



Poisoned Soul

The Deadly Effects
of Bitterness



Problems Christians Face

Poisoned Soul

The Deadly Effects of Bitterness

by

Paul Young

Poisoned Soul - The Deadly Effects of Bitterness

Published by Emmaus Bible School UK

© Copyright

No part may be reproduced in any manner, including photocopying, without written permission.

1st Printing 2017

Printed by

EMMAUS BIBLE SCHOOL

Carlett Boulevard, Eastham, Wirral, Merseyside CH62 8BZ

Tel: 0151 378 7289 Email: office@emmausuk.com

www.emmausuk.com

rev 20170315

Contents

Chapter 1	Bitterness - Introduction	Page 5
Chapter 2	Bitterness - Definition	Page 11
Chapter 3	The Causes of Bitterness	Page 19
Chapter 4	The Consequences of Bitterness	Page 25
Chapter 5	The Cure for Bitterness	Page 29
Chapter 6	The Conquest of Bitterness	Page 38
	Conclusion	Page 44

Bible quotations are from
New King James Version

When you have read through each lesson carefully, write down your answers to the exam questions, then go back to the website menu (use the back arrow at the top left of your screen) and click on '**EXAM FORM B**'.

Complete this Form, including your answers and click '**SUBMIT**'.

Do this for each lesson.

Your exams will be marked and returned to you together with a Certificate of Achievement

Chapter 1

Bitterness - Introduction

It is very troubling to witness the bitter person and I have known people in my own family who have become terribly twisted emotionally because they allowed bitterness to flourish within their hearts.

My family folklore has described my great-grandmother as a deeply bitter woman. For decades she maintained deep resentment towards her daughter, my grandmother. Her unforgiving spirit meant that she was alienated from my grandmother and the reason was simply because she had married an Englishman. Her son-in-law was English! The poison of bitterness ran deeply within her and continually spread its dreadful influence to all with whom she came in contact.

This has given me cause to pause and think about my own reaction and how I deal with the emotional and psychological wounds which have been, or appear to have been, inflicted upon me. As I have reflected upon unfair criticism, upon unfounded accusations and the imputing of false motives, I have tried to learn to react to these hostile afflictions with tranquillity and not with a bitter or resentful spirit. No one could possibly suggest that such a positive reaction to emotional wounds is automatically learnt and it is certainly not easy to overcome negative and bitter feelings. However, we can take heart from those who have left us powerful examples - people, who with God's help, overcame any tendency towards bitterness. Somehow they conquered the natural inclination to become

bitter and were never filled with destructive resentment. Instead they were positive, forgiving and free from the emotional bondage of bitterness.

Among these are

Fanny J. Crosby

Fanny J. Crosby or Mrs Van Alstyne (to give her her married name) was possibly the most prolific hymn-writer who ever lived. She composed over 8,000 hymns which is a tremendous output of sacred verse by any standard but especially so considering she was blind. She was born sighted but at the age of six weeks, owing to a doctor's mistake, she became hopelessly blind for the rest of her days.

Her reaction to her blindness was very revealing; she said, "It may have been a blunder on the doctor's part, but it was no mistake of God's. I believe that it was God's intention that I should live in physical darkness so as to be better prepared to sing His praise." Such positive sentiment reveals that she was remarkably free of any **bitterness**. She had found deep contentment in Jesus Christ and her soul was at peace. She lived to the grand old age of ninety-five and died in 1915.

Her hymns reflect her total trust in the Lord Jesus and her deep desire to praise His name. They include: "*All the way my Saviour leads me*", "*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine*", "*Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus our Blessed Redeemer*", "*Safe in the arms of Jesus*" and "*To God be the glory*". It seems unlikely that such wonderful expressions of appreciation and worship to God could have been written if there had been any **bitterness** in her heart. Obviously a number of her hymns have stood the test of time and are still sung in churches to this day. They continue to inspire congregations and enrich true worship. We thank God for Fanny Crosby, not just for her inspiring hymns but also for the blessing and example of her inspiring life.

Gordon Wilson

Gordon Wilson had the dreadful and deeply traumatic experience of being in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday (8th November 1987) when an IRA bomb exploded and rubble buried many people, including himself and his 21 year old daughter, Marie. In the terrible darkness and in tremendous pain lying under the debris of destroyed buildings they managed to reach out and hold each other's hands. This is described in moving detail in his book about his daughter which is entitled *Marie*. He recounts how she said, "Daddy, I love you very much." These were the last words she spoke. She died and it broke his heart. However, the book was reviewed by the Sunday Independent and the reviewer wrote, "This inspiring man lacks **bitterness**, praying nightly for those who under cover of darkness planted the bomb."

We could well have understood a measure of **bitterness** towards those who had caused such havoc and brought so much intense sadness to him and his family. Yet Gordon Wilson found a different response and remained a strong advocate for peace and reconciliation in the troubled province of Northern Ireland and more generally throughout Ireland. His words in a carefully prepared statement to the IRA were, "...What I meant to do in expressing forgiveness was to set aside personal vengeance and **bitterness**, which in turn denied the Loyalist paramilitaries any grounds for using bereavement as a pretext for imposing suffering on Nationalists, Catholics, Republicans or IRA members. I wanted no revenge, no **bitterness** and no grief for other families."

Gordon Wilson became a close friend of Irish President Mary Robinson and took a seat in the Irish Senate (which for a Northerner was very unusual) where he worked for peace and reconciliation. He died in 1995.

In both these cases there was a refusal to let bitterness intrude into their hearts. Both the blind hymn writer and the Northern Irish peace activist reached out for God's help to overcome the natural inclination to blame and seek vengeance. They also saw a bigger picture where the name of God could be glorified and the traumatic events they had experienced could make them stronger people to fulfil a higher calling for the collective welfare of other people. We thank God for such people, who show us a better way of dealing with the unfair experiences of life and the terrible, even shocking things, which can intrude into our lives.

Marah (Bitterness) - Exodus 15:22-27

When the nation of Israel journeyed from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land it was an arduous and drawn out pilgrimage. In total it lasted 40 years and this was because the people did not trust the Lord but reacted with dread when they heard of the giants who lived in the land of Canaan. Faith in the Lord could have reduced the journey to a matter of weeks but failure to trust Him and instead be guided by fear, caused the journey to be greatly extended.

God prevented them from reaching the Promised Land sooner so that the unbelieving generation would die out and a new generation arise who could enter and conquer the land of promise. Even so God was faithful to His people. He fed them with manna (a sort of wafer, sometimes known as angels' food) and quail and provided water for them in one of the most inhospitable environments in the world, the Sinai Desert.

In Exodus 15.22 we read that Israel had travelled for three days and were unable to find any water but eventually they arrived at what became known as Marah. At Marah there was water but it was totally undrinkable because it was **bitter**. There must have been some impurities in the water that caused the people to spit

it out if they even took one mouthful. It was because of its bitter nature that they called the place 'Marah' as that name means **'bitterness'**.

However, it was not very long before the bitterness was not just in the water but also in the hearts and minds of the people. Their bitterness found expression as they grumbled and complained against Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel. In his book 'Going Places with God' Stephen Olford wrote, "Where there is resentment and bitterness, there is the poison of destructive criticism." Moses was the focus of the people's destructive criticism but this masked something deeper. Moses was God's chosen leader for the nation and therefore to criticise Moses was, in effect, to criticise and complain against the Lord. Similarly when we are not blessed in the way we think we should be or our prayers are not answered in the manner we expect then we, like Israel, may become bitter, critical and complaining towards the Lord. "It only requires a given set of circumstances, and bitterness – which is really the sin of rebellion and resentment against God – will surface." (Olford)

Moses turned to the Lord in prayer and He revealed the answer to Israel's problems. It was simply that a branch of a nearby tree needed to be thrown into the water. When this was done then the water was transformed from bitterness to sweetness; from something distasteful to something refreshing, from a curse to a blessing. We do not know which tree the branch came from and we have little understanding of how such a miraculous transformation could take place. However, we are convinced that the Lord was the answer to the bitterness in the water and was also the answer to the bitterness in the hearts of the Israelites. It is important to remember that the Lord always has answers to our deepest needs. He has both the power and the love to enable us to conquer the bitterness that can so easily arise in our own hearts.

