

Weekly Encouragement

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Family Disappointment

By Rev. Peter Eng

Picture courtesy of Flowerpictures



I recently read Zechariah 3 which tells the vision of Joshua the high priest with the filthy garment. I don't I have not noticed the significance of this passage before now. This time, my mind immediately went to a thought in "Life Together" (by [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)). The point Bonhoeffer made was something I had lived in practical denial, but his point is so compelling that whenever I think of this book, that thought dominates.

Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who lived under Nazi Germany. When Hitler was gaining power, it was already apparent to him that Hitler was evil, and he opposed Hitler; but it was futile. The Germans were mesmerized by Hitler's fascist nationalism, and German Christians were reorganized ([Deutsche Christen](#)) and became Hitler's tool. A

small minority opposed Hitler, and they were called the [Confessing Church](#).

The enormity of German Christian defection to Hitler was deeply disappointing to Bonhoeffer. Out of that disappointment, he wrote about what it means to be united in Christ. He boldly asserted that in our life together as Christians, we will suffer disappointment towards others in the community. That was my epiphany.

I like to think of our life together in Christ, in terms of all we should be, and all the joys of faith. These are certainly real. We enjoy Christian community. In God our Father, we have brothers and sisters in Christ. In Christ, we belong also to each other. What a wonderful blessing!

But there is another family reality. Disappointment. Our family by birth and our family by the blood of Christ are remarkably similar in this aspect. While we enjoy the family most of the time, from time to time, we are so disappointed that can no longer see the good of the family member, and interpret everything from the dark of disappointment.

Family disappointment is difficult to handle. Those we love the most are also those who disappoint us most. Those we respect the most are also those who hurt us the most when they fail.

Zechariah wrote to encourage the people to return to God's work in earnest. Apparently, one of the things that kept the people from returning was the character of Joshua the high priest. He was supposed to represent the people in their approach to a holy God, but Joshua himself had filthy clothes ([Zech 3](#)). The people did not see how they could approach God through this filthy high priest.

In the vision, Satan (means "accuser") was standing beside Joshua "to resist him." That is to say, the Accuser was accusing Joshua of wrong. Satan is saying that this man is a sinner and is unfit for ministry. He has done wrong things, and so he cannot serve YHWH (the LORD). Joshua had nothing to say. He was as the one with filthy garments, quite unfit for service. He did not even look like he was dressed for the role. God commanded clean clothes and clean head gear for Joshua (symbolizing forgiveness and a renewing of the mind). He solemnly commanded Joshua to leave his sinful ways and thoughts and serve him.

Here we see God's powerful actions. In paraphrase, it is God telling the people, "I know you are disappointed in your high priest. I know Satan constantly accuses him of sin, and there is some truth in the accusations. But I forgive him, cleanse him, and I am dealing with him. Put his past wrongs behind you. He will serve me faithfully from here on." The people were neglecting worship because they were disappointed with the high priest. God did not tell them to look for another priest. Instead, God's solution to deal with their disappointment was by reminding them of the humanity and frailty of the high priest, the LORD's forgiveness, and the restoration of the priest.

The head of the family, the leader in the church, the author you admire, your

mentor: they are all sinners. They will disappoint. Satan will find valid grounds to accuse them of wrong. We can join the Accuser in accusing them, or we can join the holy God in forgiving and restoring the errant priest.

God calls us to hope in the leaders who disappoint us. Satan calls us to despair.

In our life together, we will suffer disappointments, and we will disappoint others. We will have imperfect leadership just as we have imperfect membership. What do we do with our disappointments? We can be the accuser in league with the Accuser (Satan), or we can take God's approach.

The Lord cleansed the filthiness from the high priest, and charged him to remain holy. God forgives the high priest and ask the people to continue to be served by the high priest.

Let the body of Christ have the mind of Christ.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.