

It Is Written

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Bitterness

By Heath Rogers

The English word "bitterness" means "extreme enmity; sharpness; severity of temper; biting sarcasm; painful affliction; deep distress of mind."

In the New Testament, the word "bitterness" is translated from the Greek word *pikria*. This term denotes the spirit of a man who harbors resentment about the past. Instead of reconciling differences and restoring relationships, he prefers to nurse the grudge.

There is an obvious problem with harboring resentment and nursing grudges: they will never go away. In fact, they will actually become stronger and more destructive; eventually poisoning or consuming the bearer's heart (Acts 8:23). Not content with conquering one heart, bitterness will eventually spread to others.

The Bible warns against developing a root of bitterness: "looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15; see also Deut. 29:18). Notice that a root of bitterness will spring up and cause many to be defiled. Harbored resentment and nursed wounds will not remain under the surface. Like a weed, they will eventually spring forth and spread.

We have been growing a garden for three years now. The problem with developing a new garden spot is ridding the soil of weeds. Every year we till the ground and plant the seeds. The freshly planted garden looks so clean, but beneath the surface are the root systems of the grass that used to be a part of the lawn. Soon the plants sprout, but so do the weeds. When weeds pop up, we can break them off at the surface, but they are not really gone. To truly get rid of the weeds, we have to pull them up by the roots. If we fail to do so, the weeds will take over the garden. Each year we eventually reach a point at which we give up on pulling the weeds and determine to do better next year.

Try to picture the soil of our heart containing a root system of bitterness. We may keep it looking nice on the surface (what we allow others to see in us) but we are fooling ourselves if we think it is harmless to harbor resentment and nurse grudges. Bitterness is a poison in our heart that eventually contaminates our entire life. Like weeds, bitterness attempts to spread itself to others.

Like other sinful attitudes, a feeling of bitterness (distress and resentment, despair and hopelessness) can spread to others. A person who has a sour attitude about the government, economy, local sports team, local church, etc., can easily find an audience and infect others with his negativity.

However, the destructive nature of bitterness is not only that the negative feelings are spread to others, but the harbored resentment and nursed grudges eventually lash out at others. The English word "bitter" comes from an Old English word that literally meant "to bite." This is a good description of the effect of bitterness, which often lashes out at others with "biting" words (Ps. 64:3; Rom. 3:14).

Let's keep bitterness out of our heart.

The Devices of Satan

By Jim McDonald

"That no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

In verses 6-11 of this chapter Paul admonished the Corinthian Christians to forgive the offending brother who was present with them. He feared that should they not do that and thereby confirm their love toward

him, he might be swallowed up by his overmuch sorrow. He urges that such forgiveness be manifested and offered the brother that Satan might not gain an advantage over him.

In this passage is mentioned the "devices" of Satan. Vine defines device as "denotes thought, that which is thought out... hence a purpose, device" (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 307). A synonym for "device" would be "scheme." While both "device" and "scheme" may be used in a proper and good sense, it is more often the words convey an idea of evil purposes. Certainly in the passage from 2 Corinthians the word describes a bad sense. Peter said it well: "Be sober, be watchful, your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Foolish is the man who discounts the devices of Satan. Satan is pictured in Revelation as a great red dragon who lashes and thrashes about, and is so fearsome that with a might swoop of his tail he catches a third of the stars of the heavens and casts them to the earth (Rev. 12:3f). He has a great arsenal of weapons at his command and we should respect him in the sense that we recognize the danger of his potential injury to bring a flood of wickedness upon our world as well as to bring injury on us, personally. Consider some of his devices:

Deception. Satan is a master of deception. Little wonder in this because Jesus identified him as a liar and father thereof (John 8:44). He used deception when he approached Eve in the very beginning of man's existence on this earth. Although God had warned Adam that the first couple were not to eat of the tree which stood in the midst of the garden, clearly stating that in the day they did so, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17), Satan brazenly disputed God's word. He approached Eve saying, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). When Eve responded that God had indeed forbidden them to eat of the tree in the garden's midst (thus showing she did understand God's instructions); Satan responded, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4b-5). Eve believed Satan's lie; she was deluded, deceived, beguiled (1 Tim. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3). He focused her attention on the fruit: it was good to eat, lovely to look at, and it was to be desired because it would make her wise as God. Satan, by thus directing her attention to these "desirable" items, tempted her through the three avenues he uses in bringing about man's fall into sin: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vain glory of life (1 John 2:15-16).

Snares. Snares are traps set to entangle a victim. Snares take various forms, and there is usually a "bait" to entice the would-be captive. Paul urged the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God that they might be able to stand against the wiles (snares) of the devil (Eph. 6:11). In a list of qualifications for prospective elders, Paul commanded that one who was a novice was not to be considered lest he be "puffed up and he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (2 Tim. 3:6). In 2 Timothy, he warns against pride so that men might repent and recover themselves out of the devil's snare (2 Tim. 2:25f).

Sickness, disease, and misfortune. When Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath, a woman came in who had for 18 years been bowed together so that she could not lift herself up (Luke 13:10-11). Jesus' opponents watched to see whether Jesus would heal the woman so that they might have something to condemn Him for, but in His answer to them, He put them to shame. He reminded them they would lose their ox or ass from a stall on the Sabbath Day that they might feed and water the animal, then He concluded, "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years be unloosed from her bond on the day of the Sabbath?" (Luke 13:16). Sickness, disease, and calamities are devices Satan uses to make us despair and curse God (as he attempted to do in the case of Job).

Doubt. Paul warned that we need the armor of God so we might be shielded from the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph. 6:6). Satan is an expert in creating doubt and when we doubt God we are liable to fall. Guard against doubting by calling to mind all the evidences of both God's existence and His care for us.

The Corinthians needed to forgive the erring brother who sought their forgiveness. If they did not, they would give Satan an advantage to further entangle this brother so recently recovered from immorality. Put on the whole armor of God that we might be able to withstand the guiles and snare of our adversary.