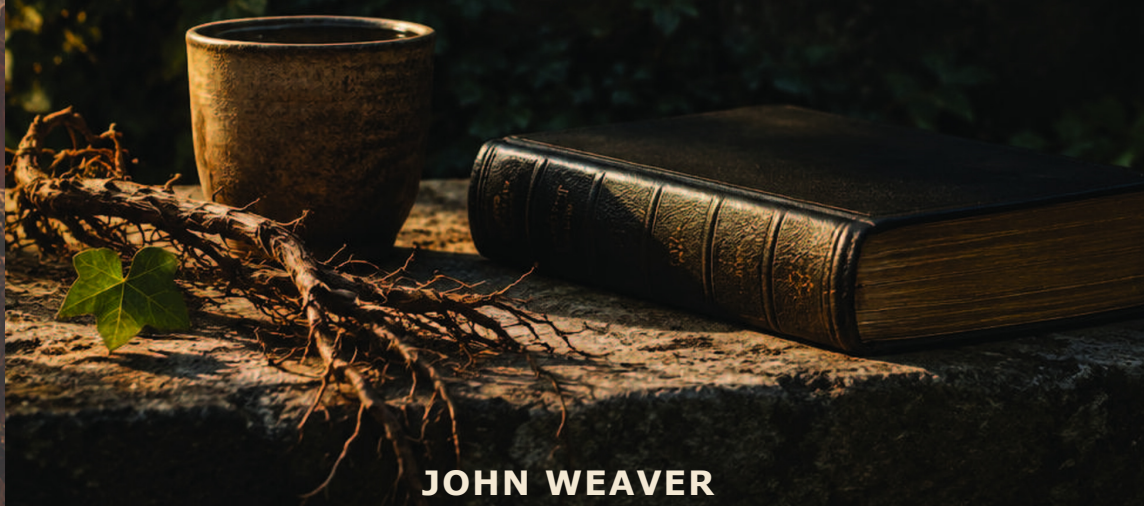
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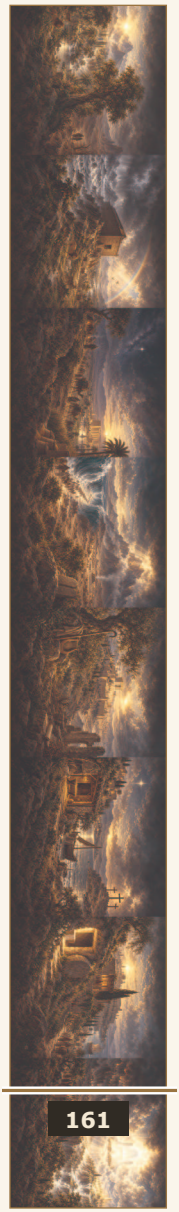
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE



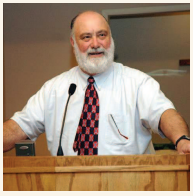
Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.

HEBREWS 12:15, EXCERPT

Bitterness can take root in the response to injury and disappointment. John Weaver considers its spiritual consequences, the ways it spreads, and the need to judge it honestly by Scripture. These messages ask readers to examine resentment and the responsibilities of forgiveness and faithful conduct.

"These things actually connect, and we should never be surprised that other sins are involved with bitterness and resentment."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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CHAPTER 1

The Sin of Bitterness

Part One

Introduction and Text

We are thankful that you are here today. Open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12. The message today is basically the introduction to the message I will bring next Sunday. In fact, it is a two-part message, and I will be dealing primarily with the text next Sunday. Just because I do not give an exposition of it today does not mean that it will not be done next Sunday. There is a lot of material to give out before I can get to the text. We are looking at Hebrews chapter 12, beginning with verse 12 and reading through verse 17. The message will be on the sin of bitterness—the sin of bitterness.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. 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; lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one

morsel of meat sold his birthright. For you know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Sins of the Saints Are Primarily Sins of the Spirit

Herbert Lockyer, many years ago, wrote a book entitled The Sins of the Saints. In that book, he deals with many sins of the spirit. What you and I tend to forget so many times is this simple statement and simple truth: the sins of the saints are primarily sins of the spirit.

Now, how can I say that? Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6 and 2 Corinthians 7, and let me explain that statement. I want you to understand that the sins of the saints are indeed primarily sins of the spirit. This does not mean that a saint cannot sin physically. He certainly can. That is not his primary sin.

If you look in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, beginning there with verse 9, I think you will understand what I am going to show you. The Apostle Paul writes: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" Now look at this next phrase: "Be not deceived."

