

Who You Are Determines Your Response When Wounded I: Put Away Bitterness

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Date: 02 November 2014

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[0:00] Well, I have thought up of a new TV reality show. It's called Scar Wars. It's all about stories of scars.

I've got some doozy scars on my body, and I'm sure you've got some scars on your body. They're stories of being wounded. Now, if you've been around long enough, I'm guessing you've accumulated some scars.

Because if you're human, you're going to get scratched. You're going to get cut. You're going to get pierced and bruised. You're going to get beat up. Get broken. Physical scars tell stories of physical wounds.

But there's another kind of wound we're going to look at for the next two Sundays. It's a wound that doesn't take place on your outer person. It's a wounding of your inner person.

The wound is deeper than a physical puncture. The wound we need to focus our attention on penetrates into our inner being.

[1:11] A wounding of one's soul. When someone sins against you. Let me give you some examples. If you've been betrayed.

If you have been on the receiving end of broken promises. If you've experienced rejection. If you've experienced emotional abuse.

Physical abuse. Sexual abuse. Or all of the above. You've been wounded. Inside. In other words. Someone has sinned against you. They've hurt you. They've wounded you. Physical wounds can be seen. They can be treated.

And eventually they heal. And for those of us. Some of us get scars. Emotional wounds. Emotional wounds. If they go untreated. They fester.

[2:08] They become infected. They become toxic. If you would open up your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4. We're going to be looking at really just one verse this morning.

But I'm going to read a few. So Ephesians 4 verse 31 and 32. Please turn there with me. As I read God's word for us this morning.

God says this. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Let me read that again. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Be kind to one another. Tender hearted. Forgiving one another. As God in Christ forgave you this morning. And next Sunday if we are given that.

[3:18] So this morning and next Sunday we're going to be studying Ephesians 4 verse 31 and 32. And applying it to our lives. How we as Christians respond biblically to woundedness.

How are we as Christians to respond when someone sins against us? That's what we're going to be looking at. When we are sinned against.

When we're hurt. When we're wounded. We need to respond in a way that pleases God. We're not to be bitter towards those who've sinned against us.

We are to be Christ-like to those who have wounded us. This is a tall order. This is the way of Jesus. We could sum it up this way.

As Christians we're to put off bitterness. And put on forgiveness. All along here I've been telling you.

[4:18] Who you are as a Christian determines things. Determines how you live your life. And what we're looking at here is this. Who you are as a Christian. Being brought from death to life.

Being who you are determines a new way of responding to being sinned against. Now imagine. A man is rolled into the emergency room on a gurney.

And this guy went swimming in a dirty pool with an open wound on his arm. So he shows up. He's got all sorts of symptoms of this infection.

He's diagnosed with a staph infection. Which is a pretty nasty type of infection. In fact that staph infection is producing poison toxin that jumps into the circulatory system.

And is now brought through his system. To his vital organs. If unchecked it will kill him. Now this guy on the gurney doesn't realize quite the situation he's in.

[5:22] So imagine him laying there on the gurney in the ER. The doctor walks in. And this man with a staph infection on his arm.

Thinking that everything is going to work out just fine. He says, Hey doc. How can I stop from getting an infection next time? The doctor responds this way.

Sir, you may not have a next time. The infection in you right now can kill you. We must first stop this infection sir.

And then we can talk about how to prevent this from happening again. This morning we're going to focus our attention on stopping the spread of an infection called bitterness.

That's where we're going to focus this morning. Next Sunday we're going to look back and ask the question, How do we respond when wounded?

[6:23] How do we move forward when the next time someone sins against us? How do we move from being infected with bitterness to being forgiving as Christ forgave us?

So this morning, Christian, you must put away your bitterness. We're going to look at five things that are going to help us understand this.

Five things you need to know in order to put away bitterness and to please God. Let me just name those right now so you can follow me along. First one is the bitter infection.

