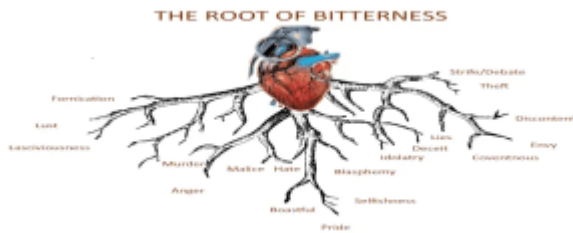


Bitterness: Weeding Out the Poisonous Root



—BY Jim Henry

I read this article long ago some in the 1980s. It helped me greatly to overcome the grudges and bitterness I used to have toward various people for their perceived wrongs against me. If you have bitterness in your heart toward anyone, I urge you to read it! When I was bitter toward a person, it was like a spiritual acid in my soul. I learned over time to forgive others as Christ has forgiven me. I've realized how sinful I have been in the past in my attitudes words and deeds toward some people, and knowing that humbles me greatly. I can say now by God's grace I'm free from the past and have my eyes only on the present and future, praise God!

I'm not sure who the author of this article, Jim Henry is. There's a Baptist pastor by that name. It could be him.

Bitterness is that hateful, spiteful sourness in the heart that creeps in when you have been, or think you have been, maliciously wronged. I looked up the word in a dictionary, and it was defined as a sharpness affecting the taste, the feelings, or the mind. It comes from an old English word that meant "sharpness to the taste."

If you've ever had a difficult experience with someone who made you mad, and you resented it, held on to it—you know how bad it tasted spiritually, and in your mind it raised hateful feelings and thoughts. That is bitterness, and God's Word has something to say about it.

RECOGNIZING BITTERNESS

How does bitterness show itself?—In at least three ways.

One kind of bitterness is directed against God. You can become bitter against God in the loss of a loved one, when a friend swindles you out of money, when the boss passes you over for a promotion you really deserved and gives it to someone else, or when your husband walks off and leaves you for another woman.

You are angry, and you say, "Lord, if You love me so much, why did this happen? If You answer prayer, why didn't You answer mine? Either You are not powerful enough, or You didn't care enough. Either way, I am angry with You!"

A second kind of bitterness is against other people. It can be there in a child who decides to rebel against his parents, to run away from home because he believes they are unfair to him. It can be there in a wife who says, "I'll have a nervous breakdown if my husband keeps treating me like this, and I'll get even with him."

It might be a person who says, "OK, if I forgive them for what they did to me, that wouldn't be fair. They don't deserve to be forgiven. I'm going to carry this a little longer and maybe somehow along the way they'll see what it has done to me, and something will happen to them."

You and I cannot afford the luxury of holding on to bitterness and resentment against others, because it only becomes the root of other problems.

Your bitterness can also be directed against yourself, and show itself in an inability to forgive yourself, even though God has forgiven you. You carry that load until you say, "I deserved it, but I'm strong enough to take it, and I'll just carry this thing and deal with it myself." Self-centered pride latches onto your heart and you refuse the forgiveness of God and others.

This can also cause you to live in self-pity. You say, "OK, I deserve this. God's trying to punish me. I shouldn't have done this or that, and now I deserve what I'm getting, and I'm just going to have to be a martyr and carry it." So you trudge along in life nursing bitter resentment and a grudge against God or someone else. You carry it until you make life miserable for yourself and everyone around you. Why? Because you never dealt with your bitterness. The Bible says, "Watch out for such bitterness!" ("Look diligently"— Heb.12:15 .)

BITTERNESS BEGINS UNSEEN

Not only am I to "look diligently" for bitterness, but because it may be unseen, I may not be aware of it; and being unaware of it, I may be especially liable to its danger.

Look what the Scripture says: "See to it that no one misses the grace of God, that no bitter root grows up..." Now, where is a root? Usually under the ground. You don't see it, but it's there. I have some weeds in my yard, growing through everything—even bricks! There are roots down there somewhere. They cause weeds to grow, whether there's shade or sunshine—I can't get rid of them. I don't see the roots, but the evidence is everywhere.

