
Beware of Bitterness

Heb 12:15

Introduction:

1. Bitterness, more than anything else, prevents Christians from being used by the Lord
2. There are many causes of bitterness
 - a. Some are bitter at their circumstances
 - b. Some are bitter at other people
 - c. Some people are even bitter at God
3. It is sad that a person would allow his joy and happiness to be swallowed up by the whale of bitterness
4. Some parents are bitter at their children and some children are bitter at their parents
5. Some husbands are filled with bitterness toward their wives and wives eaten alive with bitterness against their husbands
6. Bitterness shows up in churches often resulting in splits
7. An acid container cannot be used for any other purpose and a Christian with bitterness cannot be used by God
8. Bitterness is anger that has been left untreated, unconfessed and unforsaken
9. Bitterness will destroy your spiritual life and even your health
10. During WWII, the USS Tang surfaced under the cover of darkness to fire upon a large Japanese convoy off the coast of China. Since previous raids had left the American vessel with only eight torpedoes, the accuracy of every shot was absolutely essential. The first seven torpedoes were right on target; but when the eighth was launched, it suddenly deviated and headed right back at their own ship. The emergency alarm to submerge rang out, but it was too late. Within a matter of seconds the U.S. sub received a direct hit and sank almost instantly. We become bitter and think that we are hurting the other person, but we are only destroying ourselves. Being bitter is like aiming a torpedo at your own heart.

I. The Causes of Bitterness

- There are basically three wells from which bitterness flows

A. Disappointment – 1Sam 1:10

1. Sometimes, when a child does not get his way, he screams, rolls on the floor, holds his breath, throws a fit
2. He is angry with someone or something
3. His will has been frustrated and his desires denied
4. The same thing can happen in adults who have not learned that things do not always go their way
5. Bitterness comes when disappointment flourishes
6. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is a good example of disappointment turning into bitterness
 - a) *She was a good, moral, faithful wife*
 - b) *She didn't rebel against her husband or Lord*
 - c) *She went to God's house regularly*
 - d) *Yet, the Lord shut up her womb -she had no son*
 - e) *She wanted an honorable thing – a child*
 - f) *She wanted a son for a good reason – she would give him back to the Lord*
 - g) *Year after year she waited and she became bitter*
1Sam 1:10 *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.*
 - h) *How many times have people become bitter after because they were sorely disappointed?*

B. Disillusionment

1. Disillusionment with the actions of others is often a source of bitterness
2. Have you ever been put out with someone because they did something contrary to what you thought they should have done?
3. If you answer “No!” then you aren't being truthful
4. Paul warns husbands not to be bitter against their wives
Col 3:19 *Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*
5. I suspect that if it is possible for husbands to be bitter against their wives, then the reverse is also possible
6. At the marriage altar, a man and woman promise to love each other “till death do us part”

7. But, little by little, bitterness creeps in
Ed Rowell wrote: When I was young, a neighboring family came down with a devastating illness. Several of the children died, and the rest suffered permanent brain damage. What investigators found was that the father had found a truckload of discarded seed corn and fed it to the family hogs. The corn was not intended for animal feed and had been treated with something so bugs wouldn't eat it before it germinated. The hogs ate it with no visible effects. But when the family hogs became the family breakfast, the family was poisoned. Many pesticides and heavy metals like lead and mercury do not pass through the digestive system, but remain in the body. In tiny doses, the effects are minimal. But over time, the effects the are horrible.
This happens to us. Every day we ingest minute amounts of anger, conflict, bitterness, and disrespect. No big deal, we think. These get buried in our subconscious and 20 yrs later we go ballistic over something. We wonder, "Where did that come from?" Don't let bitterness, arguing, criticism, complaining rot your attitude.
8. No man ever loved his wife with all his heart one day and then hated her the next day
9. That is why Eph 4:26 tell us...
26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:
10. Put your confidence in the Lord, not in man
Ps 118:8 It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.
 - a) *His actions are always perfect*
 - b) *His decisions are always just and right*
 - c) *If we are in disagreement with God then we are the ones who are wrong*

C. Death – 1Sam 15:32b

32 ... And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past.

1. Death is another source of bitterness according to Bible
2. A spouse dies unexpectedly, a baby dies and some people become bitter
3. The death does not make any sense, people are upset

II. The Curses of Bitterness

- If we do not confess and forsake the hurt then bitterness can creep it
- When we allow bitterness into our lives then it spreads and affects every area of our lives
- If not treated with God's healing power, then bitterness will totally steal God's peace

A. Bitterness Discomforts – Heb 12:15

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you...