Israel had experienced physical bitterness, the distasteful sensation of foul, stale water. We may have physically experienced bitter tastes, such as lemon peel, which can be harsh and unpalatable. However physical bitterness is not a particular problem because such foods can be easily avoided. It is the emotion of bitterness which is the much greater problem, the feelings of bitterness which can affect anyone, even the most tranquil of persons. Today we may be free of any kind of bitterness (do thank God) but tomorrow we may be engulfed by it because of words spoken to us or about us or of actions done to us, even behind our backs. “The acid test as to whether a person is in true victory is simply this: when the challenge comes, does he turn to the Lord with the faith of contentment, or run from the Lord with the fire of resentment?” (Olford)

Poisoned Soul EXAM 1 AK17
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Give another name for manna:
 - a. Wilderness bread
 - b. Angels' food
 - c. Wafer dough

2. Exodus 15 recounts part of Israel's journey. How long did it take?
 - a. 3 days
 - b. 3 weeks
 - c. 3 months

3. What 2 things are likely to lead to the poison of destructive criticism?
 - a. Bitterness and anger
 - b. Resentment and bitterness
 - c. Jealousy and bitterness

4. What qualities does the Lord have that enable us to overcome bitterness?
 - a. Righteousness and grace
 - b. Love and mercy
 - c. Power and love

5. Which New Testament verse confirms what we have learned so far?
 - a. James 3:8
 - b. Philippians 3:20
 - c. Romans 12:1

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Marah means bitterness.
7. Bitter water was made pure after Moses threw a tree branch into the water.
8. Manna and water were the only two provisions God made for the Israelites in the wilderness.
9. A deep contentment in Jesus Christ and a sense of peace are the result of positive circumstances.
10. It was the dread of facing giants which led to the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Most of us have experienced feelings of bitterness at times. Have you known 'true victory' according to Olford's acid test? (p10)

Chapter 2

Bitterness - Definition

Essentially **bitterness** is an attitude of resentment, hostility, irritation and even hatred towards a person or persons. The Collins Concise English Dictionary talks of “strong unrelenting hostility or resentment”. Hebrews 12:15 speaks of ‘**a root of bitterness**’ and clearly if that ever develops within the human heart then it will produce the **fruit of bitterness**. We should “guard against the growth of any ‘root of bitterness’, an expression which, coming as it does from Deuteronomy 29:18, probably means a person whose heart is turned away from the Lord and who becomes ‘a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit’, thereby causing trouble within the Christian community and defiling many besides himself.” (*A New Testament Commentary*)

Many years ago I used to teach in a large Comprehensive School in the city of Coventry. One member of staff did not get the promotion which he felt he deserved and as he thought about it over the subsequent weeks and months he became deeply resentful. He stopped doing anything which was not contractual, gave up everything that was voluntary and did only what he was obliged to do as a teacher in the school. His whole demeanour became soured and **bitter** and he talked constantly of how he had been cheated out of what was rightfully his. He had become a **bitter** person and a **root of bitterness** was producing its fruit in his life.

Years later I took the funeral of a man who died at the age of 92. Over fifty years earlier he had failed to gain some money from the legacy of a deceased relative. He had been denied, what he thought, was legitimately his. For the next fifty years he talked about that incident with increasing resentment every day. His family got fed up with his **bitterness** and wanted him to forget it but he could not forget or let go of his resentment. He **would** not deal with the **root of bitterness** in his heart in his earlier life, and in the end he **could** not deal with it. Sadly he could be described as a bitter and twisted old man. It was a sorrow to see him and listen to the bitter words he spoke and realise that he totally lacked contentment. His life was disturbed in a deep and terrible way by a few hundred pounds. How true it is that **“the love of money is a root of all (kinds of) evil”** (1 Timothy 6:10).

The truth is that a grudge is harder on the one who holds it than on the one against whom it is held. Too often people will not or cannot let go of the pain of the past, and still carry the burdens of things done years ago. It is simply a fact that no matter how long they nurse a grudge, it will not get better. In fact it can only get worse and seems to devour a person from the inside. It is often the result of a deep hurt or wound in the spirit through what someone has done or said. There is a feeling of dreadful pain and thoughts continually focus so much upon that wound that it begins to fester until it becomes dreadfully infected with the poison of bitterness. This needs to be avoided at all costs because it is so destructive.

Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, picks up on this point when she writes about her father in her book, *Speaking for Myself*. Her father had left the family in dire straits when she was very young. She writes, “It was around this time that I renewed contact with my dad, perhaps for the same reasons – the sense that life is too short to hold grudges against the people you love.” She seems to have had the good sense

not to let bitterness enter her heart over hurts felt deeply from long before. She realised that ‘to store our memories with a sense of injury is to fill that chest with rusty iron, which God made for refined gold.’

The word ‘bitterness’ and its derivatives of ‘bitter’ and ‘bitterly’ occur scores of times in the Bible.

Esau - Genesis 25:24-34; 27:1-41; 33:1-11

One such example of a bitter person is Esau. He was denied the hereditary blessing, which he expected to receive, as the elder son, from his father Isaac. He lost that blessing because of the treachery of his twin brother Jacob who deceived their father. When Esau discovered his loss his reaction is described in these words, “**he cried with a loud and bitter cry**” (Genesis 27.34). He was so bitter towards Jacob that he wanted revenge and decided upon murder. We know, as we read the book of Genesis, that Jacob was divinely protected from his brother’s bitter anger which, with the passing of the years, subsided and eventually the twins were reconciled to each other. Thus time can bring about healing of the soul from the disease of bitterness, if we are willing to let go of the past. Esau became a great and mighty man and was the founding father of the nation of Edom which became a powerful, rich and educated people. The nation of Edom inhabited the land to the east and south of the Dead Sea.

Naomi - The Book of Ruth

There is a gem of a story in the Old Testament book of Ruth. It commences with tragedy but ends with blessing. Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion leave their ancestral land and home in Bethlehem and move east to settle, across the River Jordan, in the land of Moab. They moved

because there was famine in their home country. This was hugely ironic as the name 'Bethlehem' means 'house of bread' and implies fertility of the land and abundance of food. However, the lack of food in 'the house of bread' led this family to migrate to Moab and there they settled. The sons married two local women named Orpah and Ruth and presumably they looked forward to an enhanced life in their adopted country. Sadly it all went wrong. Firstly, Elimelech died, and was buried in Moab, to be followed to the grave by his two sons who were also buried in their adopted country.

In the grief and tragedy of loss Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. So she crossed back over the Jordan River and arrived in her home town with just one companion, her daughter-in-law, Ruth. The people met her on her return and she insisted that they no longer call her 'Naomi' but 'Mara' which means '**bitterness**' because she said, "***The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.***" She pointed out that she went out full but came back empty. She left Bethlehem with husband and sons and returned with just a daughter-in-law who was a foreigner from the land of Moab. Her life had become a "***most bitter lamentation***" (Jeremiah 6:26).

