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## How Big of a Burden is Bitterness?

**Ephesians 4:31:** (NKJV) *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."*

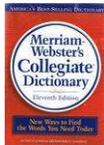
We all have had experiences in our lives that have left a bitter taste in our mouths. Whether it is a self-inflicted emotional wound that brings the bitterness or a wound that comes from someone or somewhere else, the fact is, we are wounded and we become bitter. So, what does bitterness do? Is it ever helpful in any way? Is holding bitterness a practice that nourishes us or is holding bitterness a practice that eats us alive from the inside out? How do we recognize bitterness and how do we eradicate it from our lives? Today we look into a Biblical perspective on the burden of bitterness.

*"Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness."  
- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### Questions for consideration:

1. What is Bitterness?
2. Where does Bitterness come from and what can it do to us?
3. How can we manage and eliminate Bitterness in our lives?

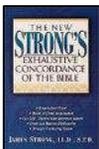
### 1. What is Bitterness?



**Merriam - Webster online Dictionary:**

**bit·ter** Function: adjective

- 1: being or inducing one of the four basic taste sensations that is peculiarly acrid, astringent, or disagreeable and suggestive of an infusion of hops
- 2: marked by intensity or severity:
  - a: accompanied by severe pain or suffering <a bitter death>
  - b: being relentlessly determined: <a bitter partisan>
  - c: exhibiting intense animosity <bitter enemies>
  - d: harshly reproachful
- 3: expressive of severe pain, grief, or regret <bitter tears>



**Some Old Testament words:**

**Bitter:** Strong's #4785 Marah (maw-raw'); bitter; Marah, a place in the Desert: the spring with bitter water which was three days travel from the crossing place of the Red Sea in the peninsula of Sinai

**Exodus 15:23:** *"And when they came to **Marah <4785>**, they could not drink of the waters of **Marah <4785>**, for they were **bitter <4751>**: therefore the name of it was called **Marah <4785>**."*

**Bitter:** Strong's #4751 mar (mar); or (feminine) marah (maw-raw'); bitter (literally or figuratively); also (as noun) bitterness, or (adverbially) bitterly:

**Genesis 27:34:** *"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding **bitter <4751>** cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father."*

**Bitter:** Strong's #4844 meror (mer-ore'); or merowr (mer-ore') bitter herb, bitterness

**Exodus 12:8:** *"And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with **bitter <4844>** herbs they shall eat it."*



### Some New Testament Words:

**Bitter:** Strongs #4087 pikraino (pik-rah'-ee-no) to make bitter 1a) to produce a bitter taste in the stomach 2) to embitter or render angry, indignant 2b) to be embittered, irritated

Colossians 3:19: "Husbands, love your wives, and **be <4087> not bitter <4087> against them.**"

**Bitter:** Strongs #4088 pikria (pik-ree'-ah); acridity (especially poison), literally or figuratively bitter gall, extreme wickedness, bitterness, bitter hatred

Acts 8:23: "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of **bitterness <4088>**, and in the bond of iniquity."

**Bitter:** Strongs #4089 pikros (pik-ros'); bitter, harsh, virulent

James 3:11: "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and **bitter <4089>?**"

James 3:14: "But if ye have **bitter <4089>** envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

## 2. Where does Bitterness come from and what can it do to us?

**Bitterness can often be self-inflicted and come from our own poor choices:** Genesis 27:34-36: Esau blamed Jacob and complained bitterly, but Hebrews 12:16 gives a different perspective.

**Bitterness as a result of our choices can give us the "it's his fault" perspective on life:** Hebrews 12:7-17:

- Once we adopt "it's his fault," our angst becomes misdirected and we lose our objectivity;
- Now that we have angst, it grows without inhibition secretly within us;
- That root having taken a stronghold can now begin to affect others;
- The result is MANY are defiled.

**Bitterness can come because we forsake God's ways:** Jeremiah 2:19-20

**Bitterness can come because our hearts are out of harmony with God:** Acts 8:21-23

**Bitterness can come because we rely on earthly and devilish reasoning:** James 3:14-16

As a result of bitterness finding one of these paths into our heart, we now become vulnerable.

**Consider these for help with bitterness:**

Psalms 41:10-13: Focus instead of the love God has for you and He will heal your bitterness.

Philippians 3:13: The Apostle Paul could have been bitter in many circumstances because of all that happened to him. Bitterness is self-defeating.

Proverbs 4:23: Bitterness is the

opposite of sweetness!

