

Dealing with Disappointment with Others

Introduction

Good morning. This is week 6 of our Summer Sermon series where we are addressing Great Questions that you have submitted. And I am addressing three of your questions dealing with Disappointment. Disappointment with God / Disappointment with other Christians / Disappointment with ourselves. We are looking at what causes disappointment – and what God’s word has to teach us about dealing with disappointment.

Review

Last week I said that disappointment happens when our experience of something doesn’t meet our expectations. And we looked at how that applies to God. It is my premise that we experience disappointment with God because we have wrong expectations about who He is and what He has promised. And so we need to have those false expectations smashed – and get back to basics – “Who is God anyway – and what can we expect from Him?” We concluded that God’s ways are vastly different from ours – and that one of ways He is different is the things He values. And one of the things He values most is the development of our faith. He values the development of our faith more than He values our health – more than He values our material well being and more than He values our desire for peaceful circumstances. And I left you with a little 2 word phrase – Anybody remember what it was?

Even though

We need to adopt this word as a masthead of faith and use that it over and over in our life in dealing with disappointment.

Even though my health deteriorates – I will trust Him

Even though my finances are in shambles – I will look to Him

We closed last week by asking you to write out an “Even though” statement of faith. I was so moved last Sunday as I read through and prayed over each of the cards you turned in. I was touched by the deep disappointments and your faith statements that so many of you shared that I brought them to Sean and the elders. On Tuesday we spent about an hour and a half in God’s presence bringing your disappointments and your powerful statements of faith before the Father. I want to say again – it is an incredible honor for me to be part of such a community of believers.

This week we are looking at “Dealing with Disappointment with Others” – and specifically the question that came in dealt with disappointment with other Christians. So that’s where we are going today.

Let's Pray.

We are all in this together

Let's start by saying that this happens to all of us. We are going to disappoint each other because we are fallen people in a fallen world. Whether we believe in "Total depravity" as a Calvinist believes or what Dallas Willard calls "Enough depravity" – we are going to disappoint one another. Both agree that as Christians we are capable of doing horrific things that will cause deep disappointment

Another reason that we disappoint one another is that we have false expectations of people. As John Ortberg says: Everybody's Normal until you get to know them.

And the more we get to know one another – the more we work and serve together – the more opportunity we have for disappointing one another. Martin Luther King wrote:

There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love.

Certainly we experience this in our marriages and in our families. In the deepest of relationships where the deepest love exists – we experience disappointment.

This past week I was trying to come up with a good example of where I had disappointed another Christian with whom I was in a deep relationship. So I asked my wife Barbara – amazingly she couldn't think of anything. Well that's one advantage of having a wife with the gift of mercy.

Actually the problem wasn't finding good examples, the problem was choosing one.

I have disappointed those who know me in many ways. As one man at the office said "You have the gift of telling people what they do wrong." And I am really good at that. And I sow the seeds of disappointment.

I have a good friend who last winter confronted me about my ability to be a good friend to him – and he was right. I disappointed him because of my poor relational skills.

John Ortberg has said:

You may wonder when the other people in your life will be mature enough not to have to work on relational skills anymore. It will never happen. People you know will never be that normal. Neither will you.

We don't have to think too long to come up with the name of a Christian who has disappointed us. Perhaps you have entrusted a valuable part of your life to somebody

and they didn't do their part. Or you invested in the life of another believer and they turned on you in some way. Now you find yourself afraid to put that much into any relational endeavor – you are afraid you'll be disappointed. Past disappointment will keep us from entering deep community.

Getting some help in this area is vitally important to our life together. If we allow disappointment with other believers to fester – it will destroy what little shreds of community and unity that we do experience. This is vitally important to Jesus. Jesus so values the unity of members of His body that He spent a significant chunk of His last hours on earth praying not just for His disciples – but for us.

If we are going to grow together as a community here in this church, we need to learn how to handle disappointment with others Christians. So let's look to the scriptures and find out what God's word can teach us about this.