However, Ruth turned out to be an exceptional daughter-in-law. She was hard working, cared deeply for her mother-in-law, showed wonderful integrity, revealed true faith in the Lord and eventually married a wealthy, God-fearing man. Her children become a great delight to Naomi in her old age and her descendants were the most important and influential in the history of Israel and indeed the whole world!

One descendant was David who became the greatest ruler Israel has ever had. He united the nation, defeated her enemies and extended the borders. He laid the foundation for a just society and for wealth to be created in the nation. Israel in David's time

was the most powerful economic, political, military and spiritual force in the Middle East. Even today he is still hailed as the greatest national leader Israel has ever known.

Later there was an even more famous descendant. He was 'great David's greater son'. He was Jesus Christ our Lord who was born with the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sins. He died and then rose again and offers salvation, forgiveness and eternal life to all who will trust Him by committing their lives to Him. He is the one who can remove the bitterness of sin from our lives, if we will only open up our lives to Him and let Him work in us.

Thus Naomi's bitterness was removed and her tears were turned to joy. She found delight through the blessings God bestowed on her daughter-in-law. I think it would be true to say that nobody ever called her 'Mara'. The bitterness evaporated before the wonderful demonstrations of the power and love of God.

Hannah - 1 Samuel 1:1-28

In the first book of Samuel we read of Hannah who was one of Elkanah's two wives. She had a very sad life being greatly burdened because she had no children and her sorrow was compounded by the fact that the other wife, Peninnah, had a number of children. In those days it was a cause of terrible shame and deep sadness to be barren and childless and Hannah's sorrow was made worse by the cruel remarks that Peninnah made about her. This seems to have been particularly intense on the annual pilgrimages to worship God at the Tabernacle in the city of Shiloh. Eventually it all got too much for Hannah and she went into the Tabernacle and prayed passionately to the Lord for a son.

She prayed with her heart and so no words passed her lips. Yet

she “**was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept**” (1 Samuel 1:10). The best advice for the bitter soul is always to pray to the Lord. Hannah’s prayers were answered in a marvellously miraculous way and she had a son who became one of the greatest prophets in the history of Israel. His name was Samuel and he led the Israelites through a very turbulent time in their history heading up the nation spiritually, judicially and politically. He was the last of the judges and first of the prophets. He was one of Israel’s most outstanding leaders. Hannah’s bitter sorrow was replaced with delightful joy and after Samuel she had other sons and daughters.

Mordecai - The book of Esther

Mordecai was the uncle and adopted father of a Jewish girl called Esther whose family had been deported to the land of Babylon. In the days of King Ahasuerus, Esther was chosen to be queen in place of the disgraced and banished Vashti. It was a great privilege for her but her nationality had been kept as a closely guarded secret. Even the King did not know that she was a Jew. An evil man by the name of Haman had gained the king’s confidence and in an act of spiteful vindictiveness had persuaded the king to set aside one particular day for the annihilation of the Jewish nation throughout the great Persian Empire. This edict was published as a law and fear gripped the Jews. Mordecai went into mourning for his people and “**cried with a loud and a bitter cry**” (Esther 4.1). His bitterness was a reflection of the feelings of all the Jews who lived there at that time. Many dwelt in the capital city of Shushan and others were scattered through the Empire.

Eventually through the courage and faith of Queen Esther the tide was turned. The king realised the evil in Haman who was executed and replaced by Mordecai as the king’s leading adviser. So the people of Israel were miraculously delivered from

destruction; the potential persecution was averted by the powerful hand of God. The bitter cry was turned into joyful praise. That transformation is remembered every year by the people of Israel even to this day in the Feast of Purim. This is not a solemn or serious festival but a joyful outpouring of fun and laughter in which all the family take part.

Job

Job was a remarkable man who had a large family, great wealth and high standing in his community. He worshipped God and lived a righteous life. He even offered sacrifices to God on behalf of his children after they had partied in case they had inadvertently sinned against the Lord. Thus he was a man of very great integrity and deep devotion to God. However, in short order, he lost his children, was stripped of his wealth and lost his credibility in the community. He then lost his health and finds himself sitting in ashes scratching his diseased skin with bits of broken pottery. Friends gathered around him but it was simply to criticise him and his motives.

Those friends are known to us as ‘Job’s Comforters’. They challenged him to admit to some terrible sin but he refused as he knew the integrity of his own heart. Even his wife was so utterly distraught that she suggested it would be best for Job to curse God and die. However Job never lost his faith in God despite his bitter experience. He says, **“I will complain in the bitterness of my soul”** (Job 7:11) and again, **“I will speak in the bitterness of my soul”** (Job 10:1). His experience was very bitter and difficult, if not impossible, to understand. He did not know that he was a powerful example of faithfulness to unseen angelic beings. Eventually all was restored to him and his bitter experience is a blessing to all generations who read of it and is an especially great encouragement to all those who go through periods of

intense sufferings and deep trials.

So many Bible characters experienced the terrible sensation of bitterness and the Scriptures give us solutions. There is no need to harbour that bitterness which ultimately produces the dark, sinister forces of destruction.

The challenge for you and me is to look into our own hearts. There we must remove all seeds, feelings and thoughts of bitterness. We must get rid of them now or perhaps the day will arrive when we will be unable to get rid of them. Then they will possess us and may ultimately destroy us. Our lives can be deeply and permanently ruined by bitterness.

We need to look at three aspects of bitterness. Firstly we will consider the causes of bitterness, then the consequences of bitterness and finally the cure for bitterness.

Poisoned Soul EXAM 2 AK17
Chapter 2 - Definition

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. Where in the Bible do we first read about a 'root of bitterness'?
 - a. Exodus 15:6
 - b. Deuteronomy 29:18
 - c. Hebrews 12:15

2. According to 1 Timothy 6:10, what else is a root of all kinds of evil?
 - a. The thirst for power
 - b. Thwarted love
 - c. The love of money

3. Esau shows us that
 - a. bitterness will break relationships beyond repair
 - b. bitterness may even lead to murder
 - c. bitterness inevitably wears off over time

4. The name 'Bethlehem' means
 - a. house of bread
 - b. God is here
 - c. house of the promise

5. Israel's national celebration of bitterness turning to joy is remembered by
 - a. the feast of Passover
 - b. the feast of Pentecost
 - c. the feast of Purim

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. A grudge is harder on the one who holds it than on the one against whom it is held.
7. Bitterness may be an appropriate reaction to deeply felt hurt.
8. The prophet Isaiah wrote about a "most bitter lamentation".
9. Elkanah and Peninnah were not able to help Hannah in her sorrow of childlessness.
10. Job's righteousness and integrity kept him from becoming bitter.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

The experience of which Bible character has been most meaningful to you in this chapter and why?

Chapter 3

The Causes of Bitterness

Where does bitterness come from? What are its origins? What triggers the bitter reaction, a reaction that can overtake us too easily and dominate us so powerfully? The causes may vary and yet there seem to be some common threads which may be uncovered in the incident of Simon the Sorcerer, an influential and powerful man of Samaria whom we read of in Acts 8:9-24.

In Acts 8:21-23 we read: ***“... for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”***

These words were spoken by the Apostle Peter to Simon the Sorcerer who wanted the same power as that exercised by the apostles. Previously Simon had used magic and demonic power to influence and exercise a certain amount of control over the people of Samaria. Clearly the people were very much afraid of him and were wary of his power. However, following the evangelistic preaching of Philip, the people accepted the message of the Gospel and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus any demonic hold over them was broken and as a consequence Simon lost his power, status and ability to control people. His authority had been replaced by that of the Lord Jesus. However, he also embraced the message of the Gospel and became a Christian believer or so it appeared.

