

The Battle With Bitterness

Miscellaneous

By Dennis Rokser

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:30-32; Hebrews 12:5-15

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Duluth Bible Church

201 W. St. Andrews Street

Duluth, MN 55803

Website: www.duluthbible.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/duluthbible

Bitterness.

So let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to the book of Titus, Titus chapter two.

This is a message I gave last Sunday when I was in El Salvador. I taught it in the morning in San Miguel and then I taught in the afternoon in Usulután the same message as we deal with the battle with bitterness.

And what we are going to look at today are the causes of bitterness, the consequences of bitterness and the cure for bitterness. But instead of starting with bitterness this morning what we want to start with is remembering the grace of God. And so in Titus chapter two let me call your attention to verse 11.

We read:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared [past tense] to all men, teaching us [in the present] that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking [future tense] for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.¹

And why has this grace been shown to us? Because Jesus Christ:

...gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, [who are now] zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.²

Now as we think of the grace of God we recognize from verse 11 that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”³ And if there is any word that could be put on the marquis over God’s plan for this age it is the word “grace.”

¹ Titus 2:11-13.

² Titus 2:14-15.

³ Titus 2:11.

We are told in John chapter one that “the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”⁴ Now that is not to suggest there was no grace in the Old Testament. In fact, we know in Genesis chapter six that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.”⁵

We know that every person who was saved in the Old Testament was saved by grace, never by works and Romans chapter four indicates that by using Abraham and David as the illustrations, both Old Testament individuals.

But grace speaks of God’s unmerited favor. Or, as we have used the acrostic before, grace speaks of God’s riches at Christ’s expense. As we think of grace we cannot help but think of a gift, an undeserving gift. For the only basis that God will save you is by grace. Grace means it is totally free to you, though it cost God something dearly. It cost him his Son. It is a free gift, a gift that we have no ability to earn or deserve or to work for. And, thus, we are not worthy of grace. We need not make ourselves deserving of grace for you can never earn it nor deserve it in any way.

And so what Paul is saying here is that it is all by grace. Verse 11 deals with the first phase or stage or tense of salvation, of, “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”⁶

Well, how did that occur? Well, that occurred by God giving his Son Jesus Christ to die for us, that God became a man and went to the cross and there paid not for his sins. He had none, but for yours and for mine so that we could be saved by grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works,⁷

“Being justified freely by His grace [How?] through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁸

You see, we were born into this slave market of sin. We were slaves to the sin nature, slaves to Satan, slaves to this world. And the only person not born into that slave market after Adam and Eve were the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ, born a free man, a part from sin was the only one who could redeem us and he came and he shed his blood and he gave his life and he died in our place so that we could be saved, redeemed, freed from the slave market of sin because of the price that he paid.

And God could do that because he has been propitiated. His holy demands against our sin have been satisfied through the death of a substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is

⁴ John 1:17.

⁵ Genesis 6:8.

⁶ Titus 2:11.

⁷ Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁸ Romans 3:24.

based upon Christ's finished work on the cross and his glorious resurrection from the grave. God will save all who are willing to put their faith in Jesus Christ alone, not faith in Christ plus, but faith in Christ period, not faith in Christ plus repenting from your sins or giving your life to Christ or going to church or giving money or something else, just faith in Christ period. Because it his work that saves us, not ours. It is his grace that saves us. It is a gift, not a reward for what we have done.

And the moment God saves us by his grace, he redeems us, he forgives us, he translates us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son. And he now wants us to learn to walk by grace and to live a holy life that brings honor and glory to him and in anticipation of the day that we will go home to be with the Lord either by death or by rapture.

Thus, in Titus chapter two we have in verse 11, stage one; verse 12, stage two; in anticipation of stage three, verse 13.

Now we know that when we are saved that God has not only placed us into Christ, but given us amazing grace resources so that we could live a godly life, we have victory over sin in our life, that we could have the fruit of the Spirit produced in our life, that we could have good works that bring honor and glory to him wrought by the spirit and consistent with the Word of God.

You might say, "Well, is grace really that important?"