Bitterness can be an unseen enemy, growing like a tumor in your mind and in your spirit. The Bible says we should look out for it. Just because we don't see it, doesn't mean it's not there.

Bitterness is the unharvested fruit of anger, and in time it will show itself. As Numbers 32:23 says, "Be sure that your sin will find you out."

BITTERNESS SPRINGS UP & CAUSES TROUBLE

The Bible warns that the root of bitterness will spring up, and when it does, what does it do? Cause good things to happen? No! Cause joy? No! Cause love? No! Cause peace? No! "See to it...that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble!"

Bitterness, improperly handled, causes trouble—and it does so in at least two ways.

First, it causes physical problems. In his book "None of These Diseases," S. I. McMillan says, "Anger, unhandled, will show itself in at least 50 diseases."

Dr. Norman Wright, a professor of psychology at Biola University and a Christian writer, agrees with McMillan. God has constructed us, says Dr. Wright, with a tube about 30 feet long that begins at our throat and runs to our rectum (the alimentary canal). That long tube, disturbed by bitterness and anger, produces things like colitis, diarrhea and ulcers. (Editor's note: Of course, such ailments often result from many other causes besides bitterness or anger.) When we are angry and do not handle it properly, there are physical consequences.

Bitterness can also show itself in our mental condition. Bitterness is really displaced anger. We can be angry at other things, other people and other objects, not knowing it comes from bitterness. All our energy and mind are set in an anger-mode, and we're affected mentally. There is no joy, no creativity, no positive power flowing through our lives because there is resentment there.

We are also affected spiritually when bitterness is not resolved. How? By an inability to accept God's Love. It can cause you to doubt your relationship to God. Ray Burke has written a book called Anger-Diffusing the Bomb, and in it he says that each time he dealt with those who doubted God's Love for them, somewhere along the line he discovered they harbored bitterness against God, themselves, or someone else. When this bitterness was dealt with and resolved, their ability to accept God's Love and forgiveness returned.

HOW DO WE OVERCOME BITTERNESS?

The good news is that anyone can overcome a bitter spirit. God encourages us to deal with it. He says in Ephesians 4:31, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger..."

The Bible is so practical and clear that if we take what God teaches us about overcoming bitterness and apply it, we can be free of the bondage of bitterness.

BITTERNESS TOWARD GOD

Begin by dealing with any bitterness toward God. The following steps may help.

First, trust God's wisdom. This doesn't mean you should believe that everything that happens on Earth is good. Sin is in the World. Satan is still the prince of the air. Yet I must believe that God allows things to happen that He may not like, and which we may not like. But in His wisdom, somewhere down the line, God will turn it around for good for His children, according to His promise in Romans 8:28 .

Second, I have to ask God what He's trying to teach me through this. The Bible says we're the disciples of Jesus. What is a disciple?—A learner. The Bible says the Father is the teacher, and we are disciples. We are learners. The experiences of life are teaching experiences. Sometimes we are so anxious to get to our destination that we forget how much joy can be ours along the way. When bitterness comes and you are tempted to be angry with God, ask Him what He is trying to teach you.

Third, apply one of God's promises to your situation.

Fourth, reject self-pity. Have you ever been a victim of the "Poor Me Syndrome"? Perhaps you know someone else who always seems to be saying, "Poor me, just look what's happened to me." No one likes being around such a sad-sack for very long, because it's no fun. So don't get into that syndrome.

Fifth, put time into proper perspective. Every difficult experience you may be dealing with now, circumstances that tend to make you angry and bitter, will in time pass away.

Sixth, be quick to give thanks. I've learned a little chorus recently, and I start singing it almost from the time I wake up in the morning: "It's amazing what praising can do." The song goes:

It doesn't matter when things go wrong,
Jesus fills my heart with a song.
It's amazing what praising can do.

