



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Resisting the Victim Mentality

By Kyle Pope

Why do we do certain things? What made us have the strengths or weaknesses we do? If I am not what I should be in some area of life, is it my choice and my responsibility? Or am I helpless to shape my own character, behavior, and disposition?

This world certainly has more than its share of horror stories about souls who have suffered the abuse, mistreatment, disrespect, and exploitation of life circumstances or treatment by others. Living through such pain leaves scars, wounds, and obstacles that may never go away. This can make the path to happiness, healthy attitudes, and righteous living far more elusive for these injured souls than for those who have not endured such nightmares. Far too many people can look back on such a dark history in their lives. These victims deserve our kindness, love, sympathy, gentleness, and patience. The Hebrew writer urges Christians to, **“strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed”** (Heb. 12:12-13, NKJV).

Unfortunately, there have been times when our world failed to acknowledge the importance of support for those who have suffered such horrid things. Victims were ignored, abuse was “swept under the rug,” and those who had faced such mistreatment were stigmatized and shamed if they openly acknowledged what they had endured. They were looked down upon if they sought help to overcome what they had been through. While this may still happen at times, the willingness to address these realities is making this neglect less common. Yet, with this increased spotlight

on conditions people have had to endure, I fear our world now suffers from another extreme attitude. More and more, it has become fashionable for more and more people to present ourselves to those around us and in our own minds as victims. Has life truly become that much harder? Is there more mistreatment now than in the past? That doesn't seem to be the case, but even so, in our world there is a growing push for *everyone* to see themselves as victims.

Why would people want to be viewed or view themselves as victims?

1. It garners sympathy. We like it when others look at us with care and compassion. If that doesn't happen under normal conditions, we may come to relish painting ourselves in a light that draws attention, a listening ear, and the sympathetic encouragement that now comes to victims.

2. It gathers allies. Victims must have those who have victimized them. If we can make others support us and hate those by whom we feel victimized, we don't have to suffer alone. Although we may not be able to return the mistreatment we have re-

ceived, if we can turn others against those who have hurt us we can subtly destroy them and make ourselves feel better in the process.

3. It excuses personal responsibility. While even the worst abuse and mistreatment does not excuse wrongdoing, that's not always how we view things. If my life circumstances are bad enough, or someone else's behavior towards me has been bad enough, my misdeeds don't look as bad. If I can see myself as a victim, I can rationalize away things I do that are wrong.

The problem is that when we allow ourselves to adopt this victim mindset it can lead to some unintended consequences.

1. It puts the focus all on us. Was the situation that made us feel abused one-sided? Are we the only one who felt pain? Was there nothing else going on in the world of any importance as we faced this experience? A victim mentality makes us forget everything else around us except how we feel; how things affect us. That can be a selfish, narrow, and shortsighted perspective.

2. It creates warring sides. As allies are gathered to support us, our adversaries are likely doing the same thing. Their allies view us as the enemy and grow to hate those who support us. This makes enemies of those who had nothing to do with the things that originally caused us pain. But it results in spreading our pain to increasing circles of supporters on opposite sides in this escalating conflict.

3. It can lead us to excuse our own behavior. What if I did wrong? What if I had the wrong attitudes or beliefs in a given situation? The victim mindset shuns self-examination. It's not my fault! Even if I do wrong, it is justified because of what I have been through. Is that sound reasoning? Paul taught that, "**each of us shall give account of himself to God**" (Rom. 14:12).

4. It minimizes the seriousness of worse things that others have suffered. All of us have seen toddlers with a bruised knee act as if their world is coming to an end. We may also have seen the irony of a grandparent, suffering under the pains of arthritis or undergoing chemotherapy for life-threatening cancer kneel to the ground in compassion to comfort the child in tears over such a small hardship. We all recognize in this the "upside-down" picture of things in such a scene. When I treat pains that I have suffered with the same terminology, gravity, and importance that the most horrid victims of

life's circumstances and mistreatment deserve I do them a disservice. I trivialize their pain in order to elevate mine. That is not right, nor is it helpful to anyone involved.

Does the Bible teach us to foster such a victim mindset? If anyone could have allowed such a spirit of victimhood to shape his mindset, it would have been Paul. In answer to those who questioned his status as an apostle, he recounted his suffering. Among other things, he wrote:

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren (2 Cor. 11:24-26).

That's quite a list! Who of us could write a comparable history? Not many! Yet, amazingly, Paul never allowed himself to see himself as a victim.

First, because he recognized how his sufferings compared to what Christ endured for us. He told the Colossians, **"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church"** (Col. 1:14). What if instead of a victim mentality we chose to see anything we suffer as sharing just a small degree of what Christ went through for us?

Second, he recognized the depth of his sin and the glory of the mercy and hope he had received. He said to the Corinthians that he was **"not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God"** (1 Cor. 15:9). He considered himself the **"chief"** of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), but recognized that he had **"obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life"** (1 Tim. 1:16). We may not have persecuted the church—and I'm not saying we should think that because of our sin we deserve any mistreatment we have endured. But, what if we chose to see any hardship we face (in the present or the past) as **"not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"** (Rom.

8:18b)? That's how Paul said we should view **"the sufferings of the present time"** (Rom. 8:18a).

Yes, Paul had enemies, but amazingly he was able to look beyond the bad attitudes others had towards him and consider the cause of Christ above his own discomfort. He told the Philippians:

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice (Phil. 1:15-18).

Does that mean we should ignore wrongdoing? No. Jesus taught, **"If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."** (Luke 17:3b). But He began these words by saying, **"Take heed to yourselves."** (Luke 17:3a).

Does this mean we should never reach out to others for encouragement as we go through trials? No. Paul taught the Corinthians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. (2 Cor. 1:3-5)

We should support one another. We should encourage one another. But that doesn't mean we have to announce with a trumpet how bad we have it, how everyone has mistreated us, and how deserving we are of sympathy. God has called us to a better mindset.

Ultimately, we are responsible for ourselves. Even the most reprehensible oppression one must endure does not have to determine who we are, what we do, and how we see our lives. Paul

taught, **“let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load”** (Gal. 6:4-5). Perhaps what you have had to face presents some obstacles to you that are much more challenging than what I have ever faced. I am so sorry! But you have a choice how you will let that shape your life going forward. Will you view yourself as a helpless victim or will you take the reins of who you are, how you will act, and what your life will be from here on out?

The Christian is not a victim, but a conqueror! We once were **“slaves of sin,”** (Rom. 6:6), but in obedience to the gospel of Christ we have been **“delivered”** (Rom. 6:17) and **“set free from sin”** (Rom. 6:22). Now, God **“leads us in triumph in Christ”** (2 Cor. 2:14). That would lead Paul—the very man we saw who suffered so many things, to write:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

We don't have to be victims. In Christ, we can be conquerors, an even **“more than conquerors.”** Thanks be to God!



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