

Freedom from Bitterness

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(Eph 4:31-32 NKJV) "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: {32} And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as Elohim for the Messiah's sake forgave you." (Eph 5:1-2 NKJV) "Therefore be imitators of Elohim as dear children; {2} And walk in love, as the Messiah also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to Elohim for a sweet smelling aroma."

In this passage we are instructed to get rid of all bitterness. Before I begin our discussion on how and why this must be done, it is crucial to realize that the basis for all our actions in this regard must be what Yahshua the Messiah has done for us on the torture stake. In all our actions, we are to be imitators of Elohim.

In the Tanakh*, there was a woman whose name meant "Pleasant." Her name was Naomi and she had moved from Israel to another land with her husband and two sons. But her husband and two sons had died. After all this, it is recorded that Naomi had made some dreary comments to her recently widowed daughters-in-law concerning the deaths of her husband and two sons: "No, my daughters, for it is much more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of hwhy has gone out against me." [Ruth 1:13b, "The Scriptures"]. Naomi was comparing in order to determine who had the right to be more bitter.

She continues in verses 20-21: And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out filled, and hwhy has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since hwhy has witnesses against me, and the Almighty has done evil to me?"

Naomi's bitterness was toward Yahweh. It was Yahweh who had taken away her husband; it was Yahweh who had taken away her two sons, and she held this against Yahweh. Five times in these three verses she holds Yahweh accountable for her bitterness.

There are many people in the world today who are like Naomi. Not only are they bitter, they enjoy being bitter. These people somehow like it and feed on it. I believe a lot of these bitter people wouldn't know what to do if they got rid of it. They wouldn't have a purpose for living because bitterness is their purpose.

We all know people like this in the world, and we know people like this in the Body of the Messiah. It is easy to recognize when somebody is bitter. You can see it in their eyes, and in the lines of their faces – even if the person is young. You can see it in their mouth, you can see it when they're smiling or laughing. They are filled with bitterness and you can clearly see it. You can hear it in the tone of their voices, even when they protest that they are not bitter. The bitterness is central, and pervades everything.

There are several bitter people recorded in the Scriptures besides Naomi. For example, Jonah was a very bitter man. Yahweh said to him, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." [Jonah 4:9 NIV].

Jonah thought he had a right to his anger. "I like being angry. Yahweh, you are wrong to forgive people. I don't want you to forgive them."

There are people who enjoy holding grudges against other people. But our text requires us to remove all bitterness, and to maintain a tender heart. Here is the question: Is it possible to be kind, compassionate, tenderhearted, and yet bitter at the same time? These are all interior

attitudes. Tenderheartedness, by definition, involves a tender heart. Bitterness is also on the inside. But it is not possible to have two different, contradictory attitudes on the inside at the same time.

The Apostle Paul tells us to get rid of all bitterness, and to be kind and compassionate to one another. Therefore, the bitterness must go. But before it can be removed, it is necessary to know what it is – and that it is there.

It is relatively easy to see it in others, but it is not so easy to see it in ourselves. It is therefore important to have a good understanding of what the Scriptural definition of bitterness is.

Let us suppose that a Believer commits a sin. He tells a lie, for instance. Now when he tells this lie, does he feel guilty or does he feel bitter? Of course, he feels guilty. When we as Believers sin, we naturally feel guilty. This is straightforward. Now let us suppose that someone told a lie about this Believer and spread it all over town. What does he feel now – guilt or bitterness?

Guilt is what we feel when we sin, and bitterness is what we feel when others sin against us. The very definition of bitterness points to the action of another. If we had committed the offense, we would feel guilty and would know that we had to confess and forsake our sin.

We might not confess that sin, but not because we did not know what to do. But what do we do with the guilt of others? Bitterness is always based on someone else's sin, whether real or imagined.

First consider the imaginary sin. There are many times we can be bitter toward someone for what he said, when in reality he did not say it. We heard a false report, and now we are bitter. We even wait for an apology which he cannot offer. Should we remain in bitterness the rest of our lives because he never apologizes for something he did not do?

Incidentally, many bitter people cannot imagine the possibility that they are being bitter over imaginary sins. As far as bitterness is concerned, the other person's guilt is always real. For such a person trying to be free from bitterness, it is acceptable for them to assume the real guilt of the other person, so long as they get rid of their own bitterness.

But what about genuine sin? There are many bitter folks who really were mistreated by the offender. So how do we, as New Covenant Believers, deal with genuine offenses? Bitterness is based on sin that in some way relates to you. It is not concerned with how great the sin is; it is based on how close it is. For example, if some great and gross immorality occurs in Iran, Iraq, El Salvador or Cuba, what do we do? We read about it or hear about it on the news at 5, but we will not feel guilty, and we will not feel bitter. Nevertheless, it was a terrible sin that someone committed. And, since we were not personally involved, there is no bitterness on our part.

Then who are the likely candidates for us to feel bitter toward? Fathers, mothers, siblings, mates, children, friends, co-workers or superiors in the workplace, fellow worshippers, and some toward Yahweh Himself! The offense does not have to be great, just close.

You might feel justified in your bitterness, but the Scriptures do not grant anyone this right. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us, "...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of Yahweh; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." [Heb. 12:15, NKJV] The writer describes bitterness as a root. A root is something underground and cannot be seen. But there can be visible evidence of its presence, as when sidewalks are lifted by tree roots.

Roots can do other things. The fact that you cannot see roots does not mean they are not there. Neither does it mean you will never see them. They drink in nourishment which makes them grow, and they are no longer roots. Eventually they sprout and come up. The fruit that is born bears a direct relation to the root producing it, whether bitter or sweet.