Other Scriptures

Let's begin with two principles that Scriptures teaches us about dealing with disappointment with others. I am not going to develop these this morning – but they are foundational – so I need to mention them.

Certainly we must speak to the need to forgive those who have deeply disappointed us. We could spend a whole sermon on “forgiving others just as God in Christ has forgiven you.”¹ Forgiveness is the door to restored relationships. Until the poison of unforgiveness is drained from our bodies, it will cause serious harm everything to our relationships.

The second principle we find is that the scripture teaches us the importance of but also the delicacy of going to another person to speak to them about how they have disappointed us. We need to be careful when we do this because we hate to have our faults pointed out to us.

I am somebody who is very often in a hurry to brush my teeth. And very often I leave remnants of toothpaste around my mouth. Now deep down, I really appreciate that people care enough about me to point that out. I don't want to go around with tooth paste on my mouth. They are helping me. But I don't like it when they point this out. In my gut I get this yuck feeling. Now think about how much this gets amplified when we are talking about real problems.

Jesus said that we need to treat these situations like touching the eye – very carefully and gently.

¹ Ephesians 4:32

So those are important principles for dealing with past disappointments with others, but the scripture we will look at today offers us an insight that will not only help us to deal with past disappointment but prevent future disappointment.

Scripture

Open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians Chapter 5 verses 16 and 17. If you don't have a Bible, would you take out the passage from your bulletin? Since verse 16 begins with a "Therefore" we need to invoke that old adage and find out what its there for.

I am going to paraphrase the first 15 verses in order to set the context:

In verses 1-3 Paul is saying:

1-3 We know that there are temporal things and eternal things. Our bodies are temporal tents but what is coming is a better and stable eternal home.

Then in verses 4-8

4-8 Life in this temporal body is difficult – we groan – we are get disappointed. We long for the eternal. God made us with this tension between the temporal and the eternal on purpose. And to prove that the unseen eternal is coming, He gave us His Spirit as a seed of that unseen eternal home. That seed is not something we can put our hands on nor can we see it for we walk by faith not by sight.

In verses 9-10

9-10 Our deepest longing is to please God. Although our bodies are temporal – our actions are not. We will be judged by what we have done in this temporal body.

And then in verse 11-15 Paul says

11-15 So - because what we do in our body matters, we do everything possible under Jesus' loving hand to convince others about these truths. And we do this, not for our own benefit but for others.

Finally, the passage we are concentrating on this morning:

¹⁶Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

¹⁷Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

There's that phrase again: "Even though..."

From the context – what I think these two verses are saying is that

16 Because there is an earthly body and an eternal body in all of us, we don't look at people according to their temporal earthly body – the way they are naturally – the way the world looks at them. 17 Because there is a new seed planted in the life of everyone who is in Christ – everything has changed – they are no longer the same – there is a seed that is going to grow and expand until that old tent of theirs is replaced by that eternal home. It's our job to see everyone who claims the name of Christ as new creations – with that seed of the Holy Spirit in every single one of them.

Application

How do we apply the truths from this text? Our text today says that we are not to look at our fellow Christian as they were but as “new creations.” How do we do that?

One of the ways for us to see one another as “new creations” is to develop a spiritual discipline of looking at each fellow Christian – not as their “earthly tent” but as the seed of the new creation that is growing within them.

In one of C.S. Lewis' sermons he said this:

It is a serious thing ... to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.

Inside of each one of us is growing a creation so wonderful that it would take our breath away if we could see it. We don't see this unless we turn the focus away from the person in the natural towards what God is growing in them. Paul saying “Stop looking at people as the world sees them. Start seeing them as God sees them. Start looking for that new creation / that seed of the Holy Spirit that is growing within.”

God is calling for major transformation in the way we look at one another. This is not easy – we have looked at people “in the natural” our whole life. But I want to challenge you today to start with one person. Try this for a week. Try to see the new creation within.

