

How to Be Free From Bitterness  
by Jim Wilson, Heather Wilson Torosyan and Chris Vlachos

**Preface**

**by Jim Wilson**

The first part of this little book on getting rid of bitterness and forgiving others has been presented many times over the last twenty years at many retreats and Bible conferences. Hundreds of the taped messages have been distributed, here and abroad. Several years ago our oldest son, Douglas, had his secretary, Chris LaMoreaux, transcribe one of these tapes and after much editing printed 1000 copies of it as a book. Since that time about 32,000 have been printed, most of which have been distributed to people who have requested it. I am grateful for the professional editorial services of Mr. Southy Grinalds on this edition. With this edition I have added five articles reprinted from the Hammer because first, they are related; second, they are short and would not get the needed distribution on their own; third, they are subjects which are not normally taught.

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**How To Be Free From Bitterness**

**by Jim Wilson**

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 4:31-5:2).

In our text we are instructed to get rid of all bitterness. Before we begin discussing how and why this must be done, it is crucial to realize that the basis for all our actions in this regard must be what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. In all our actions, we are to be imitators of God.

In the Old Testament, there was a woman whose name meant Pleasant. Her name was Naomi and she had moved from Israel to another land with her husband and sons. But her husband had died and within the next ten years both of her sons died. She made some comments to her recently widowed daughters-in-law about it.

Ruth 1:13b: "... it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" She was comparing in order to determine who had the right to be more bitter.

And in Ruth 1:20-21: "So she said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?' "

Her bitterness was toward God. It was God who had taken away her husband; it was God who had taken away her sons, and she held it against Him. Five times in these three verses she held God accountable for her bitterness.

There are many people like this today. Not only are they bitter, they enjoy being bitter. They somehow like it, and they feed on it. They wouldn't know what to do if they got rid of it; they wouldn't have a

purpose for living. They like being bitter.

We know people like that in the world, and we know people like that in the church. It is easy to recognize when somebody is bitter. You can see it in the eyes and in the lines of the face -- even if the person is young. You can see it in their mouth, you can see it when they're smiling or laughing. They are bitter and you can see it. You can hear it in the tone of their voices. You can hear it when they protest that they are not bitter. The bitterness is central and pervades everything.

There are bitter people in the Bible besides Naomi. In fact, there are quite a few. For example, Jonah was a bitter man. The Lord said to him, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"

"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die" (Jon. 4:9).

He thought he had a right to his anger. I like being angry. God, you are wrong to forgive people. I don't want you to forgive people.

People enjoy holding things against other people. But our text requires us to remove all bitterness and to maintain a tender heart. Here's the question: Is it possible to be kind, compassionate, tenderhearted and yet bitter at the same time? These are all interior attitudes. Tenderheartedness, by definition, involves a tender heart. Bitterness is also on the inside. But it is not possible to have two different, contradictory attitudes on the inside.

Paul says to get rid of all bitterness and to be kind and compassionate one to another. Therefore, the bitterness must go. But before it can be removed, it is necessary to know what it is -- and that it is there.

It is relatively easy to see when other people are bitter. But it's not so easy to see it in ourselves. It is therefore important to have a good understanding of the Bible's definition of the problem.

Let us suppose that a Christian commits a sin. He tells a lie, for instance. Now when he tells this lie, does he feel guilty or does he feel bitter? The answer is guilty. When we sin, we feel guilty. It is straightforward. Now let us suppose that someone told a lie about this same Christian and spread it all over town. What does he feel now -- guilt or bitterness?

Guilt is what we feel when we sin, and bitterness is what we feel when others sin against us. The very definition of bitterness points to the action of another. If we had committed the offense, we would feel guilty and would know that we had to confess and forsake our sin.

We might not confess the sin, but not because we did not know what to do. But what do we do with the guilt of others? Bitterness is always based upon someone else's sin -- whether real or imagined.

Consider the imaginary sin first. Many times we can be bitter toward someone for what he said, when in reality he did not say it. We heard a false report, and now we are bitter. We wait for an apology which he cannot offer. Shall we remain in bitterness the rest of our lives because he never says he is sorry for something he did not do?

Incidentally, many bitter people cannot imagine the possibility that they are bitter over imaginary sins. As far as bitterness is concerned, the other person's guilt is always real. For such a person trying to be free from bitterness, it is acceptable for them to assume the real guilt of the other person, so long as they get rid of their own bitterness.

But what about genuine sin? There are many bitter people who really were mistreated by the offender. So how do we deal with a genuine offense?

Bitterness is based on sin that somehow relates to you. It is not concerned with how big the sin is; it is based upon how close it is. For instance, if some great and gross immorality occurs in Iran, Iraq, El Salvador, or Columbia, what do we do? We read about it, but we will not feel guilty. We read about it, but we will not feel bitter. We might be appalled or amazed, but we do not feel guilty, and we do not

feel bitter. Nevertheless, it was an awful sin, and someone actually committed it. So it does not depend on how great the evil is, it depends on how close the other person is to me. Bitterness is related to those people who are close.

Who are likely candidates? The answer is simple: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, children, boyfriends, girlfriends, roommates, immediate superiors, immediate subordinates, co-workers, business partners, and maybe some other relatives -- grandparents, uncles, and others. There are even many people who are bitter against God.

We do not get bitter towards evil outside of our own immediate contact. Bitterness is based upon somebody else's sin who is close to us, and who did something to us. It might be minor. It does not have to be great, it just has to be close. Does he pick up his socks? No? Can you get bitter over that? Well, no, but what if he does it 5,000 times?

You may think you have a right to be bitter. But the Bible does not grant anyone the right to be bitter. The text says to get rid of all bitterness.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many (Heb. 12:15).

Here it describes bitterness as if it were a root. A root is something that is underground and cannot be seen. But there can be visible evidence of its presence, as when sidewalks are lifted.

Roots do other things. The fact that you cannot see roots does not mean they are not there. Neither does it mean you will never see them. They drink in nourishment, and they do not stay roots. Eventually they come up.

The fruit that is born bears a direct relation to the root producing it. The roots of an apple tree provide us with apples. If there is a bitter root, it will bear bitter fruit.

That is what this verse is saying. Beware lest any root of bitterness spring up, cause trouble, and defile many people, which means to make many people filthy. Have you ever seen bitterness go through a church? Bitterness can go through a congregation like a prairie fire. It can go through the work place or a dormitory. Why is this? Somebody decided to share. He was bitter, let the root come to the surface and bear fruit. He shared it and many people became bitter. The author of Hebrews warns us about this. He says beware of missing the grace of God. When you allow it, bitterness comes up and defiles many people. It makes many people filthy.

What happens to a person if he keeps bitterness on the inside for many years? What happens to him physically? Can he get physically sick? Suppose it is bitterness toward some member of the family. He's kept it inside, he has not shared it. He has not defiled many people -- he has kept it down inside. When he keeps it inside for some years, he finally begins to hurt. He goes to the doctor and the doctor says, "You are right, you are sick. But your sickness is not the kind I deal with. I am going to send you to the other kind of doctor."

So he sends him to the psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist agrees. "Yes, you are sick all right. And I know why you are sick. You are sick because of 20 years of bitterness towards your father. You have kept it suppressed all these years and it's just rotted out your insides. You have kept this poison within and this acid on the inside has made you just physically ill. So what I want you to do is I want you to go home and share it with your father. Why keep it in and get sick? Let it out. Get everybody else sick."

So the world has two solutions. Keep the bitterness in, and make yourself sick, or let it out and spread the sickness around. God's solution is to dig up the root. Get rid of it. But this takes the grace of God. A man must know the Lord Jesus Christ to be able to do this. He is the source of grace.

The world's solutions for bitterness shouldn't be used by Christians. When Christians copy the world, they have two poor choices. The Bible says to get rid of all bitterness. You must not keep it in and you must not share it. Surrender it to the Father, through the Son.

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:14,15).

When I was a young midshipman at the Naval Academy, I thought that the pettiness and jealousy I observed would give way to maturity. I thought the higher you got in rank, the more mature you became, the less this sort of thing occurred. But as I grew older I found out that the jealousy just got more intense. Bitterness accumulates. Unless there's a solution to it, people do not get less bitter with maturity. They get more bitter over the years. It gets worse and worse.

And if you harbor bitter envy, evil practice will result. It does not come from heaven. It is straight from the pit and is of the devil. Every evil practice results from this attitude. As should be obvious, we have a real problem. How do we get rid of bitterness?

Before we can get rid of bitterness, we have to realize that we are bitter. How can we tell if we are bitter?

One good rule of thumb is this: Bitterness remembers details. You have had thousands of conversations in your life, most of which you have forgotten. But this one took place five years ago, and you remember every single word, his intonation and the inflection of every part of his voice. You know exactly what happened -- which means you are bitter.

