



42 | ACTS 25:1-12

FROM BITTERNESS TO BLESSING

We need to put away bitterness and live in the love and freedom of forgiveness if we are going to have a fruitful Christian life.

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WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

Introduction

Someone once wisely said, “Bitterness is like drinking poison hoping the other person will die.” What exactly is bitterness, and why is it so dangerous? It seems so innocuous, but it’s deadly.

Bitterness is anger under wraps. It's testy, irritable, rude, and critical. It's a disagreeable attitude swimming in biting, snarky comments, an attitude dripping self-righteousness and self-pity. It grows like black mold in the heart.¹

Someone else described it this way:

Bitterness is the result of not forgiving others. If you are bitter at someone, it means that you haven't truly forgiven that person. To put it another way, bitterness is the result of responding improperly (unbiblically) to an offense.²

If bitterness in your heart saint, you've got to get rid of it, or it will kill your walk with God. Bitterness and unforgiveness can hurt your Christian walk almost more than any other weapon Satan has in his arsenal. It's so deadly, bitterness can derail your faith. Most of those who have forsaken their faith, forsaken their family and who have lost their happiness altogether can trace it to the hardness of heart that comes from an offense that eats at them. I've found for those who fall away from the faith, bitterness in some form was their pathway. Bitterness is the fastest way to atheism. You can't follow a God who you don't believe is just and fair. And let me tell you, he is. Yet there are many tragedies on earth we are tempted to be bitter about.

On the early morning hours of October 4, 1980, a young nursing student was brutally murdered in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park. Following the advice of well-meaning friends, Steve Linscott, a student at Emmaus Bible College, told police about a dream he'd had the night of the crime. Oak Park police later arrested him, interpreting his dream account as the roundabout confession of a psychopathic killer. Later a jury found Linscott guilty, and he was sentenced to forty years in prison. There was just one problem—Linscott was innocent! Only after time in prison and numerous legal appeals—a process that lasted twelve years—was Linscott free and vindicated!

Those years undoubtedly brought the most difficult challenges Linscott will ever face—separated from his wife and children for three and a half years except for brief visits, wondering if he had somehow brought all this on himself and why God had allowed it to happen, surviving prison violence. Those were tough years, and yet years of growth and a growing awareness of the goodness of God.³ In Linscott's words:

I have come to realize that we cannot judge God's purposes, nor where he places us, nor why he chooses one path for our lives as opposed to another. The Bible itself is replete with accounts of divine action (or inaction) that does not seem fair, that does not make sense except when viewed in light of God's perfect plan. Thousands of Egyptian children were massacred while a baby named Moses was spared. Jacob was a liar and a thief, and yet it was he, not the favored son Esau, who received the blessing of their father Isaac and of God. On one level it makes no sense that God would allow his Son to die for the sins of humankind. But God has a plan—a perfect plan.⁴

It is an awful thing to be falsely accused. It is even more horrific to be falsely incarcerated. Many in our prison systems can relate with Paul. Slander and betrayal hurts. Yet Paul is not bitter.

¹ Lucy Ann Moll, "Bitterness: Turn It into Better-Ness!," Biblical Counseling Center, May 24, 2017, <https://biblicalcounselingcenter.org/how-to-kill-bitterness/>.

² Lou Priolo, *Bitterness: The Root That Pollutes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 2-3.

³ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 315-318.

⁴ Steven Linscott with Randall L. Frame, *Maximum Security* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 189.

When bitterness sinks in, it can be seen in your attitude, your negative spirit, sharp words, and irritability. Bitterness robs a Christian of their joy and peace and love. It leads them to a place of forsaking their faith. Paul tells us what to do with bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 | See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

“What you don't forgive, you pass on and spread to others,” a counselor wisely pointed out to a woman whose husband lived a double life for twenty-five years. Only when her husband was dying of AIDS did she realize that the man she had tried so hard to trust had deceived her and potentially could have passed the disease on to her. Now, a few years after his death, she was faced with a decision: Should she keep her anger and desire for vengeance alive, or would she give it up for her own benefit and in obedience to the Lord she had come to love?⁵ Her conclusion was that bitterness must be rigorously avoided.

Bitterness and offense can overcome a soul and make them build up high walls of resistance. Solomon says as much.

Proverbs 18:19 | An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.