The second point is the bitter effect. The third is the bitter symptoms. The fourth point is the bitter truth. And finally, we'll wrap up talking about the bitter cure for our bitterness.

This first point will take the longest. The bitter infection. In this first point, I want to answer the question, What is bitterness? We see here in Ephesians 4, 31, just these words.

[7:31] Let all bitterness be put away from you. Let all bitterness be put away from you. Bitterness is what results from an untreated wound of the soul.

Bitterness is what results from an untreated hurt to the soul. Bitterness is a sinful reaction to being wounded.

And it's like an infection. Just to clarify, people are not born bitter. People are born sinful, but they're not born bitter.

People become bitter. Sinners respond sinfully to sin. And typically speaking, when sinned against, a sinner is going to sin right back.

So can you imagine someone over the years accumulating wound after wound after wound and not dealing with it in a way that pleases God? Do you know what's going to happen? That person is going to become more and more bitter.

[8:38] You'll see it on their face. Maybe you know someone like that. Maybe you're like that. Bitterness is a sinful reaction to being sinned against.

And whether that sin is real or perceived. Now, I just want to make something clear at the outset, because we're going to come back to this in just a minute. When you're sinned against, when you're wounded by someone else, when someone sins against you, God holds that person responsible for that sin.

He doesn't hold you responsible for the sin. That person has sinned against you and against God and is responsible for them. You are responsible for how you respond to being sinned against.

God holds you responsible for that. God holds you responsible for that. That's where we're going to come back to in a little bit. But let's take a deeper look at what bitterness is.

Bitterness is toxic. It's poison to the soul. Bitterness is essentially unforgiveness.

[9:55] And here's what unforgiveness says. Unforgiveness operates this way. You have wounded me and you've caused me pain and you're going to pay for it.

That's unforgiveness. It's coming back at you. You're going to pay for making me feel pain. That's unforgiveness. It raises the question of what is forgiveness.

And we're going to come back to that next week. But for the time being, let me just say this.

Forgiveness is this. Forgiveness is this. Forgiveness is this. Recognizing the wound. Not denying the pain. But instead of saying, you're going to pay for it.

Forgiveness is this. I'll pay for it. I'll bear that. The pain stops here with me. I'll own that. They're responsible for the sin.

But I'm responsible for my response. Forgiveness is paying the bill for the wrong done. Bitterness is unforgiveness.

[11:00] It says this. You're going to feel the pain for the pain you caused me. You see, bitterness has a malicious edge to it.

Look back at Ephesians 4.31. You see the connection that Paul is making between bitterness and malice? He says this. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Malice is looking to harm someone else. It's evil intent. It's the opposite of kindness. Kindness says, I want to do you good. Malice says, I want to do you bad.

I want to hurt you. I want to harm you. And so what bitterness is, is unforgiveness with a malicious edge. It's a kind of vengeance.

And we all know Romans 12. God says, vengeance is mine. It's mine to repay. Bitterness is toxic to your soul.

[12:07] It's toxic to the body of Christ. And it grieves God. It's toxic. And it spreads. It spreads. It becomes other bad things.

Look back at Ephesians 4.31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.

Wrath and anger are essentially synonyms. They're talking about very much the same thing. But if there is a difference between the two, wrath is an explosive rage.

It's temporary. Blah! Anger is more of a slow boil over time. Both are anger.

But one is more wrathful, temporary. The other is a slow stewing over unforgiveness. Clamor.

[13:08] Clamor literally means to raise your voice. To shout. And what's being forbidden there is to shout out of bitterness. To shout out of anger.

Clamor. Out of the bitter heart, the mouth speaks clamor. Slander is vilifying someone.

It's making a monster out of someone with your words. Again, it is kind of a slow boil of anger coming up out of your mouth. Out of the overflow of the bitter heart, the mouth speaks slander.

It's corrupt speech. It's not edifying speech. Bitterness is a sinful reaction to being wounded. It's toxic.