Someone might object and say that it is also possible to have a good memory of a wonderful conversation. Is this possible? Yes, but not likely. Why is this? Because memory is helped by review, review, and more review. People do not usually mull over the wonderful things as much. But they do go over and over and over the bad things. I have done quite a bit of counseling with people who are in the process of getting divorced. I have known some since the time they were married, at a happier time in their life. But at the time of the divorce they cannot remember a single happy time. All they can remember is that which they have gone over and over. They are bitter.

This doesn't mean there were not happy times. It just means that they have concentrated on how right they were and how wrong the other person was. If someone has a sharp, detailed memory for things which happened years ago when he was a child, or a young man or woman, and that memory is at all accusative of anyone else, then it is an indication of bitterness. And the solution for bitterness is to get rid of it.

I had a wonderful experience one time in Dallas, Texas. I was speaking on a Saturday night at the home of an old friend. Because I was going to be in Dallas, I wrote notes to several people that I'd known from different parts of the country at other times, and they showed up at this home.

My host asked me to speak on bitterness, which I did. Afterwards, a couple came up to see me. I had known them eight years before in Pullman, Washington. The wife came up to me and said, "We have been married for eight years. The first year of marriage I was so bitter toward my mother that I laid it on my husband every single day. Our first year of marriage was just awful because I kept sharing this bitterness toward my mother with my husband."

She then told me that seven years ago I had spoken on bitterness and she had gotten rid of hers. One day she saw another woman who was really bitter towards her mother. She thought, "I can help that woman. I can share all the common experiences. I went to her to share this, and I couldn't remember any of the details. My detailed memory had gone. All I could tell her was I used to remember things,

and I do not remember them anymore." The Lord had really taken care of her bitterness.

Another time I was teaching a four-week course on marriage. I had put a notice in the paper and did not know who would show up. A woman came who had been referred to the class by a doctor. She came in and I can honestly say that I have never seen anybody more bitter in appearance in my life. She had forty years of accumulated bitterness. She got rid of it that night and made an appointment to see me the next day at the bookstore where I worked. She came in the store, and I did not know who she was. She looked so different . I had just met her the night before, but she was clean inside now.

What is the problem? Why is it we do not get rid of bitterness? If I tell a lie, I can confess it and be forgiven. In order to get rid of it I have to bring it back to my own heart. We need to bring the realization of bitterness back to our own hearts. Instead, the temptation is to look at the offender. Look what he did. That is the nature of bitterness. In order to get rid of it, I need to recognize it is my problem before I can confess and forsake it.

But you say, "I am not bitter. I just get hurt easily." But the symptoms of getting hurt are very close to the symptoms of resentment. Do you know what instant resentment is? You might say. "It is not bitterness -- it is just hurt feelings." But there is a close relationship between being hurt and being resentful. Someone gets hurt and he gets resentful. There is another very close connection between resentment and bitterness. Resentment turns into a deep bitterness.

Bitterness is just resentment that has been held on to. It has become rancid and rotten. It is kept in and it gets worse. The links in the chain continue. There is a connection between bitterness and hatred, and a very clear biblical identification between hatred and murder. What I am saying is that hurt can lead to murder. Some might object that this teaching is too strong. But the strength of it is from the Bible.

What we want to do is make it apparent how sinful bitterness is . The bitter person must first recognize that he is bitter, and secondly, that it is a gross evil. Again, the reason people do not deal with this sin is that they think it is the other person's sin. The devil says, "Well, when he quits lying, or he quits doing this or that, or when he says he's sorry, then you will feel better."

But suppose he does not quit? Suppose he never quits? Are you going to be bitter the rest of your life because someone else insists on being in sin? That does not make any sense at all. You may say, "I will forgive him when he says he is sorry, but not until then. I have a right to my bitterness until then. When he says he is sorry, I will forgive him and everything will be fine." You keep this wall of bitterness up, and one day he comes to you and he says, "I'm sorry." Can you now forgive him? No, because bitterness doesn't forgive. In order to forgive this person when he says he is sorry you have to be ready before he says he is sorry. And if you are ready to forgive him before he says he is sorry, then it doesn't depend on whether he says he is sorry or not. In other words, you get rid of bitterness unilaterally. It does not matter what the other person does.

Earlier the point was made that bitterness seems to stem from the other person's sin -- real or imagined. That is only how it appears. In reality bitterness is a sin that stands alone. The bitter person decides to be bitter independently of the offender.

But you say, "No, he sinned against me, and when he says he is sorry everything will be fine." But this is not true.

I've known situations where an apology was offered and the person is still bitter. Suppose the offender is dead and cannot apologize. I know people who are extremely bitter and the bitterness is toward their parents who died years ago. But the bitterness has not died. Bitterness is the sin of the bitter person alone, unrelated to anybody else.

One time I went to the Walla Walla State Penitentiary to spend the day with the inmates. It was around

Christmas. I spent about six hours there. During the afternoon, I was in maximum security, talking about and teaching evangelism.

This one fellow asked about reaching the really hard-core criminals. I thought he was really interested in such evangelism and talked to him about it. Then I spent time in minimum security, protective custody and other places. In the evening I was back in maximum security, and thought I'd talk on this subject of bitterness. I figured there were probably some bitter people there.

This same fellow who asked about evangelism in the afternoon asked me another question. He said, "How can you get rid of bitterness towards somebody who beat up your three-year-old son unmercifully?" So I told him how, and then I said, "You know, when you get rid of your bitterness you can help this person so that he won't beat up other little kids."

He said, "No, this guy cannot be helped."

I said, "Sure, he can."

"No, no."

"Why not?"

"He is not with us any more."

This inmate had murdered him. He had murdered him because of what he had done to his three-year-old son -- that's why he was in prison. But even though he had killed the man, he was still bitter . In other words, expressing it did not get rid of it.

When somebody else says he is sorry, it does not get rid of our bitterness. The only thing that gets rid of it is confession before God because of the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. This is the only solution .

We must not keep it and we must not share it with others. There is only one thing to do and that is to confess it as a great and evil sin. We must be as persistent in the confession as necessary.

Once I was speaking at Monterey, California, at the U.S. Naval Post-Graduate School. There was a man there who had a great reputation as a Bible teacher. He was a line officer in the Navy, but he had been passed over for the command of a submarine. He did not have command of a submarine and he was bitter. I spoke on confession of sin and bitterness, and he was really wiped out. He came and saw me and got rid of this bitterness. The next morning, his wife said to me, "I've got a new husband." He had been bitter toward the Navy. But it was his sin, not the Navy's.

Amy Carmichael has a note in her little book *If* . "For a cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted. " If it is full of sweet water and is jolted, what will come out of the cup? Sweet water. If you gave it a harder jolt, what's going to happen? More sweet water. If someone is filled with sweet water and someone else gives him a jolt, what will come out? Sweet water. Jolts do not turn sweet water into bitter water. That is done by something else.

Jolts only bring out of the container what's already in the container. If you're filled with sweetness and light, and you get jolted, you're going to spill sweetness and light. If you're filled with honey, the honey will come out. If vinegar comes out, what does that prove? It shows what was already in the container. In other words, much bitterness is not based upon what the other person did at all. It is the result of what we do and are.

Many years ago, I was working in our bedroom at my desk. My wife, Bessie, was reading in bed. Whatever I was doing wasn't going well. Bessie said something to me and I turned around and let her have it. It was something unChristian. She looked at me in amazement and got up and left the room. I sat there thinking, "She should not have said it. Look what she said. Look, look, look." I did that for

around 10 minutes, maybe longer. I was bitter toward Bessie, but all she did was jolt the cup. What was in the cup came out of the cup.

If I had been filled with sweetness and light, it would not have made any difference. I sat there and thought about what she did. I knew better, because I had already learned this truth about bitterness. Still, I thought about her "sin" because there is enjoyment in accusing the other person. Some people do this for years.

I sat there for a while and then got up and went over to my side of the bed, got on my knees and said, "Lord, I was the only one at fault. It was my bitterness and my sin. I am confessing it, forsaking it, and please forgive me."

I got up off my knees and said, "But look what she said." I got back on my knees.

"God, I'm sorry for what I did. I accept the responsibility. It was my sin and mine only."

I got up off my knees and said, "God, you and I know who is really at fault." I knelt back down. I stayed on my knees for 45 minutes until I could get up and not say, "Look what she said."

I do not remember now what she said, and I do not remember what I was doing at the desk. I do not remember the details. The only thing I remember now is getting up. But I also know that if I had not taken care of the bitterness I would know to this day exactly what she had said. That is the nature of bitterness.

In order to get rid of it, I have to see that it is evil and that it is my sin and my sin only. I do not get rid of it through the other person saying he is sorry. I do not get rid of it if the other person quits or dies. I do not get rid of it any other way except calling it sin against the holy God, confessing it and receiving forgiveness.

The difficulty is in getting my eyes off the other person's sin. But just the fact that I think it is his problem shows that it is not. If it were his problem, and I was filled with sweetness and light, and not bitter, then I would be concerned about the other person.

