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BE WISE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS
(ANGER)

At the end of our lesson last week, we alluded to a verse found over in the book of *Exodus*. Bill and I are reading through the Bible again this year and just this past week, our reading for Wednesday included this verse. So, I want us to turn there this morning before we get to the book of *Proverbs*.

Exodus 33:13-14...

And that's the reason for the book of *Proverbs*. That's the reason God has given us the Bible! All of it! That we may know Him and finding favor in His sight and that His presence might forever be with us and that He might give us rest.

Today we're going to look at how to be wise about relationships...and I think you'll agree with me as we go through these verses that they contain warnings about anger and the use of the tongue in anger. I believe this lesson would have been better titled BE WISE ABOUT ANGER.

Let's look first at the verses that deal with anger.

Proverbs 12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 16:28; 17:9; 17:19; 26:21.

What do these verses bring to your mind? They bring to my mind a person who is bitter. A bitter person is an angry person. Have you ever known any angry, bitter people? Have you ever been a bitter person?

Let's look today at what the *New Testament* tells us about bitterness.

Hebrews 12:14-15...

Let's think for a few minutes about what causes bitterness and what is the progress of bitterness and what are the results of bitterness and what will take away bitterness.

Bitterness has done untold damage to churches. Folks get angry and bitter and leave churches. Churches split because this group over here are angry about something and this group over here aren't!

Bitterness has done untold damage to individuals and to families and to homes.

I heard one theologian say that bitterness can do more to hold back the power of God in revival than anything else...more than drugs, alcohol, adultery, homosexuality, abortion...all those sins that we think are so bad are not nearly as much a hindrance to revival in a church as is bitterness.

There must be something that causes the root of bitterness that the writer of *Hebrews* talks about in *Hebrews 12* to grow...there must first be a seed planted and that seed must be planted in some kind of soil! The cause of most bitterness is hurt...either real or imagined.

So, hurt is the seed of bitterness! Hurt causes the seed of bitterness to germinate and become a root!

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Has anyone in here ever been hurt? We all have been! And some-times the hurt we experience is intentional. Someone hurts us with malice aforethought. Sometimes the hurt is not intentional.

Sometimes the hurt is only imagined...nothing has been done to you but somehow you feel that somebody has done something wrong to you and you're hurt.

Sometimes hurt comes into our lives because it is the chastisement of God upon our lives. That's what the passage in the book of *Hebrews* is all about...it's about discipline that God brings into our lives...and the Holy Spirit is telling us that we should guard against a root of bitterness when discipline comes into our lives.

Look at *Hebrews 12:15* again... **"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God..."**

See, the soil that grows the seed that becomes the root of bitterness is a heart that harbors anger. It's the heart that is described in the verses we just read from the book of **Proverbs**. But, the Holy Spirit is telling you and me we don't need to have a heart full of anger...we need to have a heart full of the grace of God!

We have a choice! We can choose to harbor anger over hurts. Or we can apply the grace of God to our hurts.

It's such a temptation of our flesh to go over a hurt again and again and again. And in doing this, it becomes bigger and bigger and bigger.

Sometimes a sibling thinks a parent has paid more attention to the other sibling or given more to the other. And it's all imagined!

Listen, it's hard to find anyone who would admit to being a bitter person. And sometimes we can be with someone quite awhile before we recognize that that person is a bitter and angry person.

Why is that? It's because the roots don't lie on top of the ground. The root of bitterness is underground...it is hidden...it is camouflaged. But, eventually the root will begin to bear fruit.

What is the fruit that a bitter root bears? **Hebrews 12:15** says it causes trouble. Sometimes this trouble is directed to those around you. Those around you have to bear the consequences of your bitterness and it may come in the form of pouting...it may come in the form of angry words, **and we're going to get to that more in a moment.**

But, let me tell you that the trouble that comes from bitterness and anger **always** affects the bitter and angry person himself. I mean, **bitterness is an acid that eats away its container.**

You can be sick and not be bitter, but it is doubtful that you can be bitter for a long time and not get sick. It will affect you physically. It will also affect you emotionally.

Let me read to you from a book called **NONE OF THESE DISEASES...**

"The moment I start hating a man I become his slave. I can't enjoy my work anymore because he controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too much stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. The work I formerly enjoyed is now drudgery.

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Even vacations cease to give me pleasure. It may be a luxurious drive along the lake fringed with the autumn beauty of maple, oak and birch...but as far as **my** experience is concerned I might as well be driving a wagon in mud and rain.

The man I hate hounds me where I go! I cannot escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind. If the waiter serves me a porterhouse steak with French fries, asparagus and strawberry shortcake smothered in whipped cream, it might as well be stale bread and water. My teeth chew the food and swallow, but the man I hate will not permit me to enjoy it."

