

Shell Shocked Christians



When we tell the Lord's people that their hope is just to rest in Jesus, many can't accept its simplicity.

Many don't want to. They want to keep on trying to do something to deserve spiritual growth and victory. They want to even after years of failure obvious to those around them, if not to themselves.

But there are others who want so badly for it to be true. Some want it so badly they actively work at finding a way to rest and peace in Jesus. They gobble up all they can find that might help them.

While some make little progress in learning to walk with the Lord in rest and peace, others make good progress for a time only to find after a while they can't maintain it.

Why Such Difficulty?

There are doubtless many reasons for this difficulty, but one fact encompasses a great many of them:

Millions of God's people are victims of shell-shock!

There has been a great to-do over abusive homes and families. It's been all the rage to dig into your past and discover a history of abuse that is the root cause of all your failure to cope adequately with life.

And certainly for many of us the beginning of our shell-shocked state can be traced to our infancy even if we had "good" parents.

As Romans 8 and other passages make clear, just living in this sinful world is a painful process. And it didn't stop being a painful process when we grew up and got out on our own. Now the abusers are our adult peers, life's difficult circumstances, illnesses, financial reverses, sorrow, and death, perhaps even our children, and most certainly ourselves!!!

With each new difficulty that bombards us we hurt more and react, as trauma victims will, by withdrawal. Instead of turning to God, we turn to TV or some other sedative. The pain grows unbearable. We can hardly take any more.

Unrealistic Expectations

As Christians, we expect prayer to be a great source of comfort in such trials. But sometimes it is instead a great source of disappointment and pain. It contributes to our shell-shocked state.

Why?

Because we expect answers to prayer we don't get. And this disappoints us. It disillusion us. It frightens us. It pains us.

We expect to get what we want from God without adequate concern for what God wants. We expect the Christian life to be easy, when Jesus' testimony and Paul's testimony is that it is hard, very hard in-deed.

It's a shame, but it seems that a large portion of today's church doesn't know how to read the scriptures.

The whole testimony of scripture is that for most it's a very hard life. Even the Psalmist David who is so often quoted to sustain a contrary viewpoint was for much of his life a hated and hunted man.

When things got easier, David got in even worse trouble, becoming an adulterer and a murderer. God wouldn't even let him build Him a temple because he was a bloody man!

His son, who had things so easy, was the wisest of men. Still he flagrantly disobeyed God in multiplying wives and building an army of chariots on which he chose to depend, rather than on God. He sowed the seeds of the destruction of the nation his father had built. And you can't believe for a moment that none of this cost him personal pain.

Unreal Assessment of Our Rebelliousness and Sin

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it? -Jeremiah 17:9

Even if we could fathom the continuing evil of our redeemed hearts, we would rarely want to know it.

Many of us prefer to see ourselves as fairly decent human beings made better by our conversion to Christ.

Instead we need to be willing to see ourselves always as deserving only of hell, and to avoid eternal torment needing always the deepest well-springs of the grace and mercy of God.

As a result of our faulty assessment, we pridefully anticipate having a much easier time learning to walk with God in rest and peace than we really do. We're disappointed, and often discouraged

by our failure to live in Christian victory as we've been taught we can and should. And, though we might never admit it, we tend to blame God for letting us down.

Inability of the Shell-shocked

There we go again. The truth of Romans 8:28 is lost on the victims of shell-shock. No matter how much we profess to believe that God is seeking to work all things together for our good, we really don't.

We can't trust God to work all things together for our good while, at the same time, we're blaming Him for letting us down.

Nor can we withdraw into Jesus in rest, and peace, and quiet trust. The trust just isn't there.

So, what do we do? What we almost always do. Revert to some kind of works righteousness. We condemn ourselves and say we repent for not trusting God. We tell Him we know He can be trusted and we'll trust Him. We may promise to spend more time alone with Him, expecting that to be the cure.

The Only Cure

The only way to see this hopeless situation begin to turn around is to begin to live in present, practical God-consciousness. He is ever, only, always our only hope.

But, if we can't withdraw into Jesus in rest, and peace, and quiet trust, how can we live in present, practical God-consciousness?

Yes, spend more time alone with the Lord. But there do, or don't do, whatever will help get your attention to God off yourself, your difficulties, your needs, your pain, and your worries. The only antidote to your hopeless self is your all-powerful God.

Read passages of scripture that uplift the Lord, that encourage worship, and praise, and thanksgiving to Him regardless of the circumstances. Use your Nave's Topical Bible to help you discover such passages.

Read one of the few books in print that just uplift and magnify the magnificent person of God, that encourage worship, and praise, and thanksgiving. Immerse yourself in such reading. Soak it up. Sing songs of worship and praise. Let God begin to become precious to you. Just let Him be God to you, your God, possessively yours, and you His!

Wait quietly before Him if you can. Talk to Him if you can, not about you but about Him. Let Him speak love to your heart. Return to the quiet place as quickly and often as you possibly can.

Turn your heart to Him as much as you can, as often as you can. Whenever the Lord enables it, just let yourself go to Him without reservation. Agree with Him about your sin, but don't make much of it, lest it become a source of more worry and magnify the shock factor.

Come to Him as you're able, and keep coming. Don't come wanting anything from Him so much as just Himself. Let Him have more and more of your attention, more and more of the time. Let it

grow into an increasing preoccupation with God and His Christ. Let the holy hunger you begin to feel for Him begin to replace your self-concerns.

If you can't come to the Lord as you would like, or if your coming isn't met with all the response from God that you would like, just let Him work in His own time and way. Remember: it isn't your doing but His. Let Him be God, fully in charge.

No, this isn't just another form of withdrawal or escapism. It's the best road to living in reality, God-centered spiritual reality. Though it may not seem so at first, little by little you'll be enabled to face the pain of your circumstances. You'll find the pain being reduced by confidence in God's ability to care for your eternal benefit even through the very worst temporal circumstances that can be imagined.

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