I could say, "That poor guy! Look what he did. If I did something like that, I would feel awful. He must really feel awful. I think I will go help him." But if that is not my response then I am bitter, and it is my sin, not his.

I believe that this sin is a major hindrance to revival in this country. When Christians start confessing their sins, they will be able to forgive the sins of others.

## **Forgiving Others**

**by Jim Wilson**

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart (Matt. 18:35).

The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking here, and He is giving his followers teaching on forgiveness. Most of us have had experiences when someone has come to us and asked forgiveness. Other times we have gone to ask for forgiveness.

There are several common responses to such requests, but the one you most often hear is, "There is nothing to forgive." Now this sounds very gracious, but it really is not. It is a means of refusing to forgive.

The person you asked to forgive you knows full well that you need forgiving. But still they dodge the request by saying, "Oh, there's nothing to forgive." They may really think there wasn't any problem, but

that's not normally the case.

Sometimes they say, "All right, you are forgiven." They say it because they have to, but that's not what their heart is saying. But the text requires forgiveness from the heart. In other words, God knows who truly forgives, and who does not. We are told that God is going to treat each of us in a certain way unless we forgive our brothers from the heart. He does not require us to say the right words. Even though you might convince the person in front of you, you will not convince the One who searches the heart. God knows when you have forgiven your brother from your heart.

We cannot hide from the Lord when we sin in this way. Our hearts are open and manifest to Him. If we are refusing to forgive, then He knows it. He knows our sinc and He certainly knows the requirements of His word concerning forgiveness.

So what does the Bible teach about how our heavenly Father will treat us?

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21)

He thought he was asking a virtuous question. Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:22). When Jesus said this, do you think He meant to limit it to seventy-seven? Do we get to count? Are we allowed to keep a record of wrongs? Anytime someone counts the number of times he has extended forgiveness, then there is no true forgiveness. If you forgave your brother from your heart each time he sinned against you, each instance would seem like the first time.

When Jesus teaches about things like turning the other cheek, people misapply it. They say, "Yes, I will let him hit the other cheek, but if he hits me a third time, I am going to deck him."

But when Jesus taught about turning the other cheek, He was teaching us to do it from the heart. Jesus assumes the other person is sinning against you. He assumes the other person is wrong seven times, seventy-seven times, or four hundred and ninety times. But if you are counting, then you are not forgiving.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlements, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him.

"Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me and I will pay you back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart (Matt. 18:23-35).

When we passed from death to life, we were forgiven, and the debt which was eliminated was immense. When we became Christians, we received at that time unconditional forgiveness. It was a gift and we received it without conditions attached. Now there is a difference between conditional

forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness. When we were born again we received unconditional forgiveness. It was a great forgiveness like the forgiveness of the great debt in the parable. In Colossians 3:13, it says,

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. So how did the Lord forgive us? Unconditionally, and we are told to forgive as we were forgiven. We are to forgive unconditionally. But suddenly, when it comes to our debtors, we have this conditional forgiveness. Remember how the heavenly Father treats those who behave like the wicked servant in the parable. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matt. 6:12). The Lord instructed us to pray this way. But we protest, "God, I don't want to be forgiven this way. If I get forgiven the way I forgive, I'm in big trouble." The Christian who prays as instructed is praying for conditional forgiveness. In verse fourteen, right after the Lord's prayer, Jesus says, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Is this true? It is the Lord Jesus who said it.

Someone might object, "How can this be? We have received unconditional forgiveness. Now Jesus is saying that if I forgive men when they sin against me, my heavenly Father will also forgive me. But if I do not forgive men their sins, my Father will not forgive my sins. This sounds like conditional forgiveness to me."

Here is why it's conditional. He said when we passed from death to life we were forgiven a great debt. Then we had very clear instructions to forgive as we had been forgiven. We were forgiven unconditionally, and we are told to forgive unconditionally.

If someone is forgiving unconditionally, he doesn't have any problems in praying this. "Lord, forgive me as I forgive." Of course, this forgiveness is unconditional. There is no contradiction for the Christian who is doing what he is told. There is only a seeming contradiction when forgiveness is not extended in the same way it is received. This was the problem with the unforgiving servant. He had been forgiven, and then he turned around and did not forgive as he had been forgiven.

This is a powerful statement. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive your brother from your heart, as I forgave you from my heart." If I do not forgive, I have good reason to doubt my salvation.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matt. 18:15-20).

This passage, which precedes the parable we have examined, also has to do with this heart forgiveness. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you. If he listens, you have won your brother over. You say, "Well, that is not likely to happen. I have tried that. He has sinned against me and I was so mad I went and showed him his faults and it did not win him over at all." This was because you did not go with forgiveness in your heart. This text does not make a lot of sense to many people because they cannot comprehend going to someone this way. "How can you tell somebody who has sinned against you what he's done to you, and expect to win him? He will get defensive."

Why will he get defensive? Because someone is accusing him. But if someone goes with forgiveness in

his heart ? the final conclusion of all this teaching ? then the result will not be accusative.

I can guarantee that he will not be won over if his corrector goes with any kind of bitterness, resentment or accusative spirit. The corrector must not go to him in that kind of condition. We may only go to him when there is forgiveness in our hearts in advance. This forgiveness is not to be dependent on his repentance. I can guarantee he will not be repentant if he is not approached with forgiveness, from the heart. We must go with love and forgiveness. If he listens, we have won our brother over.

But if he will not listen, even though he has been approached this way, we are to take one or two others along, people with forgiveness in their hearts. This is not how it normally happens.

Someone goes with an accusation, the recipient gets defensive and is not won over. So two other people with one side of the story are collected, and they come and back up the initial corrector. They are not successful either.

Everyone must have forgiveness in his heart so that when the offender refuses to repent, it is obviously his problem. If he refuses to listen, then the church must be told. Of course, it is also necessary for the church to be full of forgiveness.

There are churches which think they exercise a godly church discipline. They do not, because this attitude is lacking. They go to this guy, lay it on him, and he refuses it. They get two or three others, and they go lay it on him, and he refuses them too. The church then kicks him out, but there is no forgiveness in the heart. But one of the objects of church discipline is to restore the offender.

If he refuses to listen to the church, he is to be treated as a pagan or a tax collector. I do not believe the Lord Jesus meant as pagans or tax collectors were actually treated. I think he means as pagans and tax collectors should be treated. Earlier, in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us to treat the just and the unjust as the Father does ? equitably.

He tells us to love our enemies. So even when we treat them as pagans and tax collectors, it is still loving treatment. It merely means they are considered outside the fellowship, but with love and forgiveness from the heart. They just do not want the forgiveness which the godly have extended from the heart. It is because of this teaching that Peter asked the question which led to the parable. "How many times should I forgive my brother?" "Love ... keeps no record of wrongs" (I Cor. 13:4,5). Love does not keep score. Some of you have heard a statement like this within marriage. The husband or the wife may say, "You always do this, and you never do that." What does this mean? Someone is keeping score. The Bible says never to do this. A record of wrongs is kept when someone adds up the offenses. But forgiveness does not do this.

What did Jesus mean when he said, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven..."? This is speaking of Christian churches, full of forgiveness, which are acting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are acting how He told them to act. Then when they make a decision based upon His word, He honors it.

He does not honor it because the church plugs a formula in some mechanical way. But if it is done with the character and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the body of forgiving believers makes a decision to discipline somebody who is not willing to repent, God honors it in heaven.

Many Christians use the verse about two or three agreeing on anything out of context. The verse has to do with church discipline, and forgiving your brother. It is right between the story Jesus told and Peter's question about how many times he had to forgive. So when two or three gather together in His name, the Lord Jesus Christ is with them. This has to do with decisions of forgiving others who have sinned against you.

You can see the relationship between this and bitterness. Bitterness is really unforgiveness. It is saying that someone did something to me, and I am not going to forgive them. But of course bitterness does not think of itself as sin, it can only see the sin of the other person.

So in one sense, forgiveness is unilateral. In one sense, Jesus Christ forgave us all before we repented. It did not become active until we received it. But God was not up in heaven holding a grudge until we got around to repenting. He is not up there bitter until we repent. He has forgiveness in His heart before we appropriate it. There is unilateral forgiveness on God's part, and He requires unilateral forgiveness on our part toward anyone who ever sins against us. We think of what the other person did to us, or said to us, and really this whole issue has nothing to do with what the other person did or said.

When a Christian has forgiveness from the heart, he is concerned about the person who did the sinning against him. He is not concerned about himself. But we are like Peter. "Sure, Lord, I'll forgive him seven times but if he goes to eight, he's in real trouble."

But real forgiveness doesn't keep count. If you have a tendency to keep count within or without the family, it is very likely you are not forgiving. And Jesus said that His heavenly Father will treat each of us with a lack of forgiveness unless we forgive from the heart. Forgive your brother from your heart.

"Well, I do not have forgiveness in my heart." Then who needs forgiving?

