Glad Tidings

"And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers…" (Acts 13:32)

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Avoiding Bitterness

(Jerry Fite)

Our sense of injustice peaks when we are personally wronged. I may be compassionate for others who are suffering, but the pain is more acute when injustice's sharp arrows hit me. If we are not careful, being wronged can lead to persistent resentment, feeding the root of bitterness.

God instructs us to be "careful" in avoiding bitterness. Determined to not forsake holiness in following after peace with all men, we should also be *"looking carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby the many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:14-15).* The inspired writer is warning us that our own sins can lead to forming a harmful root of bitterness. Falling short in living up to God's gracious instructive standard can create discouragement within ourselves. Interacting with others, our dark negativity can spread from the root of bitterness defiling fellow Christians.

Regardless of our own sin of falling short of God's divine standard, or the sin of others who treat us unjustly, bitterness is a tool the Devil can use to destroy us from the inside out.

Joseph felt the acute pain of injustice. He was mistreated by his brothers who "stripped" him of his coat of many colors, given to him by his father. They "cast him" into a dry and empty pit isolated in the wilderness. They saw his distress and refused his appeal. They then rid themselves of their brother by selling him into slavery *(Genesis 37: 23-24; 28; 39:1).* He was imprisoned upon a false accusation of seducing Potipher's wife (*Genesis 39:11-20).* After Joseph interpreted an imprisoned butler's dream, the butler forgot about his fellow prisoner for at least two more years after he was freed exactly as Joseph had prophesied *(Genesis 40:3, 41:1, 9-14).*

Being forgotten certainly hurts the ego. Having your character slandered can destroy lifelong favorable perceptions. Being rejected by family members can be devastating, leading many to root themselves in vindictive bitterness. But not Joseph. Why?

In the midst of intermittent tears revealing persistent hurt, Joseph knew God was with Him. In the confines of a prison God was giving Joseph favor in the sight of the prison keeper *(Genesis 39:21).* Receiving oversight of fellow prisoners God made that which Joseph did to prosper *(Genesis 39:23).* He was not a hit and miss "fortune teller" when he did not hesitate in interpreting the favorable dream of the imprisoned butler and the unfavorable dream of the baker. He was interpreting and prophesying by the wisdom and power of God *(Genesis 40:12-22).*

Joseph also manifested faith in God's providence. that helped him avoid bitterness. In the presence of his brothers, Joseph focused on God's providence. He could therefore speak kindness to those who had done him wrong. *"And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5)* He knew he was in God's second year of a seven-year plan of no plowing nor harvesting *(Genesis 45:6).* Believing God's providence, he could declare, *"As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20).*

Knowing vengeance belongs to God, we can absorb undeserved hurt with forbearance. He will "recompense" *(Romans 12:19-20).* We can therefore avoid bitterness, while doing good with kindness.