



“Beating Bitterness” (Hebrews 12:14-29)

Danny Hodges – NT3550

Read the passage, then go back to v.15. Today I’d like to deal with this one issue – bitterness. Next week we’ll deal with vv.16-17, and I call that subject simply “fighting the flesh.”

Go back and read vv.12-13. There are two issues here. One is feeling like quitting (every runner knows what it is like to feel like quitting), and the second is becoming “unfit” to compete.

“strengthen” = 461. anorthoo, an-orth-o'-o; from G303 and a der. of the base of G3717; to straighten up:--lift (set) up, make straight.

The idea of a “straight path” means to remove any obstacle that might trip you up or hinder your progress. One of the most common “disablers” in the race involves relationships with other people. Even Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement that they parted ways, and we never hear of Barnabas again in the NT. See Rom.12:18; Acts 24:16.

Bitterness: extreme ill will, grudge, hatred.

Bitterness affects not only me, but others as well (defile many). We’ll see how that works in a few minutes.

CASUES OF BITTERNESS

1. A wrong done to you

- Note: It is not a matter of “if” a wrong will ever be done to you, but only a matter of when, by whom, and in what way.
- These saints were being persecuted under Nero!
- The Bible is filled with examples of people who were wronged in some way or another; Abraham’s servants quarreled with his nephew Lot’s servants over provision for each of their master’s livestock (Gen.13); Esau, though he was wrong in giving in to his physical appetite and thereby forfeiting his inheritance, was nonetheless deceived, not only by his brother, but his own mother. And they deceived Isaac as well! (See Gen.27:1-34, 41.) One of the most godly men in the bible came close to letting bitterness cause him to lash out in vengeance. You find

the story in I Samuel 25 (summarize the story). The great irony of this story is that it takes place in between the events of chapters 24 and 26 (see I Sam.24:1-8; 26:1-11a); Joseph was wronged by his brothers, and repeatedly as a slave in Egypt; Jephthah, who was a bastard son, when his younger brothers had grown up, kicked him out of the family; The apostle Paul endured a lifetime of abuse. Euodia and Syntyche (Phil.4:2); The apostles regularly argued over who of them Jesus considered the greatest, even on the night Jesus was betrayed by Judas; James and John requested to sit on Jesus right and left when he came into his kingdom, and the other apostles were “indignant” (angry or annoyed at the apparent unfairness or unreasonableness of something). And then there’s Jesus!

2. The perception/assumption of a wrong

- When the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, the tribes on the east side of the Jordan river built an “imposing” altar that the other tribes presumed was an act of idolatry. They got so ticked they joined forces with intentions of killing their own brothers. Thank God they let them explain themselves before taking action, and after hearing the truth (that they actually intended the altar to help future generations know that they served the same God, even though they were separated from their brother by the Jordan).
- Acts 21:29

3. A wrong done to someone you love

- See II Samuel 13:1-5ff (summarize), 21-22, 23-24ff (summarize), 38-39. David fails to deal with this situation properly, and Absalom begins to get an attitude toward his father. Note: Though David failed, Absalom is still responsible for his attitude. David eventually sends for Absalom to come home, but once again fails as a father (II Sam.14:23-24, 28). David finally has Absalom brought before him, and he kisses him (v.33), but it appears David still has not forgiven his son (for sins that David himself had also committed, and yet God forgave him). And as you read the rest of the story, it is obvious that Absalom’s bitterness toward his father has gone deep and taken root. He spends four years building a conspiracy against his own father, and it ultimately led to his untimely death. And let’s not forget what started this whole bitterness snowball to rolling. It all began when someone he loved was wronged.

4. Envy/jealousy

- I Samuel 18:6-9
- Other examples: Korah’s rebellion; Matt.27: 18 For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

5. Issues with God

- Jonah; Asaph (Psalm 73); Jeremiah 12:1

GUARDING AGAINST BITTERNESS

1. Don't let bitterness take root
 - Can become a stronghold Damian Kyle did a message years ago in which he made a comment I'll never forget: "Bitterness has the shelf life of a Twinkie."
 - I became embittered against one of my closest friends years ago...
2. Don't hang out with bitter people
 - Prov.22: 24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, 25 or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.
3. Take regular daily doses of "the Word" (Hebrews 4:12-13)
 - Verses like Luke 6:32-36
4. Don't miss the grace of God
 - Realize how blessed we are; Note the contrast between vv.18-21 and 22-27! Abel's blood cried for vengeance, while Christ's blood calls out for mercy. What we have received is not at all what we deserved. Jesus - Forgive others as I have forgiven you.
 - Let the "awe" of God encourage you to treat others the way the Lord treats us (vv.28-29).
 - Matthew 18:21-35; Acts 6:15; 7:54-60

THE CURE FOR BITTERNESS

1. Confession (James 3:14; I John 1:9)
2. Humility
 - See James 3:13-18; 1:21; Ultimately pride is at the root of all bitter attitudes; I Sam.15:17; 10:20-22.
 - Give up your "rights."
3. Pray for the person you are bitter against (Luke 6:28)
 - My attitude against my step-dad, I began to pray for him.
4. Bless the person you have an attitude against (Luke 6: 27-28; Rom.12:20-21).

CONCLUSION

- “To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and realize the prisoner was you.”
- Note: If all of a sudden this week someone starts doing nice things for you, you will probably suspect they have had an attitude toward you!