

Introduction

Has anyone ever **SAID something to you** or **DONE something to you** for which you found it difficult to **FORGIVE** them?

I'm talking about **when you SEE THEM** or **every time you HEAR THEIR NAME** brought up, even if their wrong against you was years ago, it still brings an **UNEASINESS** in your **BODY, SOUL, and SPIRIT**.

When you **THINK OF THEM**, maybe your heart rate increases and you can feel your blood pressure rising when you **THINK** of whatever it is they **SAID** or **DID**. In fact, just **THINKING ABOUT IT** causes you to **RELIVE IT** all over again!

Did someone just come to your mind as I was talking about that? Did those **FEELINGS** come back? If that is the case, you need to realize that you quite possibly are being held in the bonds of **BITTERNESS!** You are its prisoner!

What is really a shame is that most of the time **BITTERNESS** doesn't even touch the person that we are **BITTER** toward. But it sure will **HARM** us!

BITTERNESS can cause damage beyond our imagination. It is an **INTERNAL POISON** that eats its way from the inside out!

Many times the other person may **CONTINUE** on with their life, and may be happy and content, and possibly never even **THINK** about us. But because we are **BITTER AGAINST THEM**, they continue to exert **CONTROL** in our life. If they do **THINK** about us or see us, they may get some satisfaction in seeing that they can **STILL GET AT US!**

Let me give you just two examples of what I'm talking about:

First, someone who was molested as a young child or teenager becomes **BITTER** toward their molester! While that is understandable, we need to see that molester continues to touch the victim until the victim **GIVES THAT BITTERNESS TO GOD**.

Another example would be those who were physically abused by a parent. (I'm talking about where the parent went beyond what would be considered proper discipline.) As long as one continues to **HOLD BITTERNESS** against an abuser, they continue to be abused by them! One must **GIVE THAT BITTERNESS TO GOD!**

Understand that many EMOTIONS we feel are not necessarily SIN: ANGER is not always SIN!

Ephesians 4:26—“*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*” (It is possible for us to have **RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION**—e.g. **JESUS'** cleansing of the **TEMPLE**.)

However, when our **ANGER** is **UNCONTROLLED**, it becomes **SIN**. Or when the object of our **ANGER** becomes misplaced (i.e. we carry out our **ANGER** against someone who has done us no wrong) it becomes **SIN!**

GUILT is not always SIN.

The **LORD** sometimes gives us a **GODLY GUILT**—by **conscience** or by a **convicting by HIS HOLY SPIRIT**—to help us get back onto the straight and narrow way **HE** has for us! That kind of **GUILT** is good and useful!

However, we need to understand that **SATAN** loves to use **GUILT** to **PARALYZE** us in our **CHRISTIAN WALK!** And when we allow **GUILT** over something **GOD** has **CLEANSED US** from and **FORGIVEN** us for to **AFFECT** us, then it is **SIN!**

Romans 14:23—“*. . .whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*”

GRIEF is not always SIN.

GRIEF is a **GIFT from GOD** when used to help us **HEAL** from **LOSS** or **SORROW** of some kind. **PAUL** didn't tell the **THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS** not to **GRIEVE** over their departed loved ones. He told them to **NOT TO GRIEVE** as others which **HAVE NO HOPE!**
(*1 Thessalonians 4:13*)

But listen, if we refuse to allow the **HOLY SPIRIT** to **COMFORT OUR GRIEF**, then it can turn to **SELF-PITY!** **SELF PITY is a SIN!**

ANGER/GUILT/GRIEF—are they **SIN**? Maybe not or maybe so!
But listen, there is one human **EMOTION** that is **ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS A SIN, WITHOUT EXCEPTION!** That is **BITTERNESS!**
BITTERNESS and a **SPIRIT OF UNFORGIVENESS** are **ALWAYS SIN!**

If someone spits in my face, they have **SINNED against me!** But, if in response, I hold **BITTERNESS** in my heart toward them, then I have also **SINNED.**

We may question someone's **MOTIVES** for **DOING SOMETHING** or they may even **SAY** or **DO** something that we find very **HURTFUL.**
We may feel that they have **SINNED** against us! And, depending on the circumstances, they may very well have! But that doesn't give us the right to join in on the **SINNING** by **RESPONDING WRONGLY** to a **HURT!**

Who is that one who comes to mind when we talk about **BITTERNESS?**
There might be more than one! Who is it that we personally hold **BITTER FEELINGS** against? Let's be honest with ourselves and before **GOD!**

Let's not try to **EXPLAIN AWAY** or **JUSTIFY** our **BITTERNESS.** The **HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD** brought them to mind for a **REASON!** It is because **HE LOVES US** and wants to **RID US** of that **CANCER OF BITTERNESS** that is **EATING US** from the inside out!

It may have been a short time ago or a long time ago when the **HURT** or **INJUSTICE** took place! But if **BITTERNESS** is still there, its because we've never truly **FORGIVEN** them for it.

