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ARE YOU LIVING BITTER FREE?

by Eddie Lawrence

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 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; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. (NKJV)

INTRO: During my 28 years of pastoral ministry, I have known several occasions when someone became offended and allowed the offense to become a root of bitterness in their lives. When this happens, people who are in the same family may go years without speaking, people who attend the same church avoid each other, people who sleep in the same bed refuse to open their hearts to one another. This bitterness is very destructive and it affects the people around it. As the writer of Hebrews wrote, "by this many become defiled."

Let's do a little digging in the hopes of uprooting this root of bitterness if it is present in any of our lives.

Let me ask some questions:

1. ARE YOU PURSUING PEACE WITH ALL PEOPLE? (v14)

If there is someone whom you do not desire to be at peace with, then that is a place to start looking for bitterness. This does not mean that if everyone is not at peace with you, that you have an unforgiveness issue. The Scripture says we are to live at peace with all men as much as lies within us. That is, we are not to be the door closers on reconciliation. We must be willing for true reconciliation to take place. This does not mean it will, but it does mean you are willing.

Neither does this mean that you are to submit to someone interrogating you under the guise of reconciliation. The purpose of reconciliation is to forgive sin not to focus on it. Some people will never be satisfied with any amount of repentance, restitution, or efforts at reconciliation because revenge lives in their hearts.

Is there anyone who desires to reconcile with you but you simply are not interested in things being made right?

Are there vindictive or revenge filled thoughts that you harbor toward anyone that keep you from reconciling?

May I also add, that if someone who has offended you never asks for your forgiveness, you still must forgive or you will become bitter.

So, be a pursuer of peace because that is necessary to remind bitter free.

2. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A ROOT OF BITTERNESS?

This could be a much longer list, but here are some observations I will share with you:

A. Unforgiveness and Grudge Bearing

Someone recently asked me, "What is the difference between unforgiveness and being bitter?" I thought for a moment and then said, "Unforgiveness is the sap that flow through the root of bitterness." I do believe that bitterness is fueled by unforgiveness.

B. Pride

Believing we have the right to pass judgment, deliver a verdict, and carry out the execution is putting ourselves in the place of God and is rooted in pride. You cannot be bitter and humble; but if you are bitter, you will always have a pride issue to deal with. This pride says, "I don't deserve this but they deserve judgment!"

C. Unhealed Wounds and Echoing Words in Your Mind

It has been my experience both personally and ministerially that when bitterness is present there is often something someone did or words that someone has spoken that keeps ringing in the mind. Words are powerful dear friends. They can have a long life when they are sown deep into someone's soul through some traumatic event. A person can still hear the angry words, the words of rejection, the words that humiliate in the corridors of their memory. These have to be healed through forgiveness.

These wounds can be the result of terrible things that one person has done to another. They can range from a sentence of hate filled words to years of some type of abuse. But becoming bitter just adds another terrible thing to the list of what is happening to you.

D. A Resistance to Grace

As our Scripture bears out, bitterness occurs when we fall short of the grace of God. In other words, we need to receive God's grace to forgive. "You don't know what he did to me preacher?" I may not, but God does, and He says "Forgive them." And he offers you the grace to do it. When you refuse the grace to forgive, you choose to live in unforgiveness.

E. The soul is tormented

Refusing to forgive and choosing to linger in unforgiveness brings torment to the soul. Jesus taught this in his parable of the debtors. I have seen this in many people's lives. They are tormented over and over and over by what has been done to them and the reason they are is that they will not forgive. Forgiveness is not just for the benefit of the offender but for the person who has been offended too. Torment or freedom? That is the real choice you are making when you are deciding to forgive or not?

F. The Harboring of Hatred

Bitterness buys its groceries from hatred. When we refuse to forgive we decide to focus on and relive the offense. This breeds hatred which reinforces the bitterness.

G. Breakdown One's Health

Bitterness causes rottenness in the bones. You can often see that someone's countenance is affected by bitterness. They eventually begin to reflect their countenance the hardness and callousness that has taken over their heart. Friends, you shave days, months, and years off your life by remaining in bitterness. This is not what Christ died to provide for us.

ILLUS-E. Stanley Jones said, "A rattlesnake, if cornered, will sometimes become so angry it will bite itself. That is exactly what the harboring of hate and resentment against others is--a biting of oneself. We think that we are harming others in holding these spites and hates, but the deeper harm is to ourselves. "

H. Forfeit Blessings Available Each Day

When there is a root of bitterness in your life, there is a part of your life that is on hold and decaying and will remain so until you forgive. You miss all the blessings you could see and enjoy if you were not blinded by bitterness.

What is it not only costing you, but what is it costing the people you love because you are paralyzed by bitterness. You can't respond like you should. You are not the same as you were. You are not who you could be.

I. You don't want someone else to be blessed.

If there is someone who you simply do not want good things to happen to, then do some soul searching about bitterness toward that person.

J. Who comes to mind?

When I first mentioned about there being someone whom you are not pursuing peace with, did someone come to your mind?

3. IF YOU ARE BITTER, WILL YOU CHOOSE TO FORGIVE RIGHT NOW?

A. Forgiveness is an act of your will and an act of faith. You choose to forgive and you trust God to give you the grace to walk it out. If you do your part, God will do His part.

B. Remove the Stinger - A man by the name of William Walton said, "To carry a grudge is like being stung to death by one bee."

Someone else has said that you may not be able to forget what has been done to you, but you can take the stinger out of the memory through forgiving.

C. You must forgive or you will not live in the benefits of God's forgiveness. This is the teaching of Scripture. Why set yourself apart from such wonderful blessing just because you want to see someone else cursed. Let love win. Let forgiveness come and cleanse you and free you of this torment.

D. If you asked Jesus right now, to forgive you, would he?

E. If he asked you to forgive that person who has offended you, would you? Well, he not only asks us to do this, but commands us to do it.

CONCLUSION: So, at this point, it is no longer between you and that other person, it is between you and Jesus. What do you choose to do right now? Would you come and let's all gather here in the altar, and we will all pray and lay down our offenses and let the river of God's forgiveness wash through this place this morning.....

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