

HINDRANCES TO REVIVAL
Ephesians 4:17-32

Text: Ephesians 4:30-32.

- Intro: There are three things that we need to keep in mind regarding times of spiritual awakening, or revival:
- 1) Those times are appointed by God, not by His people.
 - 2) There are certain conditions which precede such a time of blessing. These are clearly indicated in many parts of Scripture. We have considered some of them.
 - 3) Only the Holy Spirit brings about a true revival--by which I mean a time when the Church is awakened, and sinners are drawn to Christ.

Therefore, the exhortation that Paul gave in Eph. 4:30 is very timely for all who are concerned about seeing the blessing of God in their own lives as well as in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is something that we are not to do. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. It is a command of God. It meant either that the Ephesians were to stop grieving the Holy Spirit, or that they were not to make a habit of grieving the Holy Spirit--and probably Paul meant to convey both ideas.

- How do we grieve the Holy Spirit?

Well, we can give the most pointed answer to that question by looking at the context of verse 32--by which I mean the verses which precede it, and the verses which follow it. But to give a general answer we can say that we grieve the Holy Spirit when we are disobedient in any way to the Word of God! This means that we grieve the Holy Spirit when we do things that are forbidden in Scripture, and we grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to do what we are commanded to do in Scripture. We grieve the Lord when we are guilty of outward, overt sins, and we grieve the Spirit of God when we are guilty of sins of the heart. We may feel that we are getting by with certain sins, but the Holy Spirit sees into our hearts just as clearly as He observes all of our outward actions. And He is grieved by sins of any kind, either outward or inward.

Therefore, if there is to be a spiritual awakening the Holy Spirit will be preparing us as the Lord's people by dealing with us concerning those things which displease and grieve Him.

- And so we need to realize that sin, all sin, is a hindrance to revival.

I want to deal with just one of these sins today--the first sin which Paul mentioned after he gave this command that we are not to

grieve the Holy Spirit: the sin of bitterness.

I. THE SIN OF BITTERNESS.

All of us know what it is to be bitter. We get bitter when we feel that we have been wronged. Bitterness is usually accompanied with a feeling that we would like to get revenge on the person who has done us the wrong. We may spend much of our time thinking about revenge, and hoping that something bad will happen to those who have wronged us.

Often there is justification for such feeling. We may have been wronged. The whole course of our lives may have been changed because of what others have done to us. So we continue on in our bitterness because we feeling justified in being bitter.

Bitterness can easily turn to hatred.

Obviously the person who gets hurt the worst is the person who is bitter. But we are thinking about it today as it affects the Holy Spirit. IF YOU OR I AM BITTER TOWARD ANY PERSON ABOUT ANYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST, WE ARE GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT! This is the worst thing about it. We do not really see sin as it is until we see how it affects the Holy Spirit. Sin grieves Him. Bitterness is sin; therefore, bitterness grieves Him.

Now the latter part of verse 31 tells us what to do with bitterness. We are to put it away!

What does that mean?

To put bitterness away means (an aorist subjunctive passive imperative ofairo) to let it be picked up and carried away. The passive suggests that someone else is going to take it away from you. The expression indicates that you cannot do this for yourself, but that somebody else must take it away for you.

Let me illustrate what I mean.

Tomorrow is the day our garbage man comes. And I am going to have more than we usually have for him to take away. He has told me in days past that he will take away everything that I set out there for him. I am going to put out two garbage cans, two dead shrubs, and some plastic pots which I have no use for. When he sees this garbage he will pick it up and carry it all away in his truck.

Now collecting garbage is a very honorable and a very necessary occupation. I would certainly hate to live in a city

which did not have garbage collectors. As you very well know, the garbage man does not keep the garbage; before the day is over he takes it to the dump, and gets rid of it.

Verse 31 describes the garbage that sometimes accumulates in our lives. We need to set it out to let the Holy Spirit pick it up and take it away. That is exactly the idea that is given in this verse. We do not have the ability, nor the facilities to do it, but the Holy Spirit does! And it is a law of heaven that we get rid of the garbage in our lives.

Think what would happen if any of us should decide that we want to keep our garbage in our backyard. I am not talking about what you might put in your compost pile; but I mean, what if you wanted to keep all of your garbage week after week, and never get rid of it? It would not be long before some person from the city or county would pay us a visit and give us just so long to get rid of it! The law of heaven is that you cannot let garbage accumulate in your life as a Christian, and the first bit of garbage that needs to get thrown out and carried away is "bitterness." If there is any bitterness in your heart today, for any reason, then be resolved by the grace of God to set it out and let the Holy Spirit haul it away where you will never see it again.

One reason we need to do this (in addition to the fact that grieves the Holy Spirit [which is the main reason]) is that it is so explosive!

Sometimes it helps us to understand the meaning of a word if we look at derivatives of that word in the English language.

The Greek word for bitterness is pikria. And we do have some English words derived from it. One is the word, picric, an adjective, which describes something which pertains to, or designates, a yellow crystalline monoacid which is used in manufacturing high explosives.

Thus the word bitterness indicates that the person who goes around with such an attitude is liable to blow up at any minute. Bitterness is to be seen in our attitude and it will be expressed in our speech. And it is in both that an explosion can take place.