And whatever we do, let's not say: **"I don't hardly ever think about them at all."** That is not even the question. The question is **when we DO think about them, what are our thoughts about them?**

We need to have the attitude that looks to the **LORD** and says, **"Lord, thank you for forgiving me even though I continue to hurt you at times and I don't deserve to be forgiven."**

*Lord, thank you for **not holding my sins against me.** And, Lord, thank you for **giving me the power to forgive others.**"*

So, let's be honest today! If we have **BITTER** feelings, let's not deny it!
Let's see why we must GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS in our lives:
(We'll look at four things today and then four next week, LORD willing!)

I. WE MUST GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS BECAUSE IT UPSETS OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE! A couple of things...

A. BITTERNESS Causes Us To WALK In The FLESH Rather Than WALK In The SPIRIT!

Every **BELIEVER** has the choice **every day, many times a day,** to **WALK** in the **FLESH** or to **WALK** in the **SPIRIT!**
Those are the only two choices.

Galatians 5:16-17—“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

We can't control what **HAPPENS** to us in this life, but we can control how we **RESPOND** and **REACT** to those things! And so, if we have **UNRESOLVED BITTERNESS** in our life, **we are NOT RIGHT WITH GOD,** and **we are NOT WALKING IN THE SPIRIT, but in the FLESH!**

Galatians 5:22-23—“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance...”

Those are the very things we hold back from when we **CHOOSE** to be **BITTER** and remain **BITTER!**

When we are in the presence of **"that person"**, we don't feel like displaying **LOVE**, so we don't!
When we think about them, we don't feel any **JOY** and we have no **PEACE** at all within!

We aren't very **LONGSUFFERING**, or we would have given them more latitude.

**GUARDING AGAINST BITTERNESS-PT 1
EPHESIANS 4:30-32; HEBREWS 12:14-15**

But, if we would just **WALK IN THE SPIRIT** and think about how much we've been **FORGIVEN BY CHRIST**, then it would make it easier for us to **FORGIVE THEM**, even if we deem that they don't **DESERVE FORGIVENESS**, because we didn't **DESERVE CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS!** (That's **MEEKNESS!**)

When we choose to **WALK IN THE SPIRIT...**
We both **CAN** and **WILL** erase them from our **HIT LIST!**

The last chapter of **GALATIANS** drives it all home:
Galatians 6:7-8—“*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.*”

BITTERNESS WILL DEVASTATE US SPIRITUALLY!
Because it interferes with our **WORSHIP** as well!

It is impossible to be **WRONG WITH MAN** and **RIGHT WITH GOD** at the same time. And understand, the person doesn't even have to be around us anymore. In fact, they may even be in the grave and we can still hold a **GRUDGE!**
When we do that **WE CAN'T BE RIGHT WITH GOD!**

BITTERNESS Causes Us To WALK In The FLESH Rather Than WALK In The SPIRIT! Another thing...

- B. BITTERNESS Halts Our SPIRITUAL GROWTH!**
Every **BELIEVER** should want to **GROW IN GRACE**, not only because we've been **COMMANDED** to, but because we **ALL** should want to **BE ALL WE CAN BE FOR GOD.**
2 Peter 3:18—“*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.*”
We should **ALL DESIRE TO REACH OUR FULLEST POTENTIAL** for **GOD!**

**GUARDING AGAINST BITTERNESS-PT 1
EPHESIANS 4:30-32; HEBREWS 12:14-15**

We should **ALL** want to use our **SPIRITUAL GIFTS** for **GOD'S GLORY!**

We should **ALL** want to **GROW IN GRACE!**

But listen, if we **HARBOR BITTERNESS** we stop the **GROWTH** process dead in its tracks! It doesn't move again until we put that **BITTERNESS** behind us!

So, are you holding on to any **BITTERNESS**? **CHRIST** wants us to **BE FREE** from **BITTERNESS**, because **BITTERNESS UPSETS OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE!**

II. WE MUST GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS BECAUSE IT UPSETS OUR PHYSICAL LIFE!

When what happens to us becomes more than just an occurrence, it can affect our **PHYSICAL HEALTH.** **BITTERNESS** can be like a constantly running machine. When we don't **FORGIVE** and our **BITTERNESS** becomes more of a **LIFESTYLE**, it can enter into our **subconscious mind**, and run while we're **sleeping, eating, watching TV, or whatever else we're doing.**

Many medical doctors agree that **BITTERNESS AFFECTS OUR BODY** and our **PHYSICAL HEALTH!** **BITTERNESS** has been medically linked to such things as *glandular problems, high blood pressure, cardiac disorders, ulcers,* and even *more!*)

Now I'm not implying for a moment that all physical sickness is caused by **BITTERNESS**, but I am saying **IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE BITTER AND STAY BITTER, AND IT NOT AFFECT YOUR BODY IN SOME WAY!**

So, for our health's sake, we need to **LET CHRIST SET US FREE FROM BITTERNESS!**

WE MUST GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS BECAUSE IT AFFECTS OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE...OUR PHYSICAL LIFE...

