

Living Peacefully with the Past

[Part 2]

Discussion

1. What do we usually do when we get cut off in traffic?
2. What is the worst infection/wound you have ever seen?

The End.

Last week, we talked about our regret and how it's part of God's will to redeem the sins and failures for all who repent of them. This week we're going to wrap up our discussion on living peacefully with the past and look at another reaction to difficult elements of our past.

1. Forgive, regardless of how hard that may be

Regret usually involves our own bad choices; bitterness usually results from other people's bad choices. It arises when we become acutely aware that we have been wronged. Bitterness can turn the mind into a black hole of anger and revenge from which it is all but impossible to escape. Bitterness poisons the soul. Bitterness can poison everything else too. Bitterness ruins health, destroys relationships, punishes friends and enemies alike, and wreaks havoc wherever it goes. (Sittser, 2004. p.117)

We must be willing to forgive. Bitterness can be just as ruinous to the soul as regret, if not more so. The one who suffers the most from bitterness is the one who is bitter. What infection does to the human body, bitterness does to the soul. It consumes and destroys. The antibiotic used to treat the disease of bitterness is forgiveness... Forgiveness heals the soul. (Sittser, 2004. p.122-123)

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;... So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (1Pet. 1-22-23, 2:1 ESV)

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:26-37, 31-32 ESV)

Bitter people can have logic on their side – the logic of victimization. Victims are quick to draw attention to the hurt done to them. Bitter people do have truth on their side, and they are justified to feel rage... But being right does not make a person happy. Bitter people might be right, but they are also lonely. (Sittser, 2004. p.117-118)

Forgiveness does not whitewash wrongdoing or justify evil. It assumes that the wrong done is truly wrong and deserves judgment and punishment. But forgiveness manifests a willingness to give up to God the right to judge and punish an offender, to see that person as a real human being and to begin to wish him or her well. Forgiveness does not always restore the relationship, which requires movement from both sides. But it lets the hurt go and moves on. Forgiveness assumes that God is in control, that we will do justice at the proper time, and that he will make all things right in due

"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:27-38 ESV)

2. Wait for God

So we must wait. But that is not all we can do. We can also do the will of God in the present moment, however unpleasant that moment is. The past is over and done, but God is alive and well. Once we turn to him, we are immediately in the center of His will, regardless of the circumstances. God will begin at the very moment to work redemption into our lives, writing a story that will end in triumph, that will end "for [our] good." God will somehow bring the consequences of the past on us in the form of a blessing. His grace will lead to a life of no regrets and free us from bitterness. But we must be willing to wait for him to accomplish it. (Sittser, 2004. p.124)

"The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world; but joy, pleasure, and merriment He has scattered broadcast." If we start to feel secure, [C.S.] Lewis argued, we will try to make the world our permanent home. The world itself will then become an obstacle to our return to God... "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home." (Sittser [on Lewis], 2004. p.233)

God gives us those rare moments when we can clearly see the larger landscape of His redemptive plan, as if we have ascended to a high mountain pass and are looking down on the valley below. (Sittser, 2004. p.231)

[Redemption] does happen and will happen... because God is real and good and true. However long, difficult, and complex, redemption will occur because God has pledged himself to it. Jesus Christ is incontrovertible evidence of just how serious God is. (Sittser, 2004. p.129)

All will be well. Not because life will turn out that way naturally, as if there were some kind of universal law that ensures it... If anything, life is often hard, mean, and brutal. But in the end, life will turn out well because God is good and kind and gracious. He is working mysteriously to redeem us

and restore the world to what he intended it to be. All will be well because God is God. (Sittser, 2004. p.235)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14 ESV)

Discussion Questions

- What infections or wounds do you need to tend to?
 - Do you need to forgive others for wronging you?
- Do you mix anger with sin?
 - How can you put away your bitterness?
- Do you really trust God for all things in life?
 - In what ways can your trust grow?
- Are you patiently waiting for God's redemption?
or
- Are you creating a "permanent home" in this world?