

What Defines You?

John M. Buttrey II

USA TODAY recently had the story of a bride-to-be who went ahead with her wedding pictures, even though her husband-to-be was killed in the line of duty while serving as a police officer.¹ The bride said she wanted to take the pictures to honor their love and leave the pain behind. She said of the photographer's pictures,

"She captured images that still vividly show the pain left behind; images that show I am still able to laugh, smile and be me; images that show this loss has not and will not destroy me; and my favorite, images that show I am still just as fierce as ever and refuse to let this define me."

One has to admire this young woman's determination to move ahead with her life in spite of a great personal tragedy. I especially love her refusal "to let this define me." What a wonderfully courageous attitude!

Her words raise an interesting question for all to consider: What defines you? Everyone at some point in their life experiences some kind of personal tragedy. It might be a painful loss, a traumatic experience, a moment of great failure, or even times of great success and victory.

Often, we allow these moments, good or bad, to define us. On the negative side, a personal tragedy or other painful experience dictate a negative viewpoint of life and people. On the positive side, perhaps great success causes one to look down at others who are not as successful. So, all things considered, what defines you?

As Christians, it is not the events of life, good or bad, that should define us, but rather our faith in Christ. Certainly we learn from past failures and successes. However, ultimately it is the victory we have in Christ that should we define what we are all about. The apostle Paul described the type of attitude we should possess in a number of different places. To Timothy, Paul wrote:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

1 Timothy 1:12-13

To the Philippians Paul wrote:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Philippians 3:7

These two verses considered, we see that Paul did not let his past sins, nor his past accomplishments define him. What did define him? Listen to these familiar words he wrote to the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 2:20

Paul's life was defined by his faith in Christ. Hence, he could write to the Philippians:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

What defines you?

Footnote

1. USA TODAY, November 23, 2017 (Online Article)