So he says, do not be wrong about this. Do not have bad thinking about this. "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God." But note what he says in verse 11: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

What is the Apostle Paul saying? If you think that a man who lives constantly in fornication and adultery and is an abuser of himself and sodomy and all this kind of thing is saved, you are deceived. You are wrong. That kind of man shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That is what he says very plainly. Then he says, "And such were some of you." In other words, if you have done that in time past and are now saved, you are no longer doing that. You are no longer a fornicator, adulterer, abuser of yourself, effeminate, or wicked and

wrong in those areas. Those are primarily sins of the flesh, or physical sins. When God saves us, He saves us out of those sins.

Now look in your Bibles at 2 Corinthians 7, verse 1: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." What is the Apostle Paul saying? Does it do us any good to say, "Well, bless God, I'm not an adulterer. I'm not a fornicator. I'm not a thief. I'm not a whoremonger. I'm not a drunkard. I'm not another"? No, no, no. He says those are sins of the flesh, and you should be cleansed from those. But primarily, he says, you should also be cleansed from the sins of the spirit.

When you begin to think about sins of the spirit, there are all kinds of sins: anger, malice, ill will, bitterness, resentment, bad attitudes, and wicked attitudes. The point is this: If you are indeed a child of God, your sins are not necessarily going to be primarily physical sins, but they will be spiritual sins.

Bitterness Describes the Unconverted

It is true that a saint may sin physically, but usually that is not the case. Our real problem lies with spiritual sins. In other words, we are not to act like unbelievers. We are not to walk and talk like unbelievers. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4 and verse 17, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind."

So what is he saying? We are to be different. We do not walk like they walk. That is, we do not act the way they act. We do not conduct our lives the way they conduct their lives.

While it is true that we are sinners and that each of us is capable of committing any sin, the truth of the matter is this: The worst sins for a child of God are really and truly the sins of the spirit. The sins of the spirit are those which permeate and which literally destroy our walk with Christ and which will lead us to all other sins as well. All sin is wicked, wrong, ungodly, and rebellious, but sins of the spirit are really worse. When we talk about sins of the spirit, we are talking about sins of attitude and disposition, which ultimately affect our

behavior and our conduct. One of the worst sins of the spirit is the sin of bitterness or resentment.

Listen carefully to this statement: Hardly any Christian escapes this sin. It is a sin that decimates, devours, and destroys.

Our English word bitterness comes from the Greek word *pikros*, which is the Greek word for bitter. It literally means sharp, pungent, bitter, or venomous, and it denotes bitterness associated with grief, disappointment, hatred, and anger. As you study in the Bible and look at the word bitterness, you will find that bitterness has an extremely close relationship with anger, malice, and wrath. Today I want us to consider, very briefly, five truths in relationship to bitterness. First of all, bitterness is a word used in the Bible to describe the unconverted.

Now, that ought to shock you. There are plenty of words in the Bible that describe the unconverted: lost, condemned, and under the wrath of God. But it is interesting that one of the main words used to describe those who are lost is bitter, or bitterness. That is true in the Old Testament, and it is also true in the New Testament. Let me show you. Holding Hebrews chapter 12, look first of all to Deuteronomy chapter 29, verse 18.

Look what God warns: “Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood,” or bitterness and wormwood. He says, “Lest there be among you a root.” You remember, in Hebrews 12 it was called a root of bitterness.

Here it is called a root that beareth gall and wormwood. Now turn over to Deuteronomy 32 and look at verse 32. God is talking about the wickedness of Israel, and He makes this statement: “For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.” What is He describing? He is describing a people who are idolatrous and wicked, comparing them to Sodom and Gomorrah. He says they are bitter.

Now look in Psalm 10 and verse 7. This shows how the word is used to describe the ungodly in both Testaments. In Psalm 10, he is

describing the ungodly: “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.” Compare this verse with Romans 3. The apostle, inspired of God, writes that same truth. Notice Romans chapter 3, beginning in verse 13: “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” If you compare this passage with Psalm 10, you can see undoubtedly that the Apostle Paul had Psalm 10 in mind when he wrote it. Thus, in the Old Testament, to describe an ungodly man, or in the New Testament, Scripture speaks of someone who is full of bitterness and resentment.