Solomon says you can more easily conquer a castle than reconcile an offended brother or friend. Just as you can't remove the barred gates of a castle, you sometimes cannot peaceably enter the life of a wounded brother or sister. Scaling a stone wall is one thing; winning over a stony heart is another.⁶

Paul had been falsely accused and could have allowed himself to be bitter, but instead he was able to live in the freedom of forgiveness. He was fruitful and not barren. Are you living a life of freedom, or are you paralyzed by bitterness?

Key Thought: We need to put away bitterness and live in the love and freedom of forgiveness if we are going to have a fruitful Christian life.

Felix, Governor of Judea, was now gone. There had been an uprising in Caesarea and Nero recalled him from the position that Pontius Pilate once held. Felix was a great procrastinator, but the new provincial governor of Judea, **the great Festus**, is in office a mere three days before he journeys to Jerusalem to meet with Paul's accusers. He's far more invested at the start than Felix ever was.

1. THE PAIN OF INJUSTICE (25:1-5)

Paul had waited for two years, while Felix had just wanted bribes. This was a great injustice to Paul. Injustice and wrong against us is very difficult to deal with. It's easy to get sidetracked with bitterness and unforgiveness. Instead, we need to realize that we are going to be harassed with injustice from time to time, and we as followers of Christ have no place to hold on to bitterness. Sinners are going to sin, and often their irresponsible decisions are going to affect you. But our sovereign God is guiding even the injustices of the world for your good and his glory. We must trust God's plan, as Joseph did. When his

⁵ Erwin W. Lutzer, *When You've Been Wronged: Moving from Bitterness to Forgiveness* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007).

⁶ Lutzer, *ibid.*

brothers injured him, he did not hold it against them, but he forgave them, and trusted in the God who overrules people's plans for evil against us. God doesn't stop men from sinning, but he uses it for good. We can say to those who have hurt us what Joseph said to his brothers.

Genesis 50:20 | You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Wow, if you can do that, you will live a very happy life. I really don't believe that level of forgiveness is possible without the grace of Jesus Christ. So how can we get good at that? We need to realize that God's plans to do you good are much greater than anything man can plan for your harm. You are God's child, and even the harm that man plans will end up in your favor. God will use it to shape you into the image of Christ. Remember Christ was injured and killed, and he was innocent. "By his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). Listen, bitterness will slowly kill you, but forgiveness will heal you. Let's see this in the life of Paul.

A PLAN TO INJURE

Paul had plenty of reasons to be bitter, but instead he was fruitful and joyful even though he was in chains. Let's read about the plans of his enemies to injure him. They actually have another murder plot against him. Yet Festus was not at all like Antonius Felix. Felix was known to be a cruel, but weak man, a slick character, wanting bribes from Paul. But Festus was a noble man, who hardly waited three days into his place as procurator (the same office as Pontius Pilate) to see Paul.

Acts 25:1-3 | Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. ²And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, ³asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem— because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

The Jews have no real case against Paul, and they know it, so they want to coax Festus into getting Paul to Jerusalem so they can kill him as they had planned. Festus encouraged a trial in Jerusalem, not knowing that they wanted to murder Paul.

Consider what Paul had already endured. He had been arrested in Jerusalem though he had done nothing wrong, had spoken to an angry mob, had addressed the Sanhedrin, had been transferred to Caesarea to avoid assassination, had been tried before Felix, and now was about to appear before Festus, the new governor. He had not committed any crime, and yet he was a prisoner of the Roman Empire and on the receiving end of spurious accusations of hateful Jews.

To fully appreciate this passage, we need to catch a whiff of the cell that had been the apostle's home for two years, to feel the burden of his iron manacles, to share his heart's burden for the spiritual bankruptcy of Rome. I've stood above the cell beneath the ground where Paul would have been held before his trials. It's basically a broken cistern that was turned into a jail cell. He would have been lowered there into this holding cell before his trials.

How the apostle's soul must have longed to minister the gospel freely wherever and to whomever he wished.⁷ Instead he's "stuck" here in the jail, having to answer spurious questions curious monarch after curious monarch.

The Jewish leaders, likely a great deal of Sadducees from the Sanhedrin and their chief priests meet with Governor Festus and bring their charges against Paul. They had brought these accusations before. They said Paul was guilty of two capital crimes: desecrating the temple and inciting a riot, both of which were made up. But the real reason the Jews appeared before Festus in Caesarea was to bring Paul to Jerusalem to murder him.