That is exactly what this verse from Hebrews is saying. Beware lest any root of bitterness spring up, cause trouble, and defile many people – make spiritually filthy. Bitterness can spread through an entire congregation like a prairie fire. Or a work place, a dormitory, a home, Why is this? Maybe somebody decided to share something. Maybe he was bitter and let it come to the surface. It bore fruit that he then shared with others, and they in turn became bitter [defiled].

What happens to a person who is harboring bitterness on the inside? Can it make him/her physically sick? Suppose it is toward a family member and he has kept it bottled up for many years now. Finally, hurting, he goes to a doctor for help. But the doctor tells him that he needs a psychiatrist, so he sends him to one. After a few probing questions, the psychiatrist says something like, “You are sick, all right, after 20 years of bitterness toward your father. By keeping it suppressed all these years, that poison has rotted your insides. So, go to your father and share it with him. Let it out – get everyone else sick, too.”

That seems to be the world’s two solutions – to keep it in, bottled up, or let it out and spread the sickness around. But Yahweh’s solution is to dig up the root and get rid of it. But this takes the power and grace of Yahweh’s Holy Spirit that is available through His son, Yahshua the Messiah. A person must know the Son in order to come to the Father. He is the source of grace and power through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.

We, as New Covenant Believers, should not follow the world’s solutions. Scripture tells us to get rid of ALL bitterness. We must not keep it in, and we must not share it. Surrender it to Abba Yahweh, through Yahshua.

“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven, but is earthy, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” [James 3:14-15, NIV].

If anyone harbors bitter envy, evil practices will be the result. It does not come from Yahweh. It is straight from Satan himself. Every evil practice results from this kind of attitude. So, if we have bitterness, it is obvious we have a real problem. How do we get rid of it?

Before we can start, we have to realize that we are bitter. How can we tell? One good rule of thumb is this: Bitterness remembers details. You have had thousands of conversations in your life, most of which you have forgotten. But this one took place, say, five years ago, and you remember every single word, the intonation and inflection of his/her voice, and every minute detail. You know exactly what happened; it is ingrained in your mind. You are harboring bitterness.

Someone may object and say that it is also possible to have a good memory of a wonderful conversation. It is possible, but not likely. Why? Because memory is helped by review, review, review! People do not usually mull over and rehearse the good things nearly as much as the bad. This means that they have concentrated on how right they were, and how wrong the other person was. If someone has a sharp, detailed memory for things that happened years ago, and that memory is at all accusatory of someone else, then it is an indication of bitterness. And the solution is to get rid of it. Why is this so hard? IF I tell a lie, I can confess it and be forgiven. In order to get rid of it, I have to bring it back to my own heart. We must do the same with bitterness. But the temptation is to say, “Look what HE did to ME,” thereby excusing ourselves. Bitterness and resentment are close cousins. Bitterness is just resentment that has been held onto for a long time. The links in the chain continue: Resentment related to bitterness, which is related to hatred. And there is a Scriptural connection between hate and murder. Yes, it is possible that a case of resentment turned bitterness turned hatred can result in physical murder. It has happened.

Some might object that this teaching is too strong. But the strength of it comes from Sacred Scripture. What we want to do is make it apparent how sinful [ed. and how sinister] bitterness really is. The bitter person must first recognize the bitterness [Paul said, "examine yourselves."] and then recognize that it IS sin. Don't use the excuse that it's the other person's fault. The devil says, "Well, when he quits lying, or she quits doing this or that, or when he asks forgiveness, then I will get rid of my bitterness."

But what if it never happens? What if he/she never does? Are you going to live in bitterness and resentment for the rest of your life? Let's say you keep this wall of bitterness up, and one day he comes to you and says, "I'm sorry." Can you now forgive him? No, because bitterness does not forgive. In order to forgive this person when he says he is sorry, you must have already made yourself ready to do so. This means you are no longer bitter toward him. If you are ready to forgive him before he says he is sorry, then it does not depend on whether he says he is sorry or not. In other words, you get rid of bitterness unilaterally. It does not matter what the other person does or does not do. Your mental state is not dependent on the actions of another.

If you have not prepared yourself, his finally saying he is sorry, will not get rid of your bitterness. The only thing that gets rid of it is your confession of this sin before Almighty Yahweh in the Name of Yahshua the Messiah. Because of our faith in His death and resurrection, we can be free and forgiven of bitterness and all other sins.

Maybe the person you are bitter toward died years ago. There is no difference; the other person is dead, and you are still bitter. If the person who died was a Believer, he is forgiven and pure, provided he confessed his sins. His name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and he is now awaiting the resurrection of the Just. And here you are, still bitter toward him.

But if the person who died is not a Believer, then he will stand before Yahweh and be judged according to II Thes. 1:6-9 and other places.

Romans 12:19, NKJV says "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says Yahweh."

Remember this: Your bitterness is your sin, regardless of what caused it or what you think caused it. You are the one who has to deal with it. Yahweh will allow you to experience the joy that forgiveness brings to you when you repent and confess this bitterness to Abba Yahweh.

We must not keep it, and we must not share it with others. Tell it only to Yahweh. Remember that we cannot love our neighbors as ourselves if we are guilty of this sin. We have to see it as an evil, then repent of it.

I truly believe that bitterness is a major hindrance to a true Spiritual revival in the world, this country, and especially among His called-out ones. I believe that when True Believers start walking in love, truly confessing our sins, we will be able and ready to forgive the sins of others. Then and only then will we have freedom from bitterness~
