

Disillusionment

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The word “disillusion” means to free from illusion. In other words, one has an illusion (call it a belief or expectation) about something or someone. Disillusionment occurs when one is set free from that illusion (belief or expectation). Put another way, their thinking is changed. This is not always a bad thing, especially when one's beliefs or expectations are false. If approached with the right frame of mind, disillusionment in such cases can actually be very enlightening to us. The words of one doctor are helpful to understanding the benefit of being disillusioned to false beliefs and expectations.

"To most people, the word disillusionment is synonymous with pessimism or cynicism. This perception is flawed. As a disillusioned optimist, I feel that being disillusioned is the healthiest of all mindsets. To have an illusion or false representation uncovered is empowering.

When children first see a circus, they are enchanted by the wonder of it all - the costumes, the acts, the hype, the lights, and the thrills. But when adults go to the circus, they are no longer taken in by the illusions of the event. An adult sees the soiled costumes, the torn stockings, and the emptiness on the faces of the performers. They see the cramped quarters of the animals. They see through the illusion that the circus presents; they are dis-illusioned. They see things as they really are, and seeing things as they really are is healthy." (William E. Morgan, DC, A Healthy Disillusionment).

What we are talking about here are false expectations versus reality. When one's expectations are inaccurate (a false illusion), the difference between those expectations and reality will be a cause for disillusionment. The greater the gap between expectations and reality, the greater the possibility for discouragement, frustration, disappointment, depression, and of course, disillusionment.

What does disillusionment have to do with living the Christian life? Believe it or not, it has a great deal to do with our lives as Christians. I have found disillusionment can often come to us in a variety of different areas.

Disillusionment with God

False expectations and beliefs about God have been the cause of great disappointment and discouragement in some Christians. They become disillusioned when God does not answer every prayer exactly how and when they want. The false illusion that God will never allow any trouble to come into their life, will lead to discouragement when reality proves different. These are just some of the false expectations an individual can have about God. Disillusionment (being set free from illusion) in these areas will lead to greater confidence in God.

Suffering and the existence of evil are hard for some to understand. The false thinking is, if God exists, and God is good and all powerful, He would end all suffering. However, suffering exists, so the illusion is, either God is not all powerful, or He is not good. This type thinking reveals an incorrect understanding about God and the reality of suffering and evil.

This world is full of troubles and sorrows. Life is not always cake, ice cream and gifts. To expect sunshine every day is unrealistic. I hate to sound like the infamous Murphy, but, things will sometimes go wrong. There will be sickness. There will be death. There will be unemployment. There will be disappointments. With all this being the reality of life, remarkably, life can still be enjoyed in Jesus Christ, if your perspective is right (Phil. 4:4).

Disillusionment with Jesus

In the first century, many of the Jews had false expectations about the long-awaited Messiah. Take, for example, this scene from the Gospel of John:

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12:32-34).

When Jesus, as the Messiah or Son of Man, spoke of dying on the cross, the expectations of the people were challenged. However, they needed to be disillusioned. Ironically, it would only be through the disillusionment of their false expectations that they could come to accept Jesus.

Disillusioned About the Church

Brethren can become disillusioned about the church. Their false expectations lead to disappointment and/or discouragement. Perhaps they expect all the brethren to be outgoing and exceptionally friendly. Certainly we should all be friendly. However, one may have an expectation of friendliness that is not possible for an entire group to meet.

At times, one might become disillusioned with the elders or preacher. Something may be said or done that does not meet with their level of expectation. Remember, we are talking about false expectations. The reality is the elders will make decisions that are not popular, and preachers will say things that will offend, either intentionally (as a means of correction), or unintentionally (as a result of poor judgment).

How can we be free of the discouragement that comes from our false expectations? Just like the Jews of the first century, who had false expectations of the Messiah, we must become disillusioned in order to see the truth of reality. We need to get real about God, Jesus, and the church. We can do this through greater study and application of the truths found in the word of God (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Jesus said it well, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).