



## BITTERNESS: A DARK AND EVIL VENOM

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### AN EVIL VENOM

Bitterness is a venom that serves to destroy people and relationships. The writer of Hebrews knew the significance of this issue in corrupting the beauty of communion among believers, therefore he urges Christians to “strive for peace and holiness” and not allow a “root of bitterness” to spring forth and “cause trouble” (Hebrews 12:14-15). Paul echoes these instructions in Ephesians 4:31 when he writes, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with malice”. Proverbs 14:10 warns, “The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy”.

### JESUS: THE EMPOWERING EXAMPLE

A profoundly significant component in overcoming bitterness against others is to consider the character and nature of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:21-25 says, “*For to this [suffering for doing good] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*”.

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### BITTERNESS REVEALS A LACK OF TRUST

A heart bent on being bitter is a heart that does not trust in God. For Jesus, the alternative to being “reviled” and “suffering” unjustly was “entrusting himself to him who judges justly”. Jesus, the sinless Lamb, did not retaliate (and he had every right to do so as God in the flesh) against those who hurt him because He believed the Father would judge them justly. He was the living example of Paul’s words in Romans 12:19, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.” Bitterness reflects an attitude of revenge against others, a form or retaliation. Sometimes, it is acted upon via cruel behavior against offenders, while at other times it rages behind a thin veil of superficiality. Either way, it is evil, and must be confronted directly. As such, you must strive to follow the Example cited by Peter. The Example as witnessed in the person of the living Christ. If He, who committed no sin, refused bitterness a place in his heart in response to the evil of others, certainly those among the sinful (that would include all humanity, Romans 3:23) are accountable to do the same regardless of the offense.

### TRUSTING A WORTHY GOD

If you are to be consistent in resisting the temptation towards bitterness, you must grow in your ability to trust the



goodness and just nature of God. Jesus entrusted himself to the Father, and resisted a heart of bitterness and revenge even to the point of death on the cross. To the very end, his trust in the Father endured, and even under the most unbearable circumstances, he prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Of all people who have ever lived, Jesus had reason to be bitter. He was completely innocent of wrong, yet he endured the unjust cruelty of others. He did so because he understood the overarching will of God for his life. For Jesus, his suffering at the hands of others had purpose. It pointed to a much greater good (the salvation of his Church).

Though it may be difficult to do, you are wise to recognize the greater purposes of God in the midst of your own offenses. It is always during the most trying of circumstances that the fires of God will purify you most. Ultimately, God is working to transform and mold you into the perfect likeness of his son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-29). The Bible says that he created the "new self" to be like God in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).<sup>1</sup> While this may at first seem like a bizarre reality, it is reality nonetheless. And it is a blessed reality at that. If you are further equipped to respond to the evils of life as did Jesus, your entire being will be impacted. Your tendencies towards anger, anxiety, hopelessness, and futility will all give way to a steadfast faith that will bring forth in you the fruit of love, joy, peace, and kindness. It is your job to study and learn of his higher purposes. As you do this, you will become equipped to squelch any possibility of bitterness taking

root in your heart, and defiling you and those around you!

#### BITTERNESS QUICK LIST:

1. Discuss your hurts and offenses with your pastor or counselor.
2. Assess the potential for bitterness in your heart. Do you think negatively about those who have hurt you? Do you gossip about them? Are you able to pray for God to bless them?
3. **Read and journal on 1 Peter 2-3:** Answer the following questions,
  - What is the example left by Jesus when hurt by others?
  - What are the most difficult hurdles of following in Christ's steps?
  - Read James 4:1-2, how does idolatry play into holding on to bitterness?
  - In what do you tend to put your trust when hurt by others (i.e., getting even, justice, feeling better, etc.)?
  - How is this not trusting in God?
  - How can you grow in your trust in God's perfect justice?

For more books and resources, go to:

[www.christiancounseling.com](http://www.christiancounseling.com)

*Resources located on "Ask ABC" are intended for general use. It is highly recommended to seek the counsel of a pastor or biblical counselor when addressing personal and marital problems. All ABC resources are intended for personal reflection and mediation, but should not necessarily be used as a replacement for counseling.*



#### PRAYER FOR BITTERNESS

*Dear Father, thank you for the eternal example You have provided in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to emulate His holiness by trusting you completely when others seek to harm me. Equip me this week with the humility to trust you when offended by others. Remove the temptations of revenge, self-imposed justice, sinful anger, and pride. Bring to my mind the perseverance of Jesus to trust You when battered by the sins and evil of others. Protect us from the lures of Satan who dares to convince us to take matters into our own hands. Help us to pray the divine prayer uttered by the lips of our Savior when He was in agony, "Father forgive them". May we not find rest in our souls until love for our offenders reigns supreme over all other competing emotions. To you be all glory and honor. Amen.*