

B. Root of Bitterness

Hebrews 12:15 - See to it that you take personal responsibility for your own soul so that no one falls back from the grace of God and not one root of bitterness, sprouting upward, cause trouble and through this reversion many be contaminated.

The application of this verse and its doctrines to our study is ominous when compared with the high divorce rate of our society.

Many wives are abandoned by their husbands, some are never even accepted from the beginning except as a source of momentary sexual pleasure. They are then left to raise the adulterine alone without provision or protection.

This irresponsibility by the male, who is commissioned with the duties assigned to the head of the family, results in forming a root which has as one of its predominant fruits the sin of bitterness.

The abandoned wife is left defenseless, unprotected, and mentally staggered by the impact of unfulfilled expectations. This becomes the root of her bitterness which is her response to the failure of her husband to love her as Jesus Christ loved the church.

There is cause and effect here. If the husband performs his due diligence, then the wife never faces the prospect of reacting to injustice. The husband thus falls under a double cursing from the justice of God ... he is disciplined for abandoning his responsibilities to his wife and children and he is disciplined for sowing the seed of bitterness by which his wife may be neutralized in the Angelic Conflict.

At the beginning of the Depression, my grandmother was deserted by my grandfather. At the time she had four children ages 2-15. Devoutly Baptist, the idea of divorce was not considered to be even a last resort. Unfortunately, the Baptists failed to realize that abandonment is a legitimate cause for divorce. Ultimately however she chose to free herself of my grandfather whose whereabouts were unknown.

She with difficulty sought employment in various locations in South Alabama. She later entered a teacher's college and there prepared to teach. All of this forced her to break up her family and "farm them out" to relatives throughout the area.

She later remarried a rather stern man who was considered to be a successful farmer. This gave her some stability but it resulted in little happiness. He soon died leaving her a widow with a guilt complex for a life shattered from being abandoned, the stigma of being a divorcée, and the burden of seeing her children shuttled about from one family member to another.

Incidentally, my grandfather turned up in Texas. He later came back to Alabama but was injured in an automobile accident which resulted in him going insane. He spent the last 20 years of his life in the state mental institution in Tuscaloosa where he died alone. He was never visited there by either my grandmother or mother. He was never mentioned to me by them unless I asked. I remember they graciously attributed his condition to the accident. But what they left unsaid was that God had imposed upon him a reckoning. I never saw the man, in fact, I have never even seen a picture of him.

It is from this background that my grandmother wrote this poem, which by the way, has a perfect eight-six rhyme scheme throughout. I have entitled it "Root of Bitterness."

Root of Bitterness

In looking back the bitter years Since you and I were wed
And thinking of the flood of tears That I so often shed,
I would not live the life again That you condemned me to
That caused me so much shame and pain And other things to rue.

I gave my girlhood love to you I gave my very all
And thought that you were good and true So Godlike and so tall.
I trusted in your promise fair That you'd be true to me
And I'd receive both love and care And happiness from thee.

Ah! Bitter have been most all the years That once seemed bright and fair
And agonizing were the tears I shed in my despair
Like leaves that drop to autumn's call All dead, no living breath
My heart has turned to bitter gall By you, it met its death.

-- Alva Hudson Martin

The reason I have revealed this family skeleton to you is to illustrate the principle of authority in the marriage. To the husband is delegated the authority but with it comes responsibility. He is to provide for his wife and protect her from the exigencies of life. He is to love her as Jesus Christ loved the church. He is to support her and their children in the very best way he can. He takes on these obligations at the marriage ceremony and from that date forward is held by God accountable for them as long as he or his wife are alive and as long as his children are minors. If he abdicates his assignment by deserting his wife or abandoning his children then he will and must face a reckoning before the justice of God.

He is not only held accountable for these sins but also for becoming the root of bitterness in his wife's soul should she fall victim to the adversity and submit to the emotional complex of sins.

I do not condemn my grandmother for her reaction. In fact, I now have a much greater appreciation for what she endured and the many sacrifices she made on behalf of her children. She, being a woman, submitted to the protection and care of my grandfather by placing her faith in his promises and assumed integrity. He destroyed her self-respect by leaving her hopeless in the worst of economic times this country has ever known. My grandmother, being a woman, was designed by God to respond to her husband's leadership. When his leadership failed, she did what normally occurs in the soul of a woman who is created to respond to integrity—she reacted to his betrayal.

Most women would. Only a very few who have biblical problem-solving devices in their souls are able to orient and adjust and free themselves of the root of bitterness.

It is because this is a natural reaction that biblical problem-solving devices are necessary. And it is because this is natural that the two parties in a Christian marriage must be advancing believers who can conduct their relationship from the foundation of biblical principles. The man must love the woman unconditionally as Jesus Christ unconditionally loved the church while the wife must submit to her husband with respect as unto the Lord.

A positive presentation of these principles can be gleaned from a classic poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson entitled Enoch Arden. I recommend it to you and your children as a way of demonstrating the integrity of the husband in marriage and the submission of the wife to his authority even when she believes she has been abandoned.