

March 7, 2020

Hello Brethren,

Bitterness is a terrible and powerful state of mind, often resulting from deep hurts and offenses. Sadly, we see it all too often in the world today. Perhaps you've heard the old saying that "Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." It makes the point, being bitter is something that hurts the one who is bitter.

Unfortunately, bitterness often does not just hurt the one who becomes bitter. In Hebrews 12:15 we read *"looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"* Bitterness is like a poison that will eat a person from the inside out. But in the process there are times when many others are hurt too. An example from American history may help illustrate the point.

The time period of the American Revolution saw the population on this side of the Atlantic deeply divided. On the one hand there were the Loyalists, and on the other the Separatists. The Loyalists wanted to remain loyal to the British crown and remain a part of England, while the Separatists wanted to, well, separate, and form their own new country.

Life was hard for many. Setbacks and injustices deeply wounded, and sometimes drove people to do things perhaps they wouldn't have under different circumstances.

A young man from New Haven, Connecticut, with the financial help of a wealthy family, opened a pharmacy and bookstore, and initially saw good success. He managed to repay the debt, and helped pay off debt his family owed due to the financial and alcohol problems of his father.

Then things started to go badly. The British parliament imposed the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765 which severely hurt businesses. The young man quickly went from a success to financial ruin, owing a very large sum to creditors. At that time he joined the Sons of Liberty, a secret organization designed to resist the British and move Americans toward independence. In another terrible blow, after 8 years of marriage, and having three sons together, his wife suddenly died, and it happened while he was away.

Immediately afterwards, he joined the Connecticut Colony militia as a captain. He led campaigns against the British in New York, Quebec, Rhode Island and Philadelphia. He came to know General George Washington personally, and was greatly admired and trusted by General Washington. In battle he took several musket balls in his left leg, leaving it 2 inches shorter than the right, and left him in pain much of the rest of his life.

Historians agree this young man was a brilliant military strategist, and he was a man of bravery, leading his men from the front. In one battle he took a small force and broke through British lines, expecting his commanding General to follow with more men, assuring a victory. But his commander seemed more concerned with who would get the credit than a victory, and didn't come. The battle had to be re-fought later with more loss of life.

His temper caused him to lose his seniority in the militia, and probably was part of the reason he was passed over for promotion to major general, although others less deserving were given such promotions. When he learned this, he tendered his resignation to General Washington, who refused to accept it.

Being wounded twice in battle, the loss of his business, death of his wife, and being passed over for promotion left him profoundly bitter and jealous. At this time he was also court-martialed on several charges. Most were dismissed, but he was convicted of two minor charges. It hurt more that he was not defended by his friend, George Washington, which he took to be betrayal.

About that time he met and married an 18 year old beauty. One historian described her as “the very young, very pretty, very Tory Peggy Shippen.” It seems her family bias, and her connections with British military combined with his own bitterness over the numerous blows he had suffered in life, led him to make a profound change of heart and loyalties. Primarily through his new wife he started secretly communicating with the British, passing along intelligence information and American troop movement and location information – all treasonous actions!

He was installed as the commander of the fort at West Point, a key military installation in defense against the British. His British contacts then offered him a large sum of money to hand over the fort to them. Arrangements were made, but the plot was discovered and thwarted. Although his identity as a traitor was now known, he was able to slip across the lines to the British. The British gave him the rank of brigadier general, and he used his military acumen now to attack the Americans with whom he once fought. General Washington took it very personally, and was understandably deeply wounded by the betrayal and treason of a man in whom he had placed much faith and responsibility.

It was hard to fathom how a man who was heavily involved in resisting the British, bravely led men into battle against the British and helped win several key battles, could betray his country. It seems his deep bitterness overwhelmed him, and with the encouragement of his charming young wife, he was persuaded to switch sides.

Today his name is not associated with any of his successes or his military brilliance – it is only associated with treason and betrayal. If you’ve not already guessed, this brilliant officer was none other than Benedict Arnold.

Bitterness is a terrible and powerful state of mind, often resulting from deep hurts and offenses. Jesus said of the time of the end “*And then many will be offended, and will betray one another, and will hate one another.*” (Matthew 24:10). While we are taking the time to examine ourselves this year, don’t overlook the need to consider any bitterness we may develop because of hurts, offenses, setbacks and injustices we may suffer.

Bitterness is physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually destructive. Moses wrote “*so that there may not be among you a man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood.*” (Deuteronomy 29:18). It really is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

Tomorrow my family and I will be in Van Buren for morning services, and then we’ll travel down to Mena for afternoon services. I wish you all a wonderful Sabbath!

Best regards,

Thomas L. Clark  
Pastor

[thomas.clark@cogwa.org](mailto:thomas.clark@cogwa.org)

CHURCH *of* GOD  
A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION