

Series: Emotional & Spiritual Maturity. | Topic: Dealing With Bitterness

Date: August 26, 2015

Author: R. Hammond

Reference Sources:

- Life's Toolbox: Tools for Coping With Life (Rick Carter, Jr) Book
- *Dealing with Bitterness* (Terry Coomer) Article
- *Forgiveness vs. Bitterness: Getting to the Root of the Problem* (Jamie & Vickie Jett) Booklet
- Tools: *Strong's Greek Dictionary, Way of Life Encyclopedia; Webster's 1828 Dictionary*

Learning Objectives:

- To understand the definition of bitterness;
- To understand that bitterness is a sin ... and gives place to the devil in our lives;
- To understand that we are commanded to “put away” “all bitterness”;
- To understand the causes of bitterness;
- To understand the spiritual consequences of bitterness;
- To understand the Biblical way to overcome bitterness;
- To understand that we are commanded to forgive and humble repentance is the key to knowing the grace required to forgive
- To understand how to respond to the Lord's conviction regarding bitterness.

Definition: Bitterness (πικρία *pikria* 4088) acidity (especially poison) – sharp, bitter, biting; appears 4x in NT.

- The Bible uses “bitterness” to refer to internalized sinful anger.
- It is a sharp, bitter emotion that is poisonous to the spiritual well-being of both ourselves and those around us;
- Jonah is a Biblical example of a bitterness and the consequences of bitterness (Carter)

Quotes: “Bitterness is a pill that you swallow – hoping that someone else will die” (in Carter)

Review of Anger Topic (Six Steps to Overcoming Anger – and related bitterness, depression)

1. Recognize that ungodly anger is rooted in our lustful pride (“pride of life”);
2. Understand that a key to overcoming our lusts is to yield ourselves to the Lord, i.e. to “walk in the Spirit.”
3. When we are submitting to the Spirit – yielding control to him, we necessarily choose to die to self, i.e. *choosing to yield ourselves to the Lord rather to Satan and his prompting to lustful pride*
4. If I'm dying to self (dying to prideful self-centeredness – the lust “to be”), I can let go of unbiblical expectations of how others should treat me;
5. Choose to seek the Lord's help to respond graciously (with undeserved favor or kindness) instead of with an angry desire to punish people (by directing angry outbursts at them – as a weapon)
6. Having chosen to act with grace toward others (who wrong us), we can choose to genuinely forgive their wrongdoings.

BITTERNESS – LESSON OUTLINE

A. Definition: Bitterness (πικρία *pikria* 4088) acidity (especially poison) – lit. sharp, pungent, bitter, biting to the taste; appears 4x in NT.

- The Bible uses “bitterness” to refer to internalized sinful anger; (Carter)
- Bitterness is a sharp, bitter emotion that is poisonous to the spiritual well-being of both ourselves and those around us;
- Jonah is a Biblical example of a bitterness and the consequences of bitterness. (Carter)

B. Understand that bitterness is a sin and gives place to the devil in our lives

James 3:14 But if ye have **bitter** envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. **15** This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual (ME-CENTERED), devilish.

- Bitterness is sensual (*me-centered*) rather than Christ-centered; it is devilish → CF **Ephesians 4:27, 31** “Neither give place to the devil.” **SKIP TO 31** “Let all **bitterness**, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:”
- While many people have truly “wronged us,” their wrong actions are no excuse to harbor bitterness in our hearts, i.e. the sin of others in no excuse for our own sin.

C. Understand that we are commanded to “put away” “all bitterness”

Ephesians 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; **23** And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; **24** And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. **4:30** And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. **31** Let all **bitterness**, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

D. Causes of Bitterness

1. **Lack of Biblical Forgiveness.** Biblical forgiveness recognizes that we are called to put off angry unforgiveness and to put on Christ-like forgiveness.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:32** (*Putting on the new man*) And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
 - b. **Colossians 3:12** ¶ Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, **humbleness of mind, meekness**, longsuffering; **13** Forbearing one another, and **forgiving one another**, if any man have a quarrel against any: **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.** **14** And above all these things **put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.** **15** And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.
 - i. **** NOTE:** in Col 3:12 – forgiving one another is associated with “humbleness of mind, meekness.” When we fail to adopt a humble spirit, PRIDE reigns – **harming our ability to graciously forgive others.** **THIS PRIDE IS A PRIMARY REASON WHY WE CANNOT FIND THE GRACE TO FORGIVE.**

