

When Bitterness bites the Believer

Hebrews 12:14-15

I . Definitions

In English, the concept of mental bitterness comes from the idea of something that has a sharp or unpleasant taste. We speak of something being bitter if it causes grief or is hard to bear; "a bitter defeat", "bitter failure". We also speak of a "bitter loss" when someone's death has caused great grief.

Then, bitterness has come to be used of those things that cause pain or grief, such as "bitter remarks" or the actions of "bitter enemies." We say "he fought to the bitter end", meaning a tough struggle all the way to the end.

Question: Has someone ever said or done something to you for which you found it difficult to forgive them and get over it? John Underhill relates the following story

A man in Spokane (Mr. Russell) had arranged for the minister from Fourth Memorial church to have his wedding. The big day came but the minister didn't. The minister instead sent a replacement. The man was upset, and he never forgot the incident.

He continues, 30 years later Carolyn had a garage sale. My mother was there helping. A neighbor came over and they introduced themselves. He said, "Underhill, are you related to a minister?" "Yes, my husband is one.

"Well, he said, I could tell you a thing or two." His Mom said, "Go ahead, I've heard it all." He said it all over again "30 years ago he was supposed to marry..." and he told his story. Mom asked, "How long ago was that?" "30 years" he said. "Well, it couldn't have been my husband. We only moved here 25 years ago." For 30 years Mr. Russell had been bitter at the wrong man!

II. Bible Examples of Bitterness

A. Women are sometimes bitter because they cannot have children. 1 Samuel 1:10 is a case where Hannah prayed bitterly for a son. Or if a child disappoints a parent. Proverbs 17:25 *A foolish son is bitterness to his mother*

B. Slavery causes bitterness, Exodus 1:12-14 *But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more quickly the Israelites multiplied! The Egyptians soon became alarmed and decided to make their slavery more bitter still. They were ruthless with the Israelites, forcing them to make bricks and mortar and to work long hours in the fields.*

C. Human pride is a cause of bitterness, Case in point from Acts 8:23 where Simon Magus wanted God's power for bad purposes

III. Natural responses to bitterness

Watch and think about these natural feelings: Every time that person's very name is brought up, even if it was years ago, it still brings butterflies and put knots in your stomach. When you think of them, your heart rate increases. And you can feel your blood pressure rising when you think of what they said or did.

It's as though you were reliving it again, just thinking about it! Like Frankenstein, bitterness is a monster which turns on its creator, and causes internal damage beyond compare. The other person continues their life, and may be happy and content, and never even think about you, but because you hold bitterness for them, they continue to control your life.

Whatever you do, don't say: I don't hardly ever think about them at all, that's not the question. The question is, when you DO think about them, or someone else brings it up, what are your thoughts about them?

IV. Six things bitterness will do to our life: First,

A. Bitterness will devastate us spiritually

It will cause us to walk in the flesh and not the spirit. Apply the two sets of verses and we can easily see what I mean.

Galatians 5:22,23 But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Question: Does a bitter person display that type of fruit?? I don't think so

Now the other side; Galatians 5:19-21 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.

Question: Now I would suggest that a bitter person has some of these attributes compared to the first one wouldn't you say? So Bitterness will devastate us by helping us walk in V 19-21 rather than in V 22,23 **Remember:** It's impossible to be wrong with man and right with God at the same time.

B. Bitterness will destroy us physically

It's like a constantly running machine. It's not an occurrence, it's a lifestyle. It enters into our subconscious mind, and it runs while we're sleeping, eating, watching TV, talking to a friend. Medical doctors say bitterness will affect our body, or our physical health. Bitterness has been medically linked to glandular problems, high blood pressure, cardiac disorders, ulcers, and even insanity.

One leading psychiatrist wrote, "90% of all people in insane asylums could be released immediately if they would learn how to forgive, or how to be forgiven." **An article** from The Gospel Herald stated: "There was a man whose health was good. He was sturdy and strong.

His heart action and blood pressure were fine. Then his father died, and he got into a long-drawn-out legal dispute with his sister about their father's will. The case went to court, and the sister won. **From that day** on, the man could think of nothing more than the lawsuit and his sister.