The one who needs forgiving is the same one who has this unlove, this hatred, this bad attitude, this grudge, or whatever. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot have unforgiveness in your heart and rejoice in the Lord.

It is possible to have unforgiveness in your heart and still go to church and sing. But it is all a fake! The singing is false. You can make people sing but when people are clean you don't have to make them sing. But people will spontaneously sing from a full heart. Why? Because they have clean hearts.

There is a big difference between singing because you are rejoicing in the Lord, and singing to get joy. Some Christians go to church every Sunday and sing to get joy. The joy ends when they quit singing because there is uncleanness in their heart.

We would all like to think that we are the good guy and that the other person has the problem. It might not be that. Just assume you are the one that has the problem of lack of forgiveness.

If a Christian has forgiveness in his heart, he will be rejoicing regardless of how wrong the other person was, or how greatly the other person sinned against him.

But how can you show forgiveness to someone when you have to be very firm because you don't believe in their lifestyle? It is not really that difficult. If you have forgiveness in your heart, they will know it regardless of how firm you are. They will know it, based upon your tone. People can tell when you love them. They can tell when you are being firm because you are bitter, and they can tell when you do it out of love. The only thing you have to be sure of is your attitude in the conversation. You do not have to worry how they will take it. The results are the Lord's. They may not accept it but they do know the difference.

Periodically, I have had to be very firm with people. One time, 35 years ago, a man had just gotten right with the Lord the previous March. He had been a Christian since his sophomore year, but in his senior year he really got right with the Lord. He asked to live with us in our home through the summer after graduation. We moved the kids around and moved him into the house. He went home first, and came back. He moved all his stuff into our house in June. My wife was putting the kids to bed and we were down in the living room. I asked him how things were going. He said, "Not so good."

"Is it the same problem you had before?"

He said, "Yes."

"Same girl?"

He said it was the same girl.

I asked if he remembered how wonderfully God forgave him in March?

He said, "It was wonderful. There was great joy and peace."

I said, "Well, He can do it again. Let's pray right now. You may repent and confess, and be restored."

He said, "No."

I said, "Well, it's true."

"Yeah, I know. I've seen it happen. I know He will do it again, but I am not quite ready."

I said, "Well, I do not think you understand. You do not really have an option. You know better. You have to be restored now."

He said, "No I will do it sometime but not now."

"Well, I think I will have to tell the church that you are living in sin."

"You would tell the church what I told you in confidence?"

"I did not know it was in confidence, and I didn't know what you were going to tell me, and I didn't know you were going to be unrepentant having told me. God tells me to take it to the church because we are not to have fellowship with you. We are not going to eat with you. The Bible tells us what to do with anyone who calls himself a brother who is a fornicator. The church is not very godly, so they will probably kick me out for gossip. Nevertheless, the Bible tells me to tell the church. I will also tell the Officer's Christian Union, and they will not bat an eye. They will remove you so fast it will not be funny."

He got angry.

I said that there was one other problem. "In I Corinthians 5, it says we are not to eat with you. We are just not allowed to keep company with you immoral people who call themselves believers. If anybody calls himself a brother, and lives this way, we may not even eat with him. But you want me to disobey God because you are going to be unrepentant. You want me to eat with you, and have fellowship with you while you stay unrepentant. You have already moved your stuff in, so you can stay overnight. But if you're not right with the Lord by morning I want you out of this house before breakfast and I don't want you to speak to my wife or children."

He got very angry.

I said, "I love you very much. You know I love you very much. You may stay here all summer in fellowship but you do not eat breakfast here in the morning unless you are in fellowship."

He knew I loved him and that I wasn't holding a grudge against him. He knew the love was real. But if the same things had been said with some sort of bitter malice, it would have been wrong.

He was right with God by breakfast and he stayed there all summer. So forgiveness is not inconsistent with a godly discipline. If discipline exists, it does not mean that lack of forgiveness is there.

Spend time with God alone and clean house. If there is any unforgiveness toward anybody else, then forgive him from the heart. God is very quick to take you up on any serious business with Him. He is quick to forgive.

## **Man's Anger**

**by Heather Wilson Torosyan**

And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?" (Genesis 4:6, 7a)

Someone has just crunched your car, and you are angry. He was sixteen and hot-rodding. You are angry at the kid, at all of today's kids, and at the system for letting such irresponsible people out on the streets. And to top it off some Christian comes up and tells you to put away all anger and wrath. Well, that really does it. Platitudes! That's easy for him to say. Besides, the Bible says you can get angry. Jesus got angry when he drove the money changers out of the temple. And anyway, it's bad for you to keep anger in; it is better to be authentic than hypocritical.

On and on go the excuses and justifications. You attempt to convince yourself that it was really okay to get angry. I suspect we have all heard and very likely used these excuses. If anybody is so foolish as to try to point out that anger is not what God would have us to be, we simply add him to the reasons for being angry.

Some people lose their tempers over what you may call trifling things (i.e. those things that don't bother you): inefficiency in the office, someone cutting in quickly and taking a parking place, the way a husband leaves his socks on the floor, or the wife who is chronically late. Isn't it amazing what can make people really ticked?

Others may get angry at "more righteous" things like world hunger, abortion, war, lack of civil rights, or discrimination. There are hosts of other reasons that can set off tempers, reasons that are as individual as fingerprints. But whatever our trigger is, the Bible has some very definite things to say about anger.

The most often used justification is, The Bible says to get angry. Well, yes, as a matter of fact, it does say, "Be angry..." (Eph. 4:26). But that is often where people stop. They ignore the next part that says, "and do not sin." Christians are often very good on the first part of the command but a trifle weak on the second half. The verse adds a second condition to the command, "do not let the sun go down on your anger."

There are other verses that can be interpreted to allow anger. "Be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger..." Again, that indicates that if you don't just fly off the handle, that's okay. But again the following phrase adds some light to the subject. "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19,20).

Perhaps, then, it is okay to be angry if:

1. we do not sin;
2. we don't go to sleep with it;
3. it is anger from God and not man's anger;
4. it achieves righteousness;
5. it comes slowly.

Do you have the feeling that if these qualifications are met, the amount of anger would be cut drastically?

Another Biblical reference that is appealed to is when Jesus cleansed the temple (Matt. 21, John 2). This is a tricky passage to use as a proof text, for our anger is rarely so righteous. Even though the passage never actually says that Jesus was angry, we can still see how it fits at least four of the five qualifications.

The anger seemed to be God's, for the cause of the anger was not self-centered. He was purging God's

temple. The result was righteousness. Because it was of God, it was not sin. It came slowly enough to allow him to make a whip. If we like, we can assume the sun did not go down on His anger.

If we are not up to likening our anger with Christ's, we may well use the You don't understand routine. Perhaps I don't understand, but Christ certainly does. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are ? yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Christ sympathizes with our weakness, but it doesn't end there; He gives us grace in time of need (v. 16).

If we were more sophisticated, we could say that psychologically it is better to release our anger. Pent up anger may well give us ulcers. Of course, if we release our anger, others may get ulcers. It rarely occurs to people that there may be a third option, i.e. taking our anger to God. This does not mean venting our spleen towards God ("authenticity"). It means admitting to God that you are angry, that if it is not going to achieve His righteousness, you do not want it. With this confession, our anger is removed from us, we may continue our life in the joy of the Lord and nobody gets ulcers.

The Scriptures have just these few indications that anger may be all right under limited circumstances, but it says a lot more about the folly of anger and its sinfulness.

"Put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander..." (Col. 3:8). "Outbursts of anger" is listed as one of the deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression." (Prov. 29:22) "He who is quick-tempered exalts folly." (Prov. 14:29) Proverbs has a lot to say on the subject.

Suppose you are now convinced that your anger is not of God and you would like to get rid of it. How do you start? First, it is good to see where your anger is from:

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from what fills his heart (Lk. 6:45).

What we see here is that the fruit of our lives is generated from the state of our heart. If our heart has an evil treasure the overflow will be evil. If that is the case, two steps must be taken. The first is expressed in Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting." We need a heart-searching by God. The second is to confess the sins of the heart to God, "But if we walk in the light and His is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness" (I Jn. 1:7,9). The anger will disappear from our hearts like the money changers from the temple. Once our heart is clean, we should fill it with all sorts of good things. Things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent and worthy of praise are a few suggestions given by Paul in Philippians 4:8. This can also be defined as the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2).

Does the idea of putting away all anger seem hopelessly impossible to you? If it were only up to us to keep perfect control, the idea would be impossible. But thank Him it is not.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...Amen (Jude 24).

Note: In an anger where there is so much talk about low self love, it does not occur to people that someone might love himself too much. Most anger is not generated in protection of other people. It is a response caused by loving oneself too much. "I am too nice, or too important to be treated this way." Therefore anger. If the anger is a "fit of rage" then this is a characteristic of a non-Christian. Jesus saves us out of the list of works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 and saves us into the fruit of the Spirit in

Galatians 5:22-23. If you know you are a Christian and have "fits of rage" then these must be confessed and forsaken today.

