

A Luxury We Can't Afford

(a passout from the Anger group)

I have a relative who is a beautiful person - personality plus, attractive, intelligent and spiritually gifted. However, if you get to know her well, sooner or later you will become the victim of a sharp, judgmental tongue. Bitter and sweet water seem to flow simultaneously from her mouth.

She has faced many difficult circumstances in her life and overcame them by a sheer act of her own will and the help of God. She has no patience with weakness in others because she is an overcomer. In spite of all her strength, an insidious root started to grow and matured with each new adverse circumstance. That root is called "bitterness."

Even though the incidents that caused her pain happened 20 or 30 years ago...even though she was victorious over all of them and lives a life now that many would envy, she is crippled and bound by the grip of bitterness. She is still fighting a battle that should have ended years before. In a very real sense she is far more miserable in 1997 than she was when her tragedies occurred. There is no torment like the inner torment of an unforgiving spirit. It refuses to be soothed, it refuses to be healed, it refuses to forgive, it refuses to forget.

In the New Testament, every mention of bitterness comes from the same Greek root, *pic*, which means "to cut, to prick." The idea is a pricking or puncturing which is pungent and penetrating. We read in Luke 22:62 that Peter "wept bitterly." He wept because he was pricked in his conscience. He was "cut to the quick" we would say. In Acts 8:23, a man was said to have been "in the gall of bitterness" when he wanted to appear godly and spiritually powerful. He was simply a religious phony, bitter to the core.

Hebrews 12:15 states that a root of bitterness can spring up and cause trouble, causing many to be defiled. You cannot nurture the bitterness plant and at the same time keep it concealed. The bitter root bears bitter fruit. You may think you can hide it, live with it, "grin and bear it," but you cannot. Slowly, inexorably that sharp cutting edge of unforgiveness will work its way to the surface. The poison seedling will find insidious ways to cut into others. Ironically, the one who suffers most is the one who lashes out at those around him.

How can I make such a statement? Because of the parable Jesus presented in Matthew 18:21-25. The context is "forgiveness." The main character is a man who refuses to forgive a friend, even though he himself had recently been released from an enormous debt he had incurred. Because of his stubborn refusal to forgive, this bitter man was "handed over to the torturers..." And then Jesus adds the punch line: "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (v35)

Did you hear what He said? He said that we who refuse to forgive...we who live in the gall of bitterness will become victims of torture, meaning intense inner torment. If we nurture feelings of bitterness, we are little better than inmates of an internal concentration camp. We lock ourselves in a lonely isolation chamber, walled in by our own refusal to forgive.

Please remember -- Jesus was speaking to His disciples, not unbelievers. A Christian is a candidate for confinement and unspeakable sufferings until he or she fully and completely forgives others...even when others are in the wrong.

I can now understand why Paul listed bitterness first when he said: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* Ephesians 4:31,32)

For your sake, let me urge you to "put away all bitterness" now. there's no reason to stay in a P.O.W. camp a minute longer when the escape route is clearly marked.

It leads to the cross...where the only One who had a right to be bitter, wasn't.



Additional Scripture References

Mat. 24:10-13, 5:44, 11:24-26, Rom.12:19, 2Tim.3:7, Luke 6:37, Mat. 6:12, 5:21-24, Acts 24:16, James 3:17



A girl who was asked for the definition of forgiveness gave the following beautiful answer: "It is the odor the flowers give off when they are trampled upon."