

BITTERNESS¹

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

EPHESIANS 4:31-5:2 (ESV)

³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This morning we're thinking about BITTERNESS and the command to put BITTERNESS away.

I. WHAT IS BITTERNESS?

Bitterness is _____ we hang on to in order to punish the person we believe has done us wrong.

II. WHAT MAKES US BITTER?

We become bitter when we _____ someone has done us wrong. Notice, we become bitter when we believe someone has done us wrong whether they actually have or not. It doesn't matter if someone has *actually* sinned against you or not. It is the *perceived* sin that causes BITTERNESS.

III. HOW CAN WE TELL IF WE ARE BITTER?

Most people don't want to admit they are bitter. We call it something else – I'm just hurt or disappointed. But we are bitter if this one thing is true: we _____ in detail what the other person did against us. Why is this true? Because we play the scene over and over in our minds. Because we replay the event so many times it becomes engrained in our memory.

IV. WITH WHOM ARE WE MOST PRONE TO BECOME BITTER?

We are most prone to become bitter towards those who are _____ to us: our parents, our brothers and sisters, our spouses, our children, our friends, our brothers and sisters in the church family. Bitterness isn't based on how *big* an offense may be, but on how *close* the offense is to us.

V. WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT BEING BITTER?

What cancer is to the body; bitterness is to the soul. It eats us up from the inside out.

Like a root, bitterness puts off poison fruit like slander, lying, malice, hatred, anxiety, division. In addition to its poisonous fruit, I think bitterness is sin for at least three additional reasons. First, in holding on to bitterness, we are exalting ourselves as if we are of such a status that no one should ever sin against us. Second, in holding on to bitterness, we take to ourselves an authority we do not possess; we seek to punish the other person for their sin against us. Third, bitterness is the polar opposite of what we are called to do. We are called to love which means we are called to do good to others. Bitterness is sin and God tells us to put it away, to remove it from our lives.

V. HOW DO WE PUT AWAY BITTERNESS?

First, we must _____ what we believe about bitterness. The first step in putting away bitterness is to repent of any beliefs that rationalize or defend bitterness and call it what it is: sin.

Second, having changed our mind about the nature of bitterness we need to _____ our sin of bitterness to God.

¹ This sermon is based on "How To Be Free From Bitterness" by Jim Wilson.

Third, we look to the Cross and the empty tomb and assure our hearts that our sin of bitterness has been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ and that God the Father has forgiven us for our sin of bitterness.

Fourth, we _____ the person who has sinned against us. To forgive means to release to God our desire to punish the other person and to leave that in God's hand. We claim the promise of Romans 12:19, that God will see that justice is done.

Finally, pray for the Holy Spirit to show you ways in which you can _____ the other person, that is, do good to them. In many cases their sin against us is so minor we can choose to overlook it. In other cases, the sin may be serious enough or may be ongoing so that we need to engage in conflict resolution. We recommend a book called *Peacemakers*. It may be wise to seek help from the Elders or from a trusted, mature brother or sister in Christ. Finally, in cases where there has been abuse or violence, direct contact is probably not wise. In those situations, definitely reach out to the Elders, or to trained Christian counselors and if need be to legal counsel. We still need to get free from bitterness. But forgiveness does not mean forgive and forget and go back to the way things were. We can forgive and at the same time pursue the protection of the law and the prosecution of the other person if their sin warrants it. But we need to do all this with a free heart.

May 2024 be the year we put away all *bitterness*.

Grace News and Needs

VOM Needs for January: Washcloths and Monetary Gifts for Action Packs.

Women's Ministry: Weekly Prayer Gathering, Tuesday mornings in Modular, 6-7AM.