And the fact of the matter is: It is extremely important. For the believer in Christ is justified by grace. We are eternally secure by grace. We are sanctified by grace. One day we will be glorified by grace. And therefore we now are to grow in grace and to continue in grace. And as we are growing in grace and enjoying grace we are then to serve by grace. And, thus, we need to become established with grace. And as we are enjoying the Lord we can sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord for God has been disciplining us by grace. And therefore can use us to minister our spiritual gifts to others by grace. And yet we are warned to not abuse the grace of God as license to sin. And even in every situation and difficulty that we face we are to realize that God's grace is sufficient. And therefore we should abound in giving by grace as we yield to the Lord in light of his grace and therefore not fall from the truths of grace.

William R. Newell in a classic book on Romans verse by verse said this, and I quote, "There being no cause in the creature why Grace should be shown, the creature must be brought off from trying to give cause to God for His Grace... He has been accepted in Christ, who is his standing! He is not on probation. As to his life past, it does not exist before God: he died at the cross, and Christ is his Life. Grace, once bestowed, is not withdrawn: for God knew all the human exigencies," in other words failures, "beforehand: His action was independent of them, not dependent upon them. The proper attitude of man under grace: to believe, and consent to be loved while unworthy, is the great secret; to refuse to make "resolutions" and "vows", for that is to trust in the flesh; to expect to be blessed, though realizing more and more lack of worth; to rely on God's

chastening or child training hand as a mark of His kindness, things which gracious souls discover,” Newell says, “To hope to be better, hence acceptable, is to fail to see yourself in Christ only. To be disappointed with yourself is to have believed in yourself. To be discouraged is unbelief as to God’s purpose and plan of blessing for you. To be proud is to be blind for we have no standing before God in ourselves. The lack of divine blessing, therefore, comes from unbelief, and not from failure of devotion. To preach devotion first and blessing second, is to reverse God’s order, and preach law, not grace. The Law made man’s blessing dependant on devotion; Grace confers undeserved, unconditional blessing: our devotion may follow, but does not always do so, in proper measure.”

I think it is safe to say that grace is extremely crucial. If we are going to grow the way God wants us to grow, if we are going to walk the way God wants us to walk, if we are going to serve the way God wants us to serve, grace is crucial to be understood, to be enjoyed, to be believed, to be reminded of time and time again.

But with that said, let me say that there are some things that fail the grace of God. And we will see today that one of the things that seriously fails the grace of God is when a root of bitterness is in our heart that not only troubles us, but then causes others to become defiled.

As I think of bitterness, let’s, first of all, examine the causes of bitterness. Why are people bitter? In fact, let me ask another question. This morning are you bitter? Are you resentful towards someone, towards your mate, towards your children, towards your boss, towards your circumstances? Yea, maybe you are even bitter towards your God.

Now what are the causes of bitterness? Let me suggest to you, in fact, more than suggest. Let me reference to you four causes from the Scriptures for bitterness. And perhaps you could add to this list, but these, indeed, intersect with Scripture.

First of all, bitterness can be due to mistreatment by others, mistreatment by others. I want you to turn with me to the book of Colossians chapter three, Colossians chapter three.

Now when we think of mistreatment by others, the direction of that mistreatment can be in many ways. It is like it could be right in your home, right in your marriage, right in your family. When I think of bitterness I think of Esau and Jacob. Remember them? They were twin brothers and yet they were bitter because Jacob used trickery to trick his brother out of his blessing and Esau became bitter. But maybe in your life you have bitterness towards a brother or towards a sister for something they have done to you. Yes, wrong, the bitterness is not the right response.

Or I think of Joseph and Jacob and Joseph’s brothers. You remember that Jacob had a number of children, but Joseph was his favorite. And because of that favoritism Joseph’s brothers hated him without a cause. Yea, threw him into a pit, were going to kill him, instead opted for plan B, sold him into slavery into Egypt.

And it could be that there was personal favoritism in your home and maybe you felt like you were always the odd dock, the one your parents didn't really love and you are bitter towards your parents. Or it could be that you are bitter towards the other child that you thought was the one who was treated favorably and you are bitter and that bitterness is right in your home, or it has been there.

Or, as Colossians chapter three reminds us, bitterness can be in a marriage. We read in Colossians three and verse 19, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them... bitter toward them."⁹ Husbands ever bitter towards their wives? Let's reverse it. Wives ever bitter towards their husbands? Bitterness is a problem we can all relate to because in the human heart is a great potential for bitterness.

Now why are husbands bitter towards their wives? Well, sometimes it is because they can never please them. No matter what they do it can never please them and after a while they just get bitter. But maybe they have been defrauded in some ways by their wife. Or maybe she is just a constant nag. I would say like a broken record, but some of you don't even know what records are.