You can't be bitter against God and praise Him at the same time. You can't be blessing Him while you're also shaking your fist at Him. So the Bible says, "In all things, give thanks."— 1Th.5:18 . Learn to give thanks unto the Lord and praise His Name, and it's really amazing what praising can do.

BITTERNESS TOWARD YOURSELF

Many times we get angry with ourselves. It shows up in many forms—we feel rejected, we wallow in self-pity, and our self-image is poor.

It may be because of some sin or failure of yesteryear, something that, if we had it to do all over again, we wouldn't do for a million dollars; but we did do it, and we're having trouble forgiving ourselves.

How do I deal with that?

I begin by confessing my sin to the Lord, and believing His promise: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"— 1Jn.1:9 . Then once I know God has

forgiven me, I can forgive myself.

BITTERNESS TOWARD OTHERS

How do you deal with bitterness against others? One thing you must do is to keep your anger temporary. In Ephesians 4:26 God tells us we should not let the sun go down on our anger. If you're mad at somebody today, you should get it settled before the sun goes down. If it goes down and you don't deal with it, it will simmer all night, and tomorrow there's a good chance you'll be twice as angry and bitter about it as you are today. Washington Irving said that a tart temper is the only thing that doesn't mellow with age. So deal with your anger before the sun goes down. Keep a short account.

Another crucial area is the tongue. The Bible reminds us that though the tongue is a little instrument, it causes a lot of problems. You can't get into trouble for something you didn't say. That's why it's so often best to mentally stamp "N.C." on things you hear or observe. Do you know what that is? "No Comment." You can keep out of trouble that way. Watch your words. A sharp tongue is a tool that grows keener with use. Watch it.

We can also pursue peace. "Make every effort to live in peace with all men."—Heb.12:14 . "Seek peace and pursue it."— 1Pet.3:11 . We must chase after peace, like a dog after a fox! Go for it! In Philippians 4:5 we are commanded, "Let your gentleness be evident to all." Be gentle—not to most people, or to some, but to all of them. Live gently. Pursue peace.

Also, if you know someone is harboring anger, hurt or bitterness towards you because of some wrongdoing on your part, you can take the positive step of initiating reconciliation. In Matthew 5:23-24 , Jesus says that if you come to Him with your offering in hand, and then remember that a brother has something against you, leave your offering, go to your brother, and make your offering after you're reconciled with your brother. So the Lord not only tells us to go to others when we're bitter or unforgiving towards them, but He covers both angles and also tells us to go to those who are bitter or angry towards us.

There's something else: Forgive and forget. How can you forget something negative that's stuck in your mind? The Bible says God remembers our sins no more. So how can God forget something when He is omniscient? How can He know everything and still forget? Here's the secret: When you forgive and forget, the forgetting means that you, like God, don't hold that wrongdoing to the offender's account. God forgets the charge against us; He remembers it no more. Oh, He knows about it, just as you do, but He will never bring it up again. That's what we are to do. Don't fish in the pond of history. Leave it there.

Sometimes we are like the man who came running into the office of a marriage counsellor. "Sir, you've got to do something about my wife. Hurry! She's historical, she's historical!" The counselor said, "Now, wait a minute. You mean she's hysterical." He said, "No! She's historical! She's bringing up everything from the past!"

Some people can go back and reel off in chronological order everything that a person has done against them during their entire relationship. If you forgive a person, forget their offenses and never bring them up again. Don't dwell in the past and don't let the past dwell in you.

Robert E. Lee, after the Civil War, visited a home in Kentucky. The lady of the house pointed to a limbless, battered tree trunk standing on the front lawn, and said, "Before the Union army came through here, that was a beautiful, magnificent magnolia tree. Then they blasted it with their artillery, and that's all that's left. What do you think about that?"

She expected the general to sympathize with her and criticize the Union Army. But instead, he looked at her and said one sentence: "Cut it down and forget it."