Later the apostles Peter and John travelled from Jerusalem to

Samaria to undertake an important spiritual task. When they arrived they laid hands upon the new Christian believers who then received the Holy Spirit. Simon, rather foolishly and rashly, offered money to the apostles so that he could also have that same power. He tried to pay for the spiritual power to call down the Holy Spirit upon anyone on whom he would lay hands. In response he received an extremely stinging rebuke from the Apostle Peter. The rebuke is so strong that it would appear that Simon's conversion was hardly genuine and he needed to fully repent of his sins. As we review this incident carefully we can uncover some of the underlying causes of the bitterness that filled the heart of Simon.

The Problem of Pride

Clearly Simon's pride had been dented and his ego had been knocked because he no longer had power and influence over the people. No longer was he the important person in the community of Samaria. Christ had superseded him in the eyes of the people. He seems to have reacted with bitter resentment to this loss of status. It was D.L. Moody who wrote, "God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves." This seems to have been Simon's experience. Instead of showing a humble spirit his pride was exposed and he became a bitter person.

Today we may have similar problems owing to pride and egotistical behaviour. We tend to believe that our opinion is very important and therefore we should be highly regarded. This can and does cause problems generally but is particularly destructive in the local church. We must always remember that as Christians we are subject to a higher authority. All aspects of ministry should be directed by the Lord, through His Holy Spirit and in accordance with His Holy Word.

Thus it is Christ who directs His church and it is He who bestows

gifts upon each Christian to enable the fulfilment of His purposes. Some of the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit may be more public in their application than others, but they are not more important. It is too easy to crave the prominence which others may have and feel under-valued that they speak to large congregations and we do not. However each one is answerable to the Lord for the conducting of their life and ministry and for the utilisation of their gift. We must always learn contentment in the work of God and be secure in the knowledge of the gifts He has given to us.

The North American evangelist, Charles Finney, had a great ministry of reaching people with the Gospel. Huge numbers attended his meetings and crusades and multitudes accepted the Lord as Saviour. It was a powerful ministry which he exercised and one which was wonderfully anointed by the Lord. However, there was one man, Father Nash, who rarely attended any of Finney's missions but who constantly prayed for the evangelist and his Gospel work. That man sometimes spent whole days in intercession for Charles Finney's preaching. It was constantly upon his heart to uphold the preaching of the Gospel through Charles Finney. One man had the public acclaim while the other was both unheralded and largely unknown. They had different gifts, callings and ministries. Both were vital in the kingdom of God.

The local leadership in a church carries very great responsibilities for the welfare of the flock of God. If that leadership were ever divided then the result is inevitably the division of the church. No church can flourish when it is divided and so elders need to learn the necessity of giving way to each other, of not standing on ego and of allowing themselves to change opinion and develop ideas in directions they had not thought of before. This does not apply to the foundations and core truths of the Christian faith which are unalterable but to initiatives, new forms

of outreach, fresh ideas for pastoral work and potential changes to programmes. To adapt and change requires deep humility and an ability to subject the ego to the will of God.

So from the experience of Simon the Sorcerer we learn that we need to be careful of personal pride and ego which can lead to bitterness.

The Problem of Jealousy

Simon had ambition but it was a selfishly jealous ambition. He wanted the power and ministry similar to that being exercised by the apostles. He wanted to do what they were doing. It was the writer of the Proverbs who said, “**Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy?**” (27:4). If someone is envious of you then there is very little that you can do about it!

Jealousy can be seen in two ways. Firstly, there is **good jealousy** which is a godly jealousy for the integrity of God. This is when our hearts are moved to jealously defend the Lord against the blasphemous idolatry so obviously seen today. It is to feel the pain of hurt on behalf of the Lord as His name is demeaned and denigrated by all sorts of people, especially many in the entertainment and media industry.

Secondly, there is **bad jealousy** which is a selfish feeling of resentment at some perceived injury or slight inflicted on us personally. It is a covetous desire for a position of influence, for recognition and for appreciation, which we feel is given to others but is denied to us. It is ambition gone selfishly and hopelessly wrong. Often bitterness is associated with jealousy.

The Apostle James wrote these words, “**...you harbour bitter envy...you harbour selfish ambition in your hearts**” (James 3.14). Jealousy and wrong ambition can be harboured away in the

heart and can fester until they produce deep bitterness in the soul. Someone has written, “In counselling Christians, we frequently see bitterness associated with jealousy. The examples include successful attorneys who envy the ability of their colleagues, Bible College and seminary students consumed with jealousy toward fellow students...pastors or missionaries envious of others who have seen outward evidences of success.” (*How to Beat Burnout - Mission Magazine, CMML,USA*)

So from the experience of Simon the Sorcerer we understand that we need to be careful of jealousy and selfish ambition because these can lead to bitterness which will bring the condemnation of the Lord.

Out of the Will of God

We can almost hear the thundering words of the Apostle Peter to Simon the Sorcerer, “**Your heart is not right in the sight of God**”. Simon’s heart consumed as it was with pride, jealousy, selfishness and false ambition clearly indicated that he was not right with God. He was not pursuing the will of God for his life. There was falseness about the man, a hypocrisy, which still pursued worldly aims at the expense of his relationship with God.

If ever we entertain such bitter feelings and attitudes then we must be under no illusion. We are outside the will of God. We are being disobedient to our God. We will be out of fellowship with the Lord and will not enjoy His presence or His blessing. The Spirit of God will be grieved and we will be unable to serve the Lord effectively. We will be robbed of the joy of the Lord and our love will quickly turn to hatred. We will lose the desire to pray and find no delight in reading the Word of God. The bitter heart is a heart that ruins the Christian. If Simon had failed to repent of his bitterness then he would have been unable to

serve the Lord or to enjoy any sort of fellowship or relationship with the Saviour.

So from the experience of Simon the Sorcerer we learn that bitterness indicates that we are outside the will of God.

Result of Wickedness

Peter describes Simon's request as "**your wickedness**". The bitter heart is a wicked heart. Bitter feelings are sinful feelings. The bitter attitude is an evil attitude. It can easily lead to bondage and enslavement. Indeed, Peter goes on to say, "**I perceive that you are in the bond of iniquity.**" Simon had not actually found freedom and victory over sin through faith in Christ. His profession of faith seems to have been a pseudo-trust and he was still very much in bondage to sin and the bitterness he exhibited indicated very clearly that he was still in his sinful condition before God.

The causes of bitterness may vary but bitterness is evil and a sin against God. We need to search our heart continually to isolate and remove all bitterness from our spirit, because it is a most destructive influence upon the life of any individual, especially those who are Christians.

Poisoned Soul EXAM 3 AK17
Chapter 3 - Causes of Bitterness

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. What was the root cause of Simon the sorcerer's bitterness?
 - a. A heart that was not right
 - b. A mind that was jealous
 - c. A mouth that spoke without thinking

2. The three supreme authorities within a local church are
 - a. the elders, the Bible and our understanding
 - b. the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the priesthood
 - c. the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Bible

3. What does good jealousy desire?
 - a. Spiritual prominence
 - b. A vibrant local church
 - c. The integrity of the Lord

4. Which New Testament writer linked bitter envy and selfish ambition?
 - a. Paul
 - b. Peter
 - c. James

5. If we experience bitterness in our heart, then we must conclude that
 - a. we are not truly saved
 - b. we are outside the will of God
 - c. we must confront the person who has wronged us

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Simon the sorcerer was an influential and powerful man.
7. D.L. Moody wrote "God sends everyone away empty except those who are full of themselves."
8. Some gifts that the Holy Spirit gives are more important than others.
9. Ambition for a Christian is wrong.
10. Bitterness is the equivalent of being in chains.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Have you learned anything new about the causes of bitterness and how may it be of help to you?