And not only does it hit the... sometimes the needle goes...

It could be you are bitter towards your husband. Maybe he has just been so devoted to his work he has neglected you. Maybe he has been so devoted to his friends or his self, or he has been just so selfish that you have found yourself bitter towards you mate by mistreatment, neglect. And this mistreatment, by the way, maybe actual mistreatment or in some cases it might just even be perceived. But nevertheless it is real to you and you are bitter.

A second cause for bitterness is disappointment. I should say disappointing circumstances or unrealistic expectations. In fact, go with me to 1 Samuel chapter one. And we have here the story of Hannah. Now, Hannah was married to a man, Elkanah and Elkanah loved Hanna, but she was unable to give children and he ended up having another and she was fertile by the month and just could have child after child.

And the one wife mocked the other wife. And, you know, when you are married you not only want your husband to love you, but normally women want to have children. And it is a very difficult trial when they are unable to have children. It can be heart wrenching for them. It can be difficult and confusing and they wonder: Why is this happening to me?

Or maybe they have a child and the child comes out with special needs. It is like: What happened?

Or maybe they train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and as they get older they rebel and go into the world in carnality, don't want anything to do

⁹ Colossians 3:19.

with the Lord, nay, even apostatize. And if you are not careful you can become bitter, bitter about this.

And we read in 1 Samuel chapter one verse 12, “And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth.”¹⁰ Now Eli was the priest. Hannah was praying there at the temple.

Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk.

So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"

And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD."¹¹

By the way, when you are experiencing trials that you sense are making you bitter, that is what you need to do. Pour your soul before the Lord. Talk to the Lord about it. Give it over to the Lord.

Verse 16. “Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.”¹²

In other words, “It is due to the grief and bitterness of my heart and the disappointing circumstances I am because I had expectations that on getting married not only would my husband love, but I would have children my soul grieved at not being able to do this.”

And disappointing circumstances can lead to bitterness.

You know, it reminds of me Naomi in the book of Ruth. Remember, there was famine in the land. Instead of turning to the Lord she just went her own way and took her sons down to Moab where they ended up marrying unsaved women and God allowed both of those men to die and the unsaved daughters in law were still there and finally Naomi comes back with Ruth to Israel there and in doing so she says, “Don’t call me Naomi. Call me Mara for I am bitter.”¹³ None of this has worked out the way I wanted it to.”

Yes, but would you admit, Naomi, in this case about your backsliding, about your failure to look to the Lord, how you took things into your own hands, how you had to do it your way, how you went down to Moab and how you therefore did not trust the Lord and now it didn’t work out and now you are bitter? Do you not reap what you sow? She is bitter.

¹⁰ 1 Samuel 1:12.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 1:13-15.

¹² 1 Samuel 1:16.

¹³ See Ruth 1:20.

Now, when we think of disappointing circumstances we recognize there are varied trials that we face that fit into this category. I mean, maybe a loss of a mate, oh, this can be so grieving. And yet if we do not turn it over to the Lord we can become bitter. It could be the loss of your health. And if you do not walk by faith you can become bitter. It could be the loss of a child.

And you say, “Well, parents are supposed to bury children. Children are supposed to bury parents, but it doesn’t always work out that way.” And you can become bitter.

It maybe you have trained your children in the things of the Lord. As I said, they rebel. If you do not turn that over to the Lord you can become bitter.

You know, it reminds me of a man who came to the conference in El Salvador. He wasn’t sure he was going to come the third day because he worked at a job in which if he wasn’t there it wasn’t a secure place and he was afraid his things would be stolen. But when he heard the teaching he was so encouraged he said, “I don’t care if they steal it, I want to come.”

And he came and he heard a message that I gave on 1 Peter three on marriage. Well, it just so happened—and I did not know this went in his life—that this man’s wife had left him for another man and he was bitter. And as I talked about how husbands were to love their wives and how we need to deposit into the love bank for so often we withdraw, but we don’t make deposits. He began to reflect on his marriage, his previous marriage. And he began to realize that he had withdrawn and withdrawn and withdrawn and withdrawn and withdrawn and to some degree he pushed his wife away, he pushed his wife into that affair. And though that was still wrong on her part, he began to sense the responsibility on his part and where he had failed and that his bitterness, though, was to some degree reaping what he had sown.

