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THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS

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Both Moses and Saint Paul warn the people of God against the root of bitterness, which is apt to spring up and cause great trouble, both in the individual life and in families. Moses says, "Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God . . . lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." The margin reads "a poisonous herb" (Deut. 29:18). And St. Paul says we are to look diligently "lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springeth up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Heb. 12:15). Moses speaks as if the bitter root might be some man, or family, or tribe that would corrupt the nation, but Paul speaks as if the root of bitterness might be some evil passion, or unholy temper rising up in the heart of a professed Christian, which would ruin his character and communicate the evil to other souls. From these scriptures we learn that character has roots in it, the same as trees. Human character, both good and bad, is not a mere piece of mechanism, but a living thing with a living history to it, like a tree or a living creature.

There is a marvelous mystery in the make-up of a character. The thoughts and suggestions of the mind are like little seeds that are dropped in the soil; and then the preferences and the choices take on more strength and firmness, like roots; and then the decisions, the actions, the habits, become still more forceful and manifest, like the trunk of the tree or the limbs; and then the outflowing words and expressions, manner of living, and influence upon others, are like the leaves of the tree. But all trees come from roots, and the character of the root makes the character of the tree. Whether the fruit be sweet or bitter, hard or soft, healthful or poisonous, is decided by the nature of those little roots, fine and almost invisible fibers that are hid away deep down in the soil; and so the manifestations of every human character depend on the unseen roots that lie out of sight away back **in the inner depths of the heart**; and there is no law more infallible than the fact that these inner roots in the thoughts of the heart and the desires and dispositions of the inner soul will give most positive character to the outward life and the effects of that life.

In the next place, the roots of a tree will always spring into action when the favorable conditions of heat and soil and moisture are produced. In like manner there are germ roots in every heart which will sprout into action when the soul is brought in contact with surroundings and circumstances that give the opportunity for the inner spirit to act.

In the next place, the roots of the tree will turn everything it takes hold of into its own

nature and character. The roots of a peach tree will take hold of the moisture and the gases, and the acids, and the sugar; substances of water, and soil, and heat, and turn them into a peach. In like manner, a bitter tree, though you may feed it with sugar, and the best of fertilizer, and the finest of soil, and the purest water, and the sweetest of sunshine, will most positively convert everything into bitterness.

That is exactly so with the inner character of a human soul. There are people who profess the faith of Christ, and in some respects seem to be Christians, yet who have a bitter root in their hearts, or root of doubt, or fear and resentment, or pride, or self-ambition; and in spite of all the best surroundings that God's providence can give them, they seem to turn everything that their souls feed upon into bitterness, or murmuring, or fear, or selfishness; and they have no power to live an amiable or a kind and Christian life. In spite of all their will-power, their expressions, their words, their tones of voice, their correspondence and their business transactions will be tinged with some evil expression, some touch of gall or wormwood, which shows that at the root of their inner lives there is the secret of their unhappiness; for if the root of the spirit-life be bitter, it will infallibly convert all the juices which it absorbs into bitterness.

On the other hand there are people who have had the very bottom of their moral nature purified and sweetened by the power of a living Christ, and the secret roots of their moral nature purified and sweetened by the power of a living Christ, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the secret roots of their soul are turned into humility, and love and obedience; and so whatever may be their surroundings, everything that they take into their lives is turned into goodness. It is only by the power of the Holy Ghost in the secret depths of the heart that anyone can take hold of trouble and sorrow and suffering and all sorts of discomfort and disagreeable things, and turn them into grace and goodness, and usefulness. The secret of a great deal of backsliding is this root of bitterness in the secret heart. How a bitter spirit will spoil a human life! It works like a deadly malaria in the community and in the church.

The Apostle says that by this root of bitterness many will be defiled. It flows out from the heart like a stream of acid in the looks, the tones of voice, and all the manner of life. It arouses the latent evil in other people, and discourages the goodness of those who are feeble in grace. The root of bitterness will always manage to lay the blame on the Lord or on His people. It seeks for flaws in the Bible; it discounts the dealings of an overruling Providence. It discourages believing prayer. It has an instinct for seeing the faults of other people, and not their graces. It nurses its own woes and magnifies all its trials and looks with suspicion on the con-

duct of those who are humble and without guile.

The root of bitterness can never be cured by simply cutting off the branches of the tree, or even cutting the tree down even with the ground. The teaching of Isaiah is that this root must be thoroughly eradicated; not covered over, not repressed, not dealt with merely by our will-power, but that the Lord Himself must deal with it and remove it, and plant in its place the very mind of the Lord Jesus. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 55:13). This is plain enough for any undertaking, that the thorn is not to be merely trimmed and cut back but that it must be utterly removed, and in its place the fir tree; and that the brier must not be pruned or covered but in the very spot where the brier has been growing there is to be planted the myrtle tree. The thorn represents bad temper. The fir tree is a type of faith, and the myrtle tree is a type of love. So that the thorn of evil desire is to be eradicated, and the fir tree of faith planted in the same soil; and the brier of a bad temper not to be merely trimmed and cut back, tree of pure love put in its place. —Selected.

THE CHURCH

The church is the noblest and the best organization in the world.

It furnishes the best examples of righteous living.

It produces the finest specimens of character of which this world has any knowledge.

It exercises the largest influence in the world of reform.

Whatever good is in the world has come through the avenues of the church.

Both directly and indirectly it promotes and safeguards public morals.

It promotes honest, progressive and beneficent government.

It does the most to promote the sentiments of love, brotherly kindness and good neighborhood.

It does the most to promote clean, strong, brave, self-sacrificing and efficient citizens and public servants.

It does the most to make and maintain the home as a place of virtue, love, righteousness, comfort and happiness.

It sympathizes with the weak, the wronged and oppressed and pleads for social justice more than any other institution.

It brings to all classes and conditions of people the best and most comforting and hope-inspiring messages regarding their sorrows, their sufferings and what all must face—death. —Selected.

The secret of the Lord is imparted to those who have no secrets from Him.

Mr. Donald Tedlie, Feb 41