In Acts chapter 8, we read the story of Simon the sorcerer. Simon was one of those individuals who professed to believe in Christ, but he was not really converted. He was baptized, but he was still not converted. He associated with the disciples, but he was still not converted. When the disciples, or the apostles, came from Jerusalem, Simon saw that through the laying on of hands the power of the Holy Ghost was given, and he tried to buy that power. He said to the apostles, “Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” Of course, verse 18 says that he offered them money.

Peter said unto him, “Thy money perish with thee.” That is a strong, strong word for perish. It literally means this: your money go to hell with you, because that is exactly where you are going, Simon. He said, “Thy money perish with thee,” or, thy money go to hell with thee, “because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”

Do you remember the word gall that was used in the Old Testament? Here it is again: the gall of bitterness. The point is this: if bitterness and resentment are used to describe the unconverted, and you have bitterness and resentment in a saint, then it is a terrible anomaly. In reality, it is a contradiction in terms, and it should become more evident as we study the subject of bitterness. Let me

state this one more time: saints are to be different from sinners. The converted are to walk differently from the unconverted. The saved do not act like the unsaved. Bitterness, then, is a word that is used in the Bible to describe the unconverted.

Bitterness and God's Providential Dealings

Bitterness Is an Attack on God's Providence

Secondly, bitterness is nothing less than an attack upon God and His providential dealings.

When we think of bitterness or resentment, we normally think of it as being directed at people: “I don't like him. He did me wrong. I'll get back at him. I'll nail him one day.” We think bitterness is directed at those who try to harm us, embarrass us, belittle us, or hurt us in some way. We tend to think they are the objects of our resentment. They may be indirectly, but in reality, our resentment and bitterness are directed at God and His providential dealings.

Look at Hebrews 12:15–17: “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; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

SCRIPTURE READING - Genesis 25:22-34 (KJV)

In order to really understand verses 15 through 17, you have to consider the historical background, and that background is found in Genesis 25 and Genesis 27. Esau’s bitterness, although he thought it was directed at Jacob, in reality was directed at God. Notice Genesis chapter 25, beginning with verse 22.

“And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”

> The book of Malachi, chapter 1, and Romans, chapter 9, say, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." When He says, "the elder shall serve the younger," what does that mean? God chose Jacob.
>
> "And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob.
>
> "And Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint.
>
> "Therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."

Now before I comment on that, turn over to Genesis 27. Let me read this passage, and let us try to put them together. Jacob has dressed in Esau's garments, taken goat's hair, and put it on his arms. He is deceiving his father and making Isaac think that he is Esau.

In verse 26, "And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed. Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

"And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me? and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed."

"And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing."

Now skip down to verse 41. Look carefully: "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

Now go back to Genesis 25. Let me ask you a question. Think about this. Did not God choose Jacob over Esau? Yes. Did not God reveal that choice to Isaac and Rebekah? Yes, He did.

They knew from the very beginning. In order to demonstrate the wisdom of God in choosing Jacob, Genesis 25 records that Esau came from the field and told Jacob, "I'm at the point of death. Give me something to eat." Obviously, he was not at the point of death. If you are at the point of death, you do not walk in and ask for something to eat. You might be dragged or carried there, but you do not walk in. He wanted something to eat, and Jacob said, "Well, I tell you what, you sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Sure. I'm at the point of death. What good does that birthright do me?"

Esau was willing to sell his birthright for temporal gratification and pleasure. The Bible says, "Thus he despised his birthright." What was included in the birthright? There were three things.

First, the birthright included a double portion of the family estate. If there were four children, the eldest received twice as much as the other three because it was the eldest child's responsibility to care for

elderly parents when they could not care for themselves. That was God's divine provision for old age. Secondly, the birthright included headship of the family clan. There was a responsibility not only to care for one's parents, but also to be the head and leader of the family clan. Thirdly, it included the lineage of the Messiah. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ would be through that birthright.

The Bible says that Esau despised all this and literally sold it for a bowl of beans. Truly, Esau hated spiritual things; he had no use for them.

If Jacob had the birthright because it was sold to him, why, when it came time to receive the blessing, did he try to deceive his father? Why did he not simply say, "Father, the birthright is mine. I bought it from Esau"? He knew that Esau would not keep his end of the bargain, and that the blessing really and truly went with the birthright.

He deceived his father, although his father already knew that God had chosen Jacob. Yet Isaac was willing to give the blessing to Esau because Esau was his eldest, and because he loved to eat of his son's venison. You have to say that Isaac was not right with God at this particular point, because he was willing to go contrary to what he knew the will of God was.

