



"It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."
—C.S. Lewis

14-Dec-12

Consequences of a Wrong Focus (Part Two)

In Part One, we saw that it is necessary to concentrate on what we are doing. If we let our minds wander or allow something to distract us, bad things are likely to happen. If this happens often enough in our spiritual life, we will find ourselves falling in a downward spiral that could end in separation from [God](#) and even spiritual death. To explain the spiritual decline that occurs when we focus on the wrong things, we used four c-words to help us remember them:

1. *Concentration* on the problem;
2. *Contempt* for the problem;
3. *Contrivance* to solve the problem; and
4. *Conformed* to [the world](#), rather than being transformed into the image of Christ.

Part One covered the first point, using the Israelites in the wilderness as an example of a group of people who were so focused on the problem that they failed to realize how great a blessing they had been given. [Numbers 11:1-6](#) shows them griping about manna, the bread God miraculously provided for them every weekday—double on Friday—for forty years!

This leads to the second element of the downward spiral, *contempt* for the problem. [Numbers 14:1-3](#) provides another example from the Israelites:

So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against [Moses](#) and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims?"

Immediately, with their eyes on the problem, the people become angry with God. They display their contempt for what He is doing by grumbling against Him, His purposes for them, and the leadership that He had given them, Moses and Aaron. When we concentrate on the problem and fail to refocus on God and His Kingdom, we soon develop contempt for those associated with our trials.

Contempt regularly manifests itself in bad feelings and wrong attitudes against the source of the problem and against God and the purposes He seeks to accomplish through the trial. Our contempt may come in the form of envy, jealousy, anger, bitterness, resentment, or depression. However it manifests itself, we begin to view the problem negatively rather than as an opportunity to [see God](#) at work in our lives. We may feel contempt for God's methods. We doubt His [wisdom](#), purpose, and [goodness](#). We may say, "How could God do this to me? He must not really [love](#) me." Or as the Israelites allege, "He simply brought us out here to kill us."

This attitude leads to the third part of the downward spiral, some form of self-preservation via our own solutions. We will come up with some *contrivance* to solve the problem our way. Notice the Israelites' solution in [Numbers 14:3-4](#): "'Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.'" Their contempt for their situation causes them to take another step away from God, which is seeking a carnal solution in rebellion against His purposes. They will find their own way out of their mess.

Human beings constantly seek ways both to defend themselves and to escape their problems using their own human devices and cover-ups. They may run away to avoid the problem or seek to change their circumstances in some way. Within the church, people typically leave one church and join another. We are so clever at making excuses and rationalizing our situation in ways that seem so convincing and logical to us. The Israelites rationalized by saying, "Our wives and our little ones will suffer. Would they not fare better back in Egypt?"

A change of scenery is not the only "solution" we might take. We may also retaliate to get even or to protect our overly sensitive egos. Oftentimes, we will take to the road of criticism and run someone down, making ourselves look better by comparison at the other's expense.

The fourth level of the downward spiral occurs when we become *conformed* to the world and thus *controlled* by it to some extent. With our eyes off the Lord, disdaining Him and what He is trying to do, and living by our own contrived solutions, we fall into a position of being controlled by our flesh, the situation, or both. In other words, we are walking by sight rather than by [faith \(II Corinthians 5:7\)](#) and are in danger of quenching and grieving the Spirit of God ([I Thessalonians 5:19](#); [Ephesians 4:30](#)). As [Proverbs 5:22](#) warns, we become caught in the cords of our own [sin](#).

[Numbers 14:10](#) illustrates how out of control we can become when we are not walking in faith. Seeing that the people are not reacting properly to the spies' report about the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb do their best to encourage them and urge them to follow God. Their response: "And all the congregation said to stone them with stones." In just a short while, they make the leap from complaining to murder!

When we resist God's leadership and seek to take matters into our own hands, we begin to act just like the world. Rather than using the problem as a tool to "grow in the grace and knowledge of . . . [Jesus Christ](#)" ([II Peter 3:18](#)), we conform to the world's approach to life. When we are faced with a problem, a trial, a burden, or something just plain difficult, it tests our faith and distracts us from a God-ward focus. We are then faced with a choice: Where will we place our focus and trust? With God or with this world?

We have seen that a wrong focus begins when we concentrate too much on the problem, which leads to complaining and then to contempt. Soon we are pursuing our self-created solutions to ease our suffering, and before long we are conforming to this world. By doing this, we have allowed ourselves once again to be controlled by "the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" ([Ephesians 2:2](#)).

We should never forget that God is always aware of what is happening in our lives; He never leaves us alone in our trials. Our lives are governed, not by time and chance, but by His benevolent purpose. He tells us in [Jeremiah 29:11-13](#) (New English Translation):

"For I know what I have planned for you," says the Lord. "I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope. When you call out to me and come to me in prayer, I will hear your prayers. When you seek me in prayer and worship, you will find me available to you. If you seek me with all your heart and soul. . . ."

- Clyde Finklea

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Facing Times of Stress: Controlled by Doubts](#)

by Martin G. Collins

We dare not equate "can-do" enthusiasm with genuine faith, as Peter did as he attempted to walk on the water. Human faith or zeal is not godly saving faith. Too often, maturity of temperament does not keep pace with conversion. Like Peter, our tragic flaw can be closely linked to our greatest strength, which in Peter's case was his energy, enthusiasm, and zeal. Often faith destroying doubt is self-generating and self-perpetuating. Doubts will attack us, but we cannot allow them to overtake us. The antidote to doubt is a thorough knowledge of and confidence in God's sovereignty. In exercising genuine faith, it is always good to dismiss pesky afterthoughts and second

guessing, focusing intently upon the lead of Jesus Christ. The spiritual gift of faith is perishable if it is not used when given to us. We cannot unilaterally "work up" faith. Peter learned this principle as he exchanged his fleeting human zeal for enduring godly faith, a gift from God. Like Peter, as we make the transition between human to godly faith, we can always call on God, who will never allow us to perish. We need to allow God to test the quality of our faith, resisting our human proclivity to doubt.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all the fruit of the Spirit, God may have left the most difficult for last! Has anyone, other than Jesus Christ, really exhibited self-control? In the end, however, this is the ultimate aim of growing in the character of Almighty God!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
