

August 2002: Root of Bitterness

by Aaron Greenway

As you begin to read this month's message, what is passing through your mind right now when I mention the words: **divorce, abuse, insults, unkindness, lies, deception, infidelity, discrimination, betrayal, partiality, fighting, hatred, and judgmentalism?** Has anyone of us been through or experienced these? If so, you have just become a prime target of the Enemy.

Everyone goes through difficult times in their lives, but perhaps some of us have endured hurt at the hands of particular individuals, people who thought only of themselves at the time they hurt us. Perhaps, our spouse has left us or we have been rejected because of the color of our skin or our friends have turned against us. In my case, my biological father left me and my mother when I was just a year and a half. When people decide to do these things, people suffer. As a result, we get angry. We cry. We try to get through the loss we feel. I can tell you for sure that in spite of being just a year old, my entire life growing up experienced the pain of abandonment. The first thing that goes through your mind is, "What did I do to make him leave?" "Will my mother leave me too?" "And how can I honestly trust my Heavenly Father?" All these things were struggles growing up.

Because we have to resolve these things, it is very normal to experience that grieving and that anger. That is to say, that we have to go through these emotions in order to be healed of it. Otherwise, we have only just bottled it up pretending to have forgiven the person when, in fact, we are doing the opposite. We grieve and we get angry so we can forgive. Doesn't God Himself express these same emotions when we sin? And when God forgives us, He forgives us for the sake of His Son, the Lord

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Jesus. We must do the same (Matthew 6:14-15).

However, there is an evil work of the Enemy in our lives is to create a despondency, to create a hopelessness in those situations, so much so, that we literally cling to the negative memory itself. We find security in being angry. We become more comfortable carrying around a club. This is called the “root of bitterness,” shooting up in our lives. The hopelessness and the grief transform themselves into resentment and we become trapped in our own hurt. We cannot get out of it. This is the danger in allowing the natural process of healing to entrap us.

What does Scripture say? Hebrews 12:14-15, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

While anger is a natural emotion, “bitterness” is a killer to the soul. When we are bitter toward someone, we are basically saying that someone did something to us and justice should have been done but wasn’t, almost as if God Himself should have done something, but didn’t. This is precisely why bitterness is damaging to our relationship with the Lord. A bitter soul cannot sense nor respond to the Spirit of God. We have turned inward so much that any spiritual sensitivity is lost. This sends us into a “spiritual coldness.” To say the least, this path is very destructive. And it will destroy us. We must understand that when we give up our right to justice, that’s when the bitterness will be uprooted and we are free!

Everyone has scars. Everyone has been wounded. In the healing we must see that God has forgiven us of so much more than we could forgive another. Forgiveness is not overlooking a fault. It is recognizing it, and then allowing the grace of God to free us from it. Forgiveness is not just releasing someone else; it is releasing ourselves. Bitterness is nothing more than an enslavement to the past. It is continual victimization of that person. And we are the only ones that suffer for it.

Perhaps, with careful self-examination, we could identify these areas of our lives. Some of us have held things against others for years. And sometimes we have to go to that person and

resolve it with them if it continues to bother us. This is what reconciliation is all about (Matthew 5:23-24). This should especially be done with those in the family of God, being that the unity of the Body is at stake. Sometimes, we will be heard by that person and healing will begin to happen in the relationship. At other times, the person who spoke against us or hurt us will still be on his/her downhill slide. There is nothing we can do about that, except attempt to reconcile in hopes that it will bring that person to the Lord. At least, we did our part. At least, we were obedient. And now, at least, we no longer carry the emotional and spiritual load that has been strapped to our backs for so long. It is now God's burden. What a relief!

Today, let us root up that root of bitterness. Let us go to those who have harmed us and make peace. Is this going to be difficult? Of course it is! And sometimes it is because we are defensive and don't wish to be wounded again. That is the risk! But if we put on humility and recognize that this is no longer our load to bear, then it doesn't matter how that person will respond to us. What is important is that our communion with the Lord has been fully restored.