

From Grief to Gladness

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul encourages the Thessalonians **to not** “...grieve as the rest who have no hope.”

Though sorrow and grief in our vocabulary are often defined in different ways, sorrow being defined as “an internal passive reaction of feeling deep sadness and distress” and grief being defined as “the active process of one processing or going through the loss they feel,” Scripture will often use the same word interchangeably. Thus KJV will use the word “sorrow” in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and NAS will use the word “grieve.” Both aspects are understood in the text.

Grief is a natural part of life: Solomon will remind us in Eccl. 3:4 that in life there is an appointed “Time for mourning.”

Grief is not always bad: Paul will go so far as to say that there “is a sorrow according to the will of God which produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation.” He will contrast by saying “But the sorrow of the world produces death.” The question therefore is not as much how can I get rid of the grief but what is the grief producing?

It has been noted that man tends to go through 5 stages when grieving: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression & acceptance. This will not be debated at this time as it is merely a human observation and not a Divine principle or Biblical pattern set forth in Scripture. Remember, “we do not grieve as the rest.”

The stages of grief do not bring healing. The best you can hope for is some kind of “acceptance” of the loss as the final stage implies. Scripture will introduce a different way of seeing things and say that the benefits of sorrow can be greater than the times of pleasure & laughter. “It is better to go to a house of mourning... sorrow is better than laughter...” (Ecclesiastes 7:2,3)

Much has been said about the grieving process while little has been said about the way we look at the grief we’re going through. This has a profound affect on the outcome of the process!

Because grief is tied in some way to loss, we must not only clarify the loss but ask what is God producing through this loss?

Let’s first examine what you are grieving over?

Is it Loss of: a loved one, the familiar (way of life), health, relationship, dreams & aspirations, control, security & safety, fame, fortune and recognition, status & acceptance?

In other words, what have you lost that you value? Is your grief or value system rooted in the loss of worldly things or the loss of heavenly things?

James 4:9 says we should “weep and mourn” over our sin and infidelity against God in that we have not only “grieved the Holy Spirit of God” (Ephesians 4:30) but have severed ourselves from having a close relationship with Him.

In contrast, the rich young man when asked by Jesus to “sell all his possessions & give to the poor... went away grieved for he was one who owned much property.” (Matthew 19:21-22) Thus he could not bear to be separated from that which he loved most. Prioritize the wrong things, things that are temporal, things that are destined for “perish...” (Colossians 2:22) and you will find yourself with a sorrow that produces death.

Note: That which you value does not have to be inherently evil to be destructive, it just has to be inappropriately esteemed. For instance, when you value the: temporary above the eternal, personal gain above knowing God, pleasure & comfort above spiritual growth, familiar lifestyles above God’s plan & purposes

You will find yourself walking away like the rich young man with a grief both intolerable and regrettable. This will cause you to seek temporary relief in things like alcohol, drugs, debauchery, dissipation, excessive pursuits, obsessive disorders, etc.

Let go of the fleeting & the transient. That is to say, let go of your love for the world and the things in it. Embrace the love of God and His best for you & your sorrow will turn into joy! For God (not a program or a system) “... will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.” Jeremiah 31:13

There is a grief that saves. That takes us away from all that would bring hopelessness, depression, despair and death. Taking us away and sometimes, even tearing us away from things we have loved more than God to our own destruction.

Jeremiah 3:19-38 reminds us ...that the Lord is good to the person who seeks Him... for salvation is of the Lord... for if He causes grief, He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve to crush, to deprive, to defraud, but to save, restore & renew.

Hosea writes: Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days. He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him!

Healing begins when we grieve over the right things. This will produce salvation, zeal and joy (gladness). (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)