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you have some trees of bitterness standing in your life? Bitterness toward God? Toward others? Toward yourself? Cut them down and forget them.

Resolve to deal with your bitter spirit. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."— Eph.4:31-32 .

Christians and Halloween



Halloween is a high-holy day for Satanists, witches and other occult members who actually hurt people and animals.

Why I left SGI and Turned to Jesus



– By Andrew Fisher

Forward by the Webmaster:

I was very surprised when my cyberspace Christian friend, Andrew from the UK, told me he was with Soka Gakkai for nearly 25 years! I asked him to write up his story. I met many Soka Gakkai people from time to time when I lived in Japan and can tell you they are some of the hardest people to share my faith in Christ with. For one thing, they try to proselytize me when I'm trying to convert them!

I have received the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart.

For almost 30 years I was a practising Nichiren Buddhist and a local leader in the UK of the lay Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai International.

As many people are aware, Buddhism is a godless, atheist religion. To understand why I gave up being a practising Nichiren Buddhist and member of SGI we need to examine why I turned to Buddhism in the first place.

Until I was about 21 years old I was a Roman Catholic. Like many other young Catholics I had bit by bit relaxed my religious practice to the point where I never attended church regularly, took communion or made a confession. The pagan, maybe even Satanic, influences of rock music in the late 60s and 70s such as Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath had slowly entered my consciousness and had begun slowly, but surely, to dull the soft words of the Lord.

As a child I recall speaking happily and directly to the Lord about everything in my life. But now as a young man I found myself one day in the confessional box. As I confessed to some minor sins, the priest absolved me as usual and gave me a small penance of 10 Hail Marys. As I silently recited the prayers, I was struck by the ludicrousness of the situation. Here I was chanting away to the Virgin Mary while in my heart of hearts I no longer believed in a God. The steady chipping away of my soul by Satan had finally worked...at least for a while.

I thought that Nichiren Buddhism held the answers to inner peace for me and began many years of sincere practice. I began to notice as I taught many people about Buddhism that I was saying something that no other Buddhists said (or at least dared to say):

"If this practice fails to work for me personally, then I will immediately give up the practice of Buddhism."

Nichiren Buddhism essentially believes that everything can be achieved (all earthly desires are considered as enlightenment) by chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo (devotion to the mystic law of cause and effect). The universe is subservient to this law and adjusts everything in harmony with the desire of the chanting Buddhist. Little did I know that there were challenges ahead of me that chanting could not overcome. As I slowly realised this was the case I began to acknowledge that chanting had not achieved my "earthly desires".

So what happened to me? Simple! Like Paul on the road, but less painfully, I woke up one morning and I believed again in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord had filled the spiritual vacuum. I was that little boy once again being talked to in a comforting way with his dear heavenly Father. A natural and painless rebirth had occurred in my heart.

Now I found that there was a power infinitely greater than I had ever known before. Jesus was alive!

Over the next weeks and months, as I walked about in my new body, I determined to ask as many people as possible about their experiences of the Lord in their daily lives.

One of the first people I spoke to was my dentist. He told me that his grandfather had been a Methodist preacher in Argentina. He felt that, although many professed to believing in Jesus, in reality they lived godless lives.

A local young Muslim man who runs a grocery store near my home in Marbella and who has trouble finding the monthly rent and health insurance for his sick mother and brother showed me a YouTube video he was watching the as I walked in to his shop. The video was about the daily life of Jesus.

An experience that affected me profoundly and showed me I was truly walking with Jesus occurred one day as I spoke to my wife. My beloved wife is a practising Nichiren Buddhist. She often talks painfully about losing her dear brother to cancer when he was only 12 years old. For the 34 years of our married life I have often watched the tears roll down her face as she talks about the suffering of her brother as he died and of the pain of her parents as they cared for him in his last days in this world.

