

“The Confusion of Pain and Joy”

(T-7.IX)

We think our problem in life is we haven't managed to get what we want. But the real problem is we want the wrong things. We haven't managed to *want* what we (truly) want.

We have confused pain and joy. We think that what is actually joyful will cause us pain, and that what is actually painful will bring us joy.

“You no more recognize what is painful than you know what is joyful, and are in fact very apt to confuse them” (4:5).

This is because we have confused ourselves with the ego, whose desires are opposite to ours.

“What is joyful to you is painful to the ego, and as long as you are in doubt about what you are, you will be confused about joy and pain” (5:3).

The Holy Spirit always guides us so as to find joy and avoid pain.

“The Holy Spirit will direct you only so as to avoid all pain” (4:1).

But when He asks us to give up the things of the ego, we experience that as Him asking us to sacrifice joy for the sake being right with God.

“This confusion is the cause of the whole idea of sacrifice. Obey the Holy Spirit, and you will be giving up the ego, but you will be *sacrificing* nothing. On the contrary, you will be gaining *everything*” (5:4-6).

And when the ego asks us to sacrifice our real joy, we experience that as the ego standing up for our happiness, being our true friend.

That's why “The Holy Spirit's main function is to teach you to tell them [pain and joy] apart” (4:6).

Example: forgiveness

We think when we hold onto anger and resentment toward someone, we are acting in our own best interests.

We think we are making a statement: “I didn't deserve that. I deserve better. They can't do that to me. I'll turn the tables on them and prove how wrong they were.” We are sticking up for our worth.

Yet this actually brings us pain. It brings separation. It brings guilt.

It is a case of identifying with our ego. We are trying to save its face. For it did feel slighted by what the other person did and it does feel joy at the thought of turning the tables and making them pay.

And so, when the Holy Spirit tells us to forgive, to let it go, we feel like He is asking us to sacrifice our rights.

And when the ego tells us to go ahead and be angry, we feel like the ego is our friend who is standing up for us.

Yet when we forgive, don't we feel happier, freer, and even more in touch with our worth?

Could this example go at least partway toward explaining the real reason for our overall lack of happiness?