

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

BITTERNESS

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A bitter taste in one's mouth is bad, but worse is bitterness of heart or soul. Part of the definition of bitterness is "to embitter, irritate, or to make bitter." Part of the description of those who are under sin is the quotation by Paul from Psalm 10:2. "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. 3:14). Paul is describing the depravity of mankind (Rom. 3:10-18). One aspect of wickedness is "bitterness" which leads to depraved speech. The consequences of bitterness are "tongues that use deceit," poisoned lips, and cursing (Rom. 3:13,14). Bitter words come from bitterness of heart. "Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mt. 12:34).

Sometimes Christians become bitter "who have whet their tongue like a sword, and have aimed their arrows, even bitter words" (Psalm 64:3). Most are bitter because of evils which befell them. Their bitterness may be addressed to God. "Why did He allow this to happen to me? What have I done to cause God to turn away from me in this way?" Although we may not always give a clear cut answer, it is not because God has selected you with malice. Part of the answer to the questions may be where you live. You live in a sin-sick world. While God sends rain on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45), the world lost its perfection when Satan deceived Eve. We all suffer the consequences of the earth being cursed. When we read the life of Paul we are amazed at what he suffered, but always found a satisfactory answer. While in prison in Rome, unable to travel and preach, he wrote to the Philippians. "Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14). Seeing the bravery and faithfulness of Paul under evil conditions, brethren drew strength to keep the word going. What we can learn from this is that the gospel can be preached anywhere, and if it can, it can be preached everywhere. Why be bitter? The gospel is still good news. The brethren were emboldened to "speak the word of God without fear." Their boldness led others to be bold and fearless. Why be bitter when you can spread the word? What could be better?

Others are bitter at people who have hurt them. Many of us who have lived many years have had people dislike us, abuse us, cheat us, or in some other way, harm us and make our life miserable as they could. Some find it difficult to forget. Any remembrance of what happened brings a surge of anger. Whatever happened has become an incubus that distorts their outlook when that person's memory is brought back. Like a repeated nightmare, its return distorts their thinking and their reasoning ability so they cannot cope with present realities. The past is too overwhelming. What is the way of escape? How can one free himself from being consumed in bitterness?

"We remember best, not what we have labored to memorize; but the things we see so vividly with such understanding and interest, that we do not realize we are memorizing them" (Learning From Jesus, Seth Wilson, p. 24). We sing "Standing On The Promises." Once you see yourself in the mind's eye standing on what God has promised, a firm, secure base: you can release yourself from any burden of the past. "Whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust" (II Peter 1:4). The divine nature does not include remembering the past with bitter anger. The essence of the gospel is to follow Jesus. Simple faith in Christ and devotion to His Way can give one the strength to overcome whatever makes him feel again all the hurts of the past. The truly wise man has learned that Christ came, not to save us from earthly trials, but to save us from ourselves. Read the beatitudes of Jesus. The first seven are pronouncing blessings upon states of mind (Mt. 5:3-9). Nothing that is truly worthwhile comes easy. The easy way is usually the wrong way. The past is past. Start anew with "the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Why be burdened with resentment when God is still in heaven. "Forgetting the things which are past, and stretching forward to the things which are before. I press on." (Phil. 3:13,14a)