How easy it would be for Paul to be given to worry or bitterness. Yet Paul had faced much worse before. Fear and bitterness are idol indicators. They are sure signs that your heart is not trusting in God. He could live in peace because he knew God was in control and had delivered him from death countless times. He may have even come back from the dead himself in Lystra when he was executed by stoning (*cf* 14:19-20). Paul's enemies wanted to murder him, but Paul was not moved. His trust was in God.

A PLAN INTERRUPTED

Festus sees through their plan and invites the delegation of the Sanhedrin to come to Caesarea where Paul's case can be tried without any danger to him.

Acts 25:4-5 | Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there [*to Jerusalem*] shortly. ⁵ "So," said he, "let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him."

Paul would be tried in Caesarea. Remember he had been transported there from Jerusalem two years earlier with the help of 470 soldiers, since 40 assassins had covenanted to kill Paul. The Sanhedrin would have to bring their charges to Paul.

What was Paul's crime? Preaching the one true God and his Son Jesus Christ. How dare he! Why, Paul must have been as villainous as William Tyndale, who actually dared to translate the Bible into English, or the ten Boom family, who dared to hide Jews rather than let the Nazis take them away to concentration camps! When men forbid what God requires, we must side with the apostles who said,

Acts 5:29 | We must obey God rather than men.

Imagine the pain Paul could have suffered. He had dodged one murder plot, and now his enemies were planning another. For Paul, there was no need for bitterness or drama. His trust was in the Lord. When trust and hope is in the Lord, peace replaces pain. We know God has a good plan that will overrule the worst our enemies can do. Let us keep our eyes on the prize of knowing Christ. Those who hurt us or falsely accuse us need the love of Christ.

Don't give into the pain of injustice. Don't go down the path of bitterness. If you do give in, bitterness will eat you away. Instead, find God's peace through forgiveness and trusting God's plan. Lou Priolo in *Keeping Your Cool* that if you don't deal with bitterness, it will paralyze you.

If you do not respond biblically to the hurt (this would involve forgiving the sin, overlooking the sin, or realizing the 'offense' was not wrong in God's eyes) —

⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, 318.

you may begin to rehearse the offense in your mind, reviewing it over and over again. The practice of continually reviewing and imputing (charging your offender with the fault or the responsibility for) the offense violates 1 Corinthians 13:5 (“love does not keep a running account of evil”). It also cultivates the seed of hurt that matures into a “root of bitterness.”⁸

Bitterness has no place in the Christian’s life. Bitterness is really the chief characteristic of a fool. The fool says in his own heart “there is no God,” and that’s how a fool lives, as a practical atheist (14:1). A fool may say with his mouth, “I love Jesus” but in his heart, he lives as if God doesn’t exist. Consider how a fool is described in Proverbs, and you’ll see that the fool of Proverbs is a proud, bitter, self-righteous person.

QUALITIES OF THE FOOL OF PROVERBS

He despises wisdom and instruction (1:7)

He hates knowledge—doesn’t listen (1:22)

He hurts his mother (7:25)

He rejects his father’s instruction (15:5)

He is right in his own eyes (12:15)

He is quick to anger (12:16)

He is deceitful (14:8)

He is arrogant and careless (14:16)

He does not respond well to discipline (17:10)

He does not understand wisdom (17:16)

He has a worldly focus (17:24)

He does not consider discussing any other viewpoint but his own (18:2)

He provokes others to anger by the things he says (18:6)

He is quarrelsome (20:3)

He is a spendthrift (21:20)

He repeats his folly and won’t change (26:11)

He trusts in his own heart (28:26)

He cannot resolve conflicts (29:9)

He gives full vent to his anger (29:11)

The fool is controlled by the pain of injustice. He blames injustice on God, not realizing that Jesus is coming again to judge the world and make all things right. There is coming a day when...

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 | The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ They will suffer the

⁸ Lou Priolo, *Keeping Your Cool* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 14.

punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

You should rest in the justice of the Lord. A bitter person is not awaiting the justice of the second coming, but furious that things haven't gone his or her way, or that justice hasn't come sooner. They are bitter because they don't want justice on God's terms and in God's perfect timing, but they've taken the place of God, and want a kind of self-centered human vengeance (*cf* Heb 12:19).

2. A PLAN FOR INJUSTICE (25:6-10)

Often people who injure or slander us do not have a lot of information. Their intent is not to gain justice, but to hurt and discourage us. What are you as a Christian supposed to do when you are slandered or maligned?

