

BITTERNESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO ANGER AND FORGIVENESS
James 4:13-18
Message 1

INTRO: For some time I had planned to do some messages on the subject of bitterness. I suppose that most who have reached the teen age years are familiar to some degree with this subject of bitterness. I wonder, if bitterness could be weighed, how much there would be in a congregation like this.

Paul, writing to the Ephesian Christians says this: Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. Here we see the kind of company bitterness is associated with. By the way, bitterness heads this list. Then come wrath and anger. Then clamour and evil speaking or blasphemy, and last, malice.

There is a very interesting passage in Acts that speaks of bitterness. Let us read Acts 8:4-24.

Now regarding this Simon, there is a lot of history, but we do not know the accuracy of it all. I can say this about it, and that is that none of it is good, either before or after his supposed conversion. Let me say this, that when studying the history of Simon, you have to look for the one called Simon Magus, or Simon the magician. McClintock and Strong deal with 20 different Simons of this time period.

I want to spend a little time on this passage because it reveals certain elements important to a study of the topic of bitterness.

-SIMON'S PRECONVERSION LIFE

Let us read Acts 8:4-11 again (read). The place this all happens is in Samaria. The Gospel, for the first time here, has gone to Samaria, as the Lord instructed it should just before He ascended. Now Samaria was despised by the Jews because these were half Jew half Gentile people. You will remember that this is where Jesus met the woman at the well as recorded in John's Gospel.

Now here is Philip, preaching the Gospel. Verse 5 says he preached Christ. Verse 6 tells us he also did a number of miracles (read). Verse 7 describes a little of this for us

(read). Verse 8 tells us that the preaching and works of Philip brought great joy to this Samaritan city. There was great joy, BUT there was something else as well. There was a man in this city of whom our text says he 'previously' practiced sorcery. The original word for sorcery here is *mageuo*. We get our word 'magic' from this word. Verse 9 says he astonished the people. And after he astonished them he claimed to be someone great. He was very successful as verse 9 indicates. So verse 11 sums it all up like this (read).

-SIMON'S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE

So we now want to consider Simon's conversion experience. Many of the people who had fallen victim to Simon's magic then heard the Gospel from Philip who preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ and they were converted and believed and were baptized.

Now for a man like Simon, this creates a problem. He wanted to be someone great and had deceived the people and they had fallen for his words. But now they are converted from him to Christ. What will Simon do? Well, amazingly, it seems he was converted. Now here is a question for you to answer: Was Simon truly converted? This question will be raised later in the chapter. Ryrie's study Bible says in a note, "Peter's denunciation in vv. 20-23 indicates that Simon's faith was not unto salvation". However, the text says he believed and he was baptized on his profession of faith.

-SIMON'S POSTCONVERSION LIFE (14-24)

Let's look at Simon's life after his conversion as recorded in Acts 8:14-19 (read). Now here is a magician, who wanted to be a 'somebody' and he has let his magical arts go and received Christ and been baptized, and now he is tempted to want to be a 'somebody' as a Christian. This nature still resided within him. He had been able to learn magic arts by paying somebody enough money and now he thought that Christianity worked like this as well. Using worldly principles to achieve the purposes of God is the fatal flaw of the present day "Seeker Friendly" movement.

Let me mention something here I have mentioned on numerous occasions. Salvation has three tenses. There is past tense salvation. This is initial salvation. If Simon was truly

converted, and I tend to think he was, this has taken place. But then there is present tense salvation. That is ongoing salvation. It is a present tense deliverance from the power of sin. Initial salvation is expressed in the doctrine of justification. Ongoing salvation is expressed by the doctrine of sanctification. This begins the moment we are saved. Simon had his chance at it right here. He had rejected his secular way of life by rejecting the magical arts now he needed to reject his secular thinking on how to amount to something in life as a Christian. The secular way of life does not work in Christianity.

So, look at his manner of thinking (read 20-21). You could buy the magical arts, but you cannot buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are big lessons in this passage. Now Simon had a choice to make. He had received Christ by believing on Him, that would have meant repenting of his past way of life. Now he had thought the power of the Holy Spirit could be bought. This thinking was sinful and he needed to repent of it in order to go on in the process of sanctification.

Now let me tell you what I have learned about God in my life as a minister. You cannot serve with pride and bring people to repentance! I have never seen it happen. Oh, I have seen some responses, but I did not see brokenness in those responses. God does not share His glory with anyone and He does not empower pride and He does not empower those who serve for positions or authority, or those who serve while living in sin.