Chapter 4

The Consequences of Bitterness

Bitterness is not just one isolated thought or one stray feeling of resentment which we may experience when we are hurt or wounded in our spirit by words or actions. Bitterness is something which is compounded and it does not stay as just a feeling or as a single thought. The seed of resentment may be small but if it is not rooted out then it grows and eventually our actions, words, behaviour and way of life will be dominated and motivated by bitter feelings.

There may be one particular person who causes bitterness to fill our heart. We find it difficult to speak to that person and we try to avoid him or her at all times. We make every attempt to isolate or insulate our lives from that individual. We want to alienate such a person or persons; maybe we are even rude to them and want to leave them out in the cold as far as our social circle is concerned. We do not care about them, we gossip about them, take every opportunity to criticise them and disparage them whenever we can. We constantly recall all that is bad about them, all the hurt (real or imagined) which they have heaped upon us in the past. The effects are devastating.

The first effect is upon ourselves. We become cold in heart towards God, have difficulty praying and serving the Lord and end up as weak, worldly and failed Christians. So the effect of bitterness has a deep impact upon our own lives and that impact is always negative. William Shakespeare wrote, “Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot that it do singe yourself.” Also Dale Carnegie said, “Wouldn’t our enemies rub their hand with glee if

they knew that our hate for them was exhausting us, making us tired and nervous, ruining our looks, giving us heart trouble and probably shortening our lives?" We are, therefore, well warned that bitterness will badly effect and even destroy us in some way or other.

The second effect is to weaken the integrity of the person towards whom we feel bitterness. Such a person can lose esteem in the eyes of others because of our words. He cannot truly realise his potential for God because of what we might have said about him. Also it may be that the effect of our bitterness can cause physical ailments for other people.

My sister died at the young age of forty-nine. I well remember that a close family member became deeply bitter towards her and this came as 'bolt out of the blue' when he said he wanted nothing more to do with her and wanted no more contact at all with her. She was deeply shocked, dreadfully hurt and never recovered emotionally. In a matter of months she was diagnosed with cancer and died seven weeks later. The effect of those bitter words may have had nothing to do with the cancer but they certainly weakened and demoralised my sister to the extent that she was less able to deal positively with her illness.

It is true that "invisible emotional tension in the mind can produce striking visible changes in the body, changes that can become serious and fatal." (*None of These Diseases* by S.I. McMillen). We, therefore, need to take great care before we utter words which can wound and hurt other people. We certainly do not want to be the cause of illness or even death in others. May God in His mercy preserve and protect us from such destructive bitterness.

The third effect is that bitterness divides a church. This is made clear by the apostle James who mentions the word "strife".

Christian unity is the most fragile oneness and my bitter feelings can destroy it. The bitter attitude and words of one member can utterly ruin that unity and when unity is destroyed in the local church then the potential for blessing is gone. The ability to worship God is totally undermined by division and so division needs to be avoided at all costs. Thus we need to crush anything that could be negative and that includes bitterness.

The early Christian work in Serampore, India where William Carey with his colleagues Marshman and Ward achieved so much in the early nineteenth century, was marred to some extent in their last years by division caused by some new recruits. John Appleby writes, “Dr Johns **became very bitter**, feeling that Serampore should have fought more vigorously for his retention in Bengal... His bitterness was to be a cancer that infected future recruits to the work... and knowledge of this made Carey quite ill.” (*I Can Plod*) The bitterness which was allowed to fester in the heart of Dr. Johns adversely affected the work of the Gospel in India and had a negative effect upon the health of longstanding missionaries. It is right to describe such bitterness as a cancer because, if not crushed, then it grows as a dreadful malignancy upon the soul and creates havoc with Christian friendship and unity.

Fourthly, it can lead to further sins. It can become the first step in serious backsliding and its effect upon others can be extensive. If a Christian gives in to bitterness and leaves the church then other believers can become deeply discouraged. Also such actions can cause non-believers to have a disincentive to take any interest in the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. Bitterness spoils our integrity as individuals and it spreads like some dreadful disease or some awful weed, as Hebrews 12:15 says that it can cause “**many (to) be defiled**”.

We have seen this happen with dreadful results! A church where

I have preached many times found itself with a person who was filled with bitterness towards one of the elders. No one was really sure what had caused the bitterness but its effects were blatantly obvious to all. On the days when there was a communion service the elders would dispense the bread and wine to the congregation. If that particular elder was offering the sacraments to the bitter person she steadfastly refused to take it. She would take it if offered by another elder but not that particular one. Attempts were made to bring about reconciliation but it was all hopeless. The bitterness intensified and eventually she left the church. Today that church is closed and the building has been purchased by a property developer. Nothing we do or say is ever in isolation. It always has its consequences and so bitterness needs to be crushed as soon as possible.

Poisoned Soul EXAM 4 AK17

Chapter 4 - Consequences of Bitterness

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. In confronting bitterness in our hearts, we need to
 - a. root out the seed of resentment
 - b. avoid the person or cause of our bitterness
 - c. fill our thoughts with positive things

2. Which of the following are most affected by our bitterness?
 - a. The church
 - b. The person we feel bitterness towards
 - c. Our own relationship with God

3. When bitterness causes division within a local church, we need
 - a. face to face confrontation with the person who has wronged us
 - b. to utterly crush wrong thoughts within us
 - c. to immediately seek the help of others to resolve the issue

4. Unbelievers find bitterness in the Christian
 - a. excusable, so it is of little consequence
 - b. a disincentive to the Gospel
 - c. so rare that it is hardly a problem

5. 'Nothing that we do or say is ever in isolation' reflects the truth of
 - a. Mark 3:27
 - b. 2 Timothy 4:7
 - c. 1 Corinthians 12:20

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Bitterness is unlikely to stay as a feeling or isolated thought.
7. Internal bitter thoughts may have damaging physical effects.
8. Hebrews 12:15 indicates that it is unlikely others will suffer because of our bitterness.
9. Bitterness is likely to leave the deepest scars on the person who is bitter.
10. Christian unity is a robust truth which will survive any bitter thoughts I may have.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Have you suffered from or seen others suffer from the consequences of bitterness? It may help for you to share the experience.

Chapter 5

The Cure for Bitterness

Sometimes people approach me and say, 'It's all right for you living the Christian life because you are a full-time preacher!' They must think that I have some charmed spirituality which lifts me above the everyday struggles which 'lesser mortals' have! However, the truth is, that if anyone has problems in this area of bitterness then I certainly do. Like everyone else I have experienced the wounds and hurts inflicted by others. Like others I have tried to cover up and pretend all was well. I too have put up a positive front and gone through the motions that everything was all right when deep down I knew that all was not right.

There have been times when I have felt terrible bitterness towards a fellow-Christian, usually over something they said to me or about me. To pretend is not an answer and I am well aware that a bitter spirit can destroy my ministry for God. Thankfully God has given me a wonderful wife who on more than one occasion has pulled me out of the morass of bitterness into which I was sinking. She has enabled me to see the bigger picture, to gain a better perspective and to overcome the bitter trend within me. I thank God for my wife and the positive input she has upon my ministry.

How do we conquer bitterness?

The process is not easy and there are no simplistic answers and no straightforward formulae to follow. It is enormously hard work and requires continual diligence to escape the fatal

clutches of a bitter spirit.

