

The Danger of Discouragement

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Given the wickedness of the world and the mounting attempts to drive underground those who dare publicly profess faith in the Bible, it is difficult to avoid becoming discouraged. Further, when we observe the chaotic state of the church of the Lord we could easily become depressed. Of all of Satan's weapons, his favorite may be discouragement. It is certainly one of his most effective ones. He has used it relentlessly on the Lord's finest servants to try to neutralize their effectiveness.

I have heard some brethren imply, if not explicitly state, that it is sinful for a Christian ever to become discouraged. Perhaps they have not thought that through. Discouragement comes to all, small and great.

Elijah, the fiery Old Testament prophet was so despondent about the spiritual condition of Israel he asked God to take his life (1 Kin. 19:4). God did not upbraid him for his lack of faith, but encouraged him and sent him on his way (vv. 14-15). Paul, although a tower of spiritual strength, apparently became discouraged and depressed about his initial prospects in wicked Corinth. The Lord did not excoriate him, but reminded him He had "much people" in that city (Acts 18:9-10). After Paul wrote the first stringent letter to Corinth and had received no response, he became both anxious and discouraged. He was greatly encouraged by the report Titus brought him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-7). Following his extended and unjust imprisonment in Caesarea, Paul was finally sent to Rome for trial. The lengthy and perilous voyage must have left him both physically and emotionally exhausted. What a welcome sight it was when the brethren from Rome came out to meet him some forty miles from the city, upon which "he thanked God, and took courage" (Acts 28:15). Even the sinless Son of God must have been greatly discouraged on numerous occasions. He certainly was when he wept over Jerusalem (Mat. 23:23; Luke 19:41).

It is neither sinful nor abnormal for the Lord's servants to become discouraged; it is simply human. Those who will be most successful in any endeavor (including the Lord's work) are the ones who do not let it defeat or destroy them. When a brother or sister accepts an assignment and then neglects it, it is discouraging. When a preacher is maligned and criticized (and perhaps dismissed) because he has declared the Truth, it is disheartening. It is not always easy to keep on going when others around us have thrown up their hands and quit. When

worldlings hate us for our efforts to save them from the wrath of a just God, it is dispiriting. However, let us not become so disappointed in a brother or sister or in others that we let it destroy us. Let us not allow the pessimistic, cynical, or hostile spirit of others to cancel our initiative or sour our perspective. Those who eventually accomplish things in any area of life (including the Lord's kingdom) are the ones who persevere in spite of discouragement.

The devil does not worry much about a person who is self-satisfied and doing little or nothing to serve the Savior. He gets concerned only when we get serious about service to Him. The more we do and attempt to do, the more we can expect Satan to engage in his nefarious efforts of discouragement. It must bring a special delight to his malevolent heart when he can enlist some of the Lord's own people to become discouragers of their brethren. With Moses and Joshua of old, we say, "Be strong and of good courage" (Deu. 31:6; Jos. 1:9).

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