The Corinthians viewed themselves as God's chosen people. They were "it". They were the preachers with the right words. They were eloquent. And Paul said to them that he would come and check them out. Look at it in 1 Corinthians 4:19 (read). Now if you want to check out if my doctrine is right on this subject, here is how you can check it out. Speak to people with pride in your heart, and seek to become powerful, someone whom people admire, and whom you wish to control. Speak the Word of God to these people and see if you can cause people to repent and change their way of life. If that can happen and you get the glory, you can come tell me I am wrong. There are some things God will simply not do. Simon could not buy this spiritual power.

Now look at the verse I have been building up to. Let us read verse 23 (read). The NKJV or Acts 8:23 is, "For I see

that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." The KJV says, "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity." The rendering of the KJV, "...thou art in the gall of bitterness..." is more accurate than the NKJV, "...you are poisoned by bitterness..." The verb in the clause, "you are" or "thou art" is more difficult to translate. It is a present tense participle and I think could well be translated, "you are existing in the state of the gall of bitterness and the bondage of unrighteousness."

Now Charles Ryrie says these verses in Acts, "Peter's denunciation in verses 20-23 indicates that Simon's faith was not unto salvation." He then gives James 2:14-20 as further evidence. Personally, I think Simon became a Christian for verse 13 says, "Then Simon himself believed and was baptized..." I further, do not think that a person is free from all bitterness or envy or jealousy etc... the moment they become a Christian. Now they may experience some of that right away, but they may discover a lot of things they were not even aware of at the time they got saved.

You see, the moment we are saved, we are justified. Then we have been initially sanctified as to our standing in Christ. But we have not been sanctified in life yet. This is a life-long process. You may have become a Christian and many years later still carry bitterness from things that happened before you were saved. It is then, in the process of sanctification, the process of becoming holy, that these things are to begin to change. This was true for Simon in Acts 8 as well.

As we go through these messages, we may all discover some areas of bitterness we need to deal with. My effort will be to share with us 'how' to deal with bitterness. You may carry some things, but you do not know how to deal with it. So, in these messages we may well be in this passage in Acts 8 a few more times.

I. DEFINITION

The experiences we know as bitterness came to be called that because in the Hebrew OT, the experience is explained by its association with taste. TWOT says, "It is interesting to note that the Hebrews expressed tragic, unpleasant experiences in terms of

the sense of taste, bitter. Actually, we employ the same figure of speech in our English language: It was a galling experience; his actions were not in very good taste, I thought; your wife is always tastefully dressed" (Vol. 1:528).

The word 'bitter' in the Bible can be used in two senses. Various experiences can make one bitter in soul. This is the description of one who is in deep misery. Of this Job 3:20 says: "Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death..." Zech. 12:10 says of the Jews when they will recognize Christ at His return that, "...they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn." That is the reading of the NKJV. The KJV says more accurately, "... and be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for his firstborn." So in such passages we have experiences described as bitter. This is not the sense of bitterness we are going to be looking at.

But there is a more settled state of soul described in the Scriptures as 'bitter'. It is that state which we commonly call 'bitterness'. We might say, "He is a bitter man" or "She is a bitter woman." The OT uses this sense of bitterness in Deuteronomy 29:18. It says, "...so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go *and* serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood..." Hebrews 12:14-15 speaks of this passage like this: "Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 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; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."

Acts 8:23 gives further interesting light on this subject. Peter said to Simon, "I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness..." Here bitterness is described as being 'in the gall'. The Greek word for gal is cholee, of which Vine says, "A word probably connected with chloee, yellow, and denotes gall".

My computer Encyclopedia says of the gall, "The gallbladder, in humans, is a small, pear-shaped sac that stores bile, or gall, a yellowish brown or green fluid, secreted by the liver, that aids in the digestion of dietary fat. Upon stimulation by the hormone cholecystokinin, the gall bladder contracts and discharges the bile into the small intestine." Now this material is very, very bitter.

In Acts 8:23 Peter says to Simon, "For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and [in] the bond of iniquity." Peter said that he recognized this man's problem. He was submerged in the yellow-green bile, or bitterness of the gall.

The NT word for bitterness is *pikria*. It comes from the root word *pik*, which Vine says means, "'to cut, to prick,' hence literally, 'pointed, sharp, keen, pungent to the sense of taste, smell etc..." This word is used in James 3:11 like this: "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?"