1. **Clear sightedness:** we should view the other person, the one towards whom we are bitter, as someone who is deeply loved by God. Here is someone who God loves so much that He sent His Son to die for that person. If God loves that person unreservedly then so must I. That love cannot simply be worked up as a human sentiment but is a deep work of the Holy Spirit in our lives which produces the fruit of love. So this love flows into and through our hearts from a divine source, namely from God Himself. As we yield our lives ever more fully to Christ, then His Spirit can fill us and produce the fruit of love in our hearts.

2. **Repentance:** the Apostle Peter instructed Simon the Sorcerer to “**repent of your wickedness**”. He needed to exercise a change of heart and outlook. He needed a fundamental change in his life and behaviour. If we are ever to conquer bitterness then there must be a deep desire in our hearts to do so, as Ephesians 4:31 indicates when it says, “**get rid of all bitterness**”. This is repentance. It is letting go, renouncing, getting rid of, wanting to be relieved of and driving away all feelings of bitterness. It is the desire to be like the Saviour in our attitude, feelings and motivation.

3. **Prayer:** Again we read the instruction of Peter to Simon the Sorcerer, “**pray God if perhaps the thoughts of your heart may be forgiven.**” So coupled with repentance was the need to pray out the bitterness in his heart. For us it means staying on our knees in genuine prayerfulness until we have allowed God to deal with the bitterness within us. It is to pray until we have left the bitterness at the feet of Jesus, until we have the knowledge of God’s great forgiveness and cleansing.

Here we see the difference between ‘saying prayers’ and ‘truly praying’. This is the difference between the formality of saying

prayers and the reality of true intercession with God. To engage in simply formal prayers is about mouthing words but true prayerfulness is a clear connection with the living God. We must be careful never to allow our prayers to become simply ritualistic and therefore meaningless. Thus in terms of getting rid of something like bitterness there is need to be real with God and to remain on our knees in prayer until we have encountered God and experienced His deliverance and blessing. Ultimately true prayerfulness is the answer to overcoming a bitter and resentful spirit.

4. **Read the Bible:** the daily and systematic reading of the Word of God is vital in the washing away of such things as bitterness. The simple activity of focusing upon God's message is in itself a cleansing activity. It is described as the washing of water by the Word. Also as we read the Word of God we read inspiring examples of people who did not allow themselves to become victims of bitterness and who ultimately achieved outstanding things for God. We read as well of those who failed to gain victory over bitterness and so become examples of what not to be.

Joseph - Genesis 37-50

We have a wonderfully positive example in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Joseph was his father Jacob's favourite son. He was given a coat of many colours to indicate his favoured position. This caused his brothers to be jealous of him. He was given prophetic dreams from God about his future status which would make him ruler over his people. This made his brothers angry. Joseph was ripped from his father's household by those jealously, angry brothers who wanted to kill him but instead sold him to slave traders.

The slave traders in turn sold him to a leading soldier in Egypt and Joseph, through conscientious hard work and personal

integrity, became the chief man in that soldier's household. Then Joseph was falsely accused and found himself chained and in prison. He was at the lowest point and it had all started with jealous brothers. It would be understandable if he had harboured bitter thoughts and feelings and a deep desire for revenge towards them. However, there is absolutely no evidence that he had such thoughts even for a moment.

His trust in God was both total and remarkable and when the day came that he could have exacted revenge, as prime minister of Egypt, he did not. The brothers thought he would punish them for the dreadful way they had treated him, but in an act of wonderful graciousness, he forgave them and pointed out that though their actions were meant for evil, God had been there all the time and had purposed them for good. They had tried to destroy a life but God had used that life to bless and save many people, including his own family, from death by starvation. Throughout his trials, disappointments, unfair treatment and false accusations there seems to have never been a moment's bitterness in Joseph; just a simple and straightforward trust in God that all would work out right in the end. Such a story inspires us to allow God to deal with our bitter and twisted hearts.

The Older Brother—Luke 15

In contrast with the story of Joseph we have the experience of the older brother in the parable that Jesus told in Luke 15. The parable is traditionally known as the 'Prodigal Son' or the 'Lost Son'. It is about a man who had two sons and the younger decided that he wanted to leave home and the hard work of the farm, to enjoy the bright lights of a distant land. His father gave him the portion of inheritance which would have been his due and the son left. In course of time after a riotous lifestyle the

son was penniless and friendless. His only recourse was to find work and the only work was caring for pigs (which was abhorrent to Jewish sensibilities). He was so hungry that he would have eaten the same pods that the pigs were given. Eventually he came to himself and journeyed home to his father. He wanted to say 'Sorry', asking for no special favours. He would be thankful to be employed as a slave in his father's house.

The father looked out and saw his son coming home and shedding all dignity he ran to his son, embraced him and welcomed him home with a kiss, a new coat, sandals for his feet (only slaves went barefoot) and a wonderful party with good food and music. However, when the older son came home from working in the fields and was told that the younger brother was in the house and a welcome home party was in full swing he refused to join in the merriment. He revealed a bitter heart which produced vindictive accusations both against his brother and against his father who had welcomed the Prodigal. He complained that he had worked hard, obeyed all instructions and had never wasted a penny, yet he had been given no party. Now, the son who wasted everything he ever had was given a tremendous feast of joy. To him it seemed so unfair and undeserving. He refused to join in and so bitterness spoiled the party and hurt his father. The truth was that the father's entire wealth belonged to him, but he could not spare even a little kindness for his returning brother, thus demonstrating his bitter resentment.

If Joseph is an example of someone in Scripture to be imitated then the older brother is an example of someone whose bad example must not be followed.

5. Have a purpose in life: it is both instructive and sad to read the autobiography of Benazir Bhutto. She was born in Pakistan, into a privileged and wealthy family. She was the oldest child of Ali

Bhutto who was prime minister of the country. She was intelligent and was educated at Harvard and Oxford and was by her father's side at a number of important political events. Sadly her father was overthrown in a political coup, falsely accused and wrongly imprisoned. He had introduced to the country a new constitution that was democratic and which included safeguards for the poor, for women and for minority groups. He was executed on the orders of General Zia.

Benazir found herself victimised by the regime. She endured long periods of house arrest followed by imprisonment in filthy conditions and often in isolation. She was exiled for a number of years and had to cope with the death of her brother who was also, in all likelihood, murdered on the orders of Zia. Eventually she overcame illness, exile and threats to return in triumph to Pakistan and be overwhelmingly elected as prime minister in 1988. She was just thirty-five years of age and the first woman leader of a Muslim nation. She, in turn was overthrown only to be elected a second time and again overthrown by a military coup.

Tragically she was assassinated in 2007 while campaigning for re-election. She was a brave and determined woman who wanted to help the poor and keep extremism at bay.

Many thought she campaigned only to avenge her father's death but she wrote, "You can't be fuelled by **bitterness**. It can eat you up, but it cannot drive you. The task – my motivation – remained the same: to return Pakistan to a democracy through fair and impartial elections." Her potential for bitterness was overcome by an overriding purpose in life. She saw her life's work not as a personal vendetta but as service to her people and especially the needy. She constantly worked for the goal of raising the literacy levels of her people. Her government built schools, gave human rights to women and to minority religious

groups and generally empowered the poor against exploitation. The country was kept free from the fanatical extremism that now affects so much of Pakistan and indeed of the world.

Christians should have a vision of the world that needs the good news of God's saving grace. Thus the purpose for God's people is the work of evangelism, sharing the glorious message of Christ. This is a work of care and love to a hurting world and it should motivate us and lift us above our petty jealousies, pride and bitterness. When we see and understand God's will for our lives, then anything that distracts or diverts us from that will should be jettisoned. If we are aimless we can become bitter but, when we know our purpose in life, we have no time for bitterness as we pursue that purpose with every fibre of our being.

