

THE DANGERS OF UNFORGIVEN BITTERNESS!

Introduction:

It would be wise to look up and study the verses and the context of every portion in the Word of God where *bitterness* is spoken of. Also, if you look into the word *hardness* you probably will discover truth that applies to this subject.

The lack of a forgiving spirit and holding on to bitterness are very closely tied together. In fact, a person who practices bitterness about things that touch him does not practice forgiving others. Do we recognizing how bitterness develops and what it does to the person who allows it in his life.

Consider:

1. Why do people become bitter?
 2. Why does God state that a man is to love his wife and be not bitter against her? (See Colossians 3:19; I Peter 3:7.)
 3. What does a bitter spirit often produce?
 4. If a person has become bitter, what one main thing could you say the person has not done?
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ARE WE GROWING A PLANT OF BITTERNESS? (Study Hebrews 12:15-17.)

God has set before us a "*race to be run*" and a victory to be won. (See Hebrews 12:1-5.) Christ is our example. He endured the cross and the shame. His joy was full as He ran with patience the race before Him and kept His eyes upon the purpose for which He came. Nor was it an easy race for Moses, who is often spoken of in the book of Hebrews. There were hardships, disappointments, and pressures which came from every side. It would have been easy for Moses to build bitterness in his life. This is also true of Joseph.

It is not an easy race for us either. Many Christians are growing a "root of bitterness" in their lives. The plant may not be obvious, but the root in the heart becomes manifest over a period of time in words, attitudes, actions and deeds.

This portion in Hebrews 12:15-17 is also very clear and is a very strong warning. The context is vital. In the foregoing verses the writer of Hebrews speaks of God's chastening. God has a purpose in such -- to bring about godly living and to make us Christlike. Chastening sometimes does not make us better, but bitter for we find it hard to accept what God is doing. The Hebrews were going through many trials in which they had the opportunity to prove God's grace, but they failed in the application of the grace of God. Instead they allowed bitterness to creep into their hearts and lives. Thereby many were defiled.

Trials are opportunities for overcoming these very things by God's grace. But the temptation is to "tell off those lousy people we are working with" or to be upset with "those terrible circumstances we find ourselves in," and to spread our bitter, unhappy spirit. Our bitter spirit is soon injected into the lives of those about us. Bitterness as lived out in the family life brings all kinds of sinful actions and reaction, and great hurt to many. Sometimes some people never seem to get over the effect of a loved one's bitter and resentful spirit.

DO WE RECOGNIZE THE CLIMATE FOR BITTERNESS?

There are certain things that work in our lives to bring about bitterness. As you study Hebrews 10:32-34 you will note there is a climate that is conducive to producing bitterness.

The Facing of Hardships Often Produces Bitterness. The Hebrew Christians were enduring a great fight of afflictions. The early Christians faced great stresses and pressures that we know nothing about. Many had faced losses of many kinds -- jobs, homes, position, love, acceptance, etc. It is hard to tell what we will face before the consummation of our lives.

The Experience of Disappointments Often Brings Bitterness. (See Hebrews 10:33, 34, 38.) From their perspective, things did not come out right for the Hebrew Christians. They faced many unfulfilled expectations. *I personally think this -- **unfulfilled expectations** -- is a major source of bitterness.* We entertain the thoughts that God is not fair to us; He is not doing or allowing what we think or feel we deserve. As men, we have certain expectations about life, about marriage, about our employment, about many things; and if God does not fulfill them, we can very easily become bitter.

Weakened Confidence Helps to Build Bitterness. According to Hebrews 10:35 they had lost confidence that God cared, or that He was even interested in them or their needs. It is easy to feel that God does not note our burden. Could it be that often we men feel God does not enter into our concerns and so we try to carry them alone? Then we become disturbed and bitter and feel that life is not fair.

Inward Spiritual Fatigue Often Produces Bitterness. The last of these four climatic conditions that often brings us to bitterness is a slackened prayer life and neglect of the Word of God and the local church. We are very susceptible to a bitter spirit when we neglect those things that bring a closer walk with the Savior. In contrast to this, consider that Christ endured facing the cross with joy and being reviled. But He reviled not again as He committed Himself to the Father who judges righteously. (See Hebrews 12:1-4; I Peter 2:23.) Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.

Questions for your reflection and application:

1. Do you think that men are as vulnerable emotionally as ladies? Do men find it hard to share the emotional aspects of life?
2. In what way do you feel disappointments bring bitterness? Do we often experience unfulfilled expectations?
3. Have you given your expectations to God, if so what does this mean to you? Is this necessary?
4. Do people experiencing fatigue find it easier to entertain thoughts of bitterness?
5. Why are hardships apt to build bitterness in our lives?
6. How do husbands (and as dads) express their bitterness? Are you allowing such in your own life? Is there a reason for the warning in Colossians 3:19?

DO WE RECOGNIZE WHAT BITTERNESS PRODUCES IN OUR LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS?

When we allow bitterness to take over to become a root in our minds and hearts, it will produce a plant that has much fruit.

