

Grace-Energized Mothers Deal with Bitterness

Titus 2:4

The decline and fall of the human race is set forth in Romans 1.

Curiously, right in between all of those dreadful sins is one that seems to have always stood in the way of mothers loving their children to the max. Here it is in Romans 1:26-30.

*Romans 1:26-30 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, **disobedient to parents**, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; NKJV*

You see not much has changed in two thousand years, the same old sins are still swirling around and the same challenges face each of us.

God wanted the lost pagans living on Crete to see their changed lives and be confronted with living examples of Jesus Christ. Society was to be flooded at every level with the irrefutable proof of changed lives.

Grace-energized Wives and Mothers Have Two Visible Qualities

So Paul told all the grace-energized wives and mothers in the church to have two qualities everyone could detect. Listen again to them in Titus 2:

Titus 2:4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, NKJV

For a believer both sacrificial giving (agape) love is commanded as well as emotional, caring, friendship (phileo) love. We have been studying these admonitions in Titus 2.

These life-truths have always deeply impacted any society. When the Gospel that brings this impossible life into the heart of a newly saved individual starts to work through Christ's church, the world takes notice.

So what would hinder these grace-energized mothers from loving their children? As we saw last time, the most formidable hindrance may be bitterness, but the most common hindrance may be selfishness. One hindrance that is always with us, is our flesh that wants to go its way instead of God's. That is the hindrance of selfishness.

Grace-energized Lives Are Hindered by Selfishness

God has high standards. He says "nothing" can be done that is eternal, nothing enduring, nothing that pleases Him can be done energized-by-self.

*Philippians 2:3-4 Let **nothing** be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*
NKJV

He only blesses, accepts, and desires grace-energized love. Only love for husbands and children that is energized by grace is acceptable and glorifying to Him.

Each of us were born selfish. Babies cry for their own needs, not others. Toddlers do not wage battles for others, it is their own space, their own toys, and their own sinful desire for attention that prompts the terrible two's.

Watching most teenagers is a study in the art of self-absorbtion as their life is consumed by the upkeep of their little world. And sadly, physical maturity does not end this spiritual problem.

Adults retain most of the selfish desires of childhood and youth, they just are able to mask them better the older they get. A basic description of most adults in America would be that they are individuals who have these priorities: the satisfaction of **their own** personal needs and desires, the maintenance of **their own** good feelings about themselves, and the preservation of **their own** personal rights.

As we turn to II Timothy 3 this evening, we find a "prophecy" of what the world will be like in the "last days". Our present-day pleasure seeking, self-serving culture closely and ominously mirrors Paul's warnings of the "last days":

2 Timothy 3:1-7 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness

but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. NKJV

To the hedonistic culture of Roman Crete, and to the equally pleasure-seeking and narcissistic culture of today, God gives the same message. We are to be self-denying, others-ahead-of-ourselves-choosing believers.

That self-sacrificing lifestyle is never easy, always strange to the culture, and constantly glorifying to God. God made happiness, peace, and joy to grow only along the narrow pathway of grace-energized self-denial.

When wives and mothers heed this call for grace-energized love for their husbands and children, they begin down that narrow pathway of self-denial. Grace-energized love for husbands and children leads to the deepest happiness, joy, and fulfillment.

But when God's pathway of self-denial is un-followed, His admonitions unheeded, and life gets "graceless" without the grace of God energizing a life, marriage, and family--there is only emptiness, frustration, and sorrows.

How is this grace-energized emotional love for your husband and children cultivated? Paul explains that in Romans 12:10.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; NKJV

Love is encouraged when selfishness is mortified.

Selfishness will hinder, thwart, and stifle this grace-energized love God wants from wives and mothers.

But selfishness isn't the biggest hindrance, we already saw the one that is far more deadly, and it is called bitterness. As we have studied, bitterness is a deadly cancer that grows rapidly and produces a deadly poison that paralyzes a believer's love, robs their joy, and ends their peace. It zaps their spiritual strength and removes God's blessing from their lives. So at all costs, avoid bitterness.

Spotting Signs of Bitterness

What are the warning signs of bitterness? As I list off some of the most common signs of bitterness, ask yourself as a grace-energized wife or mother (and everyone else listening) are you showing any of these signs of bitterness?

It is really not that complicated to recognize that bitterness has set in. Let's think of some of the characteristics of a bitter person:

- They show a lack of concern for others. A bitter person cares very little about anybody else.
- They're very sensitive and touchy. For instance, if a bitter person walks into a room where two other people are talking, and those people get quieter as he walks in, the bitter person thinks, "They're talking about me."
- They tend to avoid meeting new people, show little or no gratitude at all, and usually speak words of empty flattery or harsh criticism.
- They hold grudges against people, often for a long, long time. They find it extremely difficult to forgive.
- They often have a stubborn or sulking attitude.
- They end up experiencing mood extremes - very high and happy one minute, and the next thing you know, they're so low they can reach up and touch bottom.
- Bitterness can be called the seed of Hell because one of the worst things about bitterness is that it doesn't stop... it keeps getting worse. It may only start as a little seed of hurt, but then it grows and festers into a very dangerous thing.¹

Bitterness is one of the more deadly cancers of the spiritual life of the believer. If you are infected by bitterness, get out of your self-imposed prison now, don't stay in a moment longer. Paul said that the Spirit of God, in the power of Christ's cross can set you free. The escape route has been marked for us by the One who should have had all the reasons in the world to be bitter but was not.

Getting and Staying Out of The Bitterness Trap

Have you ever notice that line in the Lord's Prayer? Often we have said it so many times we skip right over it. "Forgive us God the way we have forgiven others". God wants us to forgive others and not cultivate bitterness. Forgiving others isn't denying that they hurt us, or ignoring it either. Denial is mindless foolishness, God wants us to face real problems with real solutions from His Word.

Getting out of the bitterness trap starts by honestly confronting hurts in our life—and as those energized-by-grace, doing something about each hurt-induced wound!

Here are some basic steps.

¹ This list was drawn from an article called HURT AND BITTERNESS by Winkie Pratney.

- 1) ***Make a list of the people who've hurt you.*** This is always easiest for us because that is what we remember the best—the offenses others commit against us. Just jot names and things they have done to hurt you. Here are some typical hurts: "My parents didn't keep their promises." "They gave more love and affection to other members of the family." "My dad took out his bad temper on me." "My wife tries to make me into something I'm not." "My friend wasn't there when I needed him," etc.
- 2) ***Make another list of the things you have done to hurt them.*** Whoa, this is the hard part. Pride effectively edits our memories of the wrongs we do by shifting the blame, hiding our guilt, and so on. Our flesh likes our faults to stay hidden from others, so pray and ask God to shine the light of the Spirit upon your heart and expose ways you have harmed others.

One of the hardest things to do is to really clear the debts between parents and children. You could put down things like: laziness, ungratefulness (when was the last time you ever thanked your parents - just called them and thanked them?), deceitfulness (what have you done behind their backs to make them distrust you?), etc.

Making a list of those I have wronged is vital. Only when we agree with God about our sin, and see it as He sees it—can we be forgiven (I John 1:9). One of the results of making such a list is that we find that in most of the ways that we have been hurt—we hurt others. My pride maximizes others faults and minimizes mine. This exercise will bring reality into focus.

- 3) ***Take a good look at how you have hurt the Lord.*** Now we are at the most important place in our grace-energized journey out of bitterness. This is the most life-changing step. Get down on your face before God and ask Him to reveal all the ways you have hurt Him. God's Word says He is grieved when we sin. Do we miss that terrible truth? Spurgeon said, "***For it is an inexpressibly delightful thought, that He who rules heaven and earth, and is the creator of all things, and the infinite and ever blessed God, condescends to enter into such infinite relationships with his people that his divine mind may be affected by their actions.***"

Each area the Spirit convicts you about, revealing where you have grieved God, confess and forsake, making no excuses to God. God said Christ's blood cleanses away our sins not our excuses. We are transformed as we see that though God has been deeply hurt (grieved) yet He loves and forgives us and NEVER gets embittered towards us.

People closets to us can hurt us the most—right? Now as a believer think about who knows every thought, hears every word, feels every emotion we have ever had. God does, right? We have the potential to hurt God so much, and we do. Yet

He forgives. Because He forgives He demands that we must do so also to all who hurt us.

The Bible says that "The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain." (Genesis 6:6) The phrase "heart filled with pain" literally means 'to have difficulty in breathing'. God made this beautiful creation, and then He sees people not only hating and killing each other, but hating Him, too. And all that hurt goes deep, deep into His heart. We forget that God has a perfect memory. We only see a little bit - He sees it all, continuously. We only live a short time - He lives forever. When God looked at the world He made, He gasped with pain and horror. It hurt Him.

- 4) ***Pray, and ask the forgiveness of God and man.*** Now comes the simplest and hardest part of our task. Get alone with your list of how you hurt God and others and ask God to work in your heart. One by one confess them to God, then ask for and receive His forgiveness for every thing you have listed (and more as He reminds you). Then you need to tear up that list and get rid of it. Just doing that is a picture of how God wipes out, erases, washes clean, and removes our sins. Then you need to get in touch with those you have hurt and either by letter, email, phone, or in person ask for their forgiveness.
- 5) ***Destroy your files.*** Finally, there is one more vital step to take. There is still a copy of that list, it is in your mind. God says that He can also wipe that file clean. Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22 say that the blood of Christ, through the Eternal Spirit will purge your conscience from things that defile, and will allow you to get close to the Lord with a pure heart, confident you are right with Him, and as much as is possible with others.

Open the filing cabinets of your mind, take out all the files, and get rid of them. Tear up your list and burn it. You must release it all to God. Forgiveness is opening the filing cabinet before God and clearing the debts. "I'm not going to hold this against them. I'm not even going to keep a record of it."

No record. That's what God does with you. Do you want Him to remember and recall all the debts He has cleared you of? You do the same.

The Bible says, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matt. 6.14-15)

It's a choice you must make in response to God's offer of forgiveness to you. What will you do?²

² This list was quoted and paraphrased from an article called HURT AND BITTERNESS by Winkie Pratney.

Those new believers, fresh out of paganism needed coaching, training, modeling, and encouraging in a one-on-one relationship. Godly behavior is a series of choices; and those men and women had to be nurtured in daily skills that would lead to loving marriages and families.

And that is the vital ministry which we find captured for us in Titus 2.

Christ's Church Used Grace Energized Coaches in Godly Living

Just as important as the preaching and teaching of the doctrines of God's Word was the modeling and nurturing of individual saints through practical hands-on lessons in godly living.

The building blocks of Christ's church are Spirit-filled men and women. Lives given daily as obedient servants of God.

God wants men and women that will mentor, nurture, and coach godly living for His church. These individuals believe that God has called them to touch one life at a time for His glory.

For just a moment please follow along in your Bibles in Titus 2:1-8, as I again read those special character traits for men and women.

v.1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: v.2 that the [grace energized] **older men** be:

1. sober,
2. reverent,
3. temperate,
4. sound in faith,
5. [sound in] love,
6. [sound in] patience;

v. 3 the [grace energized] **older women** likewise, that they be

1. reverent in behavior,
2. not slanderers,
3. not given to much wine,
4. teachers of good things— v. 4
5. that they admonish

the [grace energized] **young women**

1. to love their husbands,
2. to love their children, v. 5
3. to be discreet,
4. chaste,

- 5. homemakers,
- 6. good,
- 7. obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

v. 6 Likewise exhort the [grace energized] **young men**

- 1. to be sober-minded, v. 7
- 2. in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works;
- 3. in doctrine showing integrity,
- 4. reverence,
- 5. incorruptibility, v. 8
- 6. sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (NKJV)

When God gets to pick the curriculum for His Church, what does He choose to be taught? He lays down twelve vital godly character qualities for women and 12 vital godly character qualities for men.

Women energized by grace have these characteristics are highly useful to God. The long-term goal of their lives is geared towards being useful to God. Parents who want their children be useful for the Lord begin early on to point their children towards the high calling and great joy of being a Titus 2 woman and the Titus 2 man.

The whole goal of a Titus 2 woman is to train younger women in Biblical, simple-to-measure, Spirit-empowered, love-based living.