

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SEVENTY-FOUR)

“BEWARE OF BITTERNESS” (PART TWO)

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

In our previous Lesson, we began to consider the sin of **bitterness**, the **fifth** specific sin which Paul urged the believers in Ephesus to put off in **Ephesians 4:25-32**. In verse **31** he writes, *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and slanderous talk—indeed all malice.”*

We noted that the word *“bitterness”* is a translation of the Greek word **pikria**: (**pik-ree’-ah**). In the New Testament, **pikria** is used in a metaphorical sense to describe animosity, resentment and harshness. It speaks of a settled emotional hostility that poisons the whole inner man.

The Holy Spirit sheds light on the devastating effects of bitterness in **Hebrews 12:15**: *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”* The phrase *“Looking diligently”* is the translation of a Greek word which literally means “to look upon, to observe, to examine the state of affairs of something, to look after, or to oversee.” The Greek word is in the plural, indicating that it is the responsibility of every believer to ensure that no member of the Body of Christ comes short of the grace of God.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are all accountable **for** each other and **to** each other. We all have the responsibility of overseeing one another in spiritual matters, so that we may grow and flourish in the grace of God, and not come short of it. We must all consciously assume the responsibility of encouraging our fellow believers to persevere in God’s grace. We must also humbly receive their encouragement and admonition.

When a *“root of bitterness”* springs up, it causes trouble. The Greek word translated *“causing trouble”* means “to disturb, to trouble, to annoy, to cause discomfort.” The word pictures a person who is

continually troubled, harassed, and annoyed by thoughts of how someone else has wronged him or her. The offended person is so troubled that he or she is almost emotionally immobilized, unable to move on with his or her life. If he or she does not get help quickly, he or she will eventually be defiled.

Adrian Pierce Rogers, was an American pastor and author. He was the senior pastor of **Bellevue Baptist Church** in Memphis, Tennessee, from 1972 to 2005. During his tenure there, he preached a sermon entitled “*The Blight of Bitterness*,” from which the following lengthy excerpt is taken:

“What is the root of bitterness and how does this root find lodging in our heart and lives? Well a bitter person is a person generally who has been hurt. Something has happened to them. Life has not worked out as they thought that it should work out. Someone has hurt them. Maybe that one they perceive to be God Himself. They are bitter at God. Or they are bitter at society. Or they are bitter at specific individuals. They may be bitter at husbands or at wives.

Why this bitterness? Well these people have been hurt. And, that hurt turns to anger and hostility. Now, the hurt may have been intentional. They may have been intentionally hurt. Or the hurt may have been unintentional. Someone hurt them and was not even aware of the fact that they hurt them. Or the hurt may have been imagined. Nobody did anything to them really. But, they feel that they have been hurt. They feel that they have been misused. They feel that they have been abused.

Now, we’ve all been hurt. There is not a one of us here that has not suffered some kind of hurt. And, when we are hurt our natural inclination is to react with anger—is it not?—to react with resentment. We have a desire to get even. We have a desire to hurt the one that has hurt us. But, if we are Christians, we recognize that desire to be

wrong. We recognize that to be of the old nature. And, we confess it, we deal with it, we get over it, and somehow it doesn't become a root of bitterness.

But, a bitter person is different. When a bitter person is hurt he doesn't deal with his bitterness. But, he takes it into his heart. He begins to dwell on it. He begins to mull it over and over again. And, then in order to justify this feeling that he has in his heart, he looks for other problems to justify this feeling of bitterness. If somebody hurts him he begins to watch that person to see if he can find other faults in that individual. And, then he becomes a very negative person. And, he looks for all of the faults and the flaws that he can find in that other person. And, when he looks for them, he will certainly find them because we all have flaws and we all have faults. As a matter of fact, you always find what you look for...

And, the bitter person—this person who has been hurt—begins to look for these things. And, sure enough, they find them. And, the more they see, the more that confirms them in their bitterness and the more bitter they become. I'll tell you something else about a bitter person—a caustic Christian, a sour saint—they have a way of bringing out bitterness in other people. A bitter person, because he becomes a student of this sort of thing, he knows where your emotional hot button is. And, he knows how to push that button and to get out of you the response that he wants. A bitter person really wants to get under your skin to see if he can get you to react with hostility to him. And, when he can, or when she can, that only confirms the bitterness that they already have. It only pushes that down deeper into their subconsciousness and gives them a right to justify that bitterness.

Now, let me say this. Few people will admit that they are bitter. This is an underground sin. The Bible calls it “[any] **root of bitterness...**” (**Hebrews 12:15**). And, the root is that which is unseen. It is underground. Few people will admit it. They will deny it, they will

disguise it, or they will disregard it. But, you will find very few people who say, 'Well I'm just a bitter person.' Every now and then you'll find one—but not many—because it takes a great amount of candor and honesty to admit that one is a bitter person...