And he said, “Oh, this teaching has been so good, so convicting, but so needed.”

What causes bitterness? Mistreatment by others. Sometimes disappointing circumstances or could I add unrealistic expectations.

You know, sometimes when couples get married they think it is going to be the Fourth of July every day, you know. Sometimes it is April Fool’s Day and they just don’t know it, you know.

You know, they think that this person is going to meet all my needs now and I am always going to be happy.

Get realistic. They are not a replacement for God. And, by the way, no one else can really make you happy. Only as you walk with the Lord can there be inner joy that can overflow.

But a third cause of bitterness is personal jealousy, personal jealousy. And to see this go with me to Acts chapter eight. And here we just read the story about Simon and his bitterness.

Verse four. “Therefore those who were scattered [due to persecution] went everywhere preaching the word.”¹⁴ The phrase “the word” there is in reference to the gospel.

What do the unsaved need to hear? They need to hear the gospel. In fact, let me pause for a moment. I heard a great story when I was in El Salvador. I met a man. He came to the conference. He was a young man about 20 years old. His name was Francisco.

I heard that a year before Francisco had a job which he still has in which he would ride the bus. And, you know, the number one means of public transportation are the busses down there because a lot of people don’t own their own car. It is too expensive.

And you see these people on the busses and they are just loaded. They are hanging out the windows. And there is a guy that drives and there is a guy who is in the back waving everyone, “Come on in,” and then taking their money. And that was his job.

Well, about a year ago in Manacala which was real close to [?] and he was on the bus. He was collecting money and a guy got on and he took a gun and put it to his head and said, “Give me your money. I am going to kill you.” He put the gun right to his head.

And Francisco says that, you know, he thought he was going to die right there. And he was not a believer. He was not saved at that time. He did not know where he was going spend eternity. He thought he was dead meat. But the Lord was gracious and the guy robbed the money, but he didn’t take his life.

Soon after that, if I recall this correctly, that he was on a route. He was still working his job and a guy that did the same job that he did said, “Francisco, would you switch shifts with me?”

So he did. He switched shifts with him and it so happened that the guy who took his place, the bus got into a bus accident and the guy was killed. And that would have been Francisco. He would have been dead on the spot.

Well, this made him think very seriously about his eternal destiny.

Now, it just so happened where these bus drivers and these money collectors would gather together, at this particular place, that there was a man who would come on up and sell them food and things like that that his wife would make for this man. His name was Johnny.

¹⁴ Acts 8:4.

Now Johnny is a pastor of the church that hosted the conference. And Johnny would go up and sell them food which was very common type of thing in El Salvador. And he would give them the gospel.

Francisco heard the good news. He knew he was a sinner. He knew he deserved judgment. He heard about Jesus Christ. Now God loved him, wanted him to be saved.

And about a year ago he put his faith in Jesus Christ. And what was an amazing twist to the story as well, is not only did God spare his life knowing that he would get saved, knowing that God is not willing that any should perish and wants all to be saved, but Francisco actually grew up in that very church that Johnny pastors although I don't think Johnny was the pastor then. And it was laden with legalism. The gospel was not clear at all so that his family was just so tired of it all they left. And now God had Johnny in place so Johnny now was clear on the gospel and Johnny could give him the gospel. He gets saved and now he is back at his same church.

And there he was all week last week taking vigorous notes as we were studying 1 Peter together.

God is amazing and this is why we need to preach the Word, the gospel.

Verse five.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.¹⁵

The gospel brings great joy.

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."¹⁶

He was the great [?] of the area.

And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries [his trickery, his magic] for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of

¹⁵ Acts 8:5-8.

¹⁶ Acts 8:9-10.

Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed.¹⁷

Let's pause for a minute. "Simon himself also believed."¹⁸ Do you know what that means? He believed. Very good. It means he believed. When the Bible says he believed it means he believed. Now I say that because there are those who are going to say—as the story unravels—well, he wasn't really a believer.

You know, once you start trifling with the Word of God and say, "Well, when it says he believed it doesn't mean he believed," you have just opened a Pandora's box of problems, because now we can't take what God says at face value. Do you know what God says here? He believed. And not only does it say he believed, but we continue, verse 13: "And when he was baptized."¹⁹

That means the Church believed he believed and he was baptized as a public proclamation of his faith. "[And] he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done."²⁰

I mean he [?], "Whoa. Look at what they... Whoa. That's... that's better than mine."