TRUST NOT IN MAN

This was a kangaroo court. How hard it is that Paul has to **endure slanders** against him when he is blameless. He refused to put his trust in any man but trusted the sovereign hand of God in all things. The words of Jeremiah must have often rang in his heart.

Jeremiah 17:6-8 | Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come.... ⁷Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. ⁸He is like a tree planted by water.

Consider Your Enemies

Paul's enemies are in God's hands. The same goes for us. No one can harm you without God's permission. If you have been harmed in a violent way, call the police. If you've been hurt or abused, you should get the authorities involved. Godly leaders will always help the victim of abuse. Paul had nothing to fear, even though he may have felt helpless. God is greater than some of the chief priests who brought slanderous accusations against Paul before the new procurator, Festus.

Acts 25:6-7 | After he [Festus] stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove.

Paul's enemies had no power and were there by God's permission. They couldn't hurt Paul, even though they wanted to kill him.

Immediately after Festus had returned to Caesarea he held his court and the case of Paul was taken up. Luke does not go into details about the charges brought against Paul. They were doubtless similar to those already made by Tertullus, but it is probable that the Jews did their best to increase and strengthen them. Yet Luke comments that they could

not prove them. Since the case was now two years old, it would have been difficult in any case to secure eyewitnesses to specific accusations.⁹

Dear saints, often when wrong is done to us God is in control. It might be an unbeliever that slanders us. It could be an immature Christian. It can also be a fully mature Christian who has lost sight of the Lord. Remember Peter himself, who had spent three years with our Lord, betrayed him and denied him three times at his hour of need. Never trust in man. Trust in the Lord!

Our ultimate enemy is a defeated foe. The Bible says that God “disarmed the rulers and authorities” of hell and darkness “and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” in Christ (Col 2:15). Consider that the plan of the enemy is already defeated. There is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Consider Yourself

When injustice comes, you need to consider yourself. You are a sinner. You have lied and perhaps slandered others. Paul was not too proud to admit that he was once a persecutor of Christians, so he should not be too hurt or too proud as he hears these slanders. This is what he himself did before the Lord saved him. Before you judge others, consider yourself. Paul said:

1 Timothy 1:15 | The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Paul says, “I am the chief of sinners.” You have hurt others. Show mercy to your slanderers. Be good and kind to them. That doesn’t mean you don’t hold them accountable, but there is no need for hatred, demonization, and bitterness. Each person is made in the image of God, and our Lord taught us to treat even our enemies with utmost kindness (Lk 6:27-36). God showed kindness to you when you hated him. Can you love your enemies as God has loved you?

Consider Christ’s Example

It was a kangaroo court that crucified our Lord. He entrusted himself completely to the Father (1 Pet 2:23). He cried out to all:

Luke 23:34 | Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

If Jesus was treated unjustly by all around him, so will you. Even his own disciples forsook him. Yet God is in perfect control, and you can forgive like Jesus.

Follow Christ’s Example

Paul’s mission and yours is the same as it’s always been. It’s not personal comfort or earthly security. It’s not to guard our reputation or live our best life now. Your mission is to preach the gospel and bring people to Christ from every nation (Mt 28:18-20). Your mission is not to build your kingdom, but Christ’s. Don’t get sidetracked. Get on that cross. You can only follow Christ from the view of the cross. Remember his words.

Matthew 16:24 | If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

⁹ Marshall, *Acts*, 403–404.

Be willing to be maligned. In fact, rejoice when you are maligned and slandered. This is the way Christ was treated as well as all the faithful prophets.

Walk in Your Integrity

Paul was not brought down by false charges and slander, but he walked with a pure heart in the presence of God. With David, he could say:

Psalm 26:11-12 | As for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. ¹² My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the Lord.

TELL THE TRUTH

In times of injustice, you never have to hide anything if you walk in your integrity. That's what Paul did. He always told the truth. He had nothing to hide.

Acts 25:8 | Paul argued in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense."

I love how brief Paul is. He's been asked about this over and over. No trustworthy evidence has been produced. He's done nothing at the temple to desecrate the faith that he loves, and now since he's appealed to Caesar, he makes it clear, he's done nothing against the Emperor Nero. All he can do is tell the truth and leave the results up to the Lord.

TRUST IN THE LORD

We can see from Paul's attitude that he's not moved by the Jews accusations. Festus then plays in the Jews hands and tries to get Paul to go to Jerusalem, but Paul stands his ground and trusts in the Lord.