Look again in verse **15**. The Bible says we're to be: '*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness*'—now watch it—'*springing up*'—because every root has fruit, springing up—'*trouble you, and thereby many be defiled...*'

Now, you're going to find out that first of all, when you are bitter it is going to hurt you first. It's going to hurt you. It's going to trouble you. But, not only is it going to trouble you. Your bitterness will have a contagion about it. Many are going to be defiled. And, so first of all there is personal trouble and then there is social trouble that comes from bitterness...

When you live outwardly a good life, but you have bitterness down beneath the surface, that outward life is just your way of pruning the limbs while you strengthen the root. And, the more you prune the limbs the more you strengthen the root. And, the more of these outward things you do that seem so good and the things that you give up, but if you don't deal radically with that root cause, it's going to trouble you and many are going to be defiled. You need to pursue it in order to recognize it. Then you need to pursue it in order to remove it, to root it out. And, there is only one thing that will root it out and that is to forgive the person who has wounded you."

Paul says in **Ephesians 4:31**, "*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.*" He says, "*All bitterness.*" The word "*all*" is the translation of the Greek word **pás** which means, "A

ll in the sense of each part that applies.” It means, “All without exception.”

Why does Paul urge the believers to put away “**all** bitterness?” Because “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (**1 Corinthians 5:6**); because even a “*root of bitterness springing up*” can cause trouble and defile many (**Hebrews 12:15**).

Brothers and sisters, every attitude, emotion and action that is inconsistent with love and the presence of the Holy Spirit is to be abandoned. Every believer should have a zero tolerance policy as it relates to sin!

In verse **31** Paul associates bitterness with **wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking**. They are all the fruit of bitterness!

“*Wrath*” is the translation of the Greek word **thumos: (thoo-mos’)**, which refers to “a violent outbreak of anger, anger boiling up instantly and soon subsiding again.” It speaks of an agitated, vehement anger that rushes along relentlessly. The word describes a tumultuous welling up of the whole spirit; a mighty emotion which seizes and moves the whole inner man. The Greeks likened it to a fire amongst straw, which quickly blazed and just as quickly burned itself out. In **Galatians 5:20**, **thumos** is listed as one of the “*works of the flesh.*” Wrath is the mental excitement which bitterness produces. It is the explosion on the **outside** of the feelings on the **inside**.

“*Anger*” is a translation of the Greek word **orgé: (or-gay’)**, which refers to a deep inner resentment that seethes and smolders. It describes anger which has become ingrained. It is long-lasting, slow-burning anger, which refuses to be pacified and nurses its wrath to keep it warm.

In distinguishing between “wrath” (**thumos**) and “anger” (**orge**), the Scottish theologian, **William Barclay** made the following comments:

"There are outbreaks of passion (**thumos**) and long-lived anger (**orge**). The Greeks defined **thumos** as the kind of anger which is like the flame which comes from straw; it quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides. On the other hand, they described **orge** as anger which has become habitual. To the Christian the burst of temper and the long-lived anger are both alike forbidden."

The Greek word translated "*clamour*" is **kraugé**: (**krow-gay**'), which refers to "loud crying or screaming that is extremely boisterous."

Interestingly, the word **kraugé** is used in **Hebrews 5:7**, to speak of our Lord's cries, as He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: "*During his earthly life Christ offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion*" The word "*cries*" in this verse is a translation of the Greek word **kraugé**. What a graphic picture is presented here of the intense sorrow and agony that our Lord had to endure on His way to the Cross!

In context of **Ephesians 4:31**, the word **kraugé** obviously refers to the shout or outcry of strife and describes a public outburst that reveals a loss of control. An example of *clamour* is the utterances and behaviour of an out of control crowd, rioting in the streets.

The Greek word translated "*evil speaking*" is **blasphémia**: (**blas-fay-me'-ah**) which means, "to speak evil of, to slander, to defame." It is speech which seeks to tarnish the reputation of others. It refers to the very worst type of slander. In Classical Greek **blasphémia** represented the strongest expression of personal defamation.

The Life Application Bible has an interesting note regarding gossip,

"We don't often call it by its right name, but gossip is passive slander, and it is a massive problem in churches today. It may be even worse than slander due to its dishonesty. A slanderer actively wants to attack

and hurt someone, so that person is easily identified. Gossipers don't care whether or not a person is hurt as they pass along dishonest and harmful information. Churches can save a lot of headaches and heartaches by not allowing gossip (or gossipers) to gain a foothold."

In the context of **Ephesians 4:31**, **blasphémia** is related to **wrath** and **anger**, but it is a more enduring manifestation of inward anger, that shows itself in reviling. It refers to an attempt to cause someone to fall into disrepute. It is the ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart.