Now he is not the first believer to get jealous over someone else's power, authority, gift, ministry and such.

Verse 14.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.²¹

Let me pause and just make a word of explanation.

In the early Church we know in Acts chapter two that the Jews received the gospel. They were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter eight, the Samaritans; Acts chapter 10, the Gentiles; Acts chapter 19 the disciples of John. And in the early Church for a short period of time in the transitional nature of the book of Acts the Holy Spirit was temporarily withheld until there was an apostle on the scene so that when the Holy Spirit was given by God to these individuals that there would not be schism in the body of Christ and we have got the Samaritan church over here and the Jerusalem church over there and we have got the Gentile church over there and the disciples of John over there

¹⁷ Acts 8:11-13.

¹⁸ Acts 8:13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Acts 8:14-16.

like happens in our cities. But instead what they had was a unified body of Christ under the leadership of the apostles and under the headship of Christ by God's holding off on giving them the Spirit until the apostles were on the scene.

Now we know that that was only temporary. For as time would go on Paul would write in Ephesians one verse 13, "In [Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,"²² so that that now is always the case. But not so temporarily in the early chapters of the book of Acts.

Verse 17.

Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,

"Hey, I want that. Here."

"Saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'"²³

Now, you know as I do these are fleshly motives. He wanted to stay the big [?]. He was jealous at the power that was displayed through the apostles. He coveted it. He wanted it. He desired it. And he became bitter about it, we will see, verse 20.

But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God, [the Holy Spirit is a gift] could be purchased with money!"²⁴

Now keep in mind when he says, "Your money perish with you," he is not saying, "May your money go to hell" because money can't go to hell. But money can perish physically and believers can be divinely disciplined by way of physical death which will happen, which happened earlier in Acts chapter five with Ananias and Sapphira.

Verse 21. "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God."²⁵ And keep in mind that bitterness is an issue of the heart. It is irrational. It is a heart issue.

You know, there are people who know doctrine, they have learned the Word of God. They can kick off principles and so forth, but in their heart they are still bitter because bitterness is a heart issue. It is not a head issue, as it were. It is not a matter of knowing more information. It is a matter of the heart not willing to respond to the Lord.

²² Ephesians 1:13.

²³ Acts 8:19.

²⁴ Acts 8:20.

²⁵ Acts 8:21.

So what does Peter tell him?

Verse 22. “Repent [change your mind] therefore of this your wickedness.”²⁶ Bitterness is wickedness. Coveting someone else’s gift is wickedness. “And pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”²⁷ And you will escape that divine discipline. “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness.”²⁸ And not only poisoned by bitterness, but “bound by iniquity.”²⁹

Do you realize that bitterness is like poison? It is like taking Drano and saying, “You know, I am so mad at you... I can’t believe you did that to me.”

That is really going to solve the problem.

“Poisoned by bitterness.”³⁰

And, by the way, then that bitterness has a tendency to spew out of our mouth so we poison others with it as well. And not only is it like poison, but it is like a ball and chain bound with iniquity. Everywhere you go, “I am bitter. I am bitter.”

Now, you may not say that. In fact, you may even act really spiritual. “I am just so loving. Isn’t the Lord great?” And you just carry that bitterness right around wherever you go.

Bitterness can be due to personal jealousy.

But here is a fourth cause of bitterness: A failure to take correction. And to see this go with me to Hebrews chapter 12.

In Hebrews chapter 12 we have an exhortation in verse five that we do well to heed.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor [faint, or] be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."³¹

Now when God seeks to correct us—and, by the way, he can correct us in many ways. He may seek to correct us through the Word of God. He may seek to use someone else to correct us. You may be corrected from the pulpit. You may be corrected through a personal bump of some kind. And you can either take that from the Lord or you can despise it. “I can’t believe this is happening.” Or you can become discouraged and faint

²⁶ Acts 8:22.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Acts 8:23.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hebrews 12:5-6.

and have a pity party. And, you know, you want to eat oatmeal out of a vase. You look like you have been baptized in pickle juice, you know, just, “Oh, I can’t believe... it is so hard to be a Christian,” when God wants to correct you.

And you know those are both just forms of pride, just pride. You should be saying instead, “I am amazed I am not corrected more often.”