Acts 25:9-10 | But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" ¹⁰ But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well."

Men will fail you, but the Lord will never fail. Paul knew that he could trust God's plan for him. God manifested himself in love through his Son. Even in your pain, God's love for you is something you can trust! I think of the words of David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa speaks of the deep love of God toward the most wretched sinners.

What is the atonement of Christ? It is himself: it is the inherent and everlasting mercy of God made apparent to human eyes and ears. The everlasting love was disclosed by our Lord's life and death. It showed that God forgives, because he loves to forgive. He works by smiles, if possible, if not by frowns; pain is only a means of enforcing love.¹⁰

Dare to trust in the most benevolent being in the universe. As God has forgiven you, you can forgive. God is holy, but he's also good. He's terrifying in his justice, but he's

¹⁰ David Livingstone in Horace Waller. *The Last Journals of David Livingstone, in Central Africa* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1875), 453.

welcoming in his mercy. Releasing yourself to his care is the beginning of wisdom. Forgiving those who hurt you is the wisest action you can take.

3. THE PROVIDENCE OF INJUSTICE (25:11-12)

Remember the most sinful act in the history of the world (the crucifixion of the Son of God), was guided by the providence of God. God is also guiding your life, and you can trust his providence to bring about what he wants. This guidance over all your suffering and injustices that you experience is called the providence of God.

Providence is the benevolent and purposeful ordering of all events of history. Nothing happens by chance. Though not always perceptible to human understanding, there is a divine or cosmic plan to the universe, a reason for everything.¹¹

There is no room for bitterness when you give yourself to the one who promises to “make all things beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:11) and who “works all things together for good” for those who love him (Rom 8:28).

Paul understood God’s providence. Many prophets had told Paul that he must testify in Rome, and the Lord himself had said the same to Paul in visions given to the apostle (*cf* 23:11). So Paul’s eyes are on God’s mission, not his own. He’s not looking for freedom. He’s looking to go where the Lord wants him to go, and that is Rome.

Paul appeals to Caesar, but he knows there’s no real justice there. He calls the government of Rome, “the beast.” There’s no real justice in Rome, but there are plenty of ministry opportunities. So Paul makes his plea to go to Rome and appear before Caesar’s courts in the city of Rome.

Acts 25:11-12 | “If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

The truth is human government maintains a lot of injustice. Only temporary and hugely imperfect justice can be maintained on earth. There is so much corruption. Only at the second coming with the playing field be leveled. Paul did not trust human government, but he trusted God who controls human government.

Daniel 2:21 | He removes kings and sets up kings.

Romans 13:1 | Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God.

BE FREE FROM FEAR

When we trust in God’s providence, we can be free from fear. Paul was clearly not afraid to die.

¹¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 832.

Acts 25:11a | “If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death.”

Paul was very wise. He was not reckless. But he was also not afraid of death. Even if death comes, we know that it is by the sovereign hand of God. The child of God longs to see Jesus face to face. Every tear wiped away. No more pain. No more sin. Death, who is our greatest enemy, is already defeated!

BE FULL OF FAITH

Paul wasn't bitter for all the wrongs done to him. He's willing to allow the wrongs of man to carry him to Rome where he could preach the gospel. He's full of hope and faith.

Bitterness can only harm you. It's like a rattlesnake. If a rattlesnake is cornered, it will sometimes become so angry it will bite itself. That is exactly what the harboring of hate and resentment against others is—a biting of oneself. We think that we are harming others in holding grudges and playing the hurts over and over, but the deeper harm is to ourselves. God wants us to be rid of bitterness and filled with faith and hope!

When we trust in God's providence, we can be free from bitterness—that's what Paul did. Knowing that God has a much larger plan beyond the hurts and betrayals in our lives allows us to live in the love and peace of Jesus.

Paul is focused on something more important than his own personal injustices. He knows God's plans are much bigger than the hurts and betrayals he's enduring. He loves the souls of men and wants to preach the gospel at Rome. So makes a surprising appeal. He asks that his trial be moved to Rome under the authority of the Caesar, who is Nero at the time.

Acts 25:11a-12 | “But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”¹² Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, “To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.”

Appealing to Caesar is Paul's ticket to Rome. No more waiting around in Caesarea. He's been there for over two years. He's ready to make his way to preach the gospel not to the citizens of Rome, but to the soldiers of Rome and to Caesar's household. By the way, Paul has an incredibly successful ministry there. He evangelizes Caesar's household and writes seven more books of our New Testament.

