

“GOD I'M BITTER”

I've heard it said "---most of our problems are human problems." This simple statement hits the nail squarely on the head. People are the cause of most of our problems!

Just think of it ---if we no longer had people, prejudice would be erased; wars would cease; pollution and overpopulation would no longer be problems.

Lets face it, our humanness causes most of our problems We are bundles of potential problems looking for a place to happen.

One of the deep problems of human life is bitterness. In his letter to the Ephesians believers, Paul addresses himself to this problem. He deals with the "gut" issues of unity, theft, lying, malice, and to "put off the old man and put on the new man." (Ephesians 4:22-24) Then the fourth chapter of Ephesians closes, Paul zeroes in on the thorny problem of bitterness.

As we examine the context of these verses concerning bitterness, we see that anger has a place in the life of the Christian. "Be angry, and yet do not sin ---" (Eph. 4:26). God permits the believer to become angry. But don't go overboard; anger is permitted, not commanded.

God permits us to become angry for several reasons. First anger is a natural emotion. The inability to become angry would leave one insensitive to wrong and make him apathetic to the pressing problems around him. When citizens fail to confront wrong with indignation and action, society teeters: on the verge of collapse. Apathy has become a major problem in our society and the church. Too often people put on blinders and drive down the road of life with little concern for righting wrongs. The prevailing attitude is, "As long as it doesn't affect my comfortable way of life directly, its none of my business.

A second reason for the permission of anger is that it is expressed by God. Jesus Christ became angry when He observed people defiling the temple by conducting corrupt money changing practices and selling maimed animals for sacrifice. If He had followed today's political strategist, He probably would have suggested they gather for a summit conference to work out a negotiated settlement mutually satisfactory to all concerned! No chance! His anger issued forth in corrective action. He made a whip of cords, drove them out of the temple, and overturned their tables.

Scripture declares that God is going to pour out His wrath upon sin. The capacity to become angry at sin and injustice reflects the moral purity of God.

A word of caution! Even though God permits anger, we are cautioned to "sin not." If we allow our anger to become personalized it becomes a sin. Jesus was incensed with the defiling of the temple and vented His anger at the wrong. God loves the sinner but hates his sin. We know He loved them and us, He went to the cross for us all.

Though anger is permitted in the life of a Christian, such anger must be temporary. Paul also says "-- do not let the sun go down on you anger." (Eph. 4:26) Natural anger that is permitted to

remain becomes sin. How many times in your lives you thought you wouldn't have an argument with a loved one, just because "You love one another" and you exchange words sometimes pretty harsh words at that. When there is a disagreement you normally see harsh words follow. Be prepared to correct it just as soon as possible, like before the "sun goes down." Meaning within the same day. Failure to quickly resolve our anger nourishes it into a grudge and some nursed grudges become irreconcilable, leaving us wide open to the devil. This is why Paul says, "And do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27). Bitterness is a division tool used by Satan to drive a wedge between husband and wife and to destroy their home. Paul says "go ahead and get angry. But then settle the differences and forget it. Kiss and make up!

Bitterness destroys friendships and the fellowship in churches. Notice, the theme of Ephesians is the unity of the believers in fellowship in, the Body of Christ. Bitterness will destroy this unity which is so essential in the assembly. Hebrews sheds practical light on the subject, when the writer says we are to follow after peace with all men (even those who have wronged us.) "See that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled." (Heb. 12:14-15)

A word of practical admonition: If you are unhappy in your church, you should either resolve your bitterness or else leave that assembly and find one where you will be happy (joyous).

Failure to be reconciled will only spread your bitterness to others and cause them to sin.

Are you "burned up" with someone right now? Have you let your anger grow into a grudge or bitterness? If you have, here are three essential steps to help break the bondage of bitterness.

First: Recognize it for what it is --- a sin! We are commanded to get rid of bitterness. Paul says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger and clamor, and slander, be put away from you, along with all malice." (Eph. 4:31) This command deals with a number of related disposition problems.

"Bitterness" (PIKRIA in Greek) refers to a malignant disposition, a long standing resentment, or a spirit that refuses to be economized. We normally think of it as holding a grudge.

"Wrath" (THUMOS in Greek), on the other hand, refers to the impulsive outburst -- as when someone "blows his top."

Example: During a ball game a player jumps up, throws his helmet on the ground, and storms back to the huddle after the referees made what he considered a bad call. The announcer observed the player's anger and wondered out loud if he would seek revenge. Sure enough, the angry player tried to get even during the next play. His "anger" (thumos) gave way to "bitterness" (pikria).

The vehicle for expressing most bitterness (or wrath) is the tongue. A bitter person is frequently involved in what Paul calls "clamor" or loud talking. Most of us have noticed that loud talking or arguing almost always accompanies anger.