On the other hand, verse 11 tells us, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful.”³² Who likes a spanking? “for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward [afterward afterward]it yields,”³³ some fruit. And that fruit is peaceable. You are not fighting the Lord anymore. And it is righteous. It is the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We are moving in the right direction now.

But that is only to those who have been trained by it. If you fight it and you resist and you won’t be trained by it what happens?

Verse 15. “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”³⁴

If you do not take the correction of God in your life in the disciplining process that he has for all of his children and he does it out of love, you become bitter. And so bitterness can happen to anyone, saved or unsaved, young or old, male or female, whether you grew up in a Christian home or not, it can happen to you. It can happen to me. And bitter people usually blame others for their bitterness.

Esau blamed Jacob. Joseph’s brothers blamed him. Naomi blamed God. Israel blamed Moses. Simon blamed Peter. No one else can make you bitter. It is your failing the grace of God that results in bitterness.

In fact, as we think of the consequences of bitterness we see in verse 15 they are three fold. Please note them well.

First of all, towards God you fail the grace of God. You fall short of the grace of God. Instead of responding to the Lord in your difficult circumstances, instead you react. Instead of forgiving the other person because you have been so forgiven, you become bitter. And, again, you pick up the Drano and you just start pouring it in and in doing so you break fellowship with the Lord. You lose your testimony for Christ.

Remember it is the grace of God that teaches us to deny ungodliness and bitterness is ungodliness. It fails the grace of God.

But, secondly, that consequence is also towards yourself. You trouble yourself. You trouble yourself.

³² Hebrews 12:11.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hebrews 12:15.

Verse 15 says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble.”³⁵

It was like Caesar who was so upset at the sun god Jupiter that he commanded his archers to take their bows and arrow and to shoot at the sun. And in doing so those arrows went up and came down and killed them. That is what bitterness does in your life.

You say, “Well, how does it trouble me?”

Well, let’s stop and evaluate. It can trouble you physically. It can cause high blood pressure, loss of sleep, premature aging, depression.

Now I am not suggesting that if you had a bad night of sleep last night that you must be bitter. I understand there are other causes for lack of sleep. But bitterness does affect you physically. In fact, when you are bitter, you will tend to be a depressed person and you will tend to be a very negative person.

But it also affects you spiritually, doesn’t it? It triggers hatred, cruelty, self pity, vindictiveness. You want to get back and you run through your mind again the video of what they have done to you and you run that thing over and over and over and over again. One, and they may not even know they did it.

Number two, every time you run it through they look worse and you look better. You come out on the white horse every time. You are the shiniest. “How did they do this to me?” You know.

“I can’t believe they did this to me. I can’t believe they did that.”

Like I said before we play Christian voodoo, you know. Mentally we pull up that [?]. You know. “I can’t believe they did that.”

And you lose teachability as well at that point. Your spiritual growth stops with that bitterness. And, furthermore, the consequences are toward others. You defile others.

Verse says, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many [many, many] become defiled.”³⁶

Now that word “defiled” is an interesting word. It speaks of a stain or a dye.

You know, my favorite fast food place is Burger King. Now, I do not eat there every day. I don’t even eat there every week, just for the record, ok? But I love whoppers. And it is partly because I like mayonnaise and ketchup with hamburger. I just like it. I don’t like

³⁵ Hebrews 12:15.

³⁶ Ibid.

the onions. I take it off and order onion rings, you know, makes... figure that out, you know. Ok. But I like whoppers.

And, you know, in the past and I eat these whoppers with that... but I love ketchup on there. Sometimes that ketchup will drop. And years ago it used to hit the table. But now it hits my shirt. And I look and, "Oh, ketchup stain again, you know."

And, you know, what the writer of Hebrews is saying here is not only does bitterness stain you, trouble you, but it is like taking a bottle of ketchup and saying... and you start... Everyone you come into contact with. You can't believe that they did to me, you know. What can I stain next, you know?

And I am just telling you this so you can pray for them, you know, you know.

You know how we spiritualize it, you know.

And in doing so we tell them.

You say, "Well, how do you do that?"

Well, in a number of ways. You may write something. Well, one of our favorite ways you just take up your cell phone.

And you are over there saying... You know. And in doing so you are taking off your glasses and your perspective of that person and you just gave it to the other person so the next time they see that person it is like I can't believe you did that to them, you know, you jerk, you know.

Now, it may be true. It may not be true. You don't even know it is true a lot of times, do you? A lot of times it was a [?] you don't even know what really transpired. Yet are so prone...

