

The Merciful Life, Part 6 | withhold bitterness

I. The Definition of Bitterness

- When referring to people Merriam-Webster defines bitter as “marked by intensity or severity” in pain, determination, animosity, reproach, cynicism, and rancor.
- Most of us imagine a bitter person being resentful and having animosity toward someone. However, the biblical understanding of this word is *not* deep-seated animosity. It’s not resentment.
- The word translated bitterness in Ephesians 4:31 is referring simply to evil and wickedness. But it’s important for us to acknowledge that the Bible does not reserve the words “evil” and “wickedness” only for Satan and Hitler and Stalin. These words refer to *everything* that is the opposite of righteousness. It refers to the foundational root of *all* our sin.

II. The Nature of Bitterness

- **Bitterness is internal.**
 - Ephesians 4:31 simply reveals that bitterness exists and needs to be put away.
 - Romans 3:10-14 explains bitterness in a little more detail and connects it to the unrighteousness that damns people to hell. Matthew 12:34
 - Acts 8 further illustrates how bitter thinking delude people.
 - Bitterness is a state of mind.
- **Bitterness is the consequence of believing a lie.**
 - Bitterness is evil thinking. It’s a wicked worldview. It’s believing and thinking about and meditating on things that are biblically untrue.
- **Bitterness is the mother of every form of sinful anger.** Matthew 7:15-20; James 3:8-12
 - If we start with bitter thinking, we can only bear bitter fruit. If you’re doing a math problem, but you start with the wrong numbers, you’ll never be able to get the right answer.
 - If you’re thinking sinfully, it will always be easy to lash out in emotional wrath. This will make it easy to dwell on that bitter thinking and allow it to stew and steam in anger. And that will eventually break out in clamor, slander, and malice. Angry actions always grow from an angry *heart*.

III. The Cure for Bitterness

- **You need to recognize that your merciless responses are the result of your believing a lie.**
 - The hardest part of overcoming bitterness is the fact that this beginning stage of anger is often difficult to see because it’s all inside. It’s the way we think, and it doesn’t always look “angry.” In fact, it often isn’t necessarily angry at all. It’s just wicked. It’s godless. It’s a delusion and a lie.
 - We do what we do because we *believe* what we *believe*. Bitterness is simply the state of not believing what we should believe. It’s the state of believing a lie. Therefore, to stop being bitter requires that we think *correctly*. We need to believe right.
- **You need to know God’s Word.**
 - This has to happen *before* we’re bitter. It has to happen *when* we’re bitter. It has to happen *after* we’re bitter. And, please know this, you *are* already bitter.
 - We don’t perfectly know, understand, and believe all truth and no lies.
 - If we’re not thinking correctly in *any* area of our lives, then we’re bitter in that area. If we’re believing any of the lies I mentioned before or any of the nearly infinite number of lies there are to believe, we’re bitter.

- **You need to understand God's Word.**
 - There are not many ways to understand God's Word. There will often be different applications of truth, but there's only one way to understand it.
 - We need to make it our deepest goal not just to know what the Bible says, but also to understand it as well as we possibly can.
- **You need to believe God's Word.**
 - To believe something is to live it. You don't believe anything that isn't viewable in your life.
 - If you know, understand, and believe God's truth, you will be thinking biblically.
 - But if you don't know, understand, and/or believe God's Word, your thinking is bitter, and you're sinning and will continue to sin.
- **You need to accept biblical reproof.** Hebrews 12:5-11; Genesis 4
 - Reproof is when someone takes God's Word and shows us that we're sinning.
 - God wants to rectify our bitter thinking by helping us to see how we should respond to reproof. It's a *good* thing designed for our benefit! It's for our maturity and conformity to Christ's likeness. Sure, it may be painful, but it's *good*.
 - When we're reproofed from God's Word . . .
 - We need to Confess our bitter thinking and choices.
 - We need to apologize. This involves asking the people against whom we've sinned to forgive us.
 - We need to repent. We need to change our mind. We have to stop believing the lies that lead to the sinful actions, and we need to know, understand, and believe the truth.
- **You need to continue studying and submitting to the Scriptures.** Hebrews 12:12-17
 - When we discover that our thinking has been bitter, we need to recognize the failure for what it was and redouble our efforts not to believe that lie ever again.
 - **Embrace God's grace.**
 - You need to rest on God's Word and look for the Spirit's empowerment.
 - It's God's grace that enables us to be positionally righteous in Christ *and* live righteously in this life.
 - **Strive for peace and holiness with everyone.**
 - A life that embraces God's grace and strives for peace and holiness with everyone is a merciful life.
 - If you're believing the truth about God, yourself, the situation, and the other person, you will want to be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving.
 - Kindness is the opposite of bitterness. It has the idea of being useful, good, and virtuous. Matthew 11:30; Luke 5:39, 6:35-36; Romans 2:4; I Peter 2:3; I Corinthians 15:33
 - God is not socially acceptable. He's often sinlessly wrathful. He gives consequences for sin. But He never ceases to be good and kind and loving.
 - So, too, we must recognize that to be kind is to think and act in line with God's goodness. It's to love the person in such a way that our relationship is biblically useful to them. It will involve us fleshing out the one-anothers in our relationship. That will include living peaceably, but it also includes the necessary reproof and rebuke.
 - And a truly kind person — from the inside out — is going to be tender-hearted. This is another word for compassionate. It's another way to understand mercy.