

Bitterness

TEXT: Eph. 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

THESIS: People have resentment or bitter towards others and they should remove that hatred anger and ill-will toward others.

INTRODUCTION:

1. This admonition came from a Roman prison about A.D. 62 by the apostle Paul, who was interested in the saints at Ephesus.
 - a. And he calls them all saints regardless of their character, regardless of their imperfection of character, regardless of their spiritual maturity, everyone is mentioned as a saint.
2. The word saint means set apart.
 - a. These people were to be set apart for God's use.
 - b. But, these people still had some work to do on their characters.
 - c. Why?
 - i. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:" (Eph. 1:4).
 - ii. God is looking for a certain kind of person in His church.
 - iii. When we think about that purpose of being holy before Him in love, without blame before Him in love, we think about those two characteristics of holiness and blamelessness, we wonder what the basis was for Paul's admonition.
3. First of all, in the first chapter, he tells them to count your blessings.
 - a. Count all the blessings that you have in Christ.
4. Then I want you to think about the glorious church in which you are a member (Ch. 3).
5. Remember from when you came (Ch. 2).
 - a. You folks were dead in sin, and look what I've done for you.
 - b. And so, put away all these things.
 - c. And, the best way I know how to live a holy life, is to get rid of this characteristic called bitterness.
 - d. You need to tell bitter, "bye, bye"
6. That word bitter comes from a word which means, to cut, to prick, have some kind of pointed or sharp things, something that is eating at me, something that is picking at me.
 - a. James wrote, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?" (Jam. 3:11)
 - i. Something is wrong with that bitter water.
 - ii. It would cut you when you drank it.
 - b. James talked about bitter envying in the same chapter (Jam. 3:14).
 - i. Here the word has to do with hatred.

- c. Bitterness is what Simon had in his heart (Acts 8:23).
 - i. He was in the gall of bitterness.
 - ii. And, Paul says we need to put it away.
- 7. Anything that pierces my heart, that sharp against me, spiritually speaking, so that my heart is not in a place where God can live, is bitterness.
 - a. There is no other name for it.
 - b. You can call it what you want to, my friend, but what is keeping us away from being close with God, is this problem.
- 8. What is it?

DISCUSSION:

I. BITTERNESS WOULD BE BETTER LABELED AS GRUDGEITUS

- A. “Fret not thyself because of evil doers . . .” (Psa. 37:1)
 - 1. Why?
 - a. That’s grudgeitus.
 - b. It is going to hurt you not the other person.
 - c. You’re gonna be the one who is going to be hurt.
 - 2. So we are to, “Wait on the Lord and keep his way . . .” (Psa. 37:34).
 - a. I heard about a grizzly bear, that was around a camp site. And, he came into a clearing where there was a lot of garbage, which had been dumped there. And, the tourist were watching the scene and a grizzly bear was eating that garbage along with a skunk. The skunk was enjoying the garbage right along with the grizzly bear. And, that was the only animal that the grizzly bear would permit to eat with him. You want to know why? He knew the consequences of what would happen if he attacked that animal. He knew the high cost of getting even. He knew that he would be the one hurt. Smart grizzly.
 - b. I have a book called, “None of these diseases” written by a medical doctor, S. I. McMillen. In that book, he insists that a disorderly emotional life, bitterness, has as its direct result ulceritus colitis, toxigorders, high blood pressure, and scores of other diseases.
 - (1) If the truth should be known, a lot of death certificates should read, he died of grudgeitus.
 - (2) He died from a bitter soul.
 - 3. Have you ever heard, “I’ll get even with him even if it takes me my whole life.”
 - a. I’ve heard members say that.
 - 4. Have you ever heard anyone say, “Why, its impossible to love sinners and hate the sin.”
 - a. They mock Jesus’ statement.
 - b. But, Jesus’ statement is one of the greatest psychological truths in all the world that has ever been uttered because it protects me.

- c. Now, it is being told by psychological articles that we are to love the sinners and hate the sin.
 - d. You know what the Great Physician said?
 - (1) If that brother repents 70x7 in a day, you forgive him.
 - (2) And you get rid of that bitterness.
 - e. The moment I start hating a man, the moment I start being bitter with someone, I become his slave.
 - (1) Hate starts to control my thoughts.
 - (2) I cannot escape his control with my mind.
 - (3) It is the effects of bitterness that has pushed person after person after person away from God.
- B. When we were looking at faith stages in Wednesday night's Bible class not too long ago, we discovered the third stage of faith.
- 1. This stage shows that people who claim to be religious for the most part, stop their religious growth at about the age of 18 and they do not proceed any further.
 - 2. If you were growing and stopped at age 18, where would you be?
 - 3. And what about teenagers, well, their idealistic aren't they.
 - a. But they have trouble when somebody different comes into their group.
 - b. There is that thing in them that is a cousin to bitterness which keeps them from being as open to people as they ought to be.
 - c. Just because we are different, it doesn't mean that God doesn't love us.
- C. Look at Eph. 4:31 again.
- 1. This was written because grudgeitis is destructive.
 - 2. It destroys the soul.
 - 3. It stops the person from growing.
 - 4. It keeps him from being who God wants him to be.

