
Bitterness

Bitterness is one of the most crushing mental problems in a person's life. When a Christian is bitter, there is a loss of close fellowship with the Lord and a hindrance in one's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.. Bitterness causes a loss of many of the blessings of the normal Christian life, including emotional stability, peace, and joy. And bitterness results in the loss of production of good works (gold, silver, precious stones) which are a major source of blessing and reward in the plan of God.

Bitterness is a devastating mental attitude sin, and it triggers a wide range of other sins, such as:

- Hatred
- Cruelty
- Antagonism
- Self-pity
- Unteachableness (implacability)
- Vindictiveness and desires for revenge
- Proudful ambition (arrogance)

Bitterness is neither consistent nor rational. A bitter person is his own worst enemy. It is very difficult to maintain any kind of relationship with a chronically bitter person; and bitterness is a major contributing cause of marital and family problems.

The objective in this short article is to provide Christians with a thorough look at what the Bible says about bitterness, including many Scripture examples, then to offer some direction about how to have victory over bitterness.

There are quite a few companion studies in the Grace Notes library which can help identify the mental attitude sin of bitterness and help deal with it from divine viewpoint.

Definition

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 struggle in the last extremity.

The biblical Greek words for bitterness are PIKROS = "bitter" and PIKRIA = "bitterness", and other derivatives. PIKROS originally meant "sharp", or "pointed". Then it was used more generally for anything that was penetrating to the senses, something that had a pervasive smell or a "shrill" noise. PIKRIA was used for the bitterness of the taste of some plants, and finally found use in speaking of personal experience when something was unpleasant, undesirable, or when something bad was unexpected.

The words PIKROS or PIKRIA are used about 40 times in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament), only rarely to refer to literal bitterness, such as the reference to "bitter" water in Exo. 15:23. Usually it is a reference to men who are (pikroi) "the bitter ones" when they are soured or cruel (Ruth 1:20; Hab. 1:6).

There are seven instances of these words in the New Testament: Matt. 26:75; Luke 22:62; Acts 8:23; Rom. 3:14; Eph. 4:31; James 3:11,14.

So, in the Bible, except when it is obvious that the actual taste of something is meant, PIKRIA refers to intensity of suffering of mind and body, something that is difficult to bear, something that causes animosity and reaction, something that is brought about by hatred or antagonism.

Bible Examples of Bitterness

- Women are bitter because they cannot have children, 1 Sam 1:10.
 - A foolish son is bitterness to his mother, Prov. 17:25.
 - Divine discipline (chastisement) of the Jewish people caused bitterness. This demonstrates the weakness and failure of the people. Bitterness destroyed the people's spiritual
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lives. The Jews brought on self-destruction by their bitterness.

- Lam. 1:4; Amos 8:10; Ezek. 27:30; Isa. 33:7; 2 Kings 14:26.
- Slavery causes bitterness, Exo. 1:14.3.
- Suffering causes bitterness to people who do not understand the Bible's problem solving devices and principles, and who do not give number one priority to their relationship with God. Deut. 32:24.
- Ridicule is a source of bitterness, Lam 3:14. The people ridiculed Jeremiah because of their bitterness toward him. When truth is taught, people sometimes react in bitterness.
- Consummate human pride is a cause of bitterness, Acts 8:23.
- Degeneracy is a source of bitterness, Rom. 3:14.
- Cosmic involvement is a source of bitterness, Eph 4:31.
- Husbands and wives are a source of bitterness toward each other, Col 3:19.

The Results of Bitterness

- Bitterness is antisocial. A bitter person is selfish, inconsiderate of others, withdrawn from society, indifferent or adverse to conformity with conventional standards of social behavior. Even strangers avoid bitter people, Prov. 14:10. No one is happy around bitter people.
- Bitterness is a sign of the spiritual life gone wrong, Jer. 2:19.
- A bitter person rejects Bible teaching. James 3:14, "But if you have bitter jealousy and strife, stop being arrogant and lying against the truth."
- Bitterness shows total lack of grace orientation. A bitter person does not understand the Plan of God, let alone how it affects individuals. In Job. 9:17-18, Job's complaint against God. "Why does God let this happen to me", is a statement of bitterness.
- Bitterness accompanies the sin unto death, Job. 21:25.

- Bitterness motivates complaining, Job 7:11, 10:1. People who habitually complain are bitter people; they have no self esteem.
- Bitterness motivates gossip, Psalm 64:3
- Bitterness fragments other peoples lives. Heb 12:15, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled.
- Bitterness is self induced misery, and it produces chain sinning. Bitterness is misery to others in the periphery. But two wrongs never make a right. You cannot build your happiness on someone else's unhappiness.

Recovery from Bitterness

Isa 38:17, "Behold, bitterness became deliverance to me. In Your love You have delivered my soul out of the pit of destruction; for You have cast all my sins behind my back."

Ephesians 1:8 tells us that we have available to us "wisdom and prudence" which are part of God's grace provision for us. Wisdom comes with a thorough understanding of Bible doctrine and the principles of Christian living. Prudence is the practical use of applied Bible truth in making decisions and solving problems in this life.

You can use the following practical methods to deal with bitterness in your life, regardless of the cause.

Many of these topics are discussed in considerably more detail in other Grace Notes articles, but this outline will give you ideas on how you can make specific application of doctrine to help with real world problems.

Confession of Sin

Personal sin leads to bitterness. You must deal with sin on a daily basis by confessing and moving on. If you don't do this, sin becomes a burden which clouds your joy, drains your spiritual energy, and destroys your productivity and vitality. In short, sin is always depressing.

1 John 1:9 states that when you confess your sins, God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In privacy, make a list of your mental attitude sins, verbal sins, and behavior sins. Ask the Lord to make you aware of the habits of your own life. Respond immediately to the Holy Spirit when He uses the Word to spotlight your sin. Name the sin to God; then rejoice in forgiveness and cleansing and your renewed fellowship with God. All the promises and provisions of God the Father are now available to you. Make it a spiritual habit to confess sins whenever they show up in your life.

The Filling of the Holy Spirit

When you have unconfessed sin in your life, the Holy Spirit is "grieved" or "quenched". But the Holy Spirit fills you and controls your life when you have no unconfessed sin in your life. This is why confession of sins is so important.

You can trust the Holy Spirit to reveal sin to you when you commit it, or even before. When the Holy Spirit is in control, He produces His fruit (Gal. 5:12). The fruit of the Spirit does not include heaviness, bitterness, discouragement, disillusion, anguish, sadness, dejection, or loss of productivity. Consider these points:

- Love is free from bitterness.
- Joy pushes bitterness out.
- Bitterness can not coexist with peace in the soul of the believer filled with the Holy spirit.
- Longsuffering gives the ability to deal with bitterness and other troubles.
- Gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance are fruits of righteousness, which is divine good. Divine good takes the place of bitterness.

Living in the Word

By constant study and meditation in the Bible you are constantly reminded of God's viewpoint, of His Plan, of His provision, or His awareness of our spirit of bitterness and what He wants to accomplish in us. Living in the sphere of human viewpoint is a source of bitterness. Living in the Word gradually transplants you to a new sphere, a new environment for your life, in which there is victory over bitterness.

Furthermore, there is a continuous cleansing taking place. See especially Ephesians 5 for how the Lord Jesus uses the Word to cleanse believers.

Orientation to Grace

Bitterness is often caused by people, most of the time by people we cannot escape, or people we love, or people we cannot confront, or people we trust. Grace Orientation includes the ability to look at people and see them as God sees them. It includes the ability to let them live their lives as unto the Lord, and trusting God to make His way clear to them. This technique lets people make mistakes without your judging them. It enables you to accept criticism without hurt or bitterness. It enables you to "esteem others better than yourself", to "do nothing through strife or vainglory."

Occupation with Christ

The technique of Occupation with Christ helps to cure bitterness because it gets your eyes off your spouse, your children, your neighbors, your friends, and yourself. Instead, as you move through the day, you are thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ, His plan for your life, the Father's provision for each incident in your life, and His provision of wisdom for each decision you must make. Occupation with Christ is a by-product of the Faith-Rest Life. Bitterness is a by-product of occupation with self, with life, with problems.

The Faith-Rest Life (Trusting God and Enjoying the Peace Which Results)

Faith-Rest is believing the promises of God and then entering into the "rest" phase of Christian living by claiming and enjoying those promises. Therefore, you must search the Scriptures daily to remind yourself of promises, and to learn new ones. You must know who and what God is so that you will not hesitate to believe that He can do what He has promised to do. Study the attributes of God using verses about the Essence of God. Know Him as He reveals Himself in the Bible. Believe Him when He tells you what He will do for you. Count on it. Let your faith rest on it. Cast your burden on the Lord.

Relaxed Mental Attitude

A relaxed mental attitude is based on knowing God and on having the divine production in the soul that comes with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. A relaxed mental attitude is one of the results of Living in the Word, Walking in Fellowship, practicing the Faith-Rest Life, and being occupied with Christ.