"My friend, right or wrong," you know. And we are bitter.

You know, Scott Johnson gave me this illustration so I will give him some credit. He said—I don't know if he wants this credit—he says, "Bitterness is like a pimple, right under the surface and all it takes is the right situation and you just bring that to the surface and go... right on the person, right?" And you start squirting pimples. Yes, at people.

Kind of gross, but communicates, doesn't it?

You say, "Oh, that would never happen in a Bible believing church, would it?"

Would it? Of course it does. When we fail the grace of God and it results in complaining, back biting, blaming, whining, gossip. Maybe through the phone, through blogs, maybe through My Space or your face or whatever that thing is called, you know.

These are the consequences of bitterness.

You say, “Oh, I am relating, I am relating. But can you tell me the cure? I don’t want to keep drinking Drano. I don’t want to keep popping pimples, you know. Well, what is the cure?”

Well, the cure depends on the situation. Go with me if you would to James chapter three, one book to your right, James chapter three verse 14.

“But if you have bitter envy...”³⁷ And what usually goes with bitter envy? “Self-seeking [arrogance] in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.”³⁸

If you are going to have a cure for bitterness in your life, you need to, first of all, face its reality. Don’t boast and don’t lie about it. If you are bitter you need to admit it.

“I am bitter.”

At least Naomi admitted it. “Don’t call me Naomi. Call me Mara,”³⁹ bitterness.

“I am bitter.”

Face its reality.

But go with me next to Ephesians chapter four. For we not only need to face its reality, but we need to realize that our sin, your sin grieves the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who wants to control you, the Spirit who wants to guide you, the Spirit who wants to empower you, the Spirit that wants to produce in your life the fruit of the Spirit is grieved.

Verse 30. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”⁴⁰

So, well, what grieves the Spirit? Well here are at least five things.

Verse 31. “Let all bitterness, wrath,”⁴¹ That’s results from that bitterness. Anger, one is a slow anger that is kind of internal, the other is a very outspoken anger. That results in clamor, loud speaking and evil whispering. And evil speaking, that is whispering. And

³⁷ James 3:14.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ruth 1:20.

⁴⁰ Ephesians 4:30.

⁴¹ Ephesians 4:31.

may it be put away from you with all malice or evil. These things are evil. These things are sin. These things grieve the Holy Spirit and therefore they are to be put away.

Well, how do you put that away as a believer? You put it away by admitting that it is sin to [?]. Regardless of what they have done to me how I have reacted in the situation is wrong. I confess this as sin to the Lord.

And we know from 1 John 1:9 that “If we confess our sin [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all righteousness.”⁴²

And by virtue of the fact that we are new creations in Christ, we have been co crucified, co buried, co risen with him. We do not have to be a slave to the sin nature anymore. We do not have to be bound by bitterness in our lives and instead we can respond to the Lord and to the grace of God and to the enablement of the Spirit of God. We can have victory over that sin.

But when you sinned and the Lord points it out you need to admit it to him for the purpose of walking in the light, for the purpose of yielding to the Lord, for the purpose of having fellowship with God again. You need to admit it to the Lord.

You say, “Well, I have. I have. I have addressed it vertically.”

Ok, that’s really good. But there is another dimension there.

Verse 32. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”⁴³

Now that you have straightened it all vertically you need to straighten it out horizontally. Really, yes, you need to choose to forgive the offending person and you forgive them by grace because God has forgiven you through Jesus Christ and you are to do this regardless of how you feel.

You say, “I don’t feel like forgiving.”

It is not an issue of feeling. It is a choice you make. You choose to forgive them. I know what they have done is wrong. But I choose to forgive him.

Do you know when someone does something that is truly wrong to you, the Bible says be angry and sin not and let not the sun go down upon your wrath.⁴⁴

There is a place for righteous anger. What they did to me was wrong, but you have to get passed that and not let that righteous anger turn into bitterness, otherwise Satan gets a

⁴² 1 John 1:9.

⁴³ Ephesians 4:32.

⁴⁴ See Ephesians 4:26.

beachhead in your life. And you choose to forgive them because you have been forgiven. You must remember this.

We don't forgive them because they deserve it or earn it or are worthy of it. You forgive them on the same basis you were forgiven. You were forgiven because of Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

And when we forgive, yes, we are to let it go and hand them over to the Lord to let the Lord deal with them in whatever way the Lord wants to deal with them. We are not to bury the hatchet, but leave the handle out.

