

When I was growing up, the Disney movie Song of the South offered us great entertainment. The song Zippety-Do-Dah became a favorite of most (but not all) who heard it. My favorite Uncle Remus stories was the one he told about how Brer Rabbit was too sharp for Brer Fox. One day Brer Fox caught Brer Rabbit (using Tar Baby) and intended to eat him. Brer Fox told him that he was going to barbeque him, and Brer Rabbit said that anything was fine as long as he wasn't thrown into the briar patch. Brer Fox then said that maybe he would just drown him, but Brer Rabbit repeated that anything but the briar patch would be all right. Brer Fox then decided he would just skin him, but once again Brer Rabbit repeated his fear of the briar patch. Brer Fox then realized that since he wanted to hurt Brer Rabbit as much as possible, he would just throw him into the briar patch. Brer Rabbit, of course, had been born and raised in the briar patch, so he got clean away.

Getting 'thrown in the briar patch' is getting a punishment that doesn't bother you at all. Some people just don't understand this. Take for example the idea of suspending a student for skipping school. Does this seem smart to you to give them three days off because they missed a day? Is this a punishment or a reward? It is a great example of being thrown into the *briar patch*.

I don't remember too many times in my life that I received the briar patch; mostly I just got punished! But I have seen the briar patch principle at work. I have seen husbands being 'punished' by divorce, though they were actually much better off afterwards. I have seen custody of children transferred to 'punish' an ex-spouse (who loves being with them); so that they will see how hard it is (and so they won't have time to have a social life, either)! And I have seen fathers refuse to take their children on a regular basis to 'punish' their ex-wives. These same fathers make their children pay their own way at a restaurant or activity to 'punish' the mother. But these are not really punishments at all.

Those that are on the receiving end of this find a place to be safe, like the *briar patch*. For a married man, it used to be called it the 'dog house.' For someone newly divorced it might be their new apartment. Solomon gave us proverbs with the idea that it is 'better to live on a corner of the roof (or in a desert) than with a quarrelsome wife (spouse)' (Proverbs 21:9, 21:19, 25:24).

The man healed in John 9 was cast out of the synagogue by the Pharisees because he would not deny the power of Christ. Though he may not have realized it, he was thrown into the *briar patch*. There he could realize the full potential of a life in Christ rather than be limited by the narrow views of the Pharisees. There are similar instances in this day and time when to be disfellowshipped would be to be thrown into the *briar patch*. It could be the best thing for us.

Paul also had an interesting example of the *briar patch* in Philippians 1:15-18 when he wrote of some who preached the gospel to stir up trouble for him while he was in chains. But though they sought to hurt him, he was not bothered by it because he just wanted the gospel preached. He did not want anything for himself, and they could not understand anything so unselfish.

People who try to punish you (in their own superiority) really end up only punishing themselves. They become caught in their own traps of selfishness. These people have the worst punishment: they have to live with their own (evil) self. I don't believe that they can ever be truly happy, even though they can look and act that way. They don't have the 'peace that passes understanding' (Philippians 4:7). And the effect of their revenge many times is not felt because of the briar patch principle. When the Lord says, 'Vengeance is mine' (Romans 12:19), perhaps it also means that others may not be able to achieve full effect of their intended revenge on us. Even if they kill us, heaven is the briar patch for the true Christian. Thus, no revenge can truly hurt us. Only God's punishment is real. His 'outer darkness' is definitely not the *briar patch*.

There are two examples that I can think of where someone was thrown into the *briar patch* for the sake of others. Remember that Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, but he knew that God meant it for Good, that he was meant to save the lives of many. And of course Jesus was killed through the workings of Satan, who thought he could win the world. But Christ could not be 'punished' in that way. He also knew that he was saving the souls of many and gladly submitted.

I just like to think of the *briar patch* as a means of thwarting evil that is being thrown at us. It is something we willingly submit to because we know that it is not really as bad as it seems. And nothing is that bad if we are in fellowship with God for He has the ultimate power to save us.

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