II. NOW I WANT TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE COMPANIONS OF BITTERNESS

- A. Open your Bible, to Rom. 3.
 - 1. Here are the companions of bitterness.
 - 2. These folks go around hand in hand together.
- B. In Rom. 3:9, in speaking of the Jews and the Gentiles, and noting that the Jew and the Gentile both had to follow the Old Testament he said, "What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin."
 - 1. How do you know that Paul?
 - 2. Well the Scripture states, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:" (vs. 10).
 - a. The unrighteous are companions with bitterness.
 - 3. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."

- (Vs. 11)
- a. The non God seekers are companions of bitter folks.
4. “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Vs. 12)
 - a. They can’t speak anything but evil.
 5. “Their throat *is* an open sepulchre;” (Vs. 13a).
 - a. He is quoting from the Old Testament here and he saying that under that Old System, nobody could be made righteous.
 - b. But, he’s got another point here.
 - c. Look at the companions of bitterness.
 6. “with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips: Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness;” (Vs. 13b-14)
 - a. What a companion.
- C. When Peter said to Simon, I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, he was telling Simon, you have already apostatized.
1. You’ve already left the Lord and so quickly.
 2. Its no wonder that James says, if any of you do err from the truth and one of you convert him.
 - a. I’ve got a heart problem.
 - b. I’ve got something wrong with my thinking.
- D. In Heb. 12:15 it states, “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;”
1. I suppose that all of you know who Booker T. Washington is (great educator).
 - a. Despite his race, despite all the insults thrown his way, despite the mistreatment.
 - b. He said, when he was one time asked what the secrets of his success was, he said, “I will never let any man reduce my soul to the level of bitterness.”
- E. The companions of bitterness is a terrible place to be in an unrighteousness, poisonous, ugly situation.
1. And, it is eating away at my soul that I cannot grow.
 2. But you say, “Well, I don’t hate anybody.”
 - a. But, why aren’t you growing?
 - b. Something is holding you back.
 - c. Something has kept you for years less than involved the way you knew you should have been.
 3. What is it?
 - a. Its this problem right here.
 4. Somewhere along the line, I got the attitude that everybody else is the problem.
 - a. And, you don’t associate it with bitterness.
 - b. But, Paul did.

5. And so he told these brethren, put it away . . . get rid of it.
- F. Who participates in it?
1. Anyone who says to himself that he cannot cope with a situation in life has this problem.
 2. Look at Phil. 4:13.
 - a. When I start thinking that I cannot cope, when it is pricking my heart, it is hurting me spiritually, I look at this verse.
 - b. Phil. 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ, who continues strengthening me.”
 - c. “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content.” (Vs. 11)
 - (1) Paul said that it doesn’t matter the situation.
 - (2) Where were you Paul when you wrote this?
 - (a) In a prison.
 - (b) Why aren’t you bitter Paul?
 - i) Because I’m not going to let that happen.
 3. Well, “I just cant make it, I just cant cope with it.”
 - a. It is the devils tool.
- G. There are others that participate in this particular problem.
1. Heb. 12:5: the Hebrew writer says, Don’t hate the chastening of the Lord.
 - a. Well, I don’t like all this correcting.
 - b. “Don’t faint when thou art rebuked of Him.”
 - (1) But, I don’t like it.
 - (2) But, you should like it because “He only chastens those whom he loves.”
 2. You know what the proverbs writer said? He said in Prov. 29:1a, “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth *his* neck.
 - a. He hardens his neck.
 - (1) He gets that stiff back and says I can’t cope with this, I don’t like it, its not doing me any good, so just leave me alone.
 - b. The Bible says, “shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Prov. 29:1b)
 - (1) My friend, do you want to destroy your life?
 - (2) It happens right up here in your mind.
- H. Look at Rev. 21:8
1. The fearful are participants in bitterness.
 2. I’m afraid of this or I’m afraid of him or I’m afraid of that or I can’t do this or I can’t do that.
 3. And, whatever it is that is going on there, is this problem of bitterness.
 4. These, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.
 - a. You don’t want that, do you?

III. WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

- A. I've got to change my heart.
 - 1. He's misunderstood.
- B. Jam. 3:13, I want a remedy for this problem
 - 1. Jam. 3:13-14, "Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."
 - a. Don't lie to yourself, James says.
 - b. Your gonna have to have some wisdom to get out of this problem.
 - c. I'm gonna have to think the way the Bible teaches me to think.
 - d. Bitterness has no glory.
 - 2. Look at Jam. 3:13 again. There's no glory in being bitter.
 - a. It isn't the wisdom that God is giving us.
 - b. In fact, the person that is bitter has lost his saltiness.
- C. Matt. 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost . . ." its saltiness.
 - 1. It lost something that should be making up his character.
 - 2. It has become bitter.
 - 3. It repulses instead of draws.
 - 4. Jesus said, ". . . if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me." (Jn. 12:32).
 - a. Well, it's the case that bitterness doesn't draw anything, it repels people.
 - (1) It is the most discouraging characteristic that a man can have, is to be bitter.
 - (2) He discourages all those that are around him.
 - 5. Sometimes though, we do not label it correctly.
 - a. We label it as, "He's a fuss bucket or He's too strict."
 - (1) Or whatever it is and what we've got is a heart problem.
 - b. It's contagious because everybody struggles with it
 - c. If you see someone who is successful in it, you'd probably follow him because bitterness is the most contagious of all sins.
 - (1) It's the easy way out.
 - (2) Well, we've tried that 25 years ago, but it won't work.
 - (3) Somebody said one time that he thought all Christians should be optimists (always be favorable).
 - (a) I don't agree with that.
 - (b) I certainly don't believe that Christians should be pessimist (always expecting the worst).
 - 6. But, we ought to coin a new word for what we ought to be . . . Christians need to be peptopmists.
 - a. What is that?

- b. This is a person who is not just saying that he can do it, but is a person who is already there saying come on.
 - (1) Come on in . . . We do not need negative folks.
 - (2) They are hindrances to Christianity.
 - (a) If you're always in the mind set of we can't do it, we'll never do it.
 - (b) It is bitterness and it's inconsistent.
- D. Back to Jam. 3:11-12, you can't get both bitter and sweet from the same fountain.
 - 1. It's inconsistent for a Christian to be this way.
 - 2. So, what do I do about it?
 - a. I confess it. Once I realize it.
 - (1) "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:7-9)
 - b. And then we set about reading the word and let it control us.
 - (1) "For the word of God is living, and active . . ." (Heb. 4:12 (ASV))
 - (2) We read the word.
 - (a) For teaching, reproof, correction and instruction (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- E. What was the purpose of the letter James wrote?
 - 1. To show us how walk before Him, without blame and in love.
 - 2. And the thing he said was, "put away bitterness."
 - 3. Why?
 - a. Because it's a learned habit.
 - b. That's why Paul told the Philippians. ". . . brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8)
 - (1) I didn't hear a bit about bitterness in any of those statements.
 - (2) Everything is good is what I am suppose to be thinking.
 - (3) But, this learned habit is so pronounced among the brotherhood, that we're all gonna have to work on it.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. I want you to tell me why Moses missed the promise land?
 - a. The people said we don't have any water. The second time.

- b. You start reading the book of Deuteronomy and you start thinking, “Oh, here comes another complaint” because that is all they ever did and I understand sometimes why Moses got so angry.
 - c. And God said, “I will give them water, speak to the rock.”
 - i. But, Moses was so bitter that he struck that rock twice.
 - ii. Now, think about that.
 - (1) That rock represented Christ.
 - (a) How many times did Moses hit it?
 - (2) Christ was only crucified once.
 - (a) So, Moses not only disobeyed God, he violated the typology.
 - (b) He hit that rock twice. He’s bitter, he’s angry and for that moment of bitterness, he missed the promised land.
 - iii. Was it worth it Moses?
 - (1) I believe he would say, “No it was not.”
2. And so the remedy is, we need to figure out what makes me negative, and confess it.
- a. Because, there is a blessing in all of this.
 - b. The revelator said, that if we can overcome this, we will eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7), we will be exempted from the second death (Rev. 2:11), we will eat of the hidden manna (Rev. 2:17), we’ll be clothed in white (Rev. 3:5), and we’ll sit down with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21).
3. If we really appreciate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we’ll let bitterness, clamor, evil speaking, and malice and wrath and anger be put away from us.
4. But, what is the Gospel of Christ?
- a. It is the news of His death, burial and His resurrection
 - i. And, it has to be obeyed (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
 - b. How do we obey that death, burial and resurrection.
 - i. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:3-4)
 - ii. That’s the Gospel.
 - c. You obey it by:
 - i. Repenting of your sins and by being immersed into Christ by being immersed into His death at which time God will take away your sins.
5. I hope you will see what holds people back, what holds the church back from growing in the Christ.
- a. It’s called bitterness.
 - b. If you need our help in getting rid of it, we ask you to come as we stand and sing.

Robert Notgrass