-Jim Wilson

## **Taking Offense**

**by Heather Wilson Torosyan**

We know from James' epistle that if a man can control his tongue he is well nigh perfect, capable of controlling his whole body. The difficulty is that there are so many imperfect people who have not as yet learned to bridle the tongue. So in the meanwhile people are being hurt right and left by what other people say.

It is not only the tongue that can hurt, but also the actions. So not only must all our friends and acquaintances bridle their tongues, they must likewise apply this know-how to their bodies.

For some reason, we put all responsibility on the offender rather than the offended. I have no intention of excusing the uncontrolled tongue. The tongue must be controlled. But until it is, do I have a right to be hurt? Must I remain susceptible to hurt feelings until everybody else is perfect? It seems to me the less efficient of two ways for achieving the same result.

We would like to have people so nice to us all the time that there would never be an occasion for us to be hurt. Obviously this is unrealistic, so what I am suggesting is that the offended toughen up.<sup>1</sup>

One way I would suggest doing this is by looking at the example of Christ.

**He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him ... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth (Is. 53:3,9).**

Any of us in this same position would consider that we had every right to be hurt. If that's the way they are going to be, see if I'm ever going to 1) speak to them again, 2) be nice to them again, 3) forgive them, or 4) die for them. Yet if this had been our Lord's reaction He would never have gone to the cross. Granted, this was an exceptional case. He did have all the power of God at His disposal. He is perfect and we are not.

**Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).**

In summary, we should have a like mind to Christ in these four aspects.

1. Don't grasp onto your identity or your rights.
2. Empty yourself.
3. Be a servant.
4. Be humble.

With such an attitude, we can also "for the joy that awaits on the other side endure all sorts of crosses, thinking nothing of the shame attached" (Heb. 12:2).

Normally those closest to us are the ones who can hurt us the most. A stranger has much less capacity for hurting us than a husband, wife, friend, brother, or sister. When wounded by someone close, we tell

ourselves, "If he really loved me, he wouldn't say that."

But on analyzing this statement, it is revealed about whom we are really thinking. Are we thinking about the lack of love in the other person and how he needs help? No, we are thinking how that lack of love in the other person affects us. In other words, we are conceited ? thinking about self and how everybody else's action relates to self.

A very favorite passage on love is I Corinthians 13. It describes love as "...not seeking its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered."

When we feel hurt, it is because there is no ready forgiveness in our hearts. Forgiveness, by nature, does not keep a record of wrongs. In Ephesians 4:32, a well known but rarely practiced verse, Paul tells us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven us." We must forgive as we have been forgiven. Remember 70 x 7. There is no limit, and certainly none to the Lord's ability to forgive.

Considering that for every temptation the Lord provides a way of escape, there is no reason why any of us should ever be hurt again. This sounds like a tall order, I know, and many would say it is impossible. But it is my belief that if the Lord promised a way of escape, each time it will be there.

"Toughen up" does not mean to "build a wall" or some other defense mechanism to keep from getting hurt. That does not work; it only means that that person becomes hard and calloused. It does mean to follow Jesus as an example as in I Peter 2:21. Jesus stayed vulnerable. The best way to keep from getting hurt is to follow Jesus and stay vulnerable. That person stays soft. He does not become hardened. The best way to "toughen up" is to stay open and take it. It hurts less.

-Jim Wilson

### **Bridling the Tongue by Chris Vlachos**

Some time ago a magnetic storm occurred in New York state that caused a conversation on a telephone line to interfere with the radio waves emitted from a nearby radio station. As a result, the conversation was broadcast on the radio without the knowledge of the two talkers. It was a coast to coast program!

All of us at one time or another have been guilty of gossip. In fact, there is enough gossip in many a church to make the recording angel weep as he records it. It is a sinful practice which God takes seriously and wants us to stop.

Paul speaks of gossip in 1 Timothy 3:11, "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." Lest we think that men are immune to this disease, Paul similarly addresses them in his second letter to Timothy, predicting that in the last days men will be, "unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good" (2 Tim. 3:3).

The Greek word which Paul uses in these two instances is the word diabolos, a familiar word from which we derive our word "devil." We don't need to consult our calendar of saints to know who the patron saint of gossip is! A gossip is nothing more than "the devil's mailman."

Diabolos is the word which is also at times translated "slanderer." Gossip is slander. In the passage quoted above from 2 Timothy, Paul places gossip in the middle of a list of other vicious practices. Clearly, the serious nature of gossip is indicated.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to detect gossip/slander in ourselves. How can we know if we are gossips? There are four questions to ask ourselves when we are tempted to share information

concerning another. The answer to these questions will likely indicate whether or not we are gossiping/slandering.

1. **Why am I saying this?**

Is my real motive to criticize? Am I really out to help the person about whom I am speaking, or is my goal to hurt them? Often under the guise of sharing a prayer request we are really gossiping/slandering. We often rationalize our gossip when our real aim is to put the other person down in order to cast ourselves in a better light. Be careful how you answer this first question. If you catch yourself trying to justify or to excuse something negative that you are about to say concerning somebody, you are probably on the threshold of slander.

2. **Is it possible there is another side to the story?**

Webster defines gossip as "spreading rumors." A rumor is an unauthenticated story. If our story is unauthenticated, then we are gossiping. It has been said that it isn't the people who tell all they know that cause most of the trouble in the church, it is the ones who tell more than they know.

3. **Would I feel comfortable saying this to Jesus?**

How would He answer us after we shared with Him some negative information concerning another? Very likely He would respond by asking us what relevance the information has to our following Him (John 21:22). If you wouldn't be comfortable sharing the tale with the Lord then the information is probably unsuitable to share with anybody else.

4. **Am I building up the person I'm speaking to by sharing this?**

Charles Spurgeon once said that gossip "emits a threefold poison; it injures the teller, the hearer, and the person concerning whom the tale is told." We should be very careful to heed Paul's exhortation, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

The answers to the above four questions will help us to detect gossip/slander. If after asking yourself the four questions you are still not sure if what you are about to share is gossip, then don't say it. Is it really necessary that you do?

One last thought. How can we stop this sinful habit of gossiping that not only plagues our lives but invades and destroys churches? The cure for gossip is twofold. First, don't spread it. Gossip is something that goes in one ear and out the mouth. Bridle your tongue! If you can't say anything good about somebody then don't say anything at all. Secondly, don't listen to it! You can't have gossiping tongues unless there are gossiping ears. Don't encourage the gossiper. Don't be quick to believe what is said. Steer the conversation to a discussion of the person's good points. Nothing will more quickly stop the gossiper/slanderer than doing this.

It has been said that gossip has neither legs or wings but is composed entirely of "tales." Sadly, most of these tales sting and have a poisonous effect on the work of revival in a life or a church. Although we are bothered from time to time by wasps in the sanctuary, may this diabolical pest, gossip, become extinct in the churches across this land.

**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. (Phil. 4:8)**

## **Introspection**

### **by Jim Wilson**

**Introspection** is the act or practice of meditating on one's own past actions and emotions. This meditation brings these things to our attention and we focus on them and evaluate ourselves in the light of our flickering mediative candle. Because our past, either distant or recent, is considered by many to be the cause or explanation of our present actions and emotions, introspection is often encouraged. Even when it is not encouraged by others, it is practiced regularly by many Christians.

Introspection is not like walking in the sunlight on a summer day. Instead, it is like going down dungeon steps with a flickering candle in your hand. You have a tiny light that throws long shadows and dimly shows skeletons, spiderwebs, and gross, crawly things.

These skeletons are things in our past which have been done to us or which we have done and are ashamed of. It also includes our imagination. A person who is addicted to introspection keeps going deeper into this dead, tomb-like dungeon, or inspects the same skeletons over and over again. The candle is not a very good light and never has a solution to this awful, macabre past. The fascination with this subject matter is never a source of joy. It is a cause of depression. It is probably the major cause of depression in people with melancholic, perfectionist personalities.

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## **The Conviction of the Judge**

Introspection says things like this: "How awful!" "How gross!" "The Lord won't have me now." "If I were God, I would not forgive me."

Introspection is a downer, not an upper. Introspection is accusative, not convicting.

In a court of law there is a difference between the accuser and the convicter. The accuser is the prosecuting attorney and the convicter is the judge. The prosecuting attorney seeks to prove guilt, and the judge decides if it has been proven. Once the judge makes the decision, the trial is over. However, the prosecutor will continue to say the person is guilty even if the judge says the person is not guilty.

In the Bible, Satan is the accuser. The Holy Spirit is the convicter.