It spreads. It injures. It's destructive. It's a bad thing. And bitterness has bitter effects.

[14:10] So we've looked at the bitter infection. Now let's look at the bitter effect. There is a reason why God is commanding us to put off bitterness here.

It's destructive. It's destructive. In Hebrews 12.15, we read that this writer, he says, he describes bitterness as a root that springs up, causes trouble, and defiles many.

Bitterness has a communal effect. Now, bitterness has adverse effects on your personal physical health.

If you're holding bitterness, it's going to show up in other ways in your body. And I would really like to make a case for that right now. But I'm not going to. Because the Apostle Paul doesn't do that.

The Apostle Paul is making a case for putting off bitterness based upon our life together as a church. This is about the health of a body.

[15:18] It has a destructive effect on a church's health, on a body of Christ. That's why this command is here in this place. Remember, Ephesians 4.1-16, Paul's talking about a local church as a body of

Christ.

Healthy, all parts working, growing up, united together under our head, Jesus. And then in Ephesians 4.17-32, Paul explains how we are to walk out that unity.

How we are to live united together. And he's saying he's got to get rid of bitterness. Bitterness, because that's going to disunite you. It will divide the body of Christ. Which, of course, grieves the Holy Spirit of God who is at work in us, seeking to unite us.

Bitterness has a bitter effect. Are you bitter? Are you bitter? Do you have an infection of your soul? Now, let's look at the bitter symptoms. Because some of you may be sitting in your seats right there and saying, I'm not bitter.

[16:36] I'm happy. I'm not bitter. And you might not be bitter. But some of you may be sitting there not realizing that you are bitter.

You may just not know that you're bitter. And so I want to help you recognize bitterness. I've read a couple books in preparation for this morning and next Sunday.

And Ben put these books up on our website. So if you want to purchase them, they're relatively inexpensive. They're easy to read. They're very helpful books on bitterness.

The first one is Jim Wilson's How to Be Free from Bitterness. It's a collection of essays. Jim Wilson writes the first one. It is excellent. I would recommend this to you. The second resource is this book by Lou Priolo.

It's called Bitterness, the Root that Pollutes. A very helpful book. And I'm going to reference that right now. Because Lou Priolo is a Christian counselor, a biblical counselor.

[17:42] And he's been in the business for 25 years helping people. And in this book, he has a section in which he outlines 17 symptoms of bitterness.

It was the accumulation of his years of counseling people. He's recognized it. And so here's what I'm going to do in order to help you recognize bitterness is in your heart.

I'm going to read through these 17. I'm going to go really quick. But there's a couple here that are worth kind of slowing down for. So you ready? Let's look at some bitter symptoms.

If any of these hit home, receive it as God's kindness to you. I'll come back to that. Evidences of bitterness.

Signs of an infection. Number one, difficulty in resolving conflicts. If you're bitter with someone, it's going to be difficult to pursue peace with them. To make peace with them. Number two, acts of vengeance.

[18:42] Backbiting, spiteful remarks, physical altercations. Number three, withdrawal. I see this one in me. The silent treatment. The cold shoulder.

The seeing someone coming but you go the other way. Anybody relate with that? Could be a sign of bitterness. Number four, outbursts of anger. And I just wanted to read something here.

When we are bitter, we don't see each new offense on a clean slate that is relatively easy to forgive. But rather as one more item on a long and growing list of similar offenses.

Elsewhere in our Bible it would say keeping records of wrongs. Outbursts of anger. Number five, biting sarcasm. Number six, condescending communication.

Speaking down to someone. Seven, criticism. Being critical of someone. Not gracious. Number eight, suspicion and distrust.

[19:41] I've seen this in me too. Instead of giving the benefit of the doubt to someone, you assume the doubt in someone. Could be a sign of bitterness. Number nine, intolerance.

What this is getting at here is everybody's got their idiosyncrasies, right? Everybody's got kind of annoying behavior. That's not sin. What intolerance is, is not bearing with that with someone, but seeing that as an offense.

Intolerance. Number ten, hypersensitivity. Treating a pinprick as though it were a knife through one's heart. Eleven, impatience.

Not seeing things through a biblical perspective. Number twelve, disrespect. If you're bitter towards someone in authority over you, you may have contempt for that person.

Bitterness towards that person. Or number thirteen, rebellion to that person. You push back.

Number fourteen is the misuse of authority. If you have a responsibility for other people and you're

bitter towards them, it can result in domineering, dictatorial, tyrannical attitudes that demand needless exactations of obedience.

[20:56] Fifteen, depression. It takes a lot to hold a grudge. A lot of energy to hold a grudge. And so if you are like way down in your emotional reserves, could it be that you're maintaining a grudge and you're bitter?

Sixteen, doubts regarding salvation. You start wondering, hey, am I saved? I'm eating up inside. Seventeen, remembering with great specificity the details of an offense.

Bitterness has a wonderful memory. Incredible memory. And Priolo mentions this. It's actually possible by replaying the offense over and over and over again in our minds to unconsciously replace facts with fiction.

Isn't that interesting? I've done that. Seventeen symptoms of bitterness. Did any of those hit home? Hit home with me.

The reason why we're going through those is to be helpful. To give you eyes to see bitterness in your soul. Because bitterness blinds. We tend not to see bitterness when we're living in the middle of it.

[22:17] Bitterness is an infection. And it's got symptoms. Now, if you're sitting there and you're wondering, oh man.

I am the most bitter person in this room right now. Don't be dismayed. This temptation is common to man.

And God is faithful. He has grace for you to put away bitterness. To get rid of it.

In fact, the very reason why this is in our Bibles is for God to set the bitter free. To free you from a root of bitterness.

To pull it out from within your heart. He wants to get rid of bitterness to make us more like Christ. And if you are like me and you find those symptoms hitting home, you know what it shows?

[23:18] Our constant need for Jesus. We're not done yet. We need His help. We need Him to continue to do the work that He began in us. To make us more like Him.

Think about it this way. Of all the people that walk the face of the earth, Jesus probably had the greatest right to be bitter.

I mean, He was crucified and He was innocent. But do you remember what He said on the cross? Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they do. He wasn't even bitter on the cross.

It's amazing. Got an amazing Savior. So we've looked at the bitter infection. We've talked about the bitter effects. We've just looked at the 17 bitter symptoms.

Now the bitter truth. You are responsible for your bitterness. Though it's true that someone has hurt you, someone else has deeply wounded you, what's also true is that God holds you responsible for how you respond to being sinned against.

[24:34] How do I know that? Well, we're being commanded to put away bitterness. Holding us responsible for our bitter response is a way in which we're learning.

It's ours to own. God's not going to command us to remove something that we were not responsible for. We can make a case from the rest of this passage as well.

Earlier on we were told, stop speaking falsehood. Speak the truth. We're responsible for our speech. God tells us, don't get angry.

Don't be sinful in your anger. We're responsible for our response that way. He says you're responsible for the way you use your hands. Stop stealing. Start using your hands to give.

We're responsible for that. We're responsible for the kinds of words that comes out of our mouth. We're not to speak corrupt words. We're to speak building up edifying words.

[25:37] We're responsible for that. And here we're being told to put away bitterness. We're responsible for our bitterness. Here's what that means.

We cannot blame someone else for our bitterness. You cannot say, you made me bitter. Bitterness comes from within.

That's your infection. That's what you brought to that wound. That's yours to own. We must own our own bitterness.

Our own sinful reaction when sinned against. But, you say.

But, you don't know, Mike. You don't know how I've been sinned against. You don't know. You don't know what he has done to me.

[26:37] You don't know what she has done to me. You don't know what that church did to me. I don't. I don't. I don't know. But God knows exactly what has happened to you.