Did you notice Paul's defense earlier? It's extremely brief. He's not bitter. Bitter people can go on and on and on about their hurt. They are so focused on it. But Paul is not focused on bitterness. Paul is not worried about his own personal hurts, because he's given them to Christ. He doesn't carry around injuries from how people have hurt him. He's too busy praying for souls to be concerned for his own reputation or comfort.

Applications

Paul was dismissed, at least temporarily, from the jurisdiction of Festus. Though Festus would subject Paul to one more hearing before a neighboring king, Agrippa, he delivered Paul to the hands of Caesar, and Paul had to wait again for his case to be decided.¹² This didn't move Paul. His eyes were on the Lord.

¹² Sproul, *Acts*, 396.

Consider these applications: (1) have the right focus, (2) exercise plentiful forgiveness, (3) practice unrelenting kindness, and (4) get busy and blessed serving God.

Have the right focus. Paul's focus was on the Lord, not his enemies. Paul knew his enemies weren't the Jews. They were slaves of Satan. He wanted them released from that satanic slavery. He knew that his battle wasn't against flesh and blood, but against Satanic forces from the unseen realm (Eph 6:12-13). His focus was on the Lord, since "the battle is the Lord's" Paul wanted his enemies to come to know the joy and peace in Christ. His focus was not on his small hurt on this earth, but on his persecutors' eternal salvation. He said, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom 10:1). Paul was once a persecutor of Christians. Paul's focus was on the gospel and the glory of God. He wanted to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Exercise plentiful forgiveness. The way to get rid of bitterness, anger, and hatred is to forgive as the Lord forgives. You have to cover that slander or that injustice with the blood of Jesus. If you are in danger, call the police. If someone is hurting you, run! Get out of there. But you should still pray for the repentance of your enemies. Pray for them to be converted, or if they are a child of God, pray for them to live a surrendered, Spirit-filled life.

Practice unrelenting kindness. Another way to get rid of bitterness is to be kind to the person who hurt you. Do good to them. Pray for them. Until there is real repentance you may not be able to reconcile. That may not happen until heaven. But you can do good to them. You can pray for them. You can hope the best for them. Be bigger than the offense. "Don't be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

Get busy and blessed in serving God. GOD'S PLAN WILL PREVAIL. Stop sulking and get busy serving the Lord. Trust God's hand in all your suffering and injustice. Get out of the casket of self-focus that is bent inward and enjoy the power of the resurrection. Start praising the Lord in all things. Start evangelizing. Invest your life in the Lord's church with discipleship and worship and service. When you are so busy and blessed, you'll forget to be bitter!

Conclusion

Let me close by telling you the tragic story of a young man named Bruce Goodrich. He was being initiated into the cadet corps at Texas A & M University. One night, Bruce was forced to run until he dropped—but he never got up. His initiation led to his death. Bruce Goodrich died before he even entered college. A short time after the tragedy, Bruce's father wrote this letter to the administration, faculty, student body, and the corps of cadets to explain the peace he had from God's plan and providence. He was not bitter at all, but trusted in the sovereign God in the death of his son.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of my family for the great outpouring of concern and sympathy from Texas A & M University and the college community over the loss of our son Bruce. We were deeply touched by the tribute paid to him in the battalion. We were particularly pleased to note that his Christian witness did not go unnoticed during his brief time on campus.

Mr. Goodrich went on:

I hope it will be some comfort to know that we harbor no ill will in the matter. We know our God makes no mistakes. Bruce had an appointment with his Lord and is now secure in his celestial home. When the question is asked, "Why did this

happen?” perhaps one answer will be, “So that many will consider where they will spend eternity.”¹³

Every evil thing that went against our Lord ended up being used for our redemption. We are the extension of Jesus on this earth, his very body. Let us not be bitter about the injustices we face. Let us endure and use them for the expansion of his kingdom.

Remember Christ’s death, the greatest of all injustices. And remember that after death for the Christian there is always a resurrection. You may have to die to yourself and your plans and your dreams, but God has something more for you. Don’t run away from the cross! Run to it. Don’t try to avoid it. When you avoid the suffering and the cross that God has called you to, you miss the power of the resurrection and the next step in your life. Don’t let bitterness kill you. Submit to the plan of God in your life and look for his resurrection power.

¹³ Michael Youssef, *God, Just Tell Me What to Do* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2014), 105-106.