The Root of Bitterness

Bitterness blows out the candle of joy and leaves the soul in darkness. Here is what God’s Word has to say about bitterness:

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. 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. (Hebrews 12:14-15).

The Germination Of Bitterness

The seed of bitterness is a hurt that is planted in someone. It may be intentional or unintentional. Someone does not mean to hurt you, but you were hurt. Sometimes the hurt is only imagined. No one has hurt you, but somehow you feel that someone has done something wrong to you. There are also times when the hurt may be the very chastisement of God upon your life. That is the context of Hebrews 12:14-15.

The soil of bitterness is a heart that harbors hostility and does not deal with hurt by the grace of God. When someone becomes bitter, the bitterness takes root in the heart and grows deeper.

The world is full of people who have not dealt with an old hurt. They look for things to criticize, people to find fault with, and ways to justify the way they feel. Have you ever seen people who are hypercritical? Generally, they are bitter people. They know how to push your hot buttons until you react in a way to further justify their bitterness. Then, they can say, "Aha! I was right. I have a right to be bitter."

The Devastation Of Bitterness

We have learned about the seed and the soil of bitterness, now let's look at the root and the fruit of bitterness, which is found in our text from Hebrews 12:14-15.

The Root Of Bitterness
The root of bitterness is underground; it is easy to hide and camouflage. Seldom do you find anyone who will admit that they are a bitter person. They will either deny it or disguise it. A bitter person is hypersensitive, ungrateful, insincere, holds grudges, and has mood swings.

The Fruit Of Bitterness
Bitterness will affect you physically, emotionally, and spiritually because the fruit of bitterness is an acid that destroys its container. When your heart is bitter, God will not be real to you be. Why? Because hatefulness and holiness do not dwell in the same heart. And without holiness you will not see the Lord (see Hebrews 12:14).

The Eradication Of Bitterness

There are three steps to eradicating bitterness:

1. Let God Reveal It. Sometimes people say, "I know my heart, there's no bitterness in me." Truth of the matter is you don't know your heart. God's Word tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). A deceitful heart cannot diagnose a deceitful heart. You need to let God the Holy Spirit do radical surgery.

2. Let Grace Reveal It. A response of bitterness is never right when someone has done something wrong to you. You need to ask God to forgive you, and He will by His grace. If someone has wronged you, cut it down and forget it. By the grace of God, bury that hurt in the grave of God's forgetfulness. Justice is God giving us what we deserve, mercy is God not giving us what we deserve, grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve.

3. Let Good Replace It. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." You cannot be holy unless you follow peace with men. It is so worth it when you forgive. But, you say, "Look what they've done! I am not going to let them off the hook." Well, they are not on the hook – you are! When you forgive, you set two people free and one of them is yourself.

You will discover that your life is more joyful when you uproot your bitterness. If God gave us justice, every person reading this would die and go to hell. Thank God for His mercy that removes His hand of punishment from us. Praise God for His grace that gives us a brand new life!

• Love Worth Finding (Tuesday, October 22, 2002)