

## OVERCOMING SELF-HATRED AND SELF- CONDEMNATION

*As I stepped in front of the group of men in the prison chapel to start my teaching, Eric caught my attention. His feet were propped up in another chair, and he glared at me with obvious anger. I started the seminar with a teaching about forgiveness and especially about forgiving our parents for rejection, abuse, and hurtful words. I explained how their abusive words and actions can get inside and affect how we think about God and about ourselves, and how the hurtful things that happen to us are not God's will but grieve His heart.*

*As the teaching progressed in the chapel, Eric took his feet out of the chair and his expression started to change. Later, as I talked to him, he reminded me of a volcano ready to explode with inner pressure. He was angry and bitter toward his father who had cursed and beat him, against God for not protecting him, against the gang in prison that had recently beat him and caused ongoing pain in his shoulder and lower back, which was the reason he had his feet propped up. Mostly, Eric was angry at himself. All of that rejection and hatred from his father had been internalized and he was full of self-hatred, constantly cursing himself and others and getting into situations that caused him to be incarcerated and attacked by others.*

*Over the course of the seminar, God softened his heart. I led him to forgive his father, the policemen, the judge, the guys that beat him up, and finally--himself. That was the hard one. He came to see that God was not against him. The love of Christ penetrated his shell. I prayed for physical healing, and God graciously took all his pain away!*

*In the course of two short days I saw the Spirit of God dramatically change a man and give him a fresh start in life. What a thrill!*

Self-hatred, accompanied by self-condemnation, is a universal human problem. The reason is found in Scripture: *"For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."*<sup>1</sup> God tells us that we have an enemy, the devil, whose name also means "accuser." Self-hatred and self-condemnation is an insidious scheme of the devil designed to destroy our relationship with God, with others, and our inner peace. Satan frequently uses the words and actions of parents and other family members to accomplish his evil purpose:

- When a child is always criticized and made to feel they can never measure up to the demands of their parents.
- When a child is raised with physical, emotional, or verbal abuse.
- When a child is told that he or she was an accident and was not wanted.

- When a child is compared to a "smarter" or "prettier" or "more athletic" brother or sister.
- When a child is in a home where a death or divorce takes place.
- When a child is from a religious home where there is legalism without love and threats that an angry God "is going to get you."

Notice that accusation is a component in each item on this terrible list, except, "When a child is in a home where a death or divorce takes place." But even in that situation, the devil comes and accuses the child, "It was your fault that your parents divorced, or that one of them died!"

Children can grow up convinced they will never be good enough to live up to the standard they have been taught. As a result, they can take either the high road or the low road. The low road is where they give up the idea of being good. They quickly take the route of rebellion, drugs, alcohol, crime or promiscuous behavior. Or, on the other hand, they can take the high road of being "good." They can be religious, but they are also anxious, compulsive, driven, and filled with self-hatred. The Pharisees took the high road with lots of rules and striving to please God and convince others they were spiritual. There are many in the church who serve God faithfully and whose lives are busy, busy, busy, at home, at work, and at church. They do many good things. But they know little of the deep inner peace the Lord offers: *"My peace I give to you....let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*<sup>2</sup> *"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. Let us, therefore be diligent to enter that rest"*<sup>3</sup>

Suppose a child is raised by abusive or alcoholic parents. Who would the child blame for his misfortunes? Children blame their parents and also God. They might think thoughts like, "God, you really did a lousy job. If You were a loving God, You would never have given me a father that treated me like that! What chance did I have?" Or a child that is raised in a religious home without love is driven by "god" to "make more bricks." Remember how Pharaoh drove the Hebrew slaves and demanded that they make more bricks?<sup>4</sup> The child grows up to hate the "god" that drives him, but it is not the God revealed in the Bible that they hate but a caricature of God. Pharaoh was a type of the devil who enslaves people and drives them to do more than they can do. And the children of Israel blamed their dilemma on God, which is what people today still tend to do.

The prodigal son took the low road. He left home and his life degenerated until he was living with harlots and people in the bars. He was a bad kid, a black sheep by his own choice. He finally woke up and said, I'm going back home and admit to my father that I sinned *"against heaven and before you"*<sup>5</sup> and ask him to take me back as a hired servant. He had his speech all memorized. As he drew near home his dad, who had been yearning, praying, and aching inside, saw him at a distance and ran to meet him, the heavy running of an older man, running to meet his son. The boy gave his speech and his dad kissed him and called for a fattened calf so they could have a celebration.

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There was another brother in that story.<sup>6</sup> The elder brother took the high road. He was a "good" boy, but he didn't really know his father although he lived in his home encompassed by his love. So he drove himself to work and to strive, hoping that his father would eventually love and accept him. But he never felt acceptable, loved, or worthy. He felt like an outcast in the home of his father. The story was told by Jesus to the Pharisees. The main point of the story is about the elder brother because the Pharisees were like the elder brother. They were religious. They followed the rules and regulations. They were filled with self-justification, self-righteousness, rejection of others, and of God. Deep in their hearts, they rejected and hated themselves. As a result of all this, they became incapable of reaching out to the prodigal sons who were coming home.

I want to say about self-hatred, without any ambiguity, that self-hatred is SIN, and the solution is REPENTANCE. The root of self-hatred and self-condemnation is pride. A person who is vain and thinks himself superior may spend hours before the mirror, thinking, "I'm Mr. Wonderful." He loves the limelight and looks for chances to jump up in front of people and say something. He might well become a preacher. What he is thinking in his self-centeredness is, "Everybody, look at me and admire me. What a wonderful person I am!" But then there is the person who is filled with self-hatred who spends hours avoiding the mirror, thinking, "I'm ugly, I'm despicable, I'm the ugly frog. Don't look at me, don't ask me to get up in front of anybody and say anything because everybody would see how awful I am." That is also self-centered, isn't it? What is he thinking about? He is thinking about self. SELF! "Everybody's going to see me. Everybody is going to see what ugly clothes I have on today. All eyes are on me." Every one of these ideas is a lie. It is self-centeredness. God's prescription is not to build up my self-esteem, which psychology tells me to do.

Self-righteousness is at work in self-hatred. It is really important to see this. SATAN'S LIE CONVINCES ME THERE IS SOMETHING HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS ABOUT PUTTING MYSELF DOWN, ABOUT CONSTANTLY THINKING OR SAYING THINGS LIKE, "I'M TERRIBLE, I'M GUILTY, I'M A FAILURE, OR I'M A WORM." This is NOT righteousness! It is not humility. Humility says, "Thank you, Heavenly Father, for loving and forgiving me again. Oh, how I praise You and honor You for who You are! How I thank You for Your kindness to me!" Pride focuses on self. Humility focuses on the Lord.

Negative thoughts and words about ourselves result in adverse consequences not only to our spirits and emotions, but to our bodies. Bill Johnson reported the following experience: "I once ministered to a woman with Crohn's disease; her colon had been dissolving for seven years. I asked her if she struggled with shame. She said she did, and I said, 'Your body is sending you a message. Your colon is eating itself. The harshness you have toward yourself is making you sick, and your body is manifesting what you are doing to yourself emotionally.' She repented for that sin and was instantly healed."<sup>7</sup>

In his training manual for counselors,<sup>8</sup> Art Mathias teaches about the destructive power of self-bitterness, which I would name self-condemnation. Following are some quotations from his manual:

"Satan uses self-bitterness against us. Self-bitterness produces an inability to forgive ourselves. Our ministry experience is that many people cannot say, 'I forgive myself.' Unforgiveness of ourselves leads to self-resentment. It says, 'I can never do anything right. Daddy was right. I'll never amount to anything.' Self-resentment leads to self-hatred, self-anger, and self-violence. Our ministry has served many that have cut or maimed themselves out of extreme shame or guilt.

"The ultimate expression of self-violence is, of course, suicide. It is characteristic of people who have reached this point to constantly entertain thoughts like, 'Nobody would care if I died. In fact, the world would be better off.' 'The only way I can make Jane happy is to kill myself.' These are sick, irrational, thoughts. To defeat self-murder, we have to break the bond of the unloving spirit and eliminate self-bitterness."<sup>9</sup>

On a teaching CD, Art Mathias told about receiving a phone call from a woman who was close to suicide. He asked her, "Why do you hate yourself so much?" She answered, "Because I had an abortion." Art led her through the steps of forgiving herself and repenting of self-anger, self-hatred, self-condemnation, and self-violence, and she was set free. He reports that many women suffer with self-hatred as a result of having abortions.

Remember the demon-possessed man of the country of the Gerasenes who was running around naked in the tombs, gashing himself with stones?<sup>10</sup> Why was he doing that? Possibly under all the demons was severe self-hatred--and also I wonder if he wasn't trying to atone for his sins, trying to appease God for being such a terrible person. Do you remember what happened with Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal? *"They cried with a loud voice and CUT THEMSELVES ACCORDING TO THEIR CUSTOM with swords and lances until the blood gushed out of them and they did that until the time of the evening sacrifice."*<sup>11</sup>

I have ministered to several young women, and middle-aged women, who have cut their own arms or thighs many times with razor blades. This phenomenon has become so prevalent, especially among teenage girls, that a name has emerged which describes this behavior: "cutters." Why do they do such a thing? Usually it is because they feel deeply sinful and unclean, perhaps because of their own sins, or because they were sinned against in horrible ways (incest or rape), and they feel they can never be clean again. It can also be a way to express anger at others, or a way to relieve anxiety, or a way to feel alive or in control. And there is something innately spiritual about blood. There is an inner knowing that the shedding of blood in some mysterious way is required to pay for sin. But the shedding of our own blood, or the sacrifice of some animal, never brings the release we are searching for. This release is only found in the holy blood that was shed for us on the cross.

I saw a documentary about fanatical Muslims in present day India. It showed one of their religious festivals, where priests took fishhooks and stuck them through the skin of their chest and stomach, put large weights on them and danced through the streets for hours with their flesh being torn, gushing blood. And it told about others who would carry chains and beat themselves with chains on their bare backs for as long as five hours at a time

We say, "How pagan! How can people view God as requiring that?" But what do you and I do when we continually lacerate ourselves with our thoughts and words of self-condemnation and self-hatred? "I'm a terrible person. I'm ugly! I'm dumb! I'm an awful person. I'm guilty!" Do you see? We may be trying to appease God, and our Father's heart is broken because we have a picture of a pagan god, not the REAL God, not the LOVING FATHER who welcomed his son back with forgiveness and open arms. It is as if the prodigal son were welcomed home by his father and the next morning he got up and went to his father with his head down and tears in his eyes and said, "Oh father, I've been such an awful person in the far country. You surely can't forgive me for what I've done. I've sinned. I've defiled myself. I've wasted and squandered your money. Oh father!"

The father would look at him in amazement and say, "Son! I love you! I welcomed you back YESTERDAY and gave a party for you. I have ALREADY forgiven you!" And the son would say, "Oh, I'm so awful, so terrible! I'll never be able to forgive myself for what I've done! I'm going to work in the fields for 18 hours a day for 30 years and hope I'll eventually be worthy so that you can forgive me!" Do you see? If we are constantly striving to satisfy the demands of an impossible-to-please God, then we can never enter the rest that God has prepared for us.

We do not need to atone for our sins. They have been atoned for! We do not need to appease an angry God. The Lamb of God took the burden Himself. He took our sin upon Himself and satisfied the demands of justice. All we need to do is to accept it, accept His love, accept His forgiveness. We need to repent of the LIE we have believed that God sees us as unworthy, blemished and rejected. LIES! These lies will keep us from ever having peace in our hearts. Whether we have taken the low road or the high road, we need to repent and run to our Father and accept His forgiveness. Self-hatred is self-centeredness. Self-hatred is self-righteousness. It is attempting to please, appease, and atone a false god. We need to see a picture of the Heavenly Father running to us with outstretched arms.

Judson Cornwall wrote that in his home he had two younger brothers well over six feet tall who were star athletes. Judson was about five feet, six inches tall and not athletic. He wrestled with feelings of self-rejection and self-hatred all of his life, even after becoming a Christian. One day as he was wrestling with these feelings about himself he said he heard the voice of God say, "Judson, I have made you small and gentle." After that, he laid down all of his self-rejection.

## Time of Reflection

In trying to find your way in life, did you take the low road or the high road? Are you past all of that and now feel that you are on the right path?

Have you struggled with self-rejection and self hatred? Self-curses?

Have you forgiven and repented of judgments against others, against God, against self?

Do you need to repent for hating yourself and putting yourself down? It is sin! Maybe you were born out of wedlock or maybe you were an accident and were told you were not wanted. Maybe you should have been a child of the other sex according to your father or mother. Can you thank God for calling you into existence when He did, and affirm that God did not make a mistake? All the sins and mistakes made by our parents can be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Isn't that good news? All the sins and mistakes we parents made with our children can also be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Isn't that good news? Do you need to forgive a father or mother who abandoned you? Who abused you? Who didn't show you enough love? An older brother or sister who hurt you or failed you in some deep way? Forgive them, right now.

Perhaps after you accepted Christ and repented of your past sins, you continued to "hear" condemnation. Many Christians never break free of that accusing voice in their minds, making their lives miserable. The accuser hammers on those past sins: "You had an abortion! You forced your wife, your girlfriend, your daughter, to have an abortion! Remember what you did when you were drunk or high! Your sin caused you to lose your spouse, or your children! You betrayed and wounded those who loved and trusted you!" The accusations go on and on. Don't continue to accept those accusations. You have repented of your sins and accepted Christ as your Savior. He has forgiven you. All those sins are under the Blood. Resist the devil! God loves you. He is your Heavenly Father. Let us come to Him with thanksgiving today.

### Endnotes

- (1) Revelation 12:10
- (2) John 14:27
- (3) Hebrews 4:9-11
- (4) Exodus 5:7-19
- (5) Luke 15:18
- (6) Luke 15:25
- (7) Bill Johnson, *The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind* (Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 152.
- (8) Art Mathias, *Biblical Foundations of Freedom* (Anchorage, Alaska, Wellspring Publishing, 2005)
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 87-89

(10)Luke 8:26-37

(11)1 Kings 18:26