

## **Breaking the Hold of Bitterness**

*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

James 3:14-16

These verses tell us that bitterness in our hearts is caused by arrogance and pride. These attitudes blind us to the truth, causing us to lie to ourselves and distort or even deny God's Word in an attempt to justify our bitterness. We brag of our righteous indignation, declaring that God is in agreement with our anger, but in reality our heart is filled with envy and strife. This self-centered thinking and reasoning comes from the world's system, our own flesh, and is inspired by demons.

There is a righteous anger we can experience when something unjust or unholy occurs in our life or the lives of others. This is a supernatural emotion expressed by the Holy Spirit and our own spirit. But when this happens, our heart is free of envy and strife. We have no animosity toward others. And most important, righteous anger never leads to bitterness in the soul.

The Greek word for bitterness is *pikria*, which means "bitter in taste to the mouth." It is used to describe bitter herbs and gall. Although bitterness is in the soul, the analogy in this definition is made to nature. Peter used this analogy with Simon the Sorcerer when he said "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23).

The natural reaction of our taste buds is to spit out what is bitter. The only time a person will keep something bitter in their mouth is when challenged or in competition with others — where pride is involved. The same is true of bitterness in the soul. Only a proud person who is in competition with someone else will keep bitterness in their heart.

I am acquainted with a young man who went to college and lived in a dormitory for the first time. The men on his floor had a hot pepper eating contest, and he decided to win, although he had never eaten a hot pepper in his life. He ignored the pain and ate hot peppers until he became numb. He won the contest, but he paid the

price for days. He told me his body burned from his mouth to his rear end. It was painful to swallow, walk, laugh or go to the bathroom. He felt as if someone were holding a blow torch to every part of his body.

Under normal circumstances, no one would abuse their body in this way. But when challenged to prove or defend themselves, people will do very harmful things, even to their own bodies. So it is with bitterness.

Insensitive, selfish people and difficult circumstances of life often challenge us to accept bitterness. In most situations, we would never allow bitter thoughts and feelings to dominate us, but when our weaknesses or faults emerge as we are attacked or fall into a trap, our pride rises up. Remember, bitterness comes from a root of arrogance and a spirit of competition.

Life is often unfair, because we live in the devil's world and he does not fight according to anyone's rules. But God has never told us to take vengeance on the people or circumstances of life which hurt us. We are to turn our battles and our cares over to Him (First Peter 5:7).

When we allow the injustices of life to make us bitter and then strike back, we lower ourselves to the level of the circumstances and those who hurt us. But when we forgive, cast our care upon the Lord, and let Him fight for us and vindicate us, we will see the situation conquered from a higher level.

### **Causes of Bitterness**

Bitterness is a choice. We do not have to receive the bitterness circumstances can bring, but we will be faced with many opportunities to become bitter in various areas of our lives. For example, Hannah was a woman who loved the Lord, but she was barren. This seemed unfair, and she became bitter over it. (See First Samuel 1:10.) Hannah lowered herself to the level of her circumstance and bitterness was the result.

Often it is not the lack of children but the presence of them and their attitudes which can tempt us to become bitter. Proverbs 17: 25 says, "A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her that bear him." If we do not keep watch over our attitudes, the challenge of raising a child can bring on bitterness.

Colossians 3:19 warns husbands, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Husbands must remember that their wives are not the same as they are. Women are built by God to look at and react differently to life and all it brings.

Because they are more emotional or defy their husband's more logical approach, the husband can be threatened and become bitter. So the Bible warns husbands not to fall for this temptation.

Where our finances are concerned, we often observe the seeming carefree lives of others, especially unbelievers. If we do not keep our eyes on the Lord, bitterness can spring up in our soul. The prosperity of the wicked led Israel into bitterness against God, leading to their destruction and captivity. Their captivity led many to become even more bitter against God, instead of humbling themselves in repentance. (See Lamentations 1:4 and Amos 8:10.)

### **Results of Bitterness**

Just as we only have ourselves to blame for becoming bitter, we only have ourselves to blame for the consequences. Once we step upon the road of bitterness, we can only expect it to lead to evil. The destination of bitterness is hatred, cruelty, revenge, self-pity, hypocrisy, jealousy, competition, and confusion. In the end, a life of sin will not only be lived, but justified. James says it so clearly again, "Where there is bitter envying and strife, there is confusion and every evil work." Bitterness is a great tool Satan uses to bring about the destruction of a believer's spiritual life and testimony.

What is amazing is, everyone recognizes the problem except the one who is bitter! Bitterness blinds them from the truth. The only pleasure a bitter person has is to enlist others in their bitterness. Thus, not only does a bitter person lose their friends, but they can make no more. (See Proverbs 14:10.) Bitterness leaves them standing alone.

### **Recovery From Bitterness**

The defeat of bitterness in your life comes from God. Your help specifically comes from the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. Therefore, you must recognize and follow these three things if you desire deliverance and freedom from bitterness.

*1. Recognize bitterness is a sin, forgiven through Jesus' shed blood.*

Bitterness is a supernatural burden which can only be supernaturally lifted by God. For this to happen, you must recognize bitterness is a sin and confess it to the Lord (First John 1:9).

*Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*

Isaiah 38:17

Once you have confessed your sin of bitterness and have consigned it to the blood of Jesus, realize that God has forgiven your bitterness and thrown it behind His back, out of His sight forever. Then, as you have been forgiven, turn and forgive the people or circumstances which offended and hurt you in the first place. Put them totally in the Lord's hands.

## *2. Depend on the Holy Spirit daily.*

When you put the offense and the offender in the Lord's hands, you will need the Holy Spirit's help to avoid taking them back in bitterness. Just as living in bitterness was a daily decision, freedom in the future depends on making the right choices daily. Freedom and bondage, blessing and cursing, and life and death are decisions you face throughout each day. Nothing in life is a one-time choice.

A successful life in the Lord involves the right decision at each moment. The Holy Spirit has been given to you to guide you in each decision. He is pleased when you depend on Him, resist sin, and forgive others. On the other hand, He is grieved when you ignore Him and go your own way.

*And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:*

*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Ephesians 4:30-32

Remember, to choose bitterness you must ignore the Holy Spirit, which cuts you off from His guidance, comfort, wisdom, and joy. But when you submit your heart and mind to Him and walk in love and forgiveness — no matter how difficult — you will soon have peace about the situation and hope for the future.

In the beginning, you may have to choose forgiveness every minute of each day, then every hour, then once a day, then once a week, until finally the sting of the offense or hurt is gone. The strength to choose will come as you lean on the Holy Spirit and stand on God's Word.

### *3. Follow the Word of God.*

Over the long run, our determination to remain free from bitterness or any other sin must come from the promises of God's Word. (See Psalm 119:11 and Second Peter 1:4.) The Holy Spirit draws from our knowledge of the Scriptures to help us make daily decisions to forgive. Our spiritual vision becomes sharpened by each promise, and we are able to detect when Satan tempts us to fall into bitterness again.

*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.*

Hebrews 12:15

Only the truth of God which makes us free can keep us free. One of the devil's greatest devices is to stir up an old memory and trap us again in the same bitterness from which we were delivered. But knowledge of God's Word can neutralize even Satan's most subtle traps.

Bob Yandian

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