

HOW TO DEAL WITH RESENTMENT

"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." Esther 7:10.

Resentment is a feeling of reflective and indignant displeasure because of something which has been done by another that is regarded as a wrong or a personal injury. Those who hold to their resentments find themselves living in the country of confusion, in the state of unhappiness, in the town of bitterness, and on the street of misery. Nobody is immune to resentment, any more than he is completely free from temptation. Every person must deal with resentment.

When one feels resentment growing in his life, it is time for self-examination. Physicians tell us that it is wise to have a physical examination about every six months, in order to discover any disease in its incipient stage. We readily acknowledge the wisdom of this procedure, but thinking people know it is also very wise to keep a close watch on one's spiritual growth. Resentments grow rapidly, and people often cultivate them without realizing it.

I. The Causes of Resentment.

Sometimes one knows the cause of his resentment, but most of the time he does not really know what it is. Frequently resentment grows out of a self-centered life. A feeling of not being wanted, not being recognized, or not being loved, along with self-pity and a little envy will grow giant resentments. Most resentments do not have any real basis for their existence. Some resent those whose achievements are more glowing than their own. Others resent those who have more radiant personalities than their own. Still others resent those who disagree with their views.

II. The Consequences of Resentment.

In the process of self-examination one should consider what resentment will do to him personally.

1. Resentment injures one's health.

One cannot harbor resentment and permit it to grow without damaging his health. If you nurse an injured pride or an inner hurt, it will fester and weaken your physical health. David Seabury said, "Experience shows that the pressure of undrained wounded emotion plays a great part in creating fatigue, nervousness and worry."

It is now a well-established fact that any feeling of bitterness toward others affects the health of the body. Sir Maurice Craig used to say, "Half a dozen bitter words and the very pepsin of your stomach loses its power." At the inquest of a dead baby, a specialist said the baby had been poisoned by breast milk which had become toxic due to the bitter hatred which possessed the mother's mind. And here is a statement from one of the late books on medicine: "A strong resentment is just as likely to cause disease as is a germ." If one cares for his health, he had better get rid of all personal resentment.

2. Resentment makes one unhappy.

It is utterly impossible for anybody to be resentful and happy at the same time. When resentment comes into the heart happiness goes out. Resentment always erupts in the form of some organic sickness, nervous disorder, or chronic unhappiness.

3. Resentment alienates one from God.

The person has never lived who could hold resentment and grudges against another and be right in his relationship with God. Nobody will ever be able to hold resentment and love in his heart at the same time.

4. Resentment destroys one's effectiveness.

When one gives way to resentment his inner life disintegrates or falls to pieces. As someone has expressed it, "The jealous man poisons his own banquet, and then eats it." He who gives way to resentment and envy is taking fire into his own bosom. When you envy a person his job, salary, house, car, popularity, ability, brains, or position, you are hurting yourself far more than you are hurting him.

Resentment never pays. To one of his friends who thought that he was too easygoing with his enemies, Abraham Lincoln said, "You have more of that feeling of personal resentment than I have; perhaps I have too little of it, but I never thought it paid." Leonardo da Vinci, the great artist, had an enemy against whom he felt a keen resentment. To get even, when he painted his picture, "The Last Supper," he portrayed his enemy as Judas. But the ugliness of his deed depressed Da Vinci, and when he tried to paint the face of Jesus Christ, he simply could not get into the proper spirit for such a sacred task. At last he was forced to recognize that his vindictiveness had not only spoiled his happiness, but had actually blunted his skill and destroyed his usefulness. So, he painted out the face of Judas and dropped his foolish resentment and animosity, and was able then to paint the face of the Lord Jesus with grace and skill. Look at it any way you want to, resentment does not pay.

A splendid scriptural example of the terrible consequences of resentment is Haman, the prime minister of Persia in the reign of Ahasuerus. Fortune had highly favored Haman. He was promoted from obscurity to the highest office of trust, the king having made him chief over all the deputies of the realm. This sudden rise to political power made Haman extremely vain. He gloated over the king's favor and the obeisance of the people. He expected everybody to bow down to him with the utmost reverence and homage. Promotion, position, and honor did for Haman just what they do so often for people, namely, spoiled him completely and hopelessly.

As Haman was coming in one day, everybody bowed before him and did him reverence except one man. Mordecai the Jew simply gazed upon the passing dignitary without taking off his hat or bowing before him and doing him honor. We are not told just why Mordecai refused to salute him in the fashion which others did. Good man that he was, he was not merely neglectful of the ordinary courtesies, or just acting as he did out of sheer obstinacy, but evidently from a real conscientious principle, such as the conviction that such reverence and worship were wrong.

This one exception to the chorus of praise and reverence with which Haman was greeted filled him with resentment. His vanity filled him with vicious madness toward this man who failed to bow to his vaunted greatness. Nursing his wounded pride, and filled with wrath, Haman immediately proceeded to seek revenge. So insatiable was his fury that Haman conceived the idea of destroying all the Jews in the realm. He went to the palace in Shushan and told the king that "a certain people" in his kingdom did not have any respect for the laws, and should therefore be put to death. On the ground that it would promote the safety of the government to exterminate the Jews, of whom Mordecai was one, Ahasuerus yielded to the appeal of Haman and issued a decree that at a certain time these people should be slain and their possessions taken as spoil. What a rash and merciless edict! How depraved the man who proposed this scheme of iniquity, and the one who agreed to execute it!

When he gave his assent to this satanic scheme, the king removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman saying, "The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with as

it seemeth good to thee." What more did Haman want? He did not waste any time in calling the king's scribe, to whom he dictated letters and sealed them with the king's signet ring and sent them into all the provinces. The letters gave orders "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day." Thus Haman's hate was to fall as a blitzkrieg upon the Jews. They were to be annihilated "in one day." That was a rather ambitious undertaking, and for no other reason than to gratify Haman's resentment toward and hatred of one Jew in particular, and all Jews in general.

It appeared that everything was in readiness for the accomplishment of the task. Even though sinners are permitted to proceed to the point at which they aim, an invisible and all-powerful God frequently, as the Bible says, "puts a hook in their nose and his bridle in their lips, and turns them back" (II Kings 19:28). Many times God refuses to permit men to carry out their plans against His people. He is always able to take care of His own.

When the news of Haman's sinister plot reached Mordecai, he sent word to Esther the queen, imploring her to intercede with the king in behalf of her people. Taking her life in her hand, so to speak, she approached the king. Happily he held out the golden scepter to her and inquired, "What is thy request? it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom." Her request was that he and Haman come to a banquet which she had prepared for them. This pleased the king, and he sent word to Haman to make haste and do as Esther had requested. At that banquet she invited them to another on the following day.

Returning home from the banquet in a joyful mood, Haman boasted of the distinct honor which had come to him in being the only man who was invited to accompany the king to the banquet prepared by Esther, and the one which was to follow, but he remarked that all of this did not avail him anything as long as he could see Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. Like infamous Jezebel, or despicable Lady Macbeth, Haman's adoring wife admonished him to murder the man the very sight of whom infuriated him. In substance she said, "Who are you, Haman? Are you not the viceroy of the king? Are you not the second man in the great empire of Persia? And yet you permit a little Jew to stand in your way and to spoil your happiness! I will tell you what to do. Build a gallows fifty feet high, and tomorrow speak to the king and get his permission to hang Mordecai thereon, and then you can go in merrily with the king to the banquet."

This idea appealed to Haman. He said, "That is the very thing! It shall be done!" Summoning his servants, he ordered them to secure carpenters and begin the erection of the gallows that very night. Early that night the sound of the hammers rang out on the royal avenue as Haman's carpenters built the gallows on which Mordecai was to be hanged. But the Bible tells us that that night the king could not sleep. Consequently, he called in his secretaries and had them read to him from the chronicles of his reign. As one of them was reading he came to a paragraph which related how two of the king's chamberlains had conspired to assassinate him, but the plot had been exposed by Mordecai, and the king's life was spared. He had that read the second time, and then inquired, "Was anything ever done to honor that man for saving my life?" They answered, "Nothing, your majesty."

At sunrise a messenger approached the king and announced that Haman was in the outer court, hoping to get the king's consent to hang Mordecai being the real purpose of his mission. Ahasuerus said, "Let him come in." When he entered the king said, "Haman, I learned last night that there is a man who once did me a great service. I would like to do something to recognize and honor him. You are a man with a fertile mind. What do you think should be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" Thinking that the king was referring to him, Haman said, "I will tell you what to do, your

majesty. Bring forth the royal apparel and the royal crown and place them on him. Then have the king's charger brought out of the stable and saddled and bridled with the golden bit, and the royal caparison be put on him. Then have the man whom you delight to honor mounted on the horse, and command one of the princes of the kingdom to take the horse by the bridle and lead him through the streets of the city, calling out as he goes, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

Looking at the cruel and crafty Haman for a moment, the king said, "Haman, thou hast well spoken. Thou art the prince to lead the horse, and Mordecai is the man who will ride the horse." Haman had intended to hang Mordecai, but God had decreed that he should perform quite another mission.

When the parade was over and Haman returned, crestfallen and humiliated, his wife and friends told him that his doom was certain. So, with a heavy heart he went to the second banquet, and there he heard the queen remonstrate with the king against the cruel edict which had gone forth for the extermination of all her people, and earnestly request that both she and they might be rescued from the intended massacre. She then exposed Haman as the instigator of the plot. The incensed king at once gave command that Haman be hanged on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, and his estate confiscated. The attendants promptly led Haman out and hanged him on the very gallows he had erected for another.

One of the paradoxes of life is that the poisonous potion which one prepares for another, he himself is finally compelled to drink. The Psalmist bore testimony to this same truth when he said: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate" (7:15-16).

Haman is the perfect example of the resentful schemer who gets caught in his own trap. He didn't know it, but he was having his own gallows erected. In the end he became the supreme victim of his own resentment and ill will. He struck out at another, but the blow landed on his own head. Ill will always proves to be a boomerang. It invariably backfires. Ill will always injures the person who gives way to it, more than it hurts anyone else. As certainly as Haman was put to death on the gallows he had prepared for the man toward whom he cherished strong resentment, the person who tries to "get even" with somebody is on the high road to personal ruin, for "hatred destroys the hater as well as the hated." A man says, "That fellow double-crossed me once, and I'll make him regret it if it takes me the rest of my life." How little such a person must care about himself — his physical, mental, and spiritual health! One of the paradoxes of life is that the would-be executioner always becomes the executed. Christ said, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

The Holy Spirit had the experience of Haman recorded in the Bible in order to remind every reader thereof that all who scheme and plan to injure their fellowmen should expect a similar or greater injury to be inflicted upon them. Haman planned for the hanging of Mordecai, and he expected to witness the execution, but he himself was hanged on the gallows which he had erected for another.

Robespierre, who sent so many to the guillotine, had his own head chopped off by that horrid instrument. When Charles I, who had destroyed Stratford, was about to be beheaded, he said, "I basely ratified an unjust sentence, and the similar injustice I am now to undergo is a sensible retribution for the punishment I inflicted on an innocent man." Lord Jeffries, after incarcerating many innocent and good people in London Tower, was himself imprisoned in the same place, where the shadows of those whom he had mistreated seemed to haunt him so that he kept crying to his attendants: "Keep them off, gentlemen! for God's sake, keep them off!" His chickens had come home to roost.

A bishop once said to Louis XI of France, "Make an iron cage for all those who do not think as we do -- an iron cage in which the captive can neither lie down nor stand straight up." The awful instrument of punishment was fashioned as he suggested. After a while the bishop offended Louis XI, and for fourteen years he was in that same cage, and could neither lie down nor stand up. The wrongs which people do recoil upon them. As God said: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Years ago the Lord led the members of the Executive Board of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky to elect as Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer a man of God, who was a strong pulpiteer and a successful pastor. Kentucky Baptists received the benefit of his years of fruitful experience. As usual, some brethren disliked the way he did some of his work, and resented the fact that he didn't do what they thought he ought to do, although none of them had been or ever will be a secretary. Whether self-appointed or influenced by others who lacked high ethical standards, I know not, but one brother arose in the annual meeting of the General Association and made a motion to terminate the services of this man of God. The messengers quickly defeated that motion. Later a fellow pastor said to me, "I have no idea what will happen to him, but sometime something tragic will happen in the life and ministry of Brother So-and-So, for no man can ever do to one of God's servants what he tried to do to Dr. So-and-So and get by with it." The secretary never mentioned the incident and never showed any resentment. For many years the other brother served in prominent pastorates and received numerous honors at the hands of Kentucky Baptists. Then, one Friday night his deacons faced him with tape recordings of telephone conversations, which he had been having from the church with a member with whom he ought not to have been talking, that were most unbecoming and out of place, whereupon he conducted his last service on Sunday night and left the state before daylight. Remember, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

III. The Cure for Resentment.

What a person does about resentment is exceedingly important. It will mean the difference between happiness and misery, between a wholesome influence over others and a bad example before them. The right thing to do with resentment is to refuse to let it come into your heart. With the Lord's help one can refrain from being resentful.

The person who does so always wins. Charles Sangster's father watched the Salvation Army in its early days when the Skeleton Army, composed mostly of thugs, tried to break up their public meetings. The thugs threw filth and stones at those participating in the services, sometimes inflicting serious wounds upon them. One day, outside Eagle Tavern on City Road, London, a Salvation Army service was in progress. The preacher was proclaiming Christ to them when a half-drunken man came out of the saloon and knocked the preacher to the ground with one savage blow. The preacher's head hit the curb-stone with such force that some thought the blow had killed him. But he staggered to his feet and looked at the brute who had struck him, and said, "God bless you." Then, with great effort, he continued the service. Sangster said, "My father knew in that moment that the Skeleton Army was defeated, and that these new soldiers of the cross would march around the world." And they have. Christian love can win, but resentment can never win.

If you have let resentment into your heart and spirit, you can get rid of it if you so desire. You can bottle up your resentment and keep it to yourself, but as it burns within it will show itself in your face and in your obvious lack of happiness, and at some time in the future it will cause you trouble. Another thing you can do is to seek revenge, but that is unchristian and will never bring you any happiness. You can and should take it to the Lord in prayer and let Him help you to eradicate it from your heart and life. As long as you harbor resentment you are not right with the Lord. When you get right with Him, resentment will be gone.