1. When disappointment and disillusionment go unconfessed bitterness can take root and trouble us
2. Bitterness can cause insomnia
3. The longer we allow a matter to “eat us up” the more it will trouble us
4. Bitterness will tie your stomach in knots - rob you of your joy, peace and contentment

B. Bitterness Defiles – Heb 12:15

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;

1. Bitterness can defile us
2. It can render us unfit and unusable for God's work
3. When we become bitter we have an improper spirit that defiles us
4. Bitterness leads to hatred and that disqualifies us from being used by the Lord
5. When we are bitter, we are guilty of harboring unconfessed sin in our lives and that defiles us
6. As long as we remain bitter we cannot have the fullest blessings of God upon us

C. Bitterness Discredits – 1Sam 1:10

10 And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

1. Remember that Eli, the high priest, mistook Hannah's bitterness for drunkenness – 1Sam 1:12-13
2. Hannah was a righteous woman and her heart was in the right place but she was bitter because she had no child
3. Bitterness can nullify our testimonies and make us poor examples of Christians
4. As Christians, we are expected to accept God's will for our lives and bitterness is a rejection of this will

D. Bitterness Distracts – Prov 14:10

10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

1. "Knoweth" – to study or ponder
2. When a person is bitter, that bitterness consumes much of that person's thought life
3. Bitterness hinders us from fulfilling Phil 4:8
8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.
4. Bitterness can cause us to be critical and nit-pick
5. Many have quit serving God and forsake God's house because bitterness has caused them to become critical
6. Bitterness distracts us from thinking right thoughts
7. Bitterness makes us self-centered distracting from duties

E. Bitterness Discourages – Job 10:1

1 My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

1. Recall the Bible account of Job
 - a) *He lost his children*
 - b) *He lost his wealth*
 - c) *He lost his health*
 - d) *His friends deserted him*
 - e) *His wife encouraged him to curse God and die*

2. Job's suffering had caused him to become bitter
3. Job became "weary of life"
4. If a person dwells on something long enough, even the most positive person will become discouraged

F. Bitterness Destroys – Job 21:25

25 And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure.

1. Bitterness can destroy our fellowship with God
 - a) *It keeps us from confessing our sins*
 - b) *That severs our fellowship with God*
2. The central focus of bitterness is self and that is a major hindrance to godliness
3. A bitter Christian is a disobedient Christian
4. The bitterness of Ahithophel destroyed him
 - a) *David / Ahithophel had been friends since childhood*
 - b) *Ahithophel became the most famous and most able politician of his day*
 - c) *He was the grandfather of Bathsheba*
 - d) *David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba caused Ahithophel to become bitter*
 - e) *Ahithophel quit and went home as the prophet Nathan was going to David*
 - f) *When Absalom rose up and took the throne from his father David, Ahithophel went over to Absalom's side and became the chief counselor of Absalom*
 - g) *God turned his counsel to naught and eventually Ahithophel went home and hanged himself*
 - h) *His bitterness killed him*

G. Bitterness Degrades – Rom 3:14

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

1. See that cursing and bitterness are linked
2. Often the bitter say things that they don't really mean
3. They lash out at people who love them
4. Their anger flares and they say things that they later regret and are ashamed of
5. Bitterness – it will degrade your testimony for Christ
6. The devil will steal your usefulness if he can't steal your salvation

III. The Cure for Bitterness

- The cure for bitterness is simple
- It has a three step process and it has a 100% cure rate if followed exactly

A. Acknowledge

Ps 38:18 For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.

Ps 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

1. We can't be delivered from bitterness until we acknowledge that we have a problem with it
2. This is often the most difficult part of the process
3. Have you been wronged?
4. Have your rights been violated?
5. Have you been treated unfairly and unjustly?
6. Do you resent the one who has done this?
7. Do you harbor thoughts of retribution / vengeance?
8. Do you look for opportunities to tell others all about how you feel?
9. Do you rehash the incident over and over in your mind?
10. You are growing bitter

B. Confess – 1Jn 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1. Like it or not – bitterness is a sin
2. When you boil it all down, bitterness is dissatisfaction with the way that God is running things
3. When you were saved, you trusted Christ as Lord and Master
 - a) *If He allows heartache into our lives then it must be for our benefit*
 - b) *He God allows someone to treat us unkindly, then it must be for our benefit*
 - c) *Bitterness comes when we rebel against God's will for our lives*
4. Submit to Christ and submit to His sovereignty
5. Confess the sin of bitterness, submit to God and then be willing to....

C. Forsake

1. Be willing to forsake the sin of bitterness
2. Turn the situation over to God
3. Forgive the person and move on
4. “Yes, but I’ll be letting them off the hook”
5. Put them on God’s hook. Let God take care of it

Conclusion:

1. Do you harbor any bitterness?
 - a. Has someone done you wrong?
 - b. Do you want to get even? Are you carrying a grudge?
 - c. If you have unresolved bitterness in your life, then you are not right with God
2. Acknowledge that bitterness is sin
3. Confess it to the Lord and forsake it.
4. Sometimes people even forget the reasons for the anger and bitterness.... Hatfield / McCoy Feud

Have you ever noticed that sometimes we get angry and remain bitter with people and actually forget why we're so upset? Take, for example, the notorious Hatfield-McCoy feud. It hit newspaper front pages in the 1880's, when the Hatfield clan feuded with the McCoy clan from across the border in Kentucky. Historians disagree on the cause of the feud -- which captured the imagination of the nation during a 10-year run. Some cite Civil War tensions: McCoys sympathized with the Union, Hatfields with the Confederacy. Others say it began when the McCoys blamed the Hatfields for stealing hogs. As many as 100 men, women and children died.

In May 1976, Jim McCoy and Willis Hatfield -- the last two survivors of the original families -- shook hands at a public ceremony dedicating a monument to six of the victims. McCoy died Feb. 11, 1984, at age 99. He bore no grudges -- and had his burial handled by the Hatfield Funeral Home in Toler, KY. -- Peter Johnson