

Just Say “NO” to Bitterness

“Just say, ‘NO’” was a popular anti-drug slogan a few years ago. The idea was simply that each person has a personal responsibility to take responsibility for his or her choices. The bad news is: that is very hard! The good news is that it helps all individuals realize they are in control of their own destiny through personal choices. That’s great news! No one is in control of me but me!

Every individual command found in scripture is a shining example of the personal power God has given each of us to make right choices. Once we quit blaming others or situations or the culture at large for whatever bad choice we have made, we gain the power afforded every person who takes personal responsibility.

Now it gets tough! Today, many people are more frustrated than ever before. The frustration and even rage are almost palpable on every social media platform. I see life-long friends “unfriending” each other. I see language and vitriol on electronic posts that I have never seen in real life.

I believe the problem is simply “bitterness.” That brings up a deeply important theological question, “What happens in the mind of a true Christian that has allowed him or her to ignore God’s word?” Yes - ignore God’s word. Each and every time we take Satan’s bait and allow bitterness (the inner motivation) to lead to attacks and expressions of vitriol, we have failed. Simply failed. Failed to obey God’s numerous commands to get rid of all bitterness! We might blame a politician. We might blame a law. We might blame protestors (on either side). We might not even know who to blame, but blame itself is a weak and futile attempt to excuse our own choices and behaviors by blaming others.

If you are bitter, own it, confess it, fight it and repent of it. Stop blaming others, because that is an ungodly (even if unrecognized) attempt to avoid personal guilt.

Easy? No. Simple? Yes! Listen to God’s word with a tender heart.

Acts 8:23, “For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of unrighteousness.” ***(Bitterness creates bondage!)***

Romans 3:4, “ Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” ***(No wonder I see bitter people, even Christians, cursing!)***

Ephesians 4:29, “Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if *there is* any good *word* for edification according to the need *of the moment*, say that, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ***(That’s too clear to need comment.)***

Ephesians 4:31, 32 “All bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” ***(An incredible command that will both constrain our bitterness and create tender-hearted forgiveness.)***

Hebrews 12:15, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many become defiled....” ***(Notice that God is teaching us that bitterness springing up is the cause of the trouble, not the situation itself, as most suppose!)***

“Bitter” and “bitterness” appear dozens of times in scripture. Perhaps God has some important lessons for us to learn. We must learn God’s truth on this vital subject and we must apply that truth diligently or we will be in the, ***“...gall of bitterness and in the bondage of unrighteousness,”*** Acts 8:23. When any culture is declining, when

groups of people are in disagreement, when opinions vary, *return to God's word and while doing so, remember, re-read, meditate on the scriptures above, then take personal responsibility for everything you allow into your heart and everything that proceeds from your mouth.*

Someone who knows you very well is always close by, **“Do not complain, brothers *and* sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door,” James 5:9.** Stay tender-hearted, Eph. 4:32!

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