He knows the wounds you have suffered. And he is seeking to do something in you. He's commanding you this morning to get rid of all your bitterness on every wound.

No matter what the size. No matter how long it's been there. No matter who laid the wound. God is calling you to remove the bitterness.

To get rid of it. To put it away. And to do that now. Now the question becomes, how do you do that? How do you get rid of bitterness of the soul? How do you get rid of this infection? Well, it's right here in the text. It says, put it away. Put it away.

[27:46] Put it away. The antiseptic for an embittered soul has to deal with. Confession. Gospel.

To put it away, I want to help you think about it in terms of this. To put away bitterness is to start by confessing it. To confess it. How does God clean out the bitterness of a wound?

Well, he starts with our humble confession of our bitterness. I know that 1 John 1.9 is very familiar to many of you.

For those of you who have never heard it before, let me read it. If we, Christians, confess our sins, He, our God, is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The word confess, in 1 John 1.9, literally means same word.

[28:52] And what John is getting at there is this. We are to agree with God. We are to agree with Him on what is going on in me.

We are to use the same word He uses to describe this thing going on inside of me. We are to confess that. We are to agree with God at that.

So if I'm talking a certain way and God says that way is falsehood, for me to confess it is, yes, God, I am lying with my speech. I'm speaking falsehood.

If there's a desire in me and God says that's lust, I confess it. Yes, God, that is lust. That's wrong in your sight. If there's a want in me and God says that's greed, I say, yes, God, that is greed.

That's offensive to you. And if God says, if there's this hostility in me and God says that's bitterness, to confess it is, yes, God, it's bitterness.

[30:02] It's wrong. I agree. I confess. So here's how this confession works. God says, call your bitterness sin.

Call it what God calls it. See it the way God sees it. Call it what God calls it. It's bitterness. And he says to get rid of it.

If you don't think this thing in you is a sin, you're not going to confess it. You're not going to see a need to remove it. This whole thing starts with realizing this thing in you is grievous in God's sight. Call your bitterness sin. Call your bitterness forgiven. If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus paid it all. Jesus paid on the cross for all of my bitterness. When you confess bitterness, the next step is call it forgiven.

[31:18] Call it paid for. Jesus paid for that with his blood. And he's not bitter towards you. He's not bitter towards you.

Even though you've sinned, he's not bitter. Call your bitterness forgiveness. He is gracious towards you. He wants to forgive you. He wants to cleanse you of that.

Call your bitterness sin. Call your bitterness forgiven. And after doing that, you call on your Savior to change you. Lord Jesus, help me to respond in a way that pleases you.

And we see that right here in Ephesians 4, 31 and 32. Here's where we'll be next week. God is calling us, instead of being bitter, he's calling us to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, as God in Christ forgave us, to be imitators of God.

That's what he's calling us to. And so when you are tempted to bitterness, confess it. Call it forgiven. Call on Jesus to change you. Jesus, help me to respond in a way that pleases you, not grieves you.

[32:33] And then the last thing, by way of an antiseptic to this infection, would you begin to prayerfully consider something? Would you start praying about going to the one you're bitter towards and confessing your sin to them, asking them to forgive you for being bitter towards them?

Would you prayerfully consider that? All this is kind of working out of the striving for peace to one another, to walking in unity together.

Now, you may be asking, well, the person I'm bitter toward is dead. What do I do? We'll talk about that next week. It's a real situation.

God is worthy and He is working in us as a church to remove bitterness and replace it with Christ-likeness.

And this morning, we have focused our time on stopping the advance and spreading of the infection called bitterness. And next Sunday, what we're going to learn is how to be Christ-like to one another when we wound each other.

[34:01] How to forgive. How to be kind. How to be tenderhearted. Let me pray. Let me pray. for you, for your soul, relax, and joy and nieg for your soul.

Thank you. Thank you. For your soul.■ their.

Thank you. Thank you. For your soul. Thank you. For your soul.