*"It is hardly possible to build anything if frustration, bitterness and a mood of helplessness prevail."*

- Lech Walesa



**It makes us numb to the reality of sin within ourselves: Acts 8:9-23**

- Bitterness forms in the *"intent of your heart"* and then produces an unmanageable ego - you must be the center of victory Isaiah 14:13-14
- That ego becomes the primary influence upon your conscience.
- Now you determine right from wrong based upon its effect on your personal status - "How does it affect me?"
- The gall of bitterness - numb to the Spirit and bound to the wretchedness of sin.

**Deuteronomy 29:18-19:**

- You are now *"bound in chains of wickedness."*

**1 Timothy 4:1-3: Bitterness creates in us fountains of pride James 3:7-18**

- Once bitterness has taken root, it poisons our words. We then spread the poison to others.
- We become a walking contradiction, speaking both blessing and cursing.
- We now pollute our spiritual environment with unspiritual and devilish attitudes.
- Now, rather than witnessing to the Gospel, our lives witness against it!

**Bitterness can come to us as a result of mistreatment: 1 Samuel 22:1-2**

- Being mistreated often leads to an inability to trust.
- Being mistreated often leads us to become perpetrators of that same mistreatment!

**Bitterness can come to us as a result of a tragic loss: Jeremiah 31:15: We can build our life around what we don't deserve, rather than around what we can learn from it to help others. It absolutely is our choice.**

**Bitterness can come thru the folly of your child: Proverbs 17:25: Bitterness and selfishness are twin brothers that don't belong in our hearts. So, what do we do with all of this? It seems as though bitterness can enter at every turn and enter easily and stealthily. Once in, it quietly takes root, masked as what we might consider "justifiable anger" or a "justifiable reaction" to wrong, or simply a "justifiable defense" of one's own self. Then it grows quietly and under the surface at first, so we are comfortable with it until one day we wake up and it rules our life.**

*"Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness." - William Arthur Ward*

Can bitter experiences ever be good for us? It depends on how we react to it. It could be a catalyst to move us forward.

**Seeing evil deceptions: Esther 3:13-14 and Esther 4:1**

**The Realization of an ancestral sin: Zechariah 12:9-10**

What do these examples teach us?

- It is possible that a bitter experience can awaken us to the most positive of actions.
- It is possible to have a bitter experience without owning a bitter attitude.



### 3. How can we manage and eliminate bitterness in our lives?

The context of Ephesians 4:31 (our theme verse) provides a formula or recipe for combating and overcoming bitterness in our lives: Ephesians 4:23-4:32: These Scriptures give us a number of "ingredients" to help us put bitterness in perspective. These help us see it and eradicate it from our lives.



#### Ingredient #1: Sanctification

Ephesians 4:23-24: Find the true meaning of sanctification (to be set apart for a holy purpose) in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7. There is no honor in bitterness. This is a "back to basics" step - finding again that first love of truth and righteousness that compelled us to walk away from evil.

#### Ingredient #2: Dwell Only in Truth

It is not enough to merely abstain from lying, we must be sure to proactively speak the truth as well. Ephesians 4:25 and John 8:32 The truth of God should provoke us to move forward in life.

#### Ingredient #3: Rein in Anger and Wrath:

Ephesians 4:26: Don't let anger consume you. This is telling us that the act of harboring anger and wrath is not merely an emotional response but in fact it is a choice. It is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to act on that anger in a sinful manner. Proverbs 14:29: Romans 12:19-21:

#### Ingredient #4: Proper Actions

Do not continue in habits of life that damage; rather replace them with activities of life that contribute: Ephesians 4:28 2 Corinthians 8:10-12 Romans 12:9-13 Hopefully it is becoming obvious that to harbor and dwell in bitterness is a choice, just as it is a choice to seek out and dwell in wisdom. With greater wisdom comes greater humility and the greater the humility in our lives, the greater the ability to suffocate roots of bitterness.

#### Ingredient #5: Proper Words

This is the test of our words, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks! Ephesians 4:29 Philippians 4:7-8

#### What is bitterness?

- It is a waste of perfectly good emotional energy;
- It is a poor excuse for not taking positive action;
- It is our personal expression of laziness regarding our own destiny;
- It is a symptom of an ego gone bad;
- It is a complete waste of time!

*"Growth in wisdom may be exactly measured by decrease in wisdom." - Friedrich Nietzsche*



Ever notice how your first piece of sour candy causes a huge reaction, but the more you eat, the less you notice? That's similar to how bitterness is able to take root in our hearts until we barely notice it is there, contaminating us and those around us.

*So how big a burden is bitterness?  
For Jonathan and Rick (and Vicki) and Christian Questions,  
Think about it...!*