Another way we express bitterness with the tongue is through what Paul calls "slander" or "evil speaking and lying." It also means failing to tell the whole truth. Have you ever stretched the truth when recounting what someone did to you? If you have, you are guilty of expressing your bitterness through slander.

We are commanded from Scripture to get rid of problems that come from a malignant disposition. Paul says, "Let all be put away from you along with all malice." We are to make a clean sweep of the bitterness that causes our disposition to go sour. Therefore, if we hope to deal with bitterness, we must begin to recognizing bitterness for what it is Sin, and then deal with it as you would any other sin – confess to God. (I John 1:9)

Second' Try to keep from hurting others. "And be kind one to another, tenderhearted ---" (Eph. 4:32.) This is a direct command to display human kindness to other people. Kind (CHRESTOS) means "pleasant or gracious." Greet people with a smile. A smile goes a long way toward removing seeds that would produce bitterness.

We are to be tenderhearted or compassionate. In practice we find it's easier to be compulsive rather than compassionate. A practical suggestion of how this works is to think of the damage your unkind actions might do in the life of someone else. Kindness and compassion accepts people just as they are (not as you want them to be) and a willingness to overlook personal hurts or wrongs suffered at the hands of others.

Its true many people are easily offended, but unless we are willing to display human compassion and kindness, we will alienate those to whom we are called to minister. It has been said the most flammable material in the world is the chip on the shoulder. Our conduct with others should be based on compassion for them in their desperate needs.

Jesus gave some practical instructions regarding the removal of bitterness in others. But people would like to blue pencil this advice out of the Bible! In His great Sermon on the Mount, He made it clear we have a definite responsibility to take the initiative in restoring those who hold a grudge. Notice what He says:

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come present, your offering. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Jesus does not discuss who is the blame, nor whether the brother has a right to be angry with you. The right or wrong of his bitterness is not the issue. If you have the responsibility to take the initiative in restoring the brother and effecting a reconciliation. Failure to seek a reconciliation will hinder your worship. Its impossible to worship while you know a brother is holding a grudge against you.

In practicing human kindness, don't be concerned about who is right or wrong. The issue is reconciliation and restoration between two people in order to prevent the fruits of bitterness. You might say, "That is a hard thing to do." I agree!

Yes, one of the hardest things to do is ask forgiveness from a person who had no reason to be mad at us in the first place. If you ever go through such an experience, you will emerge with scars on your soul that will be a tender remembrance of God's forgiveness. Our rebellion broke God's heart and cause Him great personal heartache to bring us back to Himself. Nevertheless, He took the initiative to effect reconciliation.

Third: Practice human forgiveness. That's what Paul means when he says, "forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Eph.4:32) We are to display human kindness toward those who are upset with us whether or not we have done anything to them, forgiveness, on the other hand, is to be practiced with those who have hurt us.

The word "forgive" (CHARIZMAE) is a participle picturing continuous action. It means to forgive freely; not holding back or forgive grudgingly. Think of it! We are to practice forgiving everything others have done against us, whether they seek forgiveness or not. We are to seek their forgiveness when we offend them and then go ahead and forgive others who offend us. That's revolutionary! We have the responsibility to be kind to them as well as forgive them and in doing, we will bid farewell to bitterness.

Forgiveness also involves a loss of memory failure to forget prevents full forgiveness.

Example would be like two children fighting-just before going to bed. when their mother put them to bed, she said it wouldn't be good for them to go to sleep holding a grudge because Jesus might come during the night. Reluctantly one of the brothers agreed, "Okay, I'll forgive him; but if Jesus doesn't come tonight, I'm going to sock him in the nose in the morning!"

If we haven't forgotten it, we haven't really forgiven freely as commanded. God has forgotten all the wrongs we have confessed to Him, hasn't He? Then He has the right to tell us to do the same to others.

The divine standard of forgiveness is given to show the extent of full forgiveness. the standard is, "----just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

We might object, "But that will be difficult. It will hurt me deeply to forgive him for what he has don." Stop for a minute and think about how it hurt God to forgive us. It cost God the death of His blessed Son, Jesus Christ. It may wound our pride, but the hurt will never equal how much our sin hurt God. We are to forgive as God does.

Another weak objection we might offer is, "But what if he doesn't accept my forgiveness?" Whether or not he accepts our forgiveness is not our problem. We are to forgive and then leave it up to him to respond. God has provided forgiveness to the whole human race, because He knows many will reject and trample it under foot. God knew that, yet He still holds out the "olive branch" of forgiveness to all men. God's forgiveness is offered whether we accept it or not; ours should be offered to others whether they accept it or not.

When others offend us, we are to practice forgiveness freely because without forgiving spirit, we will never be able to pry loose from the grip of bitterness.

If you have or now allowing anger to develop into bitterness, you can break its grip by following God's pattern for freedom. You can be free from bitterness

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