

## Family Issues #3 – Bitterness in the Home (Eph 4:29-32)

**Introduction** – Bitterness is probably one of the trickiest sins to see in yourself. While other sins I have committed may come to mind as I seek to be right before God, bitterness causes me to dwell on other people's sins (real or imagined) rather than my own. Bitterness is particularly sticky in the area of marriage and family life. In the midst of these intimate and long-term relationships, there runs the risk of bitterness taking root and producing a fruit that defiles many (Heb 12:14-15).

**Poisonous Speech** (v29) – Here is the measure of what should come out of your mouth. Your words should edify and impart grace. Always. If you find yourself trying to justify your corrupt speech because of what 'he did', or 'she said', or the way he looked when he said it, you are bitter.

**Grieving God** (v30) – What you say, how you act, whether you obey or not – these things affect God's relationship towards you. It is possible to grieve Him. His Spirit is with you always, when you are speaking to your spouse, your children, your parents, or your siblings.

**Put It All Away** (v31) – Bitterness grows out of a sense of being wronged by someone else. It is self-deceiving from the start. You may think you are angry because of some gross sin of another. But bitterness does not depend on how great the sin is. Bitterness depends on how close the other person is to you. This is why it often is manifest in families.

**Root of Bitterness** (Heb 12:14-15) – It is like a root because it cannot remain hidden forever. If you try to suppress your bitterness, it will always find a place to sprout – and defile many. If you 'let it all out' it will sprout and defile many. It must be put away or there will soon be *wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice* as well.

**Confess Your Sin** (1 John 1:9) – The only way to get rid of bitterness is to confess it as sin before the Lord. This must be done without regard to anyone else's sin. Only when your eyes are firmly on your own sin will you be able to be free from bitterness.

**Instead of Bitterness** (v32) – This is what makes us stand out as Christian families, and as the body of Christ – our desire and ability to forgive, to be tenderhearted, to be kind, in short, to imitate our Savior (also Col 3:13). You can forgive one another, and you must. Consider what Christ teaches us in the Lord's prayer (Matt 6:12). I have no assurance of my own salvation if I tenaciously refuse to grant forgiveness to others.

**Bitterness Towards God** – Ultimately, bitterness about any situation is bitterness towards our sovereign God. Hard providences move us to cry out to the Lord.

**Godly Bitterness of Soul** (1 Sam 1:10, 2 Cor 12:7-10) – Hannah had a 'bitterness of soul' before the Lord, and Paul was given a 'thorn in the flesh.' In both cases, they were driven to the Lord. When it is a pursuit in faith, the results are healing, comfort, joy of our salvation, and sufficient grace for any trial.

**Bitterness That Accuses God** (Ex 15:23-26) – But there is another way that a hard providence drives us to the Lord with a different kind of bitterness. This bitterness produces murmuring and complaining against God and against his servants. This bitterness drives people away from God into the wilderness (Psalm 95:8-11).

### Applications – Spiritual Defenses from Bitterness in the Home

**Identifying THE Sin** – Are you bitter? Can you remember the details of another's sin – for weeks and years? Are you prepared to forgive *only* after he says that he is sorry and really means it? Do you know how many times he did that this last week, or since you have known him?

**Confession of THE Sin** – Time does not remove bitterness. Someone else's confession does not remove bitterness. Confession of your own sin of bitterness and repentance by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to be cleansed of this poison. As Amy Carmichael said, "*For a cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, however suddenly jolted*". The bumps will come. What will spill out of you onto the rest of your family?

**Protection from THE Sin** – It is the grace of God that protects us from this carnal way of life manifested through -

**Confession** – Your household must regularly be fumigated of unconfessed sin, so that it would smell of mercy and forgiveness again (Matt 5:7, James 2:13). As you come to the altar with your family, you must be clean and at peace before one another first (Matt 5:23-24).

**Contentment** – Envy produces bitterness (James 3:14) and enslaves you no matter what. Contentment is the gift of God in all circumstances and is to be cultivated by faith (Phil 4:11-13).

**Thanksgiving** – "...*giving thanks always for all things to God...*" (Eph 5:20). Checking the Greek carefully, we find this verse means, "*giving thanks always for all things to God*". Thankfulness for everything that comes to you is the measure of your 'reformed' beliefs, and more importantly, your trust in God's character.