

THE LINK BETWEEN DEEP PAIN AND DEEP REPENTANCE

In the 17th century Sir Isaac Newton formulated three fundamental laws of motion. Most of us are familiar with the third of his laws of motion - for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What I'd like to do today is look at how this principle can sometimes work at a spiritual level in our own lives.

One way that we see this principle work sometimes at the spiritual level is where the deeper the pain that we or others go through in life the deeper level of repentance that is often produced.

Let's look at a couple of examples of men in the Bible who this was true for. First of all let's look at the apostle Peter. Starting from Luke 22:33 we read Peter saying to Christ:

"Lord I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.' [Then] Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me'"

Dropping down to verse 54 we read of how Christ's words came true:

"Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest Peter followed at a distance But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.

"A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, 'This man was with him'. But he denied it 'Woman, I don't know him,' he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.' 'Man, I am not', Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean'. Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about'. Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

"The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times'. And he went outside and wept bitterly."

To deny Christ three times was a deeply painful and humbling experience for Peter who often made impetuous statements and relied too much on his own strength and not God's

After the resurrection Christ re-created the physical surroundings of Peter's denial with a charcoal-fire breakfast and then asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Each time Peter replied, "Lord, you know that I love you." Now, the questions were not for Jesus' sake. They were Peter's. Just as Peter denied Him three times, Christ wanted three affirmations so Peter's resolve would be strengthened and he would be able to be the lead apostle and eventually die for Christ's sake.

What is interesting about this passage in John 21 is that when Christ asked, "Do you love me?", the Greek word used for love is agape which means the total unconditional love of God. When Peter tells Christ "you know I love you" the Greek word that Peter uses is philio, meaning brotherly love.

I've wondered why Peter answered with philio and not agape and the best answer I could come up with is that Peter felt truly humbled. He realized of his own strength that he could not promise the total unconditional love of God to Christ given that He had failed so miserably to do so when he denied Christ only days earlier. Instead he promised his best under the circumstances which was philio.

When he came to see himself as the weak human being that he was, the deep pain he felt from denying Christ was instrumental in ridding himself of the impetuosity that often got him into trouble. He eventually went on to become a great pillar in the early church of God and his epistles have many references to the benefits of trials in the Christian life in producing godly character.

The apostle Paul was another example of this principle of deep pain producing deep repentance. Before his conversion he was responsible for the persecution and death of many early Christians.

Can you imagine what it would have been like for Paul to preach before congregations knowing that sitting in the audience sometimes were members who had family or friends whose deaths he was responsible for? How do you think that awareness would have motivated him to go over and above in serving God and the early church of God?

One of Christ's parables focuses on this same principle. Most of us are familiar with the parable of the prodigal son. A certain man had two sons. One of them was a rebellious teenager who asked for his share of his inheritance, left home and wasted his inheritance with prodigal living. His sins finally caught up to him and he found himself desperately in want.

In Luke 15:17 it says that he finally came to himself. He realized what an utter fool he had been. Through the deep pain of his awful circumstances, after blowing all of his money, he humbly turned his life around. He felt he was utterly unworthy to be called his father's son and asked to be made as one of his father's servants.

The other son was angry at how the father threw a feast for the returning son who had been so rebellious in the past. In that is a caution to us not to look down on others, especially those we might consider Johnny-come-lately's or rebellious now. Their eventual conversion could turn out to be at a far deeper level than our own when they may possibly react to deeper pain and sins in their own life. As Christ said in Matthew 20:16: "The last will be first and the first last".

Often God will use trials to humble people when he calls them. It may be a major crisis like a divorce or a death in the family that puts someone in the frame of mind that will allow God to bring them into the church.

An awareness of how far short one has fallen open will fire up a lot more intense desire to make up for the past and more deeply appreciate what God is offering us. A good example of this is the example of the woman who anointed Christ's feet with oil and her own tears.

In Luke 7:45 we read Christ saying to his host, "You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on

my head but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Now deep pain can not only produce deep repentance, it can also develop a much deeper appreciation for God's calling and life in general than we might otherwise have. In a song that was sung at the Olympic closing ceremony one of the lines in the chorus was, "I believe that you can't appreciate real life until you've burned." Most of us have been through our fair share of personal and church trials since we left our former association. I don't know about you, but because of things I've gone through in my life I find myself much more moved to tears at emotional times and much more appreciative of friends and life in general than I would have otherwise.

In psychological terms the drive we have to make up for our weaknesses or wrongs we may have done in the past is called compensation. Many people with physical, mental and family handicaps have done remarkable things throughout history because they have developed their strengths in their desire to compensate for their weaknesses and achieve esteem and self-confidence.

In a documentary that I saw on Lord Nelson who defeated the French at Trafalgar, one of the commentators made a comment that great men make great mistakes. I found that comment encouraging from the point of view that even if you make great mistakes you can still go on to do great things for God. A good example of this is in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. It's encouraging that when God chose to remember them in this chapter He chose to remember them by their great deeds and not by their faults. Regardless of how spectacularly you may have failed today you always have a fresh start from tomorrow on to become a great success if you learn from your mistakes. In fact, those mistakes may help you to be an even better success.

This principle of deep pain producing deeper repentance can be seen in what has happened since the doctrinal crisis of our former association. The pain that most of us went through in seeing all the doctrinal truths we loved being cast aside spurred us on to more deeply understand and appreciate those truths which are unique to the church of God. United was formed out of the deep pain of that doctrinal crisis and we have good men at the helm of United who have helped develop very good procedures to prevent another doctrinal apostasy from ever happening in United.

Now I said at the beginning of the sermonette that this principle works sometimes not always. If people who are going through great pain take a victim mentality by blaming others and not accepting responsibility for their own actions it won't work in their lives. Take a rubber band, for example. The further that I pull it back the further it will go forward when I release it from what is holding it back. Now if I take a rubber band that is weak and pull it back sometimes it will snap under the pressure and go nowhere. That's what can happen if we take a victim mentality and blame others and not accept our own responsibility for our own problems.

Dr James Dobson made the following interesting comments on a video entitled, "Emotions: Can You Trust Them". He said:

"I like negative thinking too...it is negative thinking that makes me buckle my seat when I get into a car I might get myself killed if I don't...It is also negative thinking to look at

what the scriptures say about God's judgment and wrath and His promise to punish sin if you only concentrate on positive thinking you're going to eliminate a good part of what Jesus said...What I like about the scriptures is that there is a balance between the positive and negative If you only look at the negative you get depressed if you only look at the positive you get confused .

"[Like a battery] the power of the gospel comes from the positive and the negative. The negative is that sin is a disease that affects mankind. It warps, it destroys and ultimately it damns. That's negative. The positive is that Jesus Chnst came and He loves each and every one of us...and He's provided so great a salvation. That's the most positive news that has ever been given You can't understand the positive without understanding the negative...

"Penicillin is nothing but a sticky, gooey substance. It means nothing until you understand what bacteria can do to the body. When you understand bacterial infection, penicillin becomes a miracle cure. Likewise, you cannot understand why Jesus had to die and why He provided this remedy until you understand the disease of sin."

The apostle Paul writes the following in Hebrews 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The Passover season focuses our minds on Christ's sacrifice, on the incredibly deep pain that He voluntarily suffered to pay for all the awful sins we have committed in our lives. Paul urges us to let the awareness of the deep pain that Christ went through on our behalf motivate and inspire all of us on to the deepest level of repentance possible through the help and power of God's spirit.