

Saying that also brings us briefly yet to our third main point about our mission against bitterness. Here let me simply say how the calling of confessing Christians surely is never to be a cause for bringing bitterness in another person's life. We are called to live in humble respect and regard for each other and not to live in a way that we bring hurt and shame on others. Are you living and seeking to live in a way that you truly don't promote bitterness in other people's lives? Let us be careful that others don't get this so called "green sickness" from us because of our behaviour before them. How careful we should be too not to feed bitter thoughts and ways in our own hearts or that of others. You can feed bitterness by always focusing on the negatives of others and thinking more about how others have treated and do treat you rather than on how you ought to treat others. You can feed bitterness not looking to Jesus and His Word, but only getting caught up in thoughts of self-pity and revenge. Beware of bitterness! Resist it and fight against it by not allowing it in your heart and life and taking care also by prayer to uproot it the moment the seed of it is found in you.

We are to be on a mission against bitterness, not only never causing it nor feeding it, but also lovingly, humbly, patiently helping those who are caught up in bitterness. The calling of confessing Christians is to point those struggling with bitterness to Jesus the Saviour, the cure from all bitterness. In and through Christ the Saviour the most bitter can be made the most sweet, the most hard the most soft, the most calloused the most tender, the unrepentant and hopeless into the brokenhearted and very hopeful. Just think here, for example, of Corrie ten Boom and of what she and her family all suffered in World War II, and how she struggled for awhile with so much bitterness. But when she gave it up to God and found His peace in spite of it all, what a blessing she became the rest of her life, and still now years afterwards! That is the way it is. Bitterness given into poisons us and brings us down and takes others in darkness with us, but bitterness uprooted, and confessed and given over to God brings peace and joy in our path, even when dark and difficult, and it makes us become such a blessing also to others living along with us still in this world of so much gall and wormwood.

Watch out for bitterness, that "green sickness", and live that others may find healing from it through Jesus Christ the Saviour and Great Physician. The problem, the remedy, and the mission regarding bitterness—he that has ears to hear, let him hear, "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



WATCH OUT FOR BITTERNESS

The theme for this message is "Watch out for bitterness". How many live with bitterness and their lives and others are negatively infected and impacted by this.

Bitterness could be called "the green sickness" that eats away at you like a poison. Related words in the Bible are "wormwood" and "gall", both of which you find for instance in Deuteronomy 29:18 and Lamentations 3:19. Wormwood is a plant that yields bitter-tasting, dark green oil, and the word is used to speak of bitter, unpleasant, noxious, poison-like, mortifying experiences. Another related word to bitter and bitterness is the word, "gall". When I looked up that word in the dictionary among other meanings of that word given is this, "bile, the bitter greenish fluid secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder." "Gall" also means something just plain bitter, something sour, and can mean symbolically going through bitter affliction or trials.

Thinking of bitterness then as that "green sickness" of having something eat away at you in anger and resentment and hatred and revenge, let us reflect on this subject some more. It may surprise us, but the Bible warns God's people, especially confessing Christians, to beware of having bitterness and grudges and any form of "green sickness" of heart take over in our lives. Listen here to Hebrews 12:14&15 where God's Word says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 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." Do you hear? "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you," God warns. Let us think about this further, noting the problem of bitterness, the remedy from bitterness, and our mission against bitterness.

The writer of Hebrews in our text suggests bitterness is a problem that can so easily show up in our lives, even as confessing Christians. Especially also under trials and persecutions and experiencing injustice, etc, as the Hebrew Christians also knew about, being in a time of persecution. The fact is, bitterness is not so rare, and isn't it something that can so easily be found with us too? We live in a world where the problem of bitterness is huge, indeed epidemic. People live in bitterness against God, or in bitterness just about their life's circumstances, or in bitterness against their spouse, or in some family feud. People live in bitterness about work, bitterness against

the church, bitterness against government, etc. All too many acts of crime are a result of people living with bitterness and then letting it come to an explosive point in some way. Dear friends, are you troubled with bitterness, resentment, anger, dissatisfaction, and mostly always chillingly negative thoughts towards God and others, even maybe people close to you? Do you perhaps have the “green sickness” somehow? Are you allowing that to be there and to grow and take over in your life? Watch out for bitterness! Is this not a warning good for us to hear too, perhaps very important for you maybe this day? Have you let the root of bitterness take over in your heart and life?