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## **The Perfect Light**

The alternative to introspection with its attendant negative results is found in 1 John 1:5-10. I will quote verses 5 and 7:

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

This light is the source of all light. It is not a candle flickering in the darkness. There are no shadows. James says it this way in 1:17:

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Given that this light is complete, if we walk in it, nothing is hidden. Sin is shown in convicting power as opposed to accusing power. The sin is forgiven immediately because the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing. Fellowship is normal because we are in the light and we are made clean continually. Obedience is a natural result of the conviction and cleansing.

There is a wonderful example of this kind of conviction-cleansing-fellowship-obedience in Isaiah 6:1-8:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

It was not introspection that made Isaiah conscious of his sin, It was being in the presence of God. He was in the light. He could not keep quiet about his sin; he could not hide. As soon as he confessed his sin, he was forgiven. As soon as he was forgiven, he was ready to be obedient.

You may say that you have never been forgiven that fast. Perhaps you've felt that way because of the accuser instead of the convicter-cleanser. The accuser does not want anyone forgiven.

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### **Walking in the Light**

The next time you find yourself tending toward introspection, refuse to do it. Instead, come to the light. How? Pray the prayer found in Psalm 139:23-24:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Look up, not in. You do not have to look for sin. You will find sin much more quickly, starkly, and with a solution attached if you come to God and the completed work of Jesus Christ.

Sin forgiven is not the same as sin suppressed. Introspection seeks to remember in detail the sins of the past and tends to worry about the future. Paul said, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Forgetting the past is not suppression of sin if the past has been forgiven.

Walking in the light is a present-tense activity. It does not dwell in the past or in the future. It listens to the convicter, not the accuser. It receives cleansing, and responds with obedience.

### **Relationships with Parents**

**by Jim Wilson**

Of the many talks I frequently give, there are two which have received the most favorable response and the most fruitful application among young and old alike.

The first is "How to Be Free from Bitterness" and the second is "Relationships with Parents." Right now I am sitting in a study room at the Illinois Street Residence Hall at the University of Illinois. Last week, at Urbana '93, I conducted a workshop on "Relationships with Parents." Only about 50 students attended the workshop (both sessions). The shock, the incredulity, the rebellion, and the impossibility of putting this teaching into effect showed in the tears, the questions, the comments, and the follow-up conversations. This is why I am here writing it down.

I would first like to draw your attention to two passages in the Old Testament. I will first comment on them and then I will make a few suggestions for applying these Scriptures in your life.

- You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments. (Deut. 5:8-10)
- Yet you ask, "Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?" Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him. (Ezek. 18:19-20)

When we read in Deuteronomy 5:10, "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me," we could conclude that this is not just by our sense of justice. However, in the whole eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel we see that children are not held responsible for the sins of their fathers. Then what is the second commandment saying? It is saying that sin flows downhill and the sinful influence of our ancestors affects us, overlapping and passing through several generations. This is generational bad news. The sentence, however, does not end with verse 9; it continues with "but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments." This word "thousands" is really "thousands of generations," in contrast to three or four generations. How do we know it is "thousands of generations"? For two reasons. First, it is the only way the sentence makes sense, and second, two chapters later we have an explicit statement to that effect.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. (Deut. 7:9)

Sin and hatred of God cause the downward movement to three or four generations and obedience and love of God cause the upward movement to a thousand generations.

I have heard the following many times. "I had decided I was not going to be the kind of father (or mother) who raised me. I would become a Christian, marry a Christian, and do it right. I became a Christian, married a Christian and I am doing it wrong, just like my parents. I am in the second bad news generation; do I have to wait for two more bad news generations before there is a possibility of turning this descent around?" No, you do not have to wait, but unless you change your relationship with your parents and grandparents you will have to wait two more generations. Becoming a Christian and preaching the gospel to your parents does not change the relationship. Home, with parents, is one of the places where Christians think that they are allowed to lose their temper. The relationship then gets worse.

About 400 years before Christ, the prophet Malachi gave a negative conditional prophecy. It is found in the last two verses in the Old Testament.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I

will come and strike the land with a curse. (Malachi 4:5-6)

The angel Gabriel alludes to a portion of this prophecy in Luke 1:17 -

And he [John] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Notice: To stop the curse from happening, hearts must be turned both ways. Although most of my illustrations are speaking to and about children, I am really speaking to parents about their relationship with their own parents. If you are a Christian parent, turn your heart toward your parents, and turn your heart toward your children.

Now we will look at the second instance in the Ten Commandments where we read of generations.

Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (Deut. 5:16)

Application is next:

- Love God (Deut. 5:9)
- Obey God (Deut. 5:9)
- Honor your father and mother (Deut. 5:16)
- Turn your hearts to your fathers (Malachi 4:5-6)

Because we have not obeyed the two passages in the Ten Commandments, we may be in the third-and-fourth-generation promise and we will not live long on the earth (cf. Eph. 6:1). The land is in danger of being smitten with a curse. The Malachi text is a call to repentance - a turn-around of the heart.

I will now offer a few suggestions on how to have a heart repentance that will:

- stop the curse
- cause long life
- turn the three or four generations of bad news around to a thousand generations of good news.

First, there are a few things that are very important in this turn around, but they alone are not sufficient for true repentance. Though they are necessary to repentance, they alone bring no automatic guarantee of halting the curse.

- Become a Christian. Without a conversion to Christ, it is impossible to love and obey God.
- Marry a Christian. Without a Christian marriage you have no assurance that you will have Christian children.
- Stay married: "To the married I give this command:...A wife must not separate from her husband... And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10,11).

Without these three you can expect more bad generations. However, with them, the bad generations may still happen. Why? Because your prior generations still affect you and your children. Leaving your father and mother and cleaving to your wife does not mean that you have turned your heart to your father. Until that happens you are asking for another generation of bad news. You cannot expect to be a good husband or a good father if you have not turned your heart to your father.

In turning your heart to your father, four elements are necessary. Preaching the gospel to him is not one of them; do not do so, for this subverts his authority over you. Instead, you may write a letter to him that conveys each of these four elements. I recommend covering one element per paragraph as follows:

1. If you have confessed to God your previous rebellion to your father or mother, then also confess it to your earthly father with no excuses or accusations.

2. In this letter tell your father how much you respect him. If you do not respect him then of course you cannot write it without being hypocritical. But you must write it. How? First confess to God this disrespect for your father. "Why should I?" you ask, "for he has not earned it!" The Scripture says, "Honor your father and mother." It does not say, "only if they deserve it." Your father is to be honored because he is your father. You are commanded to honor him. This is not optional. If you do not honor him, then you have sinned. The same is true with your mother. Sin is forgivable and repentance is required.

After you have confessed your disrespect or lack of honor for your father and you are sure you are forgiven, then choose to respect him. You may ask, "How? He is not respectable?" Respect has nothing to do with the respectableness of the person to be respected. It has to do with the respecer and the respecer's close fellowship with and obedience to God.

Now with freedom and sincerity, write to your father how much you respect him in this second paragraph.

3. In the third paragraph you tell him how much you love him. If you do not love him then that has to be corrected first. Your reply may be, "He did not love me so I do not love him." If this is the case, it is true that as a father he should have loved you so that your response would have been a loving response. But we cannot go back to childhood and start over. Even if we could, that does not mean that your father would do it any different the second time. We address the problem from where we are, not from where we should be. You are now an adult, and as a Christian you have an unlimited access to love and forgiveness. If you do not have this access there is a very real possibility that you are not a Christian. As a Christian you may have to confess this lack of love for your father to God. Is it sin? Yes, it is sin. It is disobedience to the command of God. We have been commanded to love our neighbors, love the brothers, and love our enemies. If you do not think your father fits in one of these categories then perhaps you should study the unconditional quality of love and the biblical relationship of obedience and love.

After you have confessed and have been forgiven then choose to love your father. This love requires expression, so tell him in this paragraph.

4. The next paragraph is the place to express your gratefulness to him. If you are not grateful, then as with respect and love, it is your problem, not his. The procedure is the same. You confess your unthankfulness to God. When you are forgiven, express your thankfulness to your father.

These four elements are necessary and required. The next two are suggestions for further ways to convey respect.

- Ask your father to tell you or write to you his autobiography, his life history. He might not do it, but he will be glad you want to know about him.
- Ask him for advice and counsel, in general and specific matters. This is part of honor.

Also write the same kind of letter to your mother, but with one change. The first paragraph should express your love to her and the second paragraph should communicate your respect for her. Both sexes of the human race need love and respect from both sexes. Of the two, women need love more than they need respect and men need respect more than they need love. However, each needs both and they should not have to earn it in order to receive it.

This letter should be followed up with other kind personal letters, hugs, and other physical expressions (e.g., handshakes, if they are warm, firm, and exuberant).

The letter can be followed up with an explanation so long as the explanation does not include excuses and accusations. Here is a suggestion: "Dad, I know that you love me very much. You have not been the best expresser of your love. So growing up I did not think you loved me. Even now I have had to take it by faith. If you wondered why I was boy crazy from junior high through college, I think it was because I was looking for male affection. Of course I did not get it. I was getting taken. Now you are wondering about my letter to you and all of the hugs you are getting from me when I come to visit. Although I now have a husband and children, I still need my father and you need me. That's why I am here hugging you. I thought I would prime the pump. I'm giving to receive." Adjust this example to fit you.

When your parents receive these two letters, several things will probably happen.

- The letter will be read more than once.
- It will not be thrown away.
- You will receive some sort of favorable response.

If you do not receive a response, do not think that you did something wrong. Be patient and keep on giving. Some cultures are not expressive with their emotions, except for lost tempers (e.g., those of Northern Europe). This kind of expression from you may be embarrassing for your parents. But they still want to receive this expressed love even if they do not know how to return it.

One man in his late fifties wrote this kind of letter to his father. His mother replied, "I have been married to your father for sixty years. When he read your letter, it is the first time in our marriage I saw tears in his eyes."

In the early 1980's we held a summer school of practical Christianity at Delta House of the University of Idaho. About 40 students attended. Respect for parents was one subject that was taught. The following fall in a noon Bible class at Washington State University I was teaching on the same subject again. One of the students spoke up. He gave us a story that went something like this.

"I learned this last summer at the Delta House. When I was sixteen my father kicked me out of the house and told me to leave, saying that he would never see me again. I left home. I later became a Christian and married a Christian. Now I am a graduate student in economics at WSU. In the meantime I had not seen my father. My parents were on the brink of divorce, living in separate bedrooms at home (in one of the Great Plains states). When I learned this I wrote two letters, one to my father and one to my mother. It took me several days to write each one, so they were sent several days apart. For some reason the letters arrived on the same day, and both my parents were at home. Seeing that the letters were addressed separately, my mother took her letter to her room and my father took his letter to his room. After reading the letters, they exchanged them and went again to their separate rooms and read. When they came out my father had tears in his eyes and said, 'I'm flying out to Pullman to see my son.' I have seen my father since last summer and my parents' marriage has been saved."

There are two problems, the heart problem and the action problem. The heart problem is first. Your unlove, your disrespect, your ungratefulness has to be taken care of in repentance toward God. To write a letter without being forgiven by God only means that your letter will be insincere and hypocritical.

You may have a long wait if you wait for your father to turn to you first. You cannot afford the wait.

After you are clean, write the letters. Then continue letter writing, telephoning and visiting, expressing respect, love and thankfulness.

Doing these things will change you. You will become a better husband, son and father and a better wife, daughter and mother. Your love and obedience will bring love for a thousand generations.

## **How Does a Woman Become Secure?**

**by Jim Wilson**

A woman was made by God to be loved, protected, provided for and to be made secure. However for some reasons a woman may not feel loved, protected or secure. Security is often a function of objective truth and subjective feeling. What I mean by that is that some women have lost their parents, their husbands, their children, their food and their clothing. Objectively they have a reason to be insecure and subjectively they might not feel insecure. At the same time it is possible to feel insecure and imagine what is necessary objectively to fill this need. Here is an example.

Suppose a woman feels insecure. The feeling is so strong that she is convinced that it is also objective truth. A woman's great need is to fill up that emptiness. She thinks that a man will fill it. That is partly true. However the need is so great that she gets a man who cannot fill it. He cannot because he is also empty and is looking for a woman to fill his emptiness. Two empty, insecure people marry each other to get their own needs met. It does not happen. Now the woman is even more insecure. She thinks that if she has a baby that will meet her need. Again that is partly true. Women were made to have babies. However babies are needy, demanding creatures. An insecure woman now has greater demands on her than she is able to cope with, especially if there are multiple children. Now she is insecure and frazzled. She thinks she needs a nicer home with nicer furniture. This takes a lot of money. She has to work as well as her husband. Now she is tired, insecure and frazzled. Now it is clothes, music, parties and maybe a different man. Her husband is not romantic. He copped out early in the marriage because his needs were not being met.

This is a description of several women I am acquainted with right now. Some of them have been married more than once plus other men. Some of them are into possessions. They are finding out, rather late, that a man, children, house, possessions, and parties do not fill up their emptiness and give them the security they are looking for.

This need has to be met, but the selfishness that insists on it being met now ensures that it will not be met even if she gets the man, the children, the house and possessions. The selfishness has to go first. The selfishness becomes a tight little fist in her soul. That selfish, tight little fist, wizens and destroys the person with it.

Before God, the selfishness has to be repented of, that is confessed, forsaken and renounced. Then she will have a wonderful joy, peace and freedom which God will give to her. She will then be very secure in Christ.

As far as security is provided in this world, it comes from a closeness to her father, mother, brothers, sisters and extended family. Next it comes from her brothers and sisters in Christ who are loving and giving. It comes from her being loving and giving to all kinds of people, even if they do not return the love. It could come from her husband, but not from a future husband. I say this because she should not get married in order to get secure. She should be secure before she gets married.

Then she will not be disillusioned and hurt in her marriage.

How does a woman become secure?

She must confess her attitude, not just her action.

She must decide, with the grace of God to love her father, mother, brothers and sisters.

Her love cannot be conditional. She should not say, "I will love him if . . ." No "ifs."

This loving includes kind speech, hugs, giving and helping actions.

She should extend this love to more and more people.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

A woman's long term objective should be to be holy, loving, kind, joyful, etc. She should also want to have a loving family, loving children and grandchildren. She should want to have a "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord."

In practice a woman should reach out to her father to give and receive.

The solution given is with the assumption that the woman is already a Christian, that is she has received by faith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Lord and Savior. She has passed from death to life. This is the beginning of security for everyone, men and women.

## **Saturation Love**

**by Jim Wilson**

There are commands from God to love. These commands are to be applied to wives, brothers, neighbors, aliens and enemies. This love is that love that God had for us when Jesus Christ died for us. It is sacrificial; it is made up of its primary expression, giving. It is designed to be effective. It worked for our salvation. Love requires an object and love requires expression. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." (John 3:16). The world was love's object and giving was love's expression. This love was not half hearted or reluctant or "almost enough." It was complete and more than adequate for all of the sins and sinners in the world. "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more..." (Romans 5:20).

In obeying these commands to love we are to love as God loved. That is unconditional and without reserve or reluctance. We should have and give more love to the person needing love so that his need for love is satisfied. You may think that that is impossible. This person is so starved for love that to love him is like pouring water down a rat hole; you think that you will run out of water before you run out of rat hole. In the meantime he is hanging on to you for more love. You are convinced that you will run out of love before this love-starved person is satiated with it. This might be true if you are counting on his returning love to meet your needs. But if you get refilled by the Holy Spirit, you are never going to run out. Now let us apply this principle to raising children.

There are many different problems in raising children that require understanding and applying biblical principles. First, here are a few of these problems.

- Lack of obedience
- Effective discipline for disobedience
- Effective training and teaching
- Sibling rivalry and jealousy
- Attention getting devices such as whining, crying and tantrums
- Signs of insecurity such as speaking loudly, warts, overweight, scratching, hitting, biting, picking at the body and hand mannerisms

Each of these subjects require a book; in fact books have been written on each of these subjects. You have probably read some of them and implemented what you learned from the book and, with some of you, what you applied did not work. It is easy to draw the conclusion that the book is wrong. The book may have been right and your application may have been right. What event went wrong?

Here is the principle mentioned earlier. I will call it saturation love. Saturation love is different from

adequate love, quality time or quantity time. It includes the last two and undivided attention. Saturation means that the maximum has been reached. A saturation solution means that the solvent cannot dissolve anymore solute. For example, if you continue to add and stir sugar into a glass of water, the water will eventually become saturated with sugar, meaning no more sugar will dissolve in the water. After the saturation point, any additional sugar will fall to the bottom of the glass - the water cannot dissolve anymore.

Therefore, saturation love is quality time in great quantity with undivided attention, until the individual cannot take any more. It is possible to saturate someone with love so that any additional love is not received. It is not rejected, it is just not needed.

Over the years I have asked audiences for a show of hands if they thought their parents loved them. Over 95% of the hands went up. It was never 100% but it was always a high percentage. Then I asked this question of those who had raised their hands - "Do you think that your parents expressed this love to you adequately?" Only half of the hands remained up. The third question was: "Of those of you who think your parents expressed their love for you adequately, could you have used an even greater expression of love?" All of the hands remained up.

- No love
- Some love
- Adequate love
- Even more love is wanted

No one ever thought he received enough love from his parents. Their children will, if asked, say the same thing about them.

What are the results of not getting enough love? Disobedience<sup>1</sup> is directly proportional to the shortfall in love.\* Discipline for the disobedience, even if administered correctly, is not effective if the child is not loved enough. He thinks, "The last time I got any attention around here was the last time I got spanked." His disobedience becomes his means for getting attention. Therefore your training and teaching is ineffective if you are not giving your child enough love.

