

Pastoral Letter January 2010

The Christian's Mourning

One of the particular riches that is ours through having the book of Psalms in the Bible is that it is such a deep and searching manual of Christian experience. All spiritual life is there. From the rapturous heights to the despairing depths, the various ups and downs of our life in Christ from day to day are carefully and faithfully detailed – and this in the real (not fake) experience of the psalmists themselves.

Here is just one example. In Psalm 38:6, David utters this very solemn testimony: 'I go mourning all the day long'. He is speaking, surely, in a spiritual sense. He is not meaning to tell us that he finds the whole of life itself miserable. Rather he is affirming something that several Bible characters were very aware of, and which many of our Christian forefathers knew a great deal about also, but which often is conspicuously lacking in our own day: a deeply felt heaviness and grief over (in particular) personal and corporate sin, the depravity of the heart, the state of the church, the godlessness of the world and the lack of glory given to God.

Such 'mourning' is in great need of recovery. This Christian generation is, by and large, a very long way from it. We need to 'get back' to it. Yet, even having said that, we need to be careful not to go into 'overbalance', lest we end up utterly overwhelmed or completely in despair. Let me express what I mean in the following way.

We need to mourn over our sins and the hardness and corruptions of our hearts: yet not so as to forget that the blood of Jesus goes on cleansing us from all sin.

We need to mourn over the coolness of our affections and our lack of spiritual fervency and desire for God: yet not so as to forget that the Holy Spirit is promised as the quickener and sustainer of our souls, he who strengthens us in our inner being.

We need to mourn over the hiding of God's face to such an extent at the present time: yet not so as to forget that he who has visited his people in the past may be pleaded with to do so again.

We need to mourn over the rejection of God's law in the world (and, often, in the church): yet not so as to forget that he who is jealous for his own name and glory will yet arise in righteousness and judgment.

Let these few examples suffice. Certainly the danger facing us currently is not that of an over-indulgence of 'mourning'. As said above, we need a recovery of it. But may that recovery always maintain a proper biblical balance, which owns up to all that needs mourning over, but looks to God alone for the remedy. Only he – with the comforts and the promises of his Word - can do us any good!