

The Upside to the Pain of Rejection

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Scripture Philippians 3:18-21 (NIV).

¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Introduction

I remember a time when my dad had a blue identity book. This was replaced by a green one, first with the old South African emblem and later with the new one. And then we received a state of the art identity card. All of these identification means do the same thing; they identified him with at least an ID number, photograph and date, and place of birth. But it was not him. Only he could be him. And only I can be me.

My passport cannot be me either. It is a little more useful than an ID book because it also says where I belong, in other words, my citizenship.

Paul on the other hand reminds us of our heavenly citizenship, even though we are still bound to this life on planet earth. So where exactly do you and I fit in?

If ever there was a question with many answers, that many are hesitant to answer, it must be, “Do you fit in?”

- The socially popular person will answer, “I hope so.”
- The rejected person will answer, “No.”

- The practical person will answer, “What is it that we are all trying to fit into?”
- The realist will answer, “Fit into what?”
- What will you, as the child of God answer?

Body

Did you know that you have co-existent needs for uniqueness and fitting in (conformity)?

The truth of the matter is that “fitting in” is a problem that is not only hard to solve but also hard to define. Let me explain, humans are unique, for example, there will never be another you, not in the past, present, or future. Yet despite all your uniqueness, you want to fit in with others.

You practice your Christianity in a particular way, follow mutually acceptable social rules and morality. So do the majority of your friends, perhaps not to an exact match, but close enough otherwise you would have distanced yourself from them. You are therefore part of a group: you fit in. No normal person wants to feel or be left out.

But at the same time, you have a name, characteristics, such as looks, personality, the sport you play, the sound of your voice, etc. that identify you as a unique person, meaning that you stand out from the rest.

Fitting in is fundamental to being human. Either you experience fitting in, or you experience rejection. There is no third choice. Rejection, as we know, is harmful to anyone’s spiritual, psychological, and physical health, so fitting in is the direction to which we naturally gravitate. Here is another “thing” – your exclusion will also harm society or that very thing that you fit into, as well. Fitting in is important.

Fitting in simply means that you conform and your need to fit in is strongly motivated. Bear with me...

- There is the need to be part of a faith community in which acceptance is found and spiritual formation encouraged.
- There is the need to be correct.

- There is the need to be socially acceptable.
- There is the need to accomplish group goals.
- There is the need to establish and maintain identity.
- There is the need to align with people similar to you.

No would be a good time for us to join the practical person and ask what exactly is it we are all trying to fit in to? We want to avoid the pain of rejection and at the same time acknowledge that it is impossible to go through life without experiencing the pain of rejection at some point. At some point, you did not or will not fit in and it is going to hurt you.

So either you fit in or feel the pain. You can't fit in everywhere all the time, so you will feel the pain. Another thing: At some point, you will be the one doing the rejecting.

Let us recall the first part of verse 20 from this morning's Scripture, "But our citizenship is in heaven." You fit in with Jesus Christ and the saints. Jesus Christ and the saints do not fit in with, as verse 18 puts it, "enemies of the cross of Christ." That means that you must reject the things of the path of destruction. You reject when choose differently and you are rejected when the enemies of the cross notice it.

I must emphasize the *things of the path of destruction and not the people on that pathway*. Of course, you can *effectively* reject the people doing the things of the path of destruction by not sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with them. Do you care about them? Do you love them? God does, and so should you.

Back to the pain of rejection. Rejecting the things of the path of destruction brings about both the pain of separation and relief by doing things differently – things that glorify God, things that are to your spiritual, emotional, and physical benefit.

But... it is also true that someone can experience both the pain of rejection and the pain of not fitting in when they are lukewarm.

Before I close off, lets touch base with a couple of passages that speak to the path of destruction:

- James 4:4, “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”
- James 4:17, “If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.”
- Matthew 7:16, “By their fruit, you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”

Conclusion

As a citizen of heaven, be an ambassador that is completely sold out for Christ. Let your life become an evangelical testimony to the upside of the pain of rejection.

This is not to say that you won't experience large scale rejection from those on the path of destruction. On the contrary, acts of rejection will probably increase as the gap of your separation increases. Jesus created a new standard for relationships when he told the crowds at the Sermon on the Mount to love their neighbours. Jesus also said to love our enemies and pray to pray for them. So it's up to you to rise to the new standard that Jesus set.

There is also a strong chance that you might be hurt by a fellow citizen of heaven. There is even the likelihood that you might be the one causing another pain. Here we look toward context from verse 21, “by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Nobody other than Jesus has “arrived.” If we are to rise to the standard that Jesus set concerning our enemies, how much more forgiving, loving, and understanding can we be with our brothers and sisters in Christ? But this is a topic for another day and another message.

For now, continue demonstrating the upside to the pain of rejection, living every moment of your life to the glory of God, in the strength of God.

Amen.