

Why Be Pessimistic

Some years before World War II, Winston Churchill wrote:

Certain it is that while men are gathering power and knowledge with ever-increasing speed, their virtues and their wisdom have not shown any noticeable improvement as the centuries have rolled.

Under sufficient stress starvation, terror, warlike passion or even cold intellectual frenzy, the modern man we know so well will do the most terrible deeds, and his modern woman will back him up.

This is a rather depressing statement. But it is realistic. It recognizes the facts and does not create any false hopes. The concept of the inevitability of human progress is rejected. The truth is that we live in a corrupt and evil world.

No wonder that so many are pessimistic! There is a strong undercurrent of pessimism expressed in modern art, literature and philosophy. Contemporary art, as a self-expression of what man is, has turned ugly. So many works of art tell the viewers that the artists have gone over the threshold of despair.

Nevil Shute's chilling novel *On The Beach* portrays the world nearing its end after the major powers destroyed each other with nuclear weapons. Picture this scene of despair of one waiting for the end to come as a result of radio-active fallout.

"I won't take it,' she said vehemently. 'It's not fair. No one in the Southern Hemisphere ever dropped a bomb, a hydrogen bomb or a cobalt bomb or any other sort of bomb. We had nothing to do with it. Why should we have to die because other countries nine or ten thousand miles away from us wanted to have a war? It's so bloody unfair.'"

An ancient philosopher's view that "nothing is certain except that birth leads to death and that life cannot escape ruin" is still asserted by many modern thinkers. The Bible also gives a pessimistic description of the world. And the Bible has its own interpretation of conditions and events.

The Biblical exposure of moral evil is both devastating and grim. Sin is everywhere. Man has no ability to bring about the new world. According to the Bible, you cannot understand history unless you recognize the ugly reality of demonic evil behind history and the bias of man's heart toward evil.

The apostle Paul gave us in a nutshell the history we know and experience: "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

To speak of evil, world chaos and uncertainty is to speak of something so obvious that it has become trite.

That so many are pessimistic is understandable. But the overwhelming attitude of pessimism among Christians is uncalled for. Sure, our world does not give much reason for clapping our hands for joy.

And if the Christian faith could only say "the situation is grim and sin abounds," then its message would confirm the despair of man. But thank God that there is another side to pessimism. The Bible reveals the Lord as the Lord of history. Events have meaning. Jesus Christ is God's answer to all human history. He shows that God and not evil will ultimately triumph.

Satan was defeated on the cross by Jesus Christ. All the events of the world find their meaning in Christ. Our hope is fixed in the Lord who is sovereign, in the God who has never abdicated from his central place in the affairs of men and nations.

If that is so, why be pessimistic? As Christians we should exhibit plainly for all the world to see an optimism in Christ Himself in the knowledge that Christ never failed His own.

World conditions may make us fear and tremble, but faith in the living God should have as its result optimism. If the Christian fails to bear testimony to the sovereignty and greatness of God, along with His longing for the ultimate triumph of Christ over the evil, and the expectation of the new heaven and earth to come as promised in Scripture, who is there to witness?

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