Hebrews 12:14 says we are follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. God will not be real to you if you're bitter. Why? Because hatefulness and holiness cannot dwell in the same heart. And without holiness we'll not see the Lord.

Not only does it trouble **you**, it troubles those **around** you. If we could just lock up all the bitter people in the world and let them trouble **each other** it wouldn't be so bad, but the writer of **Hebrews** says in **verse 15** that many are defiled. **Many are defiled!**

EXAMPLE: Central North Church

Bitterness has a chain reaction and I want us to look at that from the book of **Ephesians...**

Ephesians 4:26-27...

What does it mean when it says "don't let the sun go down on your wrath"? It means to keep short accounts. It means if there is something between you and your husband...or you and your child...or you and your boss or employee or a friend...or anybody...**GET IT SETTLED BEFORE BEDTIME! Don't hold it over to the next day and the next and the next!**

Listen, if you don't let the sun go down on your wrath, you won't harbor anger and become bitter...no matter if you have truly been hurt or not! You know, we need to practice what Jesus said... He told us to pray for our enemies. **WHY?** Because if we pray for someone they won't be our enemies very long!

Skip down to **Ephesians 4:31...**

This is an incredible verse! Here we see a **definite progression**.

First, a hurt is committed...either real or imagined. Then that hurt finds lodging in a heart that is fertile for it to grow...it is planted in a heart that harbors it and nurtures and protects it. Soon it starts to grow and it grows into a root. The root is bitter. Then the root bears fruit and the fruit from the root is bitter.

But, not only is the fruit from the root **bitter**...it turns to **wrath**.

Wrath carries with it the idea of being hot. When you start a charcoal fire in the grill to cook some steaks, you want the coals to be hot, but not flaming. And if you have a lid on your charcoal cooker, these coals will smolder and be hot enough to cook your food, but they would not

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be flaming.

That's the idea of wrath...it's an **internal** heat...and **it just smolders**.

Have you ever smoldered?

Then, he mentions anger in **verse 31**. Well, what's the difference in wrath and anger? Anger is that which is **outward**. Wrath is that which is **inward**...it's a slow burn. If those coals are hot and enough oxygen gets to them, what will they do? They'll burst into flames!

EXAMPLE: **singed hair and eyebrows and eyelashes...**

We say that people **fly off the handle!** Something happens and they just have this burst of anger. But, what we don't realize is that **that slow burn was there for a long, long time.**

And that slow burn was there because this person was bitter because of a hurt that wasn't dealt with by grace but by harboring that hurt and then someone comes along and opens the lid and that slow burn has burst into flame!

Then Paul speaks in **verse 31** of clamor. The word clamor has the idea of speech...it's an **outcry**.

And that brings us to the remainder of the verses we have from our lesson:

First, let's look at the negative ones...

Proverbs 12:18-19; 14:22; 22:24-25...

The book of **James** calls our tongue that which is set on fire by hell. We said last week that it is impossible to "unsay" what we've already said. I mean, how many times have you spoken words in anger and the minute they come from your mouth, you wish you could retrieve them and stuff them back in?

And how many times has someone told **you** something you wish you could stuff back into their mouth? Some things just are better left unsaid!

And it doesn't stop there...This **clamor**...this **outcry**...this **raising of our voice** then becomes **slander (evil-speaking)**.

The devil comes along and says, "**Say this, and say that...**" and you find yourself saying things you never intended to say...all kinds of terrible and horrible things that you don't really mean!

Wrath, clamor, evil-speaking...but it doesn't end there...look at **verse 31** again...**malice**. What is malice? **Malice is the desire to hurt someone...sometimes physically!** That's when things really get out of hand and someone goes into a place of business where he has worked for a long time and takes out a gun and begins to shoot people.

EXAMPLE: Court TV

See the progression? That root of bitterness begins a slow burn and that wrath becomes anger and that anger becomes clamor and that clamor becomes evil-speaking and the evil-speaking becomes malice! **All because we've let a little seed of hurt find lodging in a heart that harbors it and nurtures it and allows it to grow into a root that bears fruit!**

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Well, what do we do about it? What do we do to prevent bitterness? And what do we do to do away with bitterness?

Let's look at the rest of our verses:

Proverbs 15:1; 15:18; 16:32; 17:14; 17:17; 19:11; 20:3; 25:15; 28:23...

How do we **give a gentle answer?**
How do we **become slow to anger?**
How do we **learn to rule our spirit?**
How do we **abandon a quarrel before it breaks out?**
How do we **overlook a transgression?**
How do we have **forbearance and a soft tongue?**

Well, I'm glad you asked...