I am asking the question in all earnestness because of two further statements in the text. It brings out with the problem of bitterness that this is a poison that not only springs up easily, but it grows all too quickly and has more and more influence over us if we are not careful. Notice the text speaks of the *root* of bitterness, suggesting from this root you can grow monsters you never imagined! Bitterness eats away at us and perverts us, corrupts us and ruins us when you let that “green sickness” like a poison be in you. Bitterness can kill you, yes, if given the reins! It will destroy mind, soul, and body even. The text in its context warns especially about bitterness causing us to fail in the way of the grace of God. It warns about letting bitterness be a trouble to you in the Christian race and life. Will you take heed to this loving and urgent warning?

The text urges us to do so, telling us something else about living with any form of bitterness that is so dangerous, and awful even, and that is, *“thereby many be defiled”*. With bitterness you should think about the way that it infects and affects others. As one commentator put it, “Bitterness, wherever it exists, it extends its influence. Bitterness always corrupts and spoils” [and often ends up] hurting so many others. Just think of the last time you have been bitter and you wallowed in your bitterness, how that negatively infected not only yourself but others as well. Bitterness left unchecked spoils so much and defiles so many, and in extreme cases results even in horrible crimes, something we hear of all too often in our times.

The problem of bitterness can easily spring up in our hearts and lives. By nature we can quickly become and stubbornly remain bitter and believe we have reason for it too. But God’s Word says it is not right, and if we know what is good for us and good for others, if we will live God-honouring lives and not fall short of the grace of God and run in faith with progress, you and I need to watch out for bitterness.

Having thought somewhat about the problem of bitterness, let us consider next, the remedy from bitterness. Here right away let me shove aside all human remedies for bitterness, such as nursing your bitterness and just holding grudges in life, or simply expressing your bitterness in revenge, or trying to drown out your bitterness through alcohol and substance abuse.

All these are no remedies, though pursued by too many still. No, the only remedy from bitterness is hearty repentance and daily faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This again is what the context of our text so clearly brings out. When you live in true faith then the following three things combined help you uproot bitterness the second that seed is found in your mind and heart. One is looking to Jesus Christ the Saviour. If there was anyone who had reason for bitterness it would be Jesus.

I often refer people who have had bitter experiences with being unjustly and unfairly dealt with in life by others to Hebrews 12:3 to point them in the way of trusting God still and not becoming bitter and resentful. *“For consider Him that endured such contradictions [or hostility] of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”* Sit with that text before God and you cannot find basis to remain bitter no matter what! My friends, have you been mistreated? Are you having it rough? Is there one disappointment after the other for you? Think on Jesus and all He went through, and that to save sinners like you and me. Think of the injustices and sufferings and cruel mistreatments Jesus suffered and endured throughout His lifetime and especially at the end of His life with His crucifixion on Golgotha! And to think that Jesus suffered and endured all that He did, as the just for the unjust, as Peter says in I Peter 3:18, that He might bring people like us to God, indeed, through His shed blood save His people from their sins. Thinking of this all about Jesus and looking to Him, does that not put things in perspective and give every reason to quit all bitterness on our part and not to allow it to spring up and trouble us anymore?

Indeed, if you think too of the depths of our sins and sinfulness, and what we really deserve in life of ourselves, who really has any right to be bitter, angry, resentful, and living with “green sickness” in his heart and life? A true conviction of sin can be a real help and cure from bitterness, for then you know you can’t claim you deserve anything good. A truly humble person will not be a bitter person. Bitterness and sinful pride go together just as humility and thankfulness go together. When someone is living in faith and repentance before God, being humble and believing, there bitterness will not be found even in difficult circumstances. If it does appear, the Christian knows the remedy, humbly looking to Jesus and giving all over to Him initially and continually. Do you know this remedy from bitterness, this remedy of living in faith and repentance before God the Saviour and His holy Word?

The non-Christian doesn’t have a sure-proof remedy from bitterness. How many people live and die in and with bitterness of heart and life. The remedy from bitterness is looking to Jesus in repentance and faith, entrusting yourself daily to Him and His care and leading in our lives. Is that how you are living? If not, will you begin so living today, or start afresh in living in this gospel way? Are you living, too, to help others caught in the snare and sin and web of bitterness, not knowing the only remedy from it?