

Bitterness

1. Believers are warned to be on guard against *any root of bitterness*. **HEB 12:15; EPH 4:31-32.**
 - A. **Bitterness**: “The quality or state of being bitter: a. to taste; b. to the mind or feelings; c. deep sorrow or anguish of heart; d. animosity, acrimony of temper, action, or words; e. intensity of frost or cold wind.”
 - (1) Of particular concern is bitterness as regarding animosity, acrimony of temper, action or words.
 - (2) **Acrimony**: “Biting sharpness to the taste or other bodily sense; pungency; irritancy; acidity. arch. 2. Sharp or irritating bitterness of disposition or manner.”
 - B. This is not an issue to be trivialized. It requires DILIGENT looking, whether that be through self-examination or through watching out for this danger in others, i.e., corporately.
 - C. The phrase, “springing up” denotes germination and growth. This is an issue which is best handled by pre-emergent treatment (preaching, warning, repentance) lest it break through the surface, grow and cause trouble.
 - D. If it does manifest itself and cause trouble, MANY will be affected by it.
2. There is a doctrinal aspect to this. **DEU 29:18-19 c/w HEB 3:12.**
 - A. Gall and wormwood are noted for their bitter quality. **DEU 32:32; ACT 8:23; PRO 5:4; LAM 3:15.**
 - B. Apostasy and heresy tend to spread their infection. **2PE 2:1-2.**
 - (1) One heresy will tend to adversely affect the way one interprets other scripture. **GAL 5:7-9; 2TI 2:16.**
 - (2) Unchecked heresy in the church will spread and overthrow the faith of some. **2TI 2:17-18.**
3. There is a personal, spiritual and moral aspect to this.
 - A. Depravity is characterized by a mouth “...full of cursing and bitterness” (**ROM 3:14**).
 - B. One can be in bitterness about oneself: failings, perceived failings, etc.
 - (1) Left unchecked, bitterness about one's own failings can result in a sense of futility that devolves into an abandonment of any legitimate attempt to do well.
 - (2) Such a depressed spiritual condition is likely to entertain evil thoughts against others who are perceived to be successful or better.
 - (3) Such a depressed spiritual condition will eventually manifest itself publicly and become a corrupting influence on others.
 - (4) Self-bitterness like this needs to be countered early with the hope of the gospel towards sinners.
 - a. Failings are part of Christian experience until Christ's return. **1JO 3:2.**
 - b. The promise of forgiven confessed sin must be claimed. **1JO 1:9; PSA 32:5.**
 - c. Reject the devil's lie that you are defined by your failings. You are defined by *Christ in you*, as much (or more!) as the darkness and the light were collectively called “day” in **GEN 1:5.**
 - C. One can be bitter against or about others.
 - (1) Husbands are expressly warned to not be bitter against their wives. **COL 3:19.**
 - (2) David was the object of the bitter words of the wicked. **PSA 64:2-4.**
 - (3) Bitterness can be owing to underlying issues like envy. **JAM 3:14.**
 - a. King Saul was a textbook case of bitterness sprung up from a root of envy.
 - b. Saul perceived that David was a better man than himself and so made it his mission to destroy him. **1SAM 18:7-9, 14-17.**