Or someone sent me this overhead a while ago. The medicine you need, extra strength, forgiven all. And you need to remember that when are unwilling to forgive someone else, you are not willing to show the grace to someone else like God has shown you.

Now chapter five verse one and two go on to say:

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.⁴⁵

You not only choose to forgive the offending person, but now you are to walk in love towards the person. And love desires to do what is best for them. It is not a feeling. Your feelings may not have come around yet. But you are willing to do what is best for them.

So go to Matthew chapter five for a moment. Matthew chapter five verse 43 and 44. And here we have the Lord Jesus addressing this issue of love even to our enemies.

Matthew chapter five verse 43.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you [let's correct that], love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.⁴⁶

Notice love manifests itself in these kind of ways. Can you bless them? Can you do good to them? Can you pray for them?

You say, "Well, if I do, they are not going to change any. I just know the way they are."

And, you know, you might be right. But you will change and you will become more like Jesus Christ and you will get over this root problem called bitterness and eventually even

⁴⁵ Ephesians 5:1-2.

⁴⁶ Matthew 5:43-44.

your feelings could come around in your marriage, in your family, in your church for those other people.

And so when your bitterness is towards others this is what is needed.

You say, “But the pastor... I sense that I am getting bitter towards God. I am getting bitter towards God.”

If you are bitter towards God you need to, first of all, admit your bitterness to God. You need to admit it.

By the way, it won't surprise him. He won't say, “Oh, you're bitter, really? Wow.”

He already knows. He knows that that disappointment you have experienced. He knows all about it. His heart goes out to you in it.

You say, “Well, if you really love me, why don't you change it?”

His ways are not our ways.

You say, “Well, what should I do then? Should I do what I do to other people? I have to forgive offending people. Should I forgive God like James Dobson suggests that we do?”

No, no. You don't forgive God. God is never wrong. What you do do, though, is you need to believe in the goodness of the Lord and faith rests in his promises to you. You need to remember that all things are still working together for good, Romans 8:28. You need to remember, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack.”⁴⁷ Psalm 23 verse one. You need to remember what Joseph said to his brothers, “You meant it for evil, but God is meaning the circumstance in my life for good.”⁴⁸ And you need to be like Psalm 27:13 and 14. I would have fainted. Maybe we could add “become bitter.”

... unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!⁴⁹

Let him work out his purposes in your life.

You say, “Ok. Wait means I am going to wait until I get what I want, right?”

No. It doesn't always work that way.

“If I wait on the Lord then he is going to give me that mate I am waiting for. He is going give me that child I need. He is going to do this in my life, right?”

⁴⁷ See Psalm 23:1.

⁴⁸ See Genesis 50:20.

⁴⁹ Psalm 27:13-14.

It doesn't say that.

What he does say, though, is that he didn't ask you to be all knowing. He said trust him. He has got a plan. And his plan is good, perfect and it is acceptable. It can't be improved on. He will work out his will in your life.

And even as we have seen in 1 Peter, we have seen this whole issue of suffering and doing what is right and that God uses suffering in our life for good reason, not for evil.

So don't be bitter, reconsider what God has for you in your life.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your Word. It has spoken to our hearts today. And you know what is going on in every heart in this auditorium and those who are watching, even, by webcast. You know those who may be bitter towards their mate or bitter towards their parents or bitter towards their children. Or they are becoming bitter because of their circumstances and they are reacting instead of responding. Or perhaps you sought to correct them and they have not taken it in their pride. I pray, Father, they would realize they are failing the grace of God, that your plan is best and can be trusted, that this bitterness is troubling them like acid to their soul and that it will defile others if it hasn't already. And I pray, Father, they would take heed to this, that they would face reality, that they would admit they have sinned and claim your forgiveness and choose to forgive those who have offended you.

And now walk in love towards them like you have loved us as they faith rest in you.

Father we know we need these kind of messages, that we are prone to bitterness. That is why you speak about it in your Word. Oh, may we not fail your grace. You have blessed us with such an undeserved way and you are there even in our disappointing circumstances saying, "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness." Oh, may we take you at your Word and mix your promises with faith that we would have victory by your grace and grow through our circumstances and not only preach grace, but practice grace in our relationships with others. For we pray and ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.