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THE BIBLE VIEW

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Bound by Bitterness

Bill Brinkworth

One of the most devastating human emotions can be feelings of bitterness. Its strangling grasp can creep into our lives. Sometimes, we do not know how much it consumes our thoughts and feelings. Before we know it, we are captured in the claws of the sin of unforgiveness.

Perhaps it started with hurt feelings over what was said, another's actions, or even a lack of response. We mull it over and over. It festers in our gut. Our spirit may even be crushed.

We can get hard feelings about the person that offended us. Perhaps those hurt want to get "even" with the other person. Before long, hurt feelings can lead to different actions, including slander against the offending person or avoidance of that person.

The hurt accomplished may not even be recognized by the "offender". They may not have a clue as to how one is reacting to their remarks or actions, yet the offeree's bitterness burrows deeper and deeper into one's life.

Holding a grudge against another can be so devastating to some that it affects their health. Anger can be a result of bitterness. When angry, adrenaline and other hormones are released into the bloodstream, causing high blood pressure and a faster beating heart. Depression, ulcers, heart attack, and stroke have also been linked to those that are controlled by the stress of bitterness and unforgiveness. Not forgiving and not attempting to forget the offense can also lead people to do or say things to the offender that they would never think of doing or saying. Bitterness can indeed affect a person's life.

All have wrongs done to them sometime in their lives that hurt their feelings. Some let them roll off their shoulders and continue with their lives; others stew and never let go of what another has done to them.

The Bible has much to say about bitterness and forgiving one another. Here is a glimpse of what is said in the Bible:

- **God says not to be bitter and hold a grudge!** “It’s not that easy not to be bitter,” is often said. That is true. No sin is easy to stop. To have a healthy life and a good relationship with God, bitterness must be halted.
*“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour [to complain, utter loud noises], and evil speaking, be **put away from you**, with all malice:” Ephesians 4:31*
- **Forgive those who have wronged you.**
*“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if **he repent, forgive him.**” Luke 17:3*
- **Christ knows all you did, yet He still has forgiven all you have done if you are saved!** (John 3:16)
*“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as **God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.**” Ephesians 4:32 Also: Col. 3:13.*
- **Do not worry and occupy your thoughts with what another has done to you.** The gateway to bitterness is the thought gate. Once an idea gets in and is contemplated, it does more damage the more it is entertained in one’s thought life. Do not let yourself dwell on it. Stop thinking about it before it gets out of hand.
*“**Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked;**” Prov. 24:19*
- **Do not even start entertaining thoughts of getting even.**
*“**Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.**” Proverbs 24:29 Also: I Peter 3:8.*
- **You certainly have wronged others, even unintentionally.** You surely want to be forgiven by others and the Lord, so forgive those who have “wronged” you!
*“**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**” Matthew 6:12 Also: Mark 11:25-26.*
- **Forgive them, even if they do the offense more than once!**
*“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, **how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, **Until seventy times seven.****” Matthew 18:21 Also: Luke 17:4.*
- **The only “getting even” God allows is to be nice to the offender!**
*“**If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.**” Proverbs 25:21- 22* Return unkindness with kindness! This is certainly not what the world gives as a solution. Vengeance never takes away hurt feelings. Also: Mat. 5:44-45, Rom. 12:14, Rom. 12:17.
- **If any “getting even” is needed, God will do it, not you!**
*“Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.****” Romans 12:19*
- **Do not be happy when bad things happen to them.** Do not gloat, “They are getting theirs!”
*“**Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.**” Proverbs 24:17-18*

Unforgiveness and the bitterness that often follow do not help or change anything. The hurt feelings of bringing the matter up repeatedly certainly digs its trap deeper and deeper. The only way to get peace is to forgive.

“It’s easy for you to say. You don’t know what that person did to me.” You are right. I do not know, but I have learned that carrying and harboring bitterness will hurt you and others. Your only choices are to let it fester or eliminate it. Hopefully, you truly want to get rid of it.

Although it is repeatedly suggested that we forget our offended feelings, most of us cannot. Only God can forget when He chooses. We may not be able to get it permanently out of our minds, but we can do our best not to let it be at the forefront of our thought-life.

We all battle hurt feelings. It is our choice how we handle them. God’s Word clearly says we should not let those temptations rule and destroy our lives. Instead of getting bitter and blaming God about a matter, it is the time to get close to Him. It is during those hard times that we learn of His mercy and grace.

The longer one carries a grudge, the heavier it becomes!
“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:” Eph. 4:26

Advice on How to Have a Good Testimony

Bill Brinkworth

One of the most valuable assets a Christian can have is his testimony. What others think of him is often what they see him do, how he reacts in certain situations, and how they believe a Christian should live (although their view may not always be accurate). Paul gave some advice on how to preserve that testimony in Ephesians 4. Some of his advice included:

- Do not live like the rest of the world and put the wrong value on things that are not that important (vs. 17-18).
- Do not lust after things of this world and be consumed with greed for them (vs. 19).
- Do not let your conversation with others be about lust for this world’s things (vs. 22).
- Live a righteous life and strive to be a good example (vs. 24).
- Let your conversation be honest, and do not lie (vs. 25).
- If you get angry, get it right with those involved before the sun goes down (vs. 26).
- Do not get close to sin, and allow the devil to destroy your testimony (vs. 27).
- Do not steal; work hard for what you want (vs. 28).
- Be careful of the words you utter, and make sure what you say helps others (vs. 29).
- Do not sadden the indwelling Holy Spirit by sinning (vs. 30).
- Do not allow the sins of bitterness, violence, anger, and evil speaking to be part of your life (vs. 31).
- Be kind to others (vs. 32).

As hard as we try, some will always see our example wrong, no matter how we adhere to the above advice and other godly principles. Although it is impossible to please all the people all the time, we have a responsibility to try to have the best testimony possible. Our example is not so much about what others think about us but what others believe about Christ from our example.

We are often all the unsaved will ever see about Christ. Will they determine that they do not want to be a Christian because of what is observed by our behavior, or will they consider being one because of how we live our lives?

“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;” Heb. 12:15

Forgive

Author Unknown

In a school in Ireland, one boy struck another, and when he was about to be punished, the injured boy begged for his pardon. The teacher asked, “Why do you wish to keep him from being punished? He hit you.”

The boy replied, “I have read in the New Testament where our Lord Jesus Christ said that we should forgive our enemies and therefore I forgive him and beg he may not be punished for my sake.”

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Mat. 6:14-15