brings me to the next serious and very difficult issue – mental afflictions. Though I've touched on this in the previous articles, I want to face it "head on" this week. (If you have not read the previous two articles, please do so before continuing.)

It is imperative that we seek a balanced and biblical approach to this issue within the body of Christ. To over-simplify the mental struggles of some as just the need to repent and to think and do biblically can be horribly wrong – just as sinful as it is to sweep all *accountability* for sinful behavior under the rug of genetics and brain chemistry.

Part of the problem is the tendency among Christians to think of all things associated with the mind as "spiritual," and those things having to do with the external, tangible material body as "physical." Therefore, if we have cancer medical treatment is appropriate; but if the problem is emotional or mental then *only* a 'spiritual' solution should be considered.

It should be clear to us that our physiology *can* affect the way we think and feel mentally. Certain foods, lack of sleep, cold medicine (and other medications), seasonal changes in sunlight, etc., etc., can all have real physiologically-based mental effects in different people. Extreme blood sugar levels – high or low – in a diabetic can cause *godly people* to think and act irrationally. So *please* do not discount the fact that some of us have emotional and mental issues directly related to chemical imbalances and/or genetic factors. This does not change spiritual truth or the sinfulness of sin. But it *does* call for a compassionate and understanding approach to this issue.

There are four levels at which emotional/mental problems should be addressed.

1. As with all problems, the spiritual aspect must come first. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we must be willing to objectively consider our relationship with God and with others in light of truth. Solicit Godly counsel and confess known sin as led by the Spirit. Spiritual issues, in some instances, *can* lead directly to the most severe of mental disorders.

2. We must be willing to limit and control those things that we know affect our mental state. Avoid, or limit, certain foods; seek other cold medicine, get more sleep, buy a sun lamp, get more exercise, etc. The knowledge of what affects us brings with it the responsibility to act accordingly.
3. Times of emotional/mental difficulty may (*will*, to some extent) come even when we have examined ourselves spiritually and dealt with the external “stressors.” Blue days, doldrums, grouchiness, and even protracted seasons of depression, may come periodically for most of us. Draw near to Him and meditate upon His word. The Psalms are especially profitable in times of depression or distress. Arming ourselves with truth and prayer, we must resist the natural tendencies of the flesh that tempt us during these times. We must seek to restructure and re-channel our thought patterns according biblical principles. Choices must be made according to love and truth, *especially* when such choices are contrary to the desires and feelings (ragings) of the flesh. In an atmosphere of grace and the knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet 3:18) we must be willing to own and confess our failures, even when we “can’t help it.” And in the midst of our own affliction let us serve others
4. When overwhelming emotional/mental distress, gloominess, lethargy, anxiety, darkness, helplessness, and such, persists despite your love for God and your desire to please him, **seek medical help!** While the Christian should always use medication with discretion and prayer, avoid “spiritual guidance” that would condemn you for taking medications. We all know the abuse of medications in a society which refuses to willingly face *any* difficulty or suffering. That does not negate the legitimate use and benefit of the many medications we have been allowed to discover and develop to alleviate chronic suffering. Not to use such means could well be considered sinful, especially if it would enable us to serve God and others more faithfully.

I am well aware that this is an extremely brief and simplistic treatment of a *very* complex issue. My only desire is to set forth a balanced overall perspective from which we may have an open and compassionate consideration of the very real pain of many of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us be more akin to merciful healers than to prosecuting attorneys. To the sick and weary, may our churches be more like hospitals than courtrooms.

*LORD, merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.*

Be merciful to those who are afflicted in mind and/or body. Grant to us who are in spiritual leadership ever greater compassion and wisdom as we seek to shepherd your flock. Have mercy on us when we have (though with good intentions) inflicted greater injury upon the wounded. Bestow many gifts of healings.

*Longing to be compassionate healers,
Amen*

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