2. See the link between pride and a shortage of grace need to forgive others

- **Hebrews 12:15 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;
 - **Two types of grace are available to the believer (SAVING & what we might call SERVING): (1) the SAVING grace** (unmerited favour) of God that we find when we repent and place our faith in Christ for forgiveness of sin; and **(2) SERVING grace (Cloud), i.e. the enablement of God to live the Christian life (2 Corinthians 12:9** And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.)
 - **A person who has known God's saving grace may know his SERVING grace to avoid bitterness.**
 - **However, God withholds this grace from the proud:**
 - **James 4:6** But **he giveth more grace.** Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the **proud**, but giveth **grace unto the humble.**
 - **Hebrews 4:16** Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, **and find grace to help in time of need.**

D. Consequences of bitterness (As Observed in Jonah)

(This section is based on Carter's chapter on bitterness)

Background: Recall that the Lord called Jonah to go and to preach repentance to the wicked Ninevites. Jonah initially refused – displaying a bitter spirit against the Ninevites. By Chapter 3, Jonah finally obeyed – and the people repented. However, Jonah continued to allow great bitterness to rule in his spirit:

1. **Bitterness causes us to neglect the spiritual needs of others (and to despise the Lord's forgiveness of those who have harmed us) (Carter)**

Jonah 3:5 ¶ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. **SKIP TO v10** And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not. **Jonah 4:1** ¶ **But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.**

2. **Bitterness causes us to neglect our own spiritual need(s) (Carter)**

Jonah 4:4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? **5** ¶ So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, **and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.**

- **Jonah was so focused on seeing the wrong righted (i.e. on seeing the Ninevites punished) that he neglected his need to own spiritual need, i.e. to forgive.**
 - Have you ever been so focused on desiring that the LORD would punish someone that you failed to appreciate your own forgiveness – causing you to fail to forgive those who wronged you?

3. Bitterness can lead to *pettiness* – and depression that is rooted in petty things

Jonah 4:6 And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. **So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.** **7** But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. **8** And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, **that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.** **Jonah 4:9** And God said to Jonah, **Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.**

E. The Bible Way to Beat Bitterness

Humble repentance and prayers are the keys to overcoming bitterness

1. Submit to God (Humble yourself before Him)

James 4:7a Submit yourselves therefore to God...

- **Psalm 34:18** The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.
- Remember that our PRIDE causes God to withhold His grace – grace that’s needed to forgive;
- Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to forgive one who caused “grief” as he forgave – “in the person of Christ”
 - **2 Corinthians 2:5** ¶ But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. **6** Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. **7** So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. **8** Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. **9** For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. **10** To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; **11** Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.
 - **Jesus commanded Peter to forgive “until seventy times seven.”**
Matthew 18:21 ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

2. Resist the devil by drawing near to God

James 4:7b “... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8a** Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you...”

3. Confess the sin of bitterness

- **James 8b** “... Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded.”
 - **Psalm 139:23** Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
 - PRAY:
 - LORD, show us where we’ve allowed bitterness to take root. And forgive our bitterness.
 - LORD, HELP us to forgive IN CHRIST – graciously as Christ forgave. Jesus went to cross in SUBMISSION to the father – that we might know grace. Help us to HUMBLY SUBMIT to you, LORD, and know your grace to forgive others – as we have been forgiven.

4. Trust the lord to restore your peace and joy

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

F. Responding to the Lord’s conviction regarding bitterness:

1. Ask the Lord to reveal any bitterness in your heart;
2. Ask him to humble you and to then give you grace to forgive.
3. Having received grace to forgive, *proceed to forgive!*
4. Thank the Lord for enabling you to forgive – *to his glory!*
5. Ask the Lord for wisdom to share these Biblical principles with others – *as He leads.*

GOSPEL

Rom 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). Ro 3:10 “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.”

Where did sin come from? Ro 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

What are the consequences of sin? (Ro 6:23) “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Jesus paid the price for our sins. (Ro 5:8) “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

What do I need to do? Turn away from your sin and place your faith in Christ for forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 3:19a) “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized ...

(Romans 10:9) Paul writes, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”