Sometimes we can be bitter, not because of what has happened to us personally, but because of what has happened to someone else whom we love. Some of us went through some difficult days prior to the beginning of Trinity Bible Church. I would be less than honest with you if I did not confess that I have had to struggle with this piece of garbage, bitterness. And I know that some of you have struggled with it--perhaps mainly because of what happened to me. But let me say that

if you have not already put it out for the Holy Spirit to pick up and take away, please do it today! Please do not be bitter for my sake, and do not be bitter for your own sake. It is displeasing to the Holy Spirit for any of us to be bitter. It will hinder the Lord's blessing on us, which also means that it will keep us from glorifying God in our work, which is our chief purpose in life.

I have been hopeful that we would have seen greater blessing than we have by now--more progress in our own lives, and more people coming to Christ. I am looking for reasons why the blessing has not been greater. Perhaps this is one reason: bitterness. The Apostle Paul probably mentioned this first because it breeds so many other sins if we let it remain just like garbage will produce maggots.

We learn from the story of Achan in Joshua 7 that his sin brought defeat at Ai to the people of Israel which must have numbered close to two million people. Known sin in any of our lives can hinder the blessing of the Lord. We need to put it out, and get rid of it.

But, you may be saying, how do you put it out? Let me make some suggestions.

II. PUTTING AWAY BITTERNESS.

- A. First, look upon it as sin. Look upon it as garbage. Admit that it grieves the Holy Spirit. I may be bitter against another person, or persons, but my sin is really and only against the Lord. Cf. Psa. 51:4.
- B. Remember that the Holy Spirit is the garbage collector and disposer of the sins of the Lord's people. That is not our task. Therefore, depend upon Him to take away what you put out.
- C. Remind yourself of the sovereignty of God. You believe this with regard to your initial salvation. Believe it about the continuing work of salvation.

*M.L.'s
comment.
Think of all
that the Lord
has been
teaching us.*

Since God is sovereign, He could have kept it from happening (that thing which has made you bitter). And if He did not, or since He did not, it must be for your good, and, in the case of our church, for my good, too.

Cf. Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11.

- D. Look at the good that has resulted: Trinity Bible Church. Would you give up this work for anything that you have known in the past? I wouldn't!!!

King David went through much more than any of us have.

Listen to what he had to say about what the Lord did for him in his troubles: Psa. 18:16-24. Perhaps some of this applies to us.

The Lord has brought us out into a large place where we are free to teach all of the Word of God, and to serve Him as He sees fit to lead us. How we ought to thank those who put us out because of all of the blessings we have already seen.

But I am not satisfied with the blessings that we have seen so far. I feel about Portland like John Knox felt about Scotland when he prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!" Therefore, I bring you one word more.

E. Forgiveness.

Those who are responsible for the rise of bitterness in our hearts, may not even think that anything wrong has been done. So they do not ask for forgiveness. But we are to be forgiving, nevertheless.

Cf. Eph. 4:32.

Bitterness and forgiveness cannot live in the same heart. All of the sins mentioned in Eph. 4:31 speak of a lack of forgiveness. We must forgive so that if people come to ask us to forgive them, we can tell them that we already have.

When we think of what the Lord has had to do to forgive us, how can we fail to forgive anyone else regardless of what they may have done?

III. JOSEPH, AN EXAMPLE.

The greatest Example we have is our Lord Jesus Christ when He prayed from the Cross those words found in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

But for one like ourselves who was completely free from bitterness, think of Joseph. Remember what he suffered at the hands of his brothers,
and Potiphar's wife,
and even the butler who forgot him for 2 years!

Cf. Gen. 45:4-8; 50:15-21.

How did Joseph get rid of any bitterness that might have arisen in his heart? By seeing the Lord in all that had happened. And so he could forgive those who had been so unkind and cruel and vicious toward him.

Concl: Is the sin of bitterness in any of our hearts at Trinity Bible Church? Then, by the grace of God, let us put it out for the Holy Spirit to take away. It is garbage. To continue to hang on to it will only produce greater rottenness in our hearts. Let us see the greatness of our God in what has happened and be able to tell those who have sinned against us that they have already been forgiven, if the subject ever should come up.

Please do not be bitter for my sake. The Lord knows what He is doing with me. I have had to put out the garbage, just as I am asking you to do. Let us forget about ourselves, and seek to please God. It may be that the blessing of revival we seek will follow close behind.

Betty Elliot, in her book, Discipline, The Glad Surrender, tells the story of a Christian woman whose husband was a police officer. One day while attending a traffic accident, he was struck by a passing car. Three days later he died. On that same day this woman's father died. And a week later she had a miscarriage. How ripe her life was for bitterness!

One day the wife of the man who had been driving the car which struck and killed her husband, called her and said that her sister-in-law had just returned from a Bible study where forgiveness had been talked about. And she asked the woman whose husband had been killed that, if she ever felt so inclined, to contact her husband, the driver of the car, and forgive him because he was devastated with guilt over the accident. The widowed woman realized that it was only through her forgiveness that the man could be healed, and that it was only through forgiveness that she herself could be healed.

The lady wanted to know why she had to forgive so much.

To be forgiving can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. But it keeps us from grieving the Spirit, defeats our enemy, and keeps the joy of the Lord alive in our hearts.

Let us not permit bitterness to hinder the blessing of God upon us here at Trinity.