



Jean's Turn

THE BITTER HEART

by Jean Dager

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby be defiled. (Hebrews 12:15)

Over the years I've known people who are bitter about life. This includes believers as well as non-believers in Jesus. I'm sure we all can say we have met such people from time to time. Perhaps they even have good reason to be bitter: a stressful marriage; a painful and sorrowful past; loss of material wealth due to the treachery of others; ill health; disappointment over failed plans, or myriad other reasons.

I can understand non-believers who have no relationship with God being bitter. But I'm especially saddened when a fellow believer has a bitter heart. Especially if that person is one who regularly reads the Bible, has an active prayer life, and tries to be a witness for Christ to others. I read a page from A.W. Tozer's *Christian Leadership*, and I believe he shed a bright light on this subject when he said:

Resentment simply cannot dwell in a loving heart. Before resentfulness can enter, love must take its flight and bitterness take over. The bitter soul will compile a list of slights at which it takes offense and will watch over itself like a mother bear over her cubs. And the figure is apt, for the resentful heart is always surly and suspicious like a she-bear.

Few sights are more depressing than that of a professed Christian defending his supposed rights and bitterly resisting any attempt to violate them. Such a Christian has never accepted the way of the cross. The sweet graces of meekness and humility are unknown to him. He grows

every day harder and more acrimonious as he defends his reputation, his rights, his ministry, against his imagined foes. (emphasis added)

I can surely see why there is the need to examine ourselves often to guard against falling into the sin of harboring ill thoughts against others or piling up resentments.

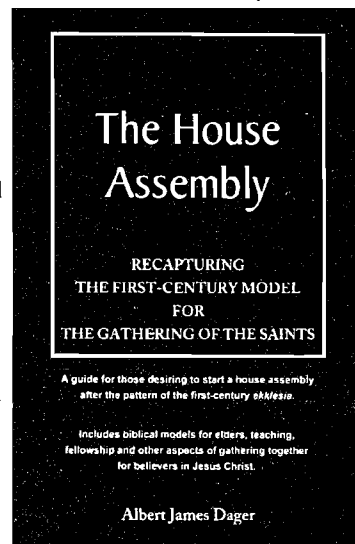
Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

Hardened and embittered spirits darken the light of Christ's love shining within us. A loving heart will always strive to be forgiving of others as Christ forgave us, and to live as much as possible with a joyful and cheerful countenance. Tozer, in his wisdom, admonishes the brethren to "die to self and rise with Christ into newness of life." ❖

Many Christians are experiencing in their churches the inevitable results of religious institutionalism: false teachings; abusive pastors; denominational tradition; anecdotal sermons; favoritism; unaccountability of pastors; constant fund-raising programs and many other issues that suck the financial, emotional and time resources of the people.

Is this what Jesus had in mind for His people?

Many believers are meeting in their homes and finding a new freedom in Christ that they could never experience in the traditional church setting. In this provocative book, Al Dager offers biblical guidelines for reestablishing the first-century model.



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