He talked about it, he thought about it, he filled himself with it, it simply became an obsession. And each day, he grew to hate his sister more. Then he began to have difficulty with his heart and blood pressure. Next, his kidneys bothered him. Before very many months had gone by, complications killed him. It seems obvious that he died from bodily injuries brought on by powerful emotion. He committed spiritual suicide, and the trigger that he pulled, was the trigger of bitterness.

C. Discourage us emotionally

Where there's bitterness, there's discouragement. Because bitterness leads to paranoia. We start to develop a victim's mentality, that everyone's out to get us. We become negative, critical, and paranoid. We become judgmental of others and think we know their motives.

We think people are always talking about us. Its like the guy who couldn't go to a football game because every time the team huddled he was sure they're talking about him.

D. Divide the fellowship

We're all human, and at times we'll give each other reason to be offended sometimes unintentionally, sometimes not! **Thought:** " Its like the guy who said "son, I'm taking momma to the Dr. for her Colitis" And the son replied Who'd momma collide with this time?

Collisions will happen within the fellowship...we can't completely avoid that...but we can control how we respond! Bitterness says, "You don't know what they said or what they did to me!" But you see, sometimes God allows us to be hurt, as a test...will they become bitter, or better? Yes, it true, bitterness, if left unchecked, can divide fellowship

D. Bitterness will defile your relationships

There's a spill-over effect with bitterness. **For example**, You don't have to be bitter toward your spouse to ruin your marriage. You can be bitter toward your mom or dad, and ruin your marriage!

For example, because of the spill-over effect from your mom or dad you may react to your mate in a way that puts strain on the marriage. Be sure of this: Bitterness toward anyone, living or dead, will injure your relationship with God and with people.

E. Bitterness will deprive you of a blessing

For example in a church setting, if you bring a negative, bitter, critical spirit to church with you, you won't come looking for a blessing, you'll be looking for what's wrong...and you're sure to find it! But you will miss all that is good about it and instead of being blessed you will walk away critical and disheartened

V . How to avoid the bite of bitterness

I would like to look at some suggestions to help make his job easier. First,

A. Sincerely desire that it be gone.

If you secretly like being bitter you will hold on to the root even if it only to get a starter slip to begin a new root again, every time you get the chance.

B. Develop a thicker skin, a deflecting ear, and a less absorbing heart.

In other words don't take things so personally, don't let everything your ear hears find its way into your heart, because that is the place the root takes hold. **Remember** as Chuck Swindoll has said, Life is 10% what happens to us; and 90% of how we respond to what happens to us!

C. Take a lesson from the Defensive Drivers Course on how to avoid problems.

Its called **FIDO** Forget It Drive On. By doing that you help avoid it taking root For example if a driver stops and argues, the root starts to develop, but if he drives on and

avoids the situation he doesn't allow it to take hold and have bad things happen so practice hollering FIDO

In closing lets take the lesson from the Monks when it comes to bitterness.

One day, two monks were walking through the countryside. They were on their way to another village to help bring in the crops. As they walked, they spied an old woman sitting at the edge of a river. She was upset because there was no bridge, and she could not get across on her own.

The first monk kindly offered, "We will carry you across, if you would like." "Thank you," she said gratefully, accepting their help. So the two men joined hands, lifted her between them and carried her across the river. When they got to the other side, they set her down, and she went on her way.

After they had walked another mile or so, the second monk began to complain. "Look at my clothes," he said. "They are filthy from carrying that woman across the river. And my back still hurts from lifting her. I can feel it getting stiff." The first monk just smiled and nodded his head.

A few more miles up the road, the second monk griped again, "My back is hurting me so badly, and it is all because we had to carry that silly woman across the river! I cannot go any farther because of the pain." The first monk looked down at his partner, now lying on the ground, moaning.

"Have you wondered why I am not complaining?" he asked. "Your back hurts because you are still carrying the woman. But I set her down five miles ago."

Question: Is carrying the bitterness worth the time and effort? Only you can decide!!!!