For years, answering as a Buddhist, I often spoke about her brother's karma and reincarnation. Now, as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the first time in all those years, the correct words came into my mouth: "Don't worry, my love. Your brother and your mother and father are in Heaven now. At rest and at peace."

Her face lit up and said, "Thank you for that." For the first time in our years together, I saw a peace finally descend upon her.

Praise the Lord and thank you!

Making time

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. – Genesis
1:1

What a profound statement the Holy Bible makes in the authorized version of the Holy Bible (King James Version of 1611) in its very first verse! The Creator not only made matter (atoms and molecules), He not only made space between them (heaven) but He also created TIME! – (in the beginning). I consider it a universal concept.. Even with my finite mind, I **must** grasp that there had to be a beginning of **time**. Some call it the “**Big Bang**.” I prefer to call this historical event, “**Genesis Chapter 1.**”

This post is not a theological disputation of what “time” is, but rather, (I hope) an amusing account of cultural differences of two different peoples of the meaning of the word of “time.”

Today a Japanese friend (who is conversant in English) asked me to do a favor and move out some rather large and heavy furniture (desks) from her attic. She did not intend for the furniture to be preserved, but to be destroyed.

“I’ll make time for it.” I replied. The entrance to the attic of her house was small. I knew the easiest way to move the large desks from her attic storage space (cheap furniture) was to break them apart with sledge hammer– a tool on hand – and to carry the lighter pieces of the broken furniture down through the attic entrance one by one. Japanese made furniture is not like that made in the West. It’s inexpensive fiberboard, not solid wood that lasts for generations as in American or European furniture. It is easily damaged and usually discarded after only few years (even one!) after its creation.

From what she said to me, I felt her saying, (as common for the Japanese people because they do not want you to go out of the way for them) “**Don’t go out of your way for me!**”

I replied again, “I’ll **make** the time!” But her reaction again seemed to me to be negative. Why on earth would a person who is asking a favor interpret what to me was a positive response to that favor such as “I’ll make the time” be as a negative? My conclusion: Cultural difference only. Me “making” time meant to her that I would be bothered to oblige her request. This is not true.

Another point: The Japanese often use the word “if” when asking a favor. “If you have time.” My response: “If you want me to do something for you, please don’t say, ‘if’, say ‘when.’ I can always find the time.”

I like to think of time as something you or “take,” or “grab,” or seize” such

as the expression "Seize the Day". I like that expression. Time is not something that "comes" to you. We all do what we consider to be our own particular priority.

When somebody says to me, "I'm busy. I don't have the time to do what you are asking." I understand that to mean, "What I am doing now is more important than your request."

As for me personally, my goal in life is of servitude to others. I like to "make the time" to help others.

When I say to somebody, "I'll make time to fulfill your request" I hope they consider that I am doing a service for the motivation of love for them, not for any personal gain on my own. This is what my blog is all about. □

Adventure hitchhiking to Saitama city



Today is the first day of another extended road trip. I hope to use this Christmas season to tell the Japanese people about Christ, and the best way I know how to do that is by hitchhiking when traveling and talking to the drivers individually.

I hitchhiked nearly 300 kilometers in three cars to the Kanto area which includes Tokyo and vicinity. My destination was Noda city in Chiba prefecture.

Two of the drivers went out of their way for me, the second driver, Mr. Tokaji very much so because it meant at least one hour extra of his time. He took me to Omiya station in Saitama City from where I took a train the rest of the way. There is a direct train from Omiya to Noda.

Mr. Tokaji said that he is a religious person. It is uncommon for me to hear such statements from Japanese people. Most say they're not interested in any matters related to faith.

Mr. Tokaji asked many questions about the Bible. He was impressed when I told him that both Christianity and Judaism helped mold Japanese culture from as early as the first century A.D. and that the chant "washoi washoi" that the Japanese say when carrying the *Omikoshi* is a Hebrew word meaning "carry". Only a tiny percentage of the Japanese know of their Jewish/Christian roots.

Total cost for transportation today: 400 Japanese yen.