Jacob had the birthright, and the blessing went with the birthright. He deceived his father and got the blessing to go with it. When Esau came in and found out what Jacob had done, he lifted up his voice and cried, "Bless me, even me also, O my father." Isaac said, "I'm sorry. Your brother's come in, he's taken the blessing, and he shall be blessed indeed."

Now, when you come down to verse 41, the Bible says in Genesis 27 that Esau hated his brother in his heart. He said, "After my father dies, after the days of mourning are over for him, I'll get my revenge. I will kill my brother Jacob. I'll nail him to the wall."

Why did he so hate Jacob? Because Jacob got the birthright and the blessing. Why did he want to kill Jacob? Because Jacob was the instrument in taking that birthright and blessing. But did Esau not know that God had already chosen Jacob? His parents knew it, and of course Esau knew it. What in the world was Esau doing? He was

murmuring, complaining, bitter, and resentful against God, but he pointed at Jacob and said, "Jacob, you're the instrument, so therefore I hate you."

In reality, he was murmuring and complaining about God's choice and God's providential dealings. He did not like the way God had worked it out, God's choice, or God's working. Although he indirectly pointed his hatred and resentment toward Jacob, in reality they were toward God. He did not like God's dealings.

But to show you the irresponsibility of Esau, he was willing to sell it for a bowl of beans. He did not care anything about it. It is like having two dogs: we can put a piece of food down for Dixie, and she does not want it. She will raise her nose, turn around, and walk off. But when Hush Puppy comes up to get the food, she rushes back and takes it just to keep him from getting it.

That is literally what resentment is: “I don’t want you to have it. I can’t have it, but I don’t want you to have it. It can’t be my way, but I don’t want it to go your way.” Let me show you how we verbalize our resentment against God in such providential acts. We begin to ask questions: Why did God allow this to happen? Why did this happen to me? How did I get in such a mess? Why did God even allow this man to be born? I feel so helpless. There is nothing that I can do about it. Why did all this come my way? Why did it have to happen at this time?

What are we saying? “God, we do not like Your sovereignty. We do not like Your providential dealings in our lives. We do not like what You allowed to come to pass.” When we become bitter and resentful, it can occur over our children, the loss of mates, money, accidents—or what I would rather call incidents, because there are no accidents in a world ruled by God. We simply do not like the things that happen to us. When we become disappointed in certain areas, we become bitter and resentful because we do not like what God has allowed to happen in our lives.

We must understand one simple truth: Whatever God brings to pass in our lives, He does it ultimately for His glory and for our good, whether we like it or not and whether we understand it or not. When Henry quoted Romans 8:28 earlier, “And we know that all things

work together for good," that does not say all things are good. It says that all things work together for good, whether we like them or not, and whether they are good to us or not. Bitterness and resentment, although we sometimes focus on people, are in reality directed at God and His providential dealings.

Bitterness Causes Individual and Corporate Problems

Thirdly, bitterness is the source of individual and corporate problems. Look back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 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." Notice the latter part: "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you"—you, individual, singular—"and thereby many"—plural—"be defiled." Bitterness and resentment, although they may start with one individual, spread like an infection.

How do we become bitter? How do we become resentful? How does bitterness and resentfulness develop in us? Here is the answer: Bitterness and resentfulness are the result of unbiblical and ungodly responses to people and problems. When we respond unbiblically, we develop bitterness and resentment. Bitterness and resentfulness are the result of unbiblical and ungodly responses to people and problems. It is just that simple.

Neither people nor problems can make us bitter. We make ourselves bitter; we make ourselves resentful. Bitterness and resentfulness are personal sins. The only way anyone can make us bitter is if we allow them to make us bitter, but we are actually doing it ourselves. We become bitter when we respond unbiblically to people and problems. Let me show you, very quickly, what God has ordained.

Turn to Romans 5. Verse 3 is what I want, but let us read verses 1 and 2 so we can see the context: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

What does the word rejoice mean here? It literally means to exult, to jump up and down in. We are justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; therefore, we exalt, jump up and down, and rejoice in the glory of God.

Now look at verse 3: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." The word glory in verse 3 is the same as the word rejoice in verse 2. He says, "And not only so, but we exalt, we jump up and down in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

What does he say we do with our problems? We rejoice in them. When was the last time you actually said, "Thank God, I don't have enough money to pay my bills. Isn't this wonderful?" Or, "Thank God, I'm as sick as a dog. Isn't this wonderful?" We do not normally jump up and down in our problems or exult in them.

God says the reason we should is that these tribulations, these tests, work patience in us; patience works experience; experience works hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. Ultimately, it is going to be for our good, although it may not be good to us at that particular time.