The first thing we do if we are harboring a hurt or think we might be harboring a hurt is this...**we allow God to reveal it.**

Psalm 139:23-24:

"Search me O God and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way."

What a verse of Scripture! What a prayer to pray back to God each morning!

"Search me O God and know my heart.

Many times we say something like, "Well, if I know my heart there's no bitterness in me." The truth of the matter is we don't know our heart! The Bible tells us in **Jeremiah 17...** ***"the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"***

See, a deceitful heart cannot diagnose a deceitful heart. But God can! That same passage in **Jeremiah** goes on to say, ***"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind..."***

We must allow God to do heart surgery on us! Remember the root of bitterness grows underground...it is easily denied and disguised. Let God reveal if we are harboring hurt in our hearts.

Let God reveal it and let grace remove it...

Back in **Hebrews 12** we see that we can never root out bitterness from our heart without **the grace of God!**

First of all, the grace of God is going to have to forgive **you** for **your** bitterness you are harboring whether you think you have the right to that bitterness or not! **Your reaction was wrong...but you can be forgiven by God's grace!**

Then, the grace of God will enable you to forgive the one who hurt you. Oh, I know that sometimes you and I believe we've been hurt so badly that we can never forgive the one who caused the hurt.

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Let me remind you of a story you probably already know...

Corrie ten Boom and her father and sister lived in Holland during WWII. They were put in a concentration by the Nazis. Their crime was that they hid Jewish people in their home so that they would not be taken off to be imprisoned and gassed. They did this because they were Christians and knew this was what God wanted them to do.

Corrie and her sister were both imprisoned at Ravensbruck. They were treated so harshly there...and Betsy, Corrie's sister died there. Corrie's father also died in a concentration camp. One guard in particular was extremely cruel to Corrie and Betsy. He made life almost unbearable for them.

Corrie ten Boom survived her imprisonment and was released. She became a world-wide lecturer for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One day after Corrie stopped lecturing in Germany a man came up to her. It was the same guard who had been so very cruel to her and her sister. He was there because he was now a Christian himself.

Some time had passed, but when she saw this man Corrie had his face so etched in her mind that she recognized him immediately. The man put out his hand to Corrie and asked her to forgive him. And this is how Corrie described what happened next...

"I stood there with coldness clutching my heart. But I know that the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

I prayed, 'Jesus, help me!' And woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me and I experienced an incredible thing. A current started in my shoulder and raced down into my arms and sprang into our clutched hands. Then this warm reconciliation seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

'I forgive you, brother,' I cried with my whole heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands...the former guard and the former prisoner. I have never known the love of God so intensely as I did at that moment."

That was a supernatural moment in time! That was the grace of God! **This Dutch girl who had received grace was giving grace and she did not come short of the grace of God!** Let grace remove it!

I read a story this week about General Robert E. Lee after the end of the Civil War. General Lee was visiting a lady in Kentucky.

This lady was so filled with bitterness from the war...what it had done to her family and her home...that she took General Lee out to her front yard and showed him a tree. The limbs of that tree were broken off from Northern artillery fire and here was this grotesque tree there and she wanted General Lee to see what the Union soldiers had done.

Expecting him to show her some sympathy, she said, "General, what do you think about that?" He said, "**Madam, cut it down and forget it!**"

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That's good advice! If someone has done you wrong...cut it down and forget it! Bury it in the grave of God's forgetfulness! And you cannot do that apart from the grace of God.

EXAMPLE: Mexican saying about two graves...

The final thing...if you've allowed bitterness to take root in your heart...

Let God reveal it...

Let grace remove it...

And let good replace it!

Verse 14...

"Pursue peace with all men, and the holiness (sanctification) without which no one will see the Lord."

Peace and holiness are linked together. Hatred and bitterness are linked together. We hear folks say, "I can't forgive him! I'm not going to let him off the hook!" **I want to remind you that you're on the hook with him!** When you forgive, you set two people free and one of them is yourself!

Let me repeat what Solomon told us in today's lesson about how a believer is supposed to speak...

We are **give a gentle answer.**

We are to **be slow to anger.**

We are to **rule our spirit.**

We are to **abandon a quarrel before it breaks out.**

We are to **keep away from strife.**

We are to **overlook a transgression.**

One more thing I want to mention and we'll be through. The Bible tells us to flee evil. I believe we've seen from this lesson that many times the tongue is evil. I pray that you and I will learn to flee those who have evil tongues. If someone speaks evil of someone else in our presence, if we don't have the courage to ask them not to do that, then the thing we are to do is to flee...to turn away!

Only by the grace of Almighty God are we able to do any of these things. But, if He has given us these commands, He will, by His grace enable us to do them!