I want to stop a minute and I want you to pick that person now – a Christian who has disappointed you. If you cannot think of someone who has disappointed you, just think of some Christian with whom you have a close relationship. And then close your eyes.

This person has the Spirit of the living God living within them. They have a new creation within them that is growing. If we could see it right now it would stun us. It's there every day – and yet we treat them as ordinary people.

Keep your eyes closed and try to picture them – not as they naturally are – but as the new creation God is forming in them right now.

I am going to describe some of the attributes and the destiny of that new creation:

Not ordinary – This person that you are thinking about - they may appear pretty ordinary but the scripture tells us that all of creation - the entire universe is waiting on tip-toe to see the unveiling of the new creation that is growing within them.² Paul is telling us we are to see it now. Can you see that in the person you are thinking about? Are you joining in with all creation?

Being groomed for service – When we look at this person in the natural – we may not think of them as being groomed for the highest office in the universe. Yet Jesus is grooming that new creation to rule with Him. He said that this person will sit with Him on His throne.³ Can you picture that grooming happening right now?

No spot or wrinkle – There is another thing about that new creation. Paul tells us that everything is new about it. But Jesus tells us that it is perfect – it has no spots – no wrinkles. I so often see the faults in other people. Can we see this person’s personality being completely transformed so as to be faultless?⁴

Transformed body – As you think about this person and try to imagine them as a new creation – you probably are picturing them in the old body – that’s going away too. This new creation will not be a disembodied ethereal spirit. It will have a body – A body so magnificent that all earthy beauty will pale compared to their beauty. Paul says that “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.”⁵ Can you see this person’s body being transformed into something glorious?

Be like Jesus What else can you see about the person as you imagine them as a totally new creation? When many of us think about Jesus, we think of one who is incredibly loving, caring, wise, compassionate and powerful. The apostle John said that “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him.”⁶ That person you are thinking about will one day be like Jesus. Can you look at that person in that way?

Like Him in His attitude and His compassion

Like Him in His closeness to the Father

Father – open our eyes to see the new creation with this person. And may we not leave this place without being changed by that truth. Amen

A Paradigm Shift

What Paul is calling for here in our passage today is a paradigm shift. Not just a new way of acting but a whole new way of seeing other Christians. And the way we see one another can completely alter the way we act.

² Romans 8:19

³ Revelation 3:21

⁴ Ephesians 5:25-27

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:49

⁶ 1 John 3:2

Stephen Covey tells a story in his book "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" of how he went through a paradigm shift in relating to someone.

He was sitting on a New York subway one quiet Sunday morning when a man and his children got on his subway car. The man sat down next to Covey and closed his eyes, while his children immediately began yelling back and forth, throwing things, and even grabbing people's papers. Although the children were being very disruptive, the father made no attempt to control his kids. It appeared that he was oblivious to the situation. Covey grew more irritated by the minute. Clearly everyone else on the subway felt irritated, too.

So Covey finally turned to the man and said, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more?" The father lifted his gaze as he became conscious to the situation, and he said, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Stephen experienced a new way of looking at this man. He saw him in new eyes. He was disappointed that the man wasn't controlling his children. Now he found himself in a totally different place. Paradigm shifts don't have to take a long time. But they do require us to change.

Will we learn to look at one another as God does? People who are not normal but who have the seed of the Holy Spirit in them? People who are going to constantly disappoint us? Do we take God's words seriously – to look at every Christian as the new creation within them?

Will we adopt Paul's "even though – yet now" attitude?

Even though so and so has disappointed me, yet now I will endeavor to see the new creation within them – to see them as God sees them.

As we take communion today we will be breaking the bread – and the bread is a symbol not just of Christ's body that died on the cross – but a symbol of your brothers and sisters who disappoint you.⁷ As you take the bread today – hold it – and say

Even though so and so disappointed me, help me to see them "in Christ" as a new creation – as I take this bread.

Let's pray.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10¹⁷ Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.