

The Bitter Heart

A man once drove by a farm and decided to get out and watch an old farmer still using a mule-drawn plow. The farmer did not seem to be getting very far with the mule as he stood there pulling on the reins. The visitor finally said, "I don't like to tell people how to run their business, but you could save yourself a lot of work by saying 'git' to that mule instead of pulling on the reins." The old farmer pulled a big handkerchief from his pocket and he wiped his brow. "Reckon you're right," he agreed, "but this mule kicked me five years ago and I ain't spoke to him since."

This little story may bring a smile to your face, but it illustrates a deep problem that someone suffers from just about everywhere I have been. The scriptures make it clear about the place of forgiveness in a Christian's life. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Forgiveness must work between God and man and man and man. Matthew 6:14-15 says, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Carrying a grudge and having an unforgiving spirit carries a high price tag. Generous and noble minds are able to forgive, while weak, ineffective, and immature minds are unable to forgive. When Paul condemned the Jew and the Gentile, he proclaimed that all men's mouths were "full of cursing and bitterness" (Romans 3:14). What kind of mind will you have? Plato once said that the greatest gift a man can give is forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Hebrews 12:15 adds, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Some brethren carry their bitterness for other Christians to their grave — in direct opposition to God's word. James 3:12-14 says, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

Just like in the old days when seals were put in hot wax, a Christian who has a forgiving spirit can be sure when God has sealed the forgiveness of sins in his heart. The work of the Lord that we have to do is far more important than grudge carrying. The church is no place for those who cannot forgive others. He that cannot forgive others breaks down the bridge over which he must pass himself. Proverbs 24:17 says, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth ..."

The end goal of forgiveness and a right attitude toward others is being mature and complete like God is mature and complete (Matthew 5:48). The whole idea is to make us like God. We build our grace by learning to forgive those who do not ask or do not deserve forgiveness.

The one who holds a grudge merely hurts themselves because their bitter heart festers and festers. Is this what the Lord wants? Would the Lord be pleased at the grudges you hold?

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