Brothers and sisters, let us attend to the words of Solomon in **Proverbs 6:16-19**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

16 There are six things that the LORD hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him:

17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift to run to evil,

19 a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who spreads discord among family members.

The Apostle says, "*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, **with all malice.***" Malice has been described "The icing on the vice cake."

The word "*malice*" is a translation of the Greek word **kakia**: (**kak-ee'-ah**), which refers to, "malignity, ill-will, a desire to injure, wickedness, depravity." **kakia** is the general term for evil that is the root of all vices. It is the underlying principle of evil which is present, even if not outwardly expressed. Malice always desires to hurt others and rejoices in the hurt that is caused!

The Anglican archbishop and New Testament Greek Scholar, **Richard Trench** wrote that **kakia** is “that peculiar form of evil which manifests itself in a malignant interpretation of the actions of others, an attributing of them all to the worst motive.”

Commenting on **Ephesians 4:31**, **Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones** said:

“Malice means wicked desires with respect to others, a determination to harm others, again a kind of settled spirit which so hates others that it thinks of ways of harming them, plots such ways, gloats over them, and then proceeds to put them into practice; it is a kind of malignity. Evil, malicious gossip and slander also form a part of this malice that he tells us all to put far from us.”

Paul says “*all malice.*” In emphasizing the “all” of “*all malice,*” **H. A. Ironside** remarked: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all—**A-L-L**—malice. Now, you see, if you do not live up to that, you are not living a real Christian life. This is Christianity in the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Brothers and sisters, if we are serious about living what **Ironside** refers to as “a real Christian life...in the power of the Holy Ghost,” we must **put away** “*all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice.*”

The words, “*put away,*” are the translation of a Greek word which means, “to raise up, to take upon oneself and carry what has been raised, to bear away what has been raised, to carry off or remove.”

The word is used figuratively in verse **31** to picture the taking up and carrying away of the evil attitudes and actions mentioned in the verse. Brothers and sisters, these evil attitudes and actions are the filthy rags which characterized the “**old man.**” In light of the fact that the “**old man**” was crucified with Christ, and that the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, or the **flesh** has been rendered effectively inoperative, let us put

off the “**old man**” and put on the righteous garments which characterize the “**new man.**” Let us put on the garment of Christ-likeness, so that the world might see Him in our words and works. Let us allow Him to live His wonderfully efficacious life in and through us, a new life, a supernatural life, a life that is impossible for us to live otherwise. The source of the potential to “put off” and “put on” is, of course, the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The words, “*put away,*” are in a construction in the Greek which indicate that the words, are a command that is to be carried out with a sense of urgency. We must not delay in putting away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice. They must be put away immediately.

The construction of the words in the Greek also indicate that the one who is commanded to do the “putting away” is being acted upon by an outside force. In this case, the outside force is the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters, while we are commanded to “**put away**” all the evil attitudes and actions mentioned in verses **25-31**, it is important for us to understand and appreciate that we cannot put them away by relying on our own strength. We must rely on a strength “outside” of our own—the supernatural strength supplied by the Holy Spirit. If you doubt that this is true, just attempt to put away **one** of these sins in your own natural power and see how successful you are! We are to intentionally and consistently yield to the Holy Spirit, so that His divine enablement can transform us and give us both the desire and the power to say a big “**No**” to sin.

This is not to say however, that believers must simply relax and “Let go and let God.” No, we must still make the volitional choice to say “No” whenever any of these ugly sins raises its ugly head. As we noted in an earlier Lesson, we are 100% responsible to put away these sins, and at the same time, we are 100% dependent on the Holy Spirit to supply the desire and the power to do so.

Commenting on the sins listed by Paul in verse **31**, **Ray Stedman** made the following remarks:

"What a terrible list this is. Yet these are the things the Holy Spirit sees in us. You see how superficial many of us are in judging our own lives? We think because we keep out of trouble and stay within the law that we have pleased God. Not at all. As the Holy Spirit looks at us he sees these things that are shocking to him, grieving to him. We look at them and we justify them. But let us be honest and admit they are there, and often there, in our Christian lives. This is what is producing weakness in our Christian living, these very things.

They may be present in your heart right now. You may be boiling with rage at someone right now, you may be seething at some possible fancied injury or insult that someone said to you just this morning, your husband or wife, or someone else. Well, if so, put it away. That is the word of the Lord. Put away these things, let them all be put away. That means to repent of them, change your mind about them, stop justifying them to yourself, stop saying you have a right to feel this way, stop defending them. Immediately when you do this, an ungrieved Spirit within will release to you the love of Christ, the kindness of a God who, as the Lord Jesus himself said, 'is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.' That is what Christianity is, tenderheartedness, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave us."