

## Dealing With Bitterness – Eph 4:29-32

**Introduction** – (*This sermon is in honor of the absolute truth and freeing power of God’s Word and the faithful service of one of my first pastors, Jim Wilson, who just went to be with the Lord*) Bitterness is probably one of the trickiest sins to see in yourself. While other sins I have committed may come to mind as I seek to be right before God, bitterness causes me to dwell on other people’s sins (real or imagined) rather than my own. Bitterness is a sin that often destroys marriages and families. Amid these intimate and long-term relationships, there runs the risk of bitterness taking root and producing a fruit that defiles many. Sometimes it is not hard to see how bitterness has ruined a person; you see it in their countenance, or in their envy and malicious gossip. That is why God commands us to get rid of all bitterness. It takes the grace of the Lord to identify one’s own bitterness, and it is only the work of grace in our hearts by which we can rightly get rid of all of it.

**Poisonous Speech** (v29) – Here is the measure of what should come out of your mouth. Your words should edify and impart grace. Always. If you find yourself trying to justify your corrupt speech because of what “he did”, or “she said”, or the way he looked when he said it, you are bitter.

**Grieving God** (v30) – What you say, how you act, whether you obey or not – these things affect God’s relationship towards you. It is possible to grieve Him. His Spirit is with you always, when you are speaking to your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, or anyone else.

**Put It All Away** (v31) – Bitterness grows out of a sense of being wronged (again, real or imagined) by someone else. Either way, it is self-deceiving from the start. You may think you are angry on account of the wickedness of the sin of another. But bitterness does not depend on how magnanimous the sin is. Bitterness depends on how close the sin is to you. This is why it so often is found in a marriage or in a family. Notice that bitterness is associated with wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice. Bitterness is a wicked sin that brings forth these other, more external sins.

**Instead of Bitterness** (v32) – This is what makes us stand out as Christian families, and as Christian people – our desire and ability to forgive, to be tenderhearted, to be kind, in short, to imitate our Savior (Eph 5:1-2). You can forgive one another, and you must. Consider what Christ teaches us in the Lord’s prayer (Matt 6:12). I have no assurance of my own salvation if I tenaciously refuse to grant forgiveness to others. And when we are wronged, we should remember Thomas Watson’s idea that we know all about the one who *brought* this trial to us and forget the One who *sent* it (Phil 2:14).

**What Comes from a Root of Bitterness** (Heb 12:14-15) – It is like a root because it cannot remain hidden forever. If you try to suppress your bitterness, it will defile you – emotionally, spiritually, even physically. However, it will always find a place to sprout – and defile many others. Unbelieving psychology may tell you to “let it all out,” but that just shares the defilement, the filth, of your bitterness. So don’t repress the bitterness, it will make you sick. And don’t share the bitterness with others; it will make them sick. Get rid of the root of bitterness.

**Identifying Bitterness** (James 3:13-16) – A “righteous” mind that cannot set aside the countless details of another’s offenses is a mind tempted towards bitterness. A “holy” heart that does not want to forgive is a heart tempted towards bitterness. A soul that covets another’s spouse, children, possessions, or circumstances is a soul tempted towards bitterness. In fact, these may not be evidences of temptation, but rather of the real thing.

**Bitterness that Accuses God** (Ex 15:23-26) – Hard providences are supposed to drive us to the Lord (many Psalms), but there is a way of accusing the Lord with murmuring and complaining that reveals our self-righteousness (“I deserve better”). This bitterness drives people away from God into the wilderness (Psalm 95:8-11). In the story of the Israelites at the bitter waters of Marah, we are to see that God makes bitter waters sweet. He is gracious, but how do we respond?

**Get Rid of All Bitterness** – Are you bitter? Can you remember the details of another’s sin (real or imagined) – for weeks and years? Are you unwilling to prepare to forgive only after he says that he is sorry and really means it? Do you know how many times she did that this last week, or since you have known him? Can you count how many times you have “patiently forgiven”? Can you list all the reasons that your anger (bitterness) is justified?

**Confess Your Sin** (1 John 1:9) – The only way to get rid of bitterness is to *confess it as sin* before the Lord. This must be done without regard to anyone else’s sin. Only when your eyes are firmly on your own sin will you be able to be free from bitterness. Do not connect the dots of their sin with your confession – that is simply justifying your sin. Confess the bitterness to God; confess the external outworking of that bitterness to the one you have harmed (the anger, the wrath, the malice...).

Time does not remove bitterness. Someone else's confession does not remove bitterness. Confession of your own sin of bitterness and repentance by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to be cleansed of this poison. As Amy Carmichael said, "*For a cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted*". The bumps will come. What will spill out of you onto those around you?

**"BUT THEY SINNED!"** (Matt 7:3-5, Gal 6:1) – Their sin is no excuse for yours. Yours is greater as you stand before a holy God because it is your sin He will judge before you, not theirs. And you are not qualified to help, you cannot see straight to help, until you have dealt with yourself first. If you get up from your confession of sin and say something like, "but they....," you will need to get back down and confess some more. You have not yet rid yourself of the bitterness.

**Protection from the Sin** – It is the grace of God that protects us from this carnal way of life. The means of that grace includes- **Keeping Short Accounts** – Your household (and other relationships) must regularly be fumigated of unconfessed sin, so that it would smell of mercy and forgiveness again (Matt 5:7, 1 Pet 4:8, Col 3:13). As you come to worship with others, you must be clean and at peace with one another first (Matt 5:23-24).

**Contentment** – Envy produces bitterness (James 3:14) and enslaves you no matter what. Contentment is the gift of God in all circumstances and is to be cultivated by faith (Phil 4:11-13).

**Thanksgiving** – "...*giving thanks always for all things to God...*" (Eph 5:20). Checking the Greek carefully, we find this verse means, "*giving thanks always for all things to God*". Thankfulness for everything that comes to you is the measure of your "reformed" beliefs, and more importantly, your trust in God's character.

God makes sweet the waters of bitterness, but you must come to Him in repentance and faith. Christ died for your bitterness and His grace is sufficient to change how you feel and what you must do.

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