This may not be straightforward as we can so easily be infected with the poison of bitterness when difficulties and trials arise in our lives. Someone has written, "As difficulties come, let us make sure that we become better and not bitter Christians." We should see our lives as being purified by trials so that we can better serve the Lord and fulfil His purpose for our lives.

6. Look at Christ on the Cross: as the nails were driven into the hands and feet of Jesus by rough, uncaring Roman soldiers He reacted in a different way from most people who were being crucified. Usually the reaction would be to curse and shout abuse at the executioners or at least to look at them with hate-filled eyes but no such bitter reaction comes from the Saviour. His words reveal no sense of bitterness, resentment or hatred. He says, "**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**" (Luke 23:34)

If anyone had cause to be bitter, then Jesus did. If anyone had a genuine reason to express bitter anger, then He did. He had

been unfairly accused. The charges against Him were trumped up. The court had not upheld the normal rules of Roman justice and legal integrity and the magistrate Pontius Pilate had given way to mob rule and made a political decision. He felt that to crucify Jesus would quieten the crowds and bring an end to any disturbance in the city of Jerusalem. How wrong he was!

Thus Jesus had every cause to feel bitter but exhibited no bitterness at all. It is a powerful example to us because we have never suffered the unfairness He experienced and yet too easily we can become bitter and resentful.

Whether or not to forgive is a decision that we make and though we may not forget the hurts inflicted upon us we can say, "I forgive". This needs to be repeated every day and we need to ask the Lord for help to make the words meaningful and effective in our lives. With His grace and help we can truly be forgiving people who do not let bitterness ruin both our relationships with other people and our relationship with the Lord.

Forgiveness is the antidote for bitterness. In May 2008 Rosimeiri Boxall at the age of nineteen committed suicide by jumping from a window. She was driven to this desperate act by the bullying of two acquaintances who had made her life a misery by slapping and punching her and spraying deodorant into her face. In court they were convicted and found guilty of causing her death by manslaughter. Rosi was the adopted daughter of Rev. Simon Boxall and his wife Rachel who loved her very much. Their loss was dreadful but they could say: "We are sure that she is now safe in God the Father's arms." They were also quoted as saying: "We continue to pray for those who were responsible for Rosi's death. We want them to know that we forgive them. That does not mean that what they did doesn't matter, of course it does." He added, "Forgiveness means that **we refuse to be**

shackled by bitterness and our prayer is that forgiveness will allow the girls to be released from the burden of what they've done so that they can even now grow into the sort of people that God intended them to be." (*Evangelicals Now*) It is hard to imagine such a response but, with Christ's help it can be achieved.

We must never let bitterness weaken the quality of our personal Christian lives and we must not let bitterness ruin the work of our church life. We need the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives through a close fellowship with the Saviour to experience the holy contentment which is found in doing the will of God. Corrie ten Boom, who had survived the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp in which her sister, Betsy, died, wrote these words: "It was 1947...I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. It was a truth they needed most to hear in that **bitter**, bombed-out land." (*Tramp for the Lord*) With God's help she overcame all feelings of bitterness which could have haunted her life because of the cruel actions of concentration camp guards and German military personnel. She reflected in a wonderful way the forgiving attitude of her Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Bitterness will always destroy and so we must wage war upon it and never let it defeat us. The battle at times is hard but with the Lord's help we can know victory and follow the Lord's instruction through the words of the Apostle Paul, "**And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**" (Ephesians 4:32)

Poisoned Soul EXAM 5 AK17
Chapter 5 - Cure of Bitterness

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. If we see a bitter spirit in someone, we should
 - a. leave well alone
 - b. be sorry for their hurt
 - c. confront their attitude in a positive manner

2. In terms of overcoming bitterness, understanding God's love for me
 - a. leads to clear sightedness
 - b. helps me to praise
 - c. encourages my faith

3. Which Bible verse indicates that Joseph was right to think God would work out His will in the end?
 - a. Philippians 4:13
 - b. Romans 8:28
 - c. Hebrews 13:5

4. The bitterness of the older brother in Luke 15
 - a. broke the relationship between the father and the younger son
 - b. hurt the father and his own enjoyment of the party
 - c. represents the unbeliever's attitude towards God

5. Which characteristics of God does Paul highlight in Ephesians 4:32?
 - a. Kind and tender hearted
 - b. Merciful and loving
 - c. Gracious and longsuffering

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Christian service is a sure protection against bitterness.
7. Prayer is a vital weapon in overcoming bitterness.
8. The analogy of washing is used to describe the effect of Bible reading.
9. Having a meaningful purpose in life will help protect us from bitterness.
10. Roman injustice and religious hatred were causes of bitterness in Jesus.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Have you experienced the cure for bitterness in your life?

Would what you have learned in this chapter enable you to help someone you know who is harbouring a bitter spirit?

Chapter 6

The Conquest of Bitterness

Susanne Geske

Susanne came from Germany, the daughter of parents who divorced when she was five years old. At the age of twenty she left home and in a remarkable way came to faith in Christ. She went on to Bible College and did some months of training on a mission trip to Africa in the country of Zaire (now known as Congo). She married a very shy and unassuming man named Tilmann Geske. Their family was completed with three children, two daughters and a son. Eventually they went to serve the Lord in Malatya in Eastern Turkey. Tilmann set up a business and they tried to communicate the love of Christ with local Turkish people on a personal basis. Then in April 2007 Tilmann and two colleagues were tortured and killed in their office. The terrible crime still echoes in Turkey to this day as the legal process drags on.

The shock for Susanne was overwhelming but she maintained a steady poise and quiet determination in the face of the dreadful event. She was able to say, “I believe that Jesus went to the cross to forgive all our sins and on the cross He forgave those who were taking His life, saying: ‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ So I am going to forgive the people who took the life of my husband because truly they did not know what they were doing. I am going to stay here to show them that I forgive them.” Her love for Christ, her love for people and her love for the Gospel have driven out any

bitterness that might have taken root. Her loss is incalculable but her love is a true and wonderful reflection of the love of Jesus Christ, her Lord and Saviour.

Charlotte Elliott Just As I Am

The following story is told in *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes* by Robert J. Morgan. Charlotte Elliott of Brighton, England was an embittered woman. Her health was broken, and her disability had hardened her. “If God loved me,” she muttered, “He would not have treated me this way.” Hoping to help her, a Swiss minister named Dr. Cesar Malan visited the Elliotts on May 9, 1822. Over dinner, Charlotte lost her temper and railed against God and family in a violent outburst. Her embarrassed family left the room, and Dr. Malan, left alone with her, stared at her across the table.

“You are tired of yourself, aren’t you?” he said at length. “You are holding on to your hate and anger because you have nothing else in the world to cling to. Consequently, you have become sour, bitter and resentful.”

“What is your cure?” asked Charlotte.

“The faith you are trying to despise.”

As they talked, Charlotte softened. “If I wanted to become a Christian and to share the peace and joy you possess,” she finally asked, “what would I do?”

“You would give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates and loves, pride and shame.”

“I would come to God just as I am? Is that right?”

Charlotte did come just as she was. Her heart was changed that

day. As time passed she found and claimed John 6:37 as a special verse for her, “... **the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.**”

Several years later, her brother, Rev. Henry Elliott, was raising funds for a school for children of poor clergymen. Charlotte wrote a poem, and it was printed and sold across England. The leaflet said: *Sold For the Benefit of St. Margaret’s Hall, Brighton: Him That Cometh To Me I Will In No Wise Cast Out.* Underneath was Charlotte’s poem – which has since become the most famous invitational hymn in history.