- (4) Other roots from which bitterness towards others can develop are heart-sins such as pride, jealousy, lust, covetousness, hatred, lack of mercy, etc.
- (5) The Greek word from which “bitterness” in **HEB 12:15** is translated is “pikria” which Strong's Dictionary defines as “acridity (especially poison), literally or figuratively.”
 - a. **DEU 32:32-33** shows a connection between “bitter” and “poison.”
 - b. Mind how the bitterness that Paul's enemies had towards him defiled others by poisoning their minds. **ACT 14:2; GAL 4:15-17; ACT 15:24.**
 - c. If the wicked will not repent or cannot refute the doctrine or conversation of the righteous, character assassination is a common default tactic.
- D. The greatest danger is when one is bitter against God.
 - (1) This is a terrible condition in which one perceives his best Friend to be his enemy, his selfless Savior to be a selfish taskmaster, his Giver to be a withholder, his Just Judge as a capricious tyrant, his soul's Lover to be his tormentor.
 - (2) The irony is that God is none of these negatives. It is our deceived analysis of circumstances that paints Him so blackly.
- 4. Here are five major categories in which bitterness against God tends to arise:
 - A. “God didn't make me the way I would like to have been made.”
 - B. “God let something happen to me that wasn't fair or that I didn't like.”
 - C. “God put me under rules and limitations that crimp my style.”
 - D. “God dealt with someone differently than I think He should have.”
 - E. “God didn't give me what I asked for.”
- 5. All of the above five categories of bitterness have a common root: “My will is not dominant; it should be.” **DAN 4:35 c/w ISA 14:13-14.**
 - A. “God didn't make me the way I would like to have been made.”
 - (1) This is a matter of the clay striving against the Potter. **ROM 9:20.**
 - (2) God reserves the right to exercise discrimination in His creation. **JOB 39:13-17; EXO 4:10-11; REV 4:11.**
 - (3) Cracked or weak vessels may be specifically made that way for His glory. **JOH 9:1-3; 1CO 1:27-29.**
 - B. “God let something happen to me that wasn't fair or that I didn't like.” c/w **EZE 18:25.**
 - (1) This is another example of the clay striving against the Potter.
 - (2) Sometimes this is really a matter of us blaming God for the consequences of our own bad choices. **PRO 19:3; ISA 8:21.**
 - (3) Job's trials prompted him to question God's justice but God's answers were stronger than Job's objections. **JOB 34:23; 40:6-8.**
 - (4) We do well to consider that it is better with us than we deserve. **PSA 103:10-11.**
 - C. “God put me under rules and limitations that crimp my style.”
 - (1) This is the philosophical basis of atheism and Darwinian evolution.
 - (2) God's rules and limitations are for our own good, that we be saved from the consequences of our own depravity. **GEN 11:6-8 c/w GEN 8:21.**
 - (3) God's rules and limitations were originally very few (one). Man's sin is what multiplied rules and limitations.
 - D. “God dealt with someone differently than I think He should have.”
 - (1) This is another facet of “...The way of the Lord is not equal...” (**EZE 18:25**).
 - (2) Consider the parable of the hired laborers. **MAT 20:1-16.**
 - (3) Consider the parable of the talents. **MAT 25:14-15.**
 - (4) Consider Jesus' response to Peter. **JOH 21:22.**

- (5) Consider that God is more merciful than men. **1CH 21:11-13; LUK 9:53-56.**
- (6) Consider that God's ways and thoughts are superior to ours. **ISA 55:8-9.**
- E. "God didn't give me what I asked for."
- (1) Consider these people to whose prayers God said, "No."
- Moses prayed to enter the promised land. **DEU 3:23-28.**
 - David prayed for his baby's life. **2SA 12:15-20.**
 - David desired to build a house for God. **1CH 28:2-6.**
 - Paul prayed for removal of a thorn in the flesh. **2CO 12:7-10.**
 - Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering be taken away. **LUK 22:42.**
- (2) Perhaps it's a matter of "Not yet, my child." We are taught that we don't always get what we pray for right away. **LUK 18:1-8.**
- (3) Perhaps sin confounded the request. **ISA 59:2.**
- (4) Perhaps it was a self-gratifying prayer that was best not rewarded. **JAM 4:3 c/w PSA 106:14-15.**
- (5) Perhaps God was sparing you from something which you could not bear because of weakness or immaturity. **1CO 10:13.**
- (6) Perhaps God did answer your prayer but you received it in vain. **2CO 6:1.**
- (7) Perhaps you were looking for God to do your will rather than seeking His will, praying accordingly and submitting. **1JO 5:14-15; MAT 6:10.**
- F. All bitterness towards God may be summarized as being an ignorance of and/or a lack of submission to His will.
6. Bitterness with God Who is invisible will be fleshed out in everyday life in ways that are very visible.
- Somebody is going to feel your pain and since God is untouchable, the next closest target will be those around you.
 - Family, friends and brethren are likely to be deemed as God's co-conspirators against you.
 - Everyday injustices and inequities will be deemed as more ways that God is making your life miserable.
 - The mouth begins to fill with cursing and bitterness (**ROM 3:14**) because the heart is filled with cursing and bitterness. **LUK 6:45.**
 - Hatred or malice towards our fellows makes believers into liars. **1JO 4:20.**
 - Remember **HEB 12:15.** This bitterness will defile others.
7. We do well to consider our Lord Jesus Christ. **HEB 3:1-2; 12:3.**
- Jesus was the Eternal King of glory born into a poor family in His incarnation. How fair was that?
 - Jesus was thrust on the scene in the midst of political uncertainty, legal corruption and spiritual deception amongst those who should have known better.
 - Jesus was ill-received of His own people to Whom He had been sent. **ROM 15:8; JOH 1:11.**
 - Jesus' own disciples given to Him of the Father were often disappointing. **MAR 16:14.**
 - Jesus never married, never enjoyed marital sex, never begat natural children.
 - Jesus lacked a parsonage. **MAT 8:20.**
 - Jesus was misquoted, misunderstood, falsely accused, condemned though innocent.
 - If ever a man had cause to gripe against God for seeming inequities, it was Jesus.
 - But Jesus was perfectly resigned to God's will from the beginning to the end. **LUK 3:49; JOH 5:30; 6:38; HEB 10:5-7.**
 - May Christ's example be sufficient to counter all bitterness.

