



Update

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Freedom from Bitterness

Looking carefully lest any one fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled (Heb. 12:15).

We are a nation overflowing with raw emotions. Fear, anger, and hate spew all around us. This has become far greater than political differences. Hurting people on all sides are hurting other people. So how do we walk through this in peace and be able to help others who are desperately needing it?

Emotions have energy, and energy must go somewhere. It is never dormant. If it is not released in positive ways it will turn on us and cause physical and emotional problems. Right now, we are seeing great destruction, much of it caused by angry people.

Then if we aren't careful, we become angry and resentful.

As we said in the last newsletter, God starts with the heart. Our hearts. A major key is dealing with bitter root judgment. That's a combination of two things—a root of bitterness and a judgment. Some years ago, we introduced you to “Jack” when I was going to Butner Prison in North Carolina. That teaching is timely today.

When Jack walked over to me after the teaching that night, he was heavy-hearted and downcast. As

our eyes met I said, “Tell me about it.” He said, “I don't know what to say—I guess I am just disappointed with life.” As we talked I could tell he had bitter root judgments that were robbing him of his present joy and future direction.

Bitterness means we have gone through an experience that didn't work out like we needed it to. Not only does it affect us, it defiles others. *Looking carefully lest any one fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled* (Heb. 12:15). As we can eat something that leaves a bitter taste in our mouths, so a life experience can leave a bad feeling in our spirits. Bitterness can be anything between a mild “I wish that hadn't happened” to an angry spewing out of resentment.

When an experience causes us loss, we will either call on the grace of God or we will become bitter. In bitterness there is always a sense of loss or injustice. The loss may be something material, financial, our position in life, defacing of our character and reputation, or a threat to our future.

If we believe the loss was a “true

need” and if we do not ask for and receive God's help, a root of bitterness will most surely develop. Receiving the grace of God empowers us to release the outcome of the situation into His hand.

Bitterness demands an answer to the question, “Why did this happen?” and finally arrives at God's doorstep. That root feeds daily experiences creating more shades of resentment and thus the bitterness grows.

Here is the heart of the problem—bitterness holds God accountable to us for what happened, and we expect an explanation from Him that is acceptable to us.

There are three Greek words in the New Testament that mean judge or judgment. One means to *examine*. A second means to *discern* or *evaluate*, as in: *But he who is spiritual judges all things* (I Cor 2:15). In “discernment” we see the wrong in another's life, but we do not withdraw our spirits from them, and we remain open to help them if we can.

The third word for judgment means to *pass a final verdict* on someone and withdraw our spirits from him or her as in *Judge not, that you be not judged* (Matt 7:1). Judge in this verse is from *krino* and means to pass a final judgment as a judge

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would in a court of law. In this verse it means to pass a **personal judgment** out of **our personal code** of life. But only God has the right to pass a final verdict out of His personal code.

What we don't realize is that by doing this we have taken the place of God to pass our verdict.

Another thing we don't realize is that we are using **our** standard of righteousness as a gauge by which to judge. The primary focus when we judge another is a **fault** in them that challenges our sense of right, or at least the way we do things. When we pass judgment, we withdraw our spirit from them and are no longer open to help that person if we have the opportunity.

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things (Rom 2:1). We may not be doing the same action the other person is doing, but the same principle or attitude is in us.

That is why Jesus said, *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you* (Matt 7:1-2). We are condemning in someone else what we have in our own life.

Back to Jack. He was bitter over the way his father had mistreated him. He said, "He rode my back a lot and I could never please him. He was critical of everything I did." As the conversation continued I

began to hear key statements. By questions I learned he had circled around his father's authority all his childhood and teenage years. He also was overly critical of his father and others. He was judging his father for the very things he had in his own life. He was bitter because of the way things had turned out for him.

Judgment has a boomerang. If we judge, we also have the same thing in our life.

To be free, Jack had to take responsibility for all his own wrong decisions—no matter how many people had mistreated him. He asked the Lord to forgive him for his bitterness.

Then he faced and recognized that the things he hated in his father were also in him and repented of them.

Next he forgave his father for all the wrong things he had done. Forgiving did not mean that the wrongs were excused. It meant he let them go; he released all the pent up energy of resentment and hate into God's care.

Finally, in all the areas where bitterness had been, Jack asked the Lord to fill him with His love. Jack straightened his shoulders, held up his head and smiled. He was free.

Usually at this point we need to talk about "taking up offence." We see the injustice and wrong things that happen to someone we care about, and we become wounded

for them. Empathy is one thing, becoming bitter for someone else is different. There is no grace for the person who has not been wronged, the bystander. Grace is for the one who has suffered the injury.

If taking up an offense becomes generational, those who follow can't change what has happened to the ones before them. ***Forgiveness means letting go of the hope of a better past*** (Marshall Goldsmith). Each person is responsible before God for their own sins of resentment and bitterness. Grace and forgiveness are available for them personally.

Things happen to all of us that cause pain, disappointment, and loss. Dealing with bitter root judgment and the deep emotion that goes with it is hard. But not too hard. **We have the power to choose** whether we will become bitter by holding the destructive emotions inside or better because we release and trust God with those experiences. It's the path to inner peace. ☼



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