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

C. L. Culpepper “Charlie, It’s Gone!”

One night in China, Southern Baptist missionary C. L. Culpepper stayed up late for devotions, but as he tried to pray he felt like stone. Finally he asked, “Lord, what is the matter?”

He recorded ‘I had opened my Bible to Romans 2:17. As I read on it seemed the Apostle Paul was speaking directly to me when he said, “But if you call yourself a Christian and rely upon the Gospel, and boast of your relation to God, and know His will, and approve what is excellent; and if you are sure you are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, a correction to the foolish, a teacher of children – you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself?” The Holy Spirit used these verses like a sword

to cut deeply into my heart. He said, “You are a hypocrite! You claim to be a Christian! What have you really done for Christ? The Lord said those who believed on Him would have rivers of living waters flowing from their inmost being! Do you have that kind of power?”

Culpepper awakened his wife, and they prayed into the night. The next morning at a prayer meeting with fellow workers, he confessed to pride and spiritual impotence, saying his heart was broken. The Holy Spirit began to so convict the others of sin that they could hardly bear it.

‘I watched their faces grow pale, then they began to cry and drop on their knees or fall prostrate on the floor. Missionaries went to missionaries confessing wrong feelings toward one another. Chinese preachers, guilty of envy, jealousy and hatred, confessed their sins to one another.’

The revival spread through the seminary, the schools, the hospital, and the churches in the area. Perhaps the deepest impact was made on Culpepper’s friend Wiley B. Glass, a much respected missionary. As Glass sat in the meetings, a man’s face came before him and God seemed to be asking him about his attitude toward that man. Glass had hated the man for many years, and suddenly the Holy Spirit brought him under deep conviction.

In great anguish, Glass went to Culpepper, fell on his shoulder, and said, “Charlie, pray for me!” Both men went to their knees, but Glass was so distressed he could not express his problem.

‘He was pale as death and kept groaning in his anxiety. I prayed with him and for him several times during that day and the next. In the evening of the second day he came running to me and threw his arms around me. “Charlie, it’s gone!” he exclaimed. I said, “What’s gone?” He replied, “That old root of **bitterness.**”

He told me that thirty years earlier, before he came to China, a man had insulted his wife. The insult had made him so angry he felt that he could kill the man if ever he saw him again. He realised that a called servant of God should not feel this way, and it had bothered him for years. Finally he just turned the man over to God. When the Holy Spirit began working in his heart during that week, the question came, “Are you willing for that man to be saved?” He answered, “Lord, I’m willing for You to save him... just keep him on the other side of heaven!” Finally, he came to a place where he said, “Lord, if that man is alive, and if I can find him when I go on furlough, I will confess my hatred of him and do my best to win him for You.”

When he reached that decision, the Lord released the joys of heaven to his soul, and he was filled with love and peace. He became a more effective preacher for the Lord, and during the next few years he led hundreds to Christ. (*Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*)

Bishop Festo Kivengere

Bishop Kivengere lived in Uganda during the turbulent years of the brutal regime of Idi Amin. Amin was one of the most ruthless dictators ever to hold high office in Africa. He killed many, many people and particularly persecuted the Christian Church as he espoused Islam in an attempt to gain financial support from oil-rich Arab countries. Archbishop Luwum was killed possibly by Amin himself but certainly on his orders. Luwum was Kivengere’s friend and colleague in Christian ministry in Uganda. Kivengere had to flee across the border for his life and only just managed to escape Amin’s henchmen. He eventually arrived in Britain and found exile in London.

He was comparatively safe while his fellow countrymen were hounded and destroyed by Amin’s troops. He had to face his

own attitude to Amin and find out what God required of him in response. He wrote: "Peace is not automatic...It always comes when hearts are exposed to the love of Christ. But this always costs something. For the love of Christ was demonstrated through suffering, and those who experience that love can never put it into practice without some cost. I had to face my own attitude towards President Amin and his agents. The Holy Spirit showed me that I was getting hard in my spirit, and that my hardness and **bitterness** toward those who were persecuting us could only bring spiritual loss. This would take away my ability to communicate the love of God, which is the essence of my ministry and testimony. So I had to ask for forgiveness from the Lord and for grace to love President Amin more...This was fresh air for my tired soul. I knew I had seen the Lord and been released: love filled my heart." (*I Love Idi Amin*)

Conclusion

The Second Century Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius has been described as “the philosopher-king of the Roman Empire”. He wrote a book entitled, *Meditations*. “The general sentiment of the *Meditations* is that overreaction and lingering **bitterness** are the most damaging responses to life’s iniquities. ‘If you are pained by any external thing, it is not this that disturbs you, but your own judgment of it,’ he writes. ‘And it is in your own power to wipe out this judgement now.’” (Simon Seberg Montefiore in *101 WORLD HEROES*).

George MacDonald, whose genre of writing was the fountainhead for such literary luminaries as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, had many problems in his life. “With eleven children, MacDonald didn’t always find it easy to put bread on the table, but in spite of problems with finance and his health, there was no **bitterness**. He rejoiced in the goodness of God.” (*3000 Quotations from the writings of George MacDonald* by Harry Verploegh). Somehow he was able to deal with bitterness and, in the words quoted above of Marcus Aurelius, found the “**power to wipe out**” the inner judgements that produce the corrosive effects of bitterness.

Bitterness is a deeply destructive emotion. It can develop in our spirits like infection in a physical wound. It has the potential to immobilise us in our work, destabilise us in our thinking and destroy our relationships with other people. It can make us ineffective and useless for God’s service and could undermine the work of the church and its standing in our communities. A

bitter reaction will always undermine the integrity of the Gospel because the Gospel is a message that conquers bitterness. The Lord Jesus took all our bitterness on the cross. The ultimate price for sin was paid by Him and in Him we can find release from the oppressive bondage that bitterness produces. May God grant us the grace to always leave bitterness at the feet of the Saviour so that we can live life unburdened by the weight of a bitter spirit which ultimately will cause most damage to ourselves.

I hope you understand that this short book was written out of a burdened heart which wants to bring relief to all who suffer from bitterness whether they are the afflicters or the afflicted. Bitterness is a poison that saps the soul of contentment and joy, which ruins and destroys fellowship, friendship and relationships and clouds out the love and grace of God. May it have no place in our experience as we work hard to make sure it is removed far from us.

Poisoned Soul EXAM 6 AK17
Chapter 6 - The Conquest of Bitterness

Write the correct answer in the space provided:

1. The hymn 'Just as I am, without one plea,' was inspired by the Bible verse
 - a. 'Behold the Lamb of God'
 - b. '...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.'
 - c. 'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

2. The encouraging truth of John 6:37 is best summed up as:
 - a. God sees me when I am alone
 - b. God loves me even if no-one else does
 - c. God accepts me when I come to Him

3. The lesson we learn from Romans 2:17-29 is
 - a. inward reality, not outward observance
 - b. keeping the law, not pleasing ourselves
 - c. fervent service, not idle inactivity

4. The love of Christ
 - a. was demonstrated through suffering
 - b. can be put into practice without cost to us
 - c. can be communicated to others, despite a bitter spirit

5. Bitterness
 - a. cannot be conquered
 - b. can make us ineffective and useless in the Lord's service
 - c. has no effect on our Christian service

Write TRUE or FALSE in the space provided:

6. Love for Christ, for people and the gospel is able to drive out bitterness.
7. The Holy Spirit's work in us should lead to a holy contentment in doing His will.
8. Peace follows when we expose our hearts to the love of God.
9. Bitterness is a minor destructive emotion.
10. A bitter reaction undermines the message of the gospel.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

'Forgiveness is the antidote for bitterness.'

Which of the many examples given has been the most meaningful to you?