Sibling rivalry, competition, selfishness and jealousy are inversely proportional to love toward your children. So when all of the kids are saturated with love, there is little or no rivalry, squabbles, and fights. The more love, the less whining, disobedience, jealousy and the less crying and tantrums. Also the more love, the sooner the child will become a Christian.

"Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Romans 2:14)

God's means for leading us to repentance was to pour on the kindness and show us tolerance and patience even when we were sinners. How much more should we do this for our children.

What are our problems? We do not want to give hugs and attention to a whiner. We do not want to endorse bad behavior. That is true, but we are not endorsing bad behavior. We are curing it. This giving is not giving in to the child's dictations but to his real need. His perception is more true than your perception. The "whiner" is asking for attention - loving attention. We will give a small baby attention when it cries. There may be nothing wrong; he is not hungry, wet, dirty or sick; he just wants some loving. When the child is two or three or nine or ten and asks for attention we do not want to give it. We do not think the child needs it. Believe me, if he asks for it, he needs it. When he is saturated he will quit asking.

(On the other hand there are some children who need the attention but will not demand it. They need and receive even less than the demander. Because they are not demanding, you think they are satisfied.)

Our problem is we run out of "give" before the child runs out of demand. We think he will never quit demanding our attention, so we quit giving it before we should quit. And if we kept on giving the attention, we'd find our child would get satisfied. The child will get full and consequently be very secure and ask for very little in the years to come. This security is of major importance in your child's obedience to you.

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Many years ago there was a little boy who had warts on his left hand and arm. I think there were eighteen of them. He had had them for many months. One day his father asked him, "Johnny would you like me to pray to God to take away your warts?" Johnny replied, "No, they are my friends, I play with them." His father knew that these warts were evidence of the boy's insecurity and this insecurity was the result of the father himself not giving his son enough loving attention. The father made a decision and followed through with much loving attention. The warts disappeared in a very short time.

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Many years ago I was close to a young family who had four pre-school children, boys, ages one, two, three and four. One day the parents came to see me about their oldest son. He had two major problems that they did not seem able to correct.

- He was hitting each of his little brothers all day long. He was corrected on each occurrence, either shouted at or spanked or both.
- He had picked the skin off of his face in many places so that he had small red scabs all over his face. He looked like he had the measles.

The spankings did not seem to work. Their question was obvious, "What do we do?" Although I took longer to say it than it takes for you to read this, the answer was as follows:

"The next time the oldest hits a little brother, pick up the oldest and hug him." Her answer, "I don't want to reinforce that kind of conduct." "Don't worry, he already has gotten the message. Not only should you hug him the next time he hits his brother, I want you to hug him all day long. He hasn't gotten enough love since the second son was born and now there are number three and number four. The only time he gets attention is when he is bad. So he hits little brother in order to get attention. He picks his face because he is insecure. I will guarantee that if you pour loving attention on him with overkill, his face will clear up and he will quit hitting his little brothers within two weeks." She said, "I don't think I can do that." "Why not?" "I don't even like him anymore."

The parents confessed their sin and put this into effect. The predicted results came true.

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A father with a very active 12-year-old son came for help. The son had had extensive discipline for misbehaving on small things and did not seem to learn from the discipline. Also the son had a difficult time getting along with his peers.

The parents were giving a fair amount of love, attention and time to the boy, but he still would not receive correction or be repentant when spanked repeatedly. I told the father that he could not pour on too much love. The father, in desperation to see improvement, poured on the physical affection and reduced the constant verbal correction of minor things. The father then took the boy to a men's retreat where he held the son in his arms for the two hour van ride there and back, plus holding the son during the speaking sessions. Upon returning home the mother immediately recognized a change in the boy's attitude and his willingness to receive correction without pouting, as well as his desire to get along better with other children.

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In years of asking questions and listening to answers, there is one answer that stands out. "I never heard my father admit that he was wrong about anything. In the meantime Mom knew he was wrong; we kids knew he was wrong; God knew he was wrong and he himself knew it, but he would not admit it." This same statement may be true of some of you fathers whose children are grown and gone. You may be reading this and realize that you did not practice saturation love when they were growing up. In the meantime they have had all kinds of problems. Others of you have children who are teenagers, not away from home and not little "lovable" kids.

What can you do about it now? You can first confess to God all of your wrong actions such as over-discipline, put downs, ridicule, ignoring, yelling, anger, favoritism, lack of expressed love, etc. After this you can write to each of your children expressing to them that which you have confessed to God. You can tell them you have confessed your actions and attitudes to God. You can also admit specific things that you remember. You can ask the children to bring to your attention things that they are still hurting about, just as you may still be hurting about how your father treated you. When they tell you, do not be defensive, just be sorry with a godly sorrow. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Then express love to your children in many ways.

If your children are still with you, do the same except it should be personal in addition to the letter. The letter is important because:

- you can get it all said without interruptions
- the letter will get read many times
- the letter will be kept.

Remember both sexes of children need much love from both sexes of parents. If you are divorced then saturation love is more difficult but still necessary. If you are competing for the love and loyalty of your children by putting down your former spouse or by buying your children's love, this is counterproductive. It is not only less than saturation love, it is not love at all.

One of the best means of expressing love to your children is by not fighting with your spouse. It is a major cause of insecurity. If you do disagree, the children should never hear it. Suppose you already have a history of fighting or disagreeing with your spouse in front of the children. Confess your history to God, Then to your spouse and your children, and then forsake the fighting.

<sup>1</sup>We know that the child is born with, and later practices a sinful nature. This sinful nature is the primary reason for his disobedience. This changes when he come to faith in Jesus Christ. Both before and after conversion his disobedience is affected by lack of love.

### **Fits of Rage by Jim Wilson**

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>2</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the

Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25

I have been a witness to several very “scary” fits of rage:

One time I went to confront a pastor who was being unfaithful. He had come to his wife’s mobile home to visit his teenage daughters. He did not respond to me in anger, but immediately afterward went into a “fit of rage” with his wife and one daughter. When he left, he was still so dangerous I locked the door. He came back and pounded on the door very hard and then began to rock the trailer. He married the other woman. Ten years later he repented.

Many years ago Bessie and I went together hoping to reconcile a married couple. The “other woman” was there. This “other woman” seemingly went berserk. No one was hurt. She took it out on the car. She was not a Christian.

Another time, a man came into the store to inform me, in a fit of rage that he was going to kill his wife. We managed to hide his wife until the fit of rage was over. He was not a Christian.

A “fit of rage” is an act of the sinful nature. We see it clearly in very young children. We call it a “tantrum.” As the child gets older, we might say in a tormenting way, “Temper, temper, temper!” This, normally, does not moderate the explosion. We have other “going ballistic” are two of them. These euphemisms for fits of rage are descriptive, but do not sound as sinful. Consequently, we keep inventing expressions that describe these very sinful and irresponsible fits of rage. Another, “short fuse” is a euphemism for a person who is quick to anger. All of us know people like that. Some of them take pride in having a short fuse. Their friends and relatives have learned how to “walk softly” or to give them “a wide berth.” These people terrorize their families or hold them hostage to their anger. It might erupt any time.

The opposite of the acts of the sinful nature are the fruit of the Spirit. It is easy to see that self control is opposite to a fit of rage. It is not the only opposite. A person in a fit of rage is not loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, or gentle. A fit of rage undoes all of the fruit of the Spirit. This is why it is natural for a person not born of the Spirit.

If a person is born of the Spirit, then a fit of rage is not normal, nor acceptable. What are the explanations why Christians lose their tempers? First, there is no explanation nor euphemism that can justify the loss of temper. The obvious explanation is that his person who just had a fit of rage is not saved, not born of the Spirit, not a Christian. However if he is a Christian, he has accumulated many little sins of quently not received forgiveness. He is now ready to give into a little temptation with a big fit of rage. This buildup is described this way:

“Keep your servant also from willful sins;  
may they not rule over me.  
Then will I be blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.” (Psalm 19:13)

It will not be possible to implement prevention of future fits of rage without a complete confession and repentance of all previous fits of rage. This confession has to do without euphemisms that minimize the sin. The confession must include the willful sins that led up to the fits of rage.

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:1-4)

This instruction in Colossians is foundational for prevention of rage, anger, and any other sins that “cling so closely.” The instruction works only if you are a Christian because only a Christian can obey

these imperatives:

...set your hearts on things above...

Set your minds on things above...

...not on earthly things.

These commands are based on the following indicative statements. No action is necessary. They are already true if you are in Christ.

...you have been raised with Christ...

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Once our hearts and minds are "in the right place" with Christ, then we are given this instruction:

"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." (Colossians 3:8)

Similarly, this command is not given to someone who is not a child of God. That does not mean these things are permissible for unbelievers; it means that the unbelievers cannot possibly obey them. They can express anger and rage, but they cannot get rid of anger and rage without repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The unbeliever needs to repent of his sins to God, confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, believe in his heart that Christ died for his sins and arose from the dead. He would then call upon him.

"He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46, 47)

"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9)

"for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)