From my own studies I have concluded that bitterness is either closely related to, or it is a form of anger. This is the conclusion of others as well. My wife showed me an interesting paragraph in her SS material out from the Sunday School material which we get from Bob Jones University. It is given under the heading, 'Regulation of Temper'. Here is what they write: "Paul uses four words to describe the human temper. Of these, *pikria* ('bitterness, 4:32) never belongs in the believer's life. Bitterness is a deep-seated resentment, an intense animosity that continues to grow. It often stems from an act of abuse for which a person seeks to get even. These ill feelings grow until they consume and destroy the individual." (pg. 17). So, in this quote we have bitterness viewed as a form of anger.

Lou Sutura has said something like this: "Bitterness is basically anger in the deep freeze. The rebellious shall dwell in a dry land." Henry Teichroeb, who used to travel and teach with the Suterases writes, "Bitterness is the response to pride that has been thwarted."

Here is the definition I have come to after much study on this subject: "Bitterness is a state of unresolved anger caused by violated rights or thwarted desires which causes a bitter taste in the soul."

So, one of the key matters related to bitterness is anger. When an event happens that is negative it will often cause anger. This anger may be towards God or towards man. There are three words in the Greek NT that have to do with the word anger; *orge*, *thumos*, and *parorgismos*. Much labor has gone into the distinguishing of these three. If bitterness is also a form of anger, as some believe, then there are four.

We have two of these words for anger used together in Ephesians 4:31 (read). These two words are translated as 'wrath' and 'anger'. The word translated 'wrath' is *thumos*. According to Bishop Trench *thumos* "is more of the turbulent commotion, the boiling agitation of the feelings..." (Trench, 131). It seems that *thumos* is that anger that comes quickly and subsides quickly.

When it does not subside quickly it seems to develop into *orge*. That is the word translated 'anger' in Ephesians 4:31. Trench says *orge*, "is more of an abiding and settled habit of mind with purpose of revenge..." (131). Of this word *orgee*, James 1:19-20 says, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Now look at Ephesians 4:26 (read). It says, "Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath." When it says 'be angry' the word is *orgee*. When it says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath", we have yet another word for anger. It is the word, *parorgismos*. Trench further says that the third word, *parorgismos*, is, "the irritation, the exasperation, the embitterment which must be dismissed at once..." (134).

So in Ephesians 4:26 both *orge* and *parorgismos* are used. The Bible does not condemn *orge* but it does

condemn *parorgismos*. Trench says Paul is not saying here, "Your anger shall not be imputed to you as sin, if you put it away before nightfall... but rather, 'Be ye angry, yet in this anger of yours suffer no sinful element to mingle..." (134).

Trench quotes another as saying, "Anger is one of the sinews of the soul; he that wants it hath a maimed mind, and with Jacob sinew-shrunk in the hollow of his thigh, must needs halt. Nor is it good to converse with such as cannot be angry." He also says that anger is not like a poisonous plant to be eradicated but as a wild plant to be cultivated. (134). The Lord Jesus became angry, orgee, in Mark 3:5.

So we seem to have a progression. Thumos is that anger that comes and subsides quickly. Orgee is a more abiding anger. Parorgismos is a still more settled state of anger, while pikros, bitterness, according to Lou Suter is anger in the deep freeze.

Now let me say this at the outset, if I am bitter, I have something within me for which I am at fault. I may well have been wronged and may be 100% in the right, and if I am bitter, I am in a state I should not be. There is victory over bitterness. So I want to close this introductory message with Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger...be put away from you..."

Now the big question is "How"? How does one deal with bitterness? How can it be overcome, at least some of the very deep seated, long standing, horrendous issues of life? I am trusting the Lord that we will be able to at least answer the how of overcoming bitterness to a degree.

CONCL: So, what is bitterness? Here is the definition I have come to after much study on this subject: Bitterness is a state of unresolved anger caused by violated rights or thwarted desires which causes a bitter taste in the soul."

Can bitterness be overcome? Yes it can. An interesting question we will deal with later is, "Is all bitterness overcome by forgiving others for the wrongs they have done even if they do not repent?" The answer to that question by

most Christian teachers and counselors is "Yes". Please do not write me off as a heretic, but I believe the answer to that question is, "No". We'll be looking at that later.

So, let me close by reading James 4:13-18 again.