III. **WE MUST GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS BECAUSE IT UPSETS OUR EMOTIONAL LIFE!**

Where there is **BITTERNESS**, there can also be **ANXIETY** and extreme **DISCOURAGEMENT! BITTERNESS** that is not dealt with can also lead to **PARANOIA** and even other **EMOTIONAL** problems! We can even **DEVELOP** a **VICTIM'S MENTALITY!**

We can become **NEGATIVE, CRITICAL OF OTHERS, and even EXTREMELY JUDGMENTAL** even thinking we know **OTHERS' MOTIVES**, when we can't!

We can begin to have trouble in our **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS** because of these things. Just think for a minute. Who among us likes being around people who come across as being constantly **BITTER, NEGATIVE, CRITICAL OF OTHERS, EXTREMELY JUDGMENTAL** and **PARANOID?**

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS can lead

- to feelings of being overwhelmed, helpless, or hopeless...
- to worrying...
- to difficulty thinking or remembering and doing daily tasks...
- to sleeping too much or too little...
- to changes in appetite...
- to relying on mood-altering substances to achieve "peace"...
- to our isolating from people or activities
- to experiencing unusual anger or irritability
- to experiencing extreme fatigue

BITTERNESS UPSETS OUR EMOTIONAL LIFE!

IV. **WE MUST GUARD AGAINST BITTERNESS BECAUSE IT UPSETS OUR CHURCH LIFE!**

If you want to kill your **CHURCH**, if you want to destroy the ministries of this **CHURCH**, if you want to harm the cause of **CHRIST** in this community, then just **HARBOR BITTERNESS** for someone else who attends here!

Now understand that we're all human (including the **PASTOR**), and at times we may give each other reason to be offended. Sometimes it is unintentional, sometimes it is not!

A Dad told his Son, "*Son, I'm taking your mama to the Doctor for her Colitis.*" The son asked, "*Who did momma collide with this time?*"

Collisions will happen, even within the fellowship. We can't completely avoid that. But we can control how we **RESPOND!**

Someone may say, "*You don't know what they said or did to me!*" I don't mean to minimize your pain, or sound arrogant, but you're not the first person or the last to get hurt in **CHURCH!**

Sometimes we just need a good old-fashioned dose of "**growing up!**" We need to **grow up**, and **get over things** that have hurt us and move forward for **CHRIST!** We need to remember that **WE DON'T DESERVE GOD'S FORGIVENESS**, and even if they don't deserve ours, it's still the right thing to do— so **FORGIVE!**

I've been in ordained ministry for over 39 years now. At times I've been **lied to, lied about, criticized falsely, my motives judged (an area GOD reserves only for HIMSELF!), and my sincerity has sometimes been questioned.**

But **maturity** each time begs me to **blow it off**, because it's to be expected if you're trying to do what's right. I would have quit a long time ago if I allowed every hurt that came my way to affect me in the wrong way. There are bigger things to focus on, and we cannot allow our eyes to be diverted off of the real goal.

GOD is my defender, and **HE** will be yours too, if you'll let go, and let **GOD** take care of it! Don't take it into your own hands, put it in **HIS!** (*1 Peter 2:19-23*)

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GOD sometimes allows us to be hurt. I think **HE** allows it to test us. Will we become **BITTER**, or **BETTER**? Sometimes he allows valleys to be cut into our soul, but **HE** can use those valleys as a channel through which **HE** can transmit **HIS GRACE** to others, if we will allow the wound to heal, by leaving it in the hands of the **GREAT PHYSICIAN**, and not by taking it into our own hands.

BITTERNESS divides the **FELLOWSHIP**! *“You don’t know what happened!”* And I don’t need to know when I can feel the divide. In **CHRISTIAN LOVE** and on the **AUTHORITY OF GOD’S WORD**, people need to **FORGIVE** one another so they can move on from their **BITTERNESS** for **CHRIST’S sake**!

Conclusion

We are going to drive up a stake there and come back next week **LORD** willing, to look at the last four things that **BITTERNESS** will do.

So, how can we remove the *“root”* of **BITTERNESS**? **BITTERNESS** is a root by the way! There is only one way I know of to get rid of the **FRUITS** of **BITTERNESS** in one’s life. You have to yank **BITTERNESS** up by the *root* or dig it up and get rid of it, by the **GRACE OF GOD**!

Spray some heavenly Roundup on it! (i.e. **FORGIVENESS**—only **FORGIVENESS** can kill the *root* of **BITTERNESS**!) We cannot do it by ourselves. We need **GOD’S** help to do that!

Let the **LORD** yank the **BITTERNESS** out of your life and see how much better life can be!

If you have never been **FORGIVEN** of your own **SIN**, then you don’t really understand the **GRACE**, **MERCY**, and **FORGIVENESS** that **GOD** gives. Which means you don’t really know how to **FORGIVE**! **FORGIVENESS** is offered. It is a **FREE GIFT**! **TAKE IT**! Then you too will know how to **FORGIVE** and have the power to **FORGIVE**!