Now look to 1 Corinthians 10:13. Here is another reason why we should exalt, or jump up and down, in our tribulations: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful."

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." God will never put more on you than you can take. If God puts something on you, you can take it. I do not care if it is the loss of a loved one, the death of a child, financial problems, or personal sickness. If God brought it to pass in your life, you can take it.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." What happens to me happens to Doc; what happens to Doc happens to Henry; what happens to Henry happens to us. We all have the same things. It is all common. There are no supernatural problems. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."

“But will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” God always has a way out for us. His way out is obedience to the Word of God. That is the way out. As long as we are disobedient, we stay in our problems. Why, then, should we exalt? Because God always makes a way out for us.

He never puts more on us than we can take. Our problems are designed to build biblical character, and they will if we respond biblically.

Look in the book of James, right after Hebrews, James 1. Verse 3 says, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” Let us go back to verse 2: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

The word divers means variegated, many colored, and different kinds. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," or different kinds of tests and problems. Why should we count it joy? "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Ultimately, if we respond biblically, all these problems will build biblical character in us. God intends for our problems to be a strengthening process and to build biblical character. Where we sin is this: we refuse to act biblically and scripturally, then resent what has happened to us and become bitter because it has happened.

In other words, we do not use the problem as a stepping stone. We stumble over it and sometimes break more than our fingernails.

We tend to think that someone or something is responsible for what has happened to us or our family, or for bringing unfavorable circumstances into our lives. Therefore, we develop bitterness and resentment toward them, viewing them as the cause of our problem. We fail to remember that God is in control and that nothing happens apart from God's divine intervention and providence. Whatever happens, He does it for our good and for His glory.

Bitterness and resentment are personal sins. Proverbs 4:23 commands us, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." God has commanded us to keep our heart. When we become bitter or resentful, we are not keeping our heart. Proverbs

25:28 says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

Walls were built around a city to protect it. If the walls are broken down, anybody can walk in, get what they want, and walk out. God says that he who has no control over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls. People can manipulate you left and right.

Bitterness Is Incompatible with the Christian Faith

People can make you angry and bitter because you cannot control yourself. My father used to box, and I took some boxing lessons from him. He told me, "Son, if you ever really want to hurt somebody in a fight, the first thing you do is make them mad." When a man gets mad, he loses control and draws back for a haymaker. If you keep your cool, you can step in and strike him four or five times before he can ever swing. He has lost control. If you can control someone, you can manipulate them any way you want. But if they keep their spirit under control, there is not one thing you can do.

Proverbs 16:32 says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." If you can control your own self—your spirit, mind, heart, disposition, and attitude—you are better than the greatest warrior that ever lived.

But consider also the statement, "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Bitterness and resentment are infectious. They are venomous, like a snakebite. The snake may bite you on the arm, but soon that venom spreads throughout the entire body. That is what happens in many church bodies. Bitterness and resentment spread throughout, and God says they are contagious. They have caused and compounded multitudes of problems, but they have never, ever solved a problem. Thus, bitterness is a source of individual and corporate problems.

Bitterness Is Incompatible with Christian Faith and Worship

Fourthly, bitterness is utterly incompatible with the Christian faith and makes worship impossible. James 3:14-16 reveals its true

nature: "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

Many times we try to hide our bitterness under a false zeal, a hypocritical righteousness, or by masking our anger and bitterness and pretending that we have greater insight and greater wisdom.

Now, look what Scripture says in verse 14: “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” Note that the command is to glory not. We are not to exult in it, rejoice in it, or jump up and down in it. Yet we often do exactly that: we glory in our bitterness.

How do we do so? I have heard people say, “I have a right to be bitter.” Or, “If you had to live with that man, you’d be bitter too,” and, “If you had to live with that woman, you’d be bitter too.” Another says, “I tried to tell them, but they wouldn’t listen to me. They’ll find out next time, won’t they?” What are we saying? “I don’t like it because they wouldn’t follow what I wanted to say, and they got just exactly what they deserved.” You are rejoicing in your bitterness and resentment.

Now look at the words, “glory not, and lie not against the truth.” If this ever hits home to us, it will put a difference in our attitude—an attitude adjustment. When we glory or rejoice in bitterness, resentment, and bitter envy, we are lying against the truth.

What is truth? The Bible tells us in John 17:17 that the Scriptures are truth: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 14:6 tells us that Jesus Christ, the Son, is truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:17 tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Therefore, when we glory in resentment and bitterness, