

But I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

Neil Girard

Some years ago a song by this title was extremely popular - demonstrating that this is a predominate sentiment in our world today. Recently I ran into to someone who actually voiced this sentiment as his attitude toward things "religious." Though I did not have time to carry on an extended conversation, this phrase has been running through my mind as I have considered the various reasons for possessing this feeling.

It's rather easy to expose - and dispose of - the negative feelings associated with this statement in our physical world: we generally label this as being discontent and restless. The cure for these is rather straightforward: We simply start doing something that we believe needs to be done and those feelings go away.

But when it comes to things "religious," sometimes this discontent is harder to "put your finger on." I would like to present three - though there are doubtless many more - insights from Scripture which can be a source of this dissatisfaction with life as we are now experiencing it. And as is the case with any aspect of human existence, one person will experience more of one thing while another experiences more of another.

First, Solomon wrote:

[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. (Eccl. 3:11)

For those who have that innate drive to understand everything, this "piece" of eternity in their heart, with the corresponding truth that we simply cannot know everything that God is doing in our lives, can be a source of frustration. It will be a deep, often ill-defined longing for things above and beyond this mortal and temporal life.

I don't believe that God wants this to remain ill-defined though. It is the will of God that we be united with Him in thought and purpose. (Jn. 17:21) God wants this "piece" of eternity in our heart to cause us to seek Him more passionately, more determinedly, more consistently. For, as we pursue the things of eternal value, the strength of eternity's pull on us will increase.

Second, Jesus said:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)

This is indeed the next step for those who, feeling the tug of eternity in their hearts, begin to seek for that which is right and true and good. The evil of this world no longer appeals. There is no joy in stealing for we know there must be a victim to our crime. We don't want evil done to us so we begin to realize we don't want to be an evil person. We have been lied to so much that we begin to refuse to lie to others. We begin to want to have more integrity.

This can indeed be a source of bitter frustration. For just as soon as we begin to desire the righteous life, we find that, in ourselves, we do not possess the ability to be righteous. (see Rom. 7) Oh, we can be religious, self-righteous and hypocritical - and do these very well, too. But we cannot exhibit the righteousness that enables us to love our enemy, to bless those who curse us, to give our

shirt to the one who just stole our coat, to meekly turn the other cheek to the one who just slapped us - and to do all these things with an attitude of self-sacrificing love toward our oppressor. No, we do not possess that quality of righteousness in and of ourselves.

This makes Jesus' statement all the more beautiful. For He demonstrated that such a life was indeed possible. But it is only as we are filled with His Spirit - and emptied of our own self-generated power - that we can hope to experience His righteousness. But again, God stirs up this hunger in us to drive us to want more of Him.

Third, Moses said:

“For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.

“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” (Dt. 30:11-19)

This passage may indeed point to the greatest source of frustration that we experience: the longing for life while remaining surrounded by death. The Spirit of Life (see Gen. 2:7) has come to dwell within our hearts, and He longs to be streams of Living Water flowing out from our lives. (Jn. 7:38) But as we live in this dry and dusty world, we often see only the death that surrounds us. Our sinful choices and attitudes bring this death deep within our own hearts - and we become frustrated because what we are living is not life but death.

Thus, Moses' command to love God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments is a timely message for us today. It is only as we choose life that we can progressively leave the dissatisfying death we have known behind. For in every choice man has ever faced - from the two trees in the Garden of Eden to what we should have for breakfast this morning - there is the choice of life and death. Had Adam chosen the tree of life, his life would have been submitted to God's authority - sin and death would have never come to this world - and we would live forever with God. But because Adam chose knowledge instead of life, now we too, in similarly simple choices, have the option to submit to God, resist sin and experience life - even in the very “little” things of life.

I believe this deep-seated longing for life is the source of our frustration with the religiosity of our age. While our spirit within longs for the abundant life that Christ brings (Jn. 10:10), what the “church” offers us is a “religious experience” that reeks of a death far deeper and far worse than the death we've known all along in the world. Thus we are reluctant to pursue God because our way is

blocked by the stench of death. And often, our powers of discernment are still so immature and stunted because of our “church” experiences, that we can neither recognize nor articulate just what that stench is. All we know is that something stinks.

This was one of Jesus’ rebukes for the Pharisees as well: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” (Mt. 23:13)

The modern “church” has not entered into the life of God - and yet they fill up the pews and the fellowship halls with their death. Thus they too stand between lost sinners and the door to heaven. They neither go in themselves and their offensive aroma of death drives away all those who seek life. This is indeed a source of bitter frustration and dissatisfaction but we still must allow this longing for life to drive us toward God. Though none go with us, still we must follow after the Lord Jesus Christ - even as He takes us up the path that leads to persecution, suffering and death - as will surely be the case when we try to get to heaven’s door by going around the dead “church.”

Fourth, we must realize that God will never give us a once-for-all satisfaction to these three longings in this lifetime. If you were never hungry, you’d never know to eat. But because you are hungry, now the call from God to “taste and see that the LORD is good” is an enticing offer. But simultaneously we must be aware that, as Solomon wrote, “A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, But to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet,” (Prov. 27:7), if we turn to any other source - even “church” - to fill our hunger for God, we may find it sweet for the moment - but in the end it will prove to be a bitter thing.

To all these deep longings that seem to go unfulfilled there is only one answer: the Lord Jesus Christ. Philosophy and intellectual study will not draw us into the realm of the eternal - only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will do that. Moral self-will and multiple resolutions will not make us more righteous - only a vital, interactive relationship with Christ will bring out righteous characteristics in us. Religiosity and “church” attendance will never produce the abundant life - only walking in spiritual obedience to Christ will do that

May God grant that we truly experience all that He has for us in our lifetime so that, both in this lifetime and in the eternal hereafter, we may indeed find all that we’re looking for.

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