We Will Fail To Embrace the Grace of God. The Scriptures speak of "failing of the grace of God." (See Hebrews 12:15.) This means that we will fail in appropriating God's grace in our daily Christian life. By the application of God's grace we have God-given ability. Bitterness closes the door for any appropriation of His grace in its outworking in daily life. Grace is God at work in our lives. Bitterness closes the door to God's right and opportunity to work in us by His grace. Therefore, we will find it impossible to make His promises ours. We

easily slip back into the old life; we fall short of victory; and the great doctrines are not applied to daily living.

We will build depression in our lives. Bitterness will bring its fruit of the root. Depression has long been proven to be a result of a bitter spirit. Not all depression comes from bitterness, but it is a major result of a bitter life. King Saul wanted David to play his harp for him because of his depression. Why was Saul depressed? He was so far from God and so bitter and distrustful of others that he was a very depressed person.

We will become distrustful of others. Looking at King Saul's life again, it is evident that he distrusted David. He was fearful of his position and bitter toward David and toward his own son, Jonathan. When we countenance bitterness in our lives we will distrust those about us. We probably will have vain imaginations and expect that those around us are out to do us hurt. (Study I Samuel 20.)

We will manifest an insensitive spirit. A bitter person usually is or becomes a fault-finding, critical, and insensitive person. His bitter spirit is often poured out on others as he builds up a wall of protection about himself. He will receive criticism from others in the same way he gives it out. What he sows will come back to him in kind and in quantity. Such a person finds it difficult to say a good word about someone else. Along with that insensitive spirit, there is usually a manifestation of ingratitude or unthankfulness and a vengeful attitude. (See II Timothy 3:2; Romans 12:17-21.)

Note: When a child grows up in a home of bitterness, fighting, wrath, and squabbling, etc., the effect of such actions will usually be manifested in certain ways. Children are reflectors of a home, and they will usually reflect its bitterness.

Some of the ways children and youth will reflect bitterness is in -- *their impolite attitudes.* They seem to lack a "civil tongue" as they easily become catty and speak in a tone that shows the bitterness they have toward others.

-- ***their ingratitude.*** They manifest an unthankful spirit, as little appreciation or interest is given to those about them; instead they develop a selfish spirit.

-- ***their extreme unhappiness.*** Bitterness ruins the joy that should be manifested in the life of the Christian youth. They desperately need love, acceptance, and understanding and helped to understand their heart. A bitter spirit leads to misery.

We see that an impolite, unthankful, selfish spirit is the fruit of the root of bitterness.

DO WE RECOGNIZE HOW TO OVERCOME BITTERNESS?

First, we need to recognize that it is a gradual thing. It is like a root or bulb that we may plant. It gradually builds a stock that sticks its head above the ground and will eventually bring forth fruit. Bitterness is something we plant in our lives by our thought life, which in turn builds a plant from which we have much fruit. It can be entertained constantly in the thought life, while basically being unnoticed by others. But it will become obvious and can be like a festering sore. The root of bitterness becomes a noxious plant that brings self-destruction and much harm to others as they, too, are defiled.

Second, make a decision to face bitterness and deal with it. (See Hebrews 12:11-15.) Confess it as SIN. Face it like a poison that will ruin. Make a decision to get rid of the root and the fruit of bitterness by the power of God. Recognize that you must forgive others as well.

Third, don't blame God. Don't expect God to "zap" you with a little righteousness to get rid of the bitterness. Straighten out your walk and your thought life, allowing the Holy Spirit to fully control your life. Apply the truths of II Corinthians 10:3-5.

Fourth, commit your way to God's purposes. (See Hebrews 12:25, 29.) Commit everything to the Lord. Trust Him for His will and way in your life. Realize that God is the primary mover in your life. Accept what God brings into your life in events and circumstances which are His doings to teach you the lessons of patience, trust, dependency, and deliverance from bitterness.

In Conclusion:

Look up the following references for bitterness and list the negative effects and personal application.

Colossians 3:19

Negative Effects _____

Personal application _____

Hebrews 12:15

Negative effects _____

Personal application _____

James 3:10-12

Negative effects _____

Personal application _____

Personal Project:

Develop a personal anger chart listing several occasions when you were angry. There should be four columns, headed as follows:

<u>Circumstances:</u>	<u>Degree of Anger:</u>	<u>Reaction:</u>	<u>Appropriateness:</u>
(Check into the web site and materials under counseling for additional helps on anger. Also there is materials in the section -- family/ marriage. Then the next lesson deals with anger.)			

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

Bad temper is its own scourge.

A man's venom poisons himself more than his victim. (Megiddo Message)

Guiding and Application Questions:

1. What does it mean to "fail" of the grace of God? What did Paul say about the grace of God in his own life?

2. Discuss in the class or personally reflect on the relationship that King Saul had to his son, Jonathan.
3. Think through the steps to overcoming bitterness in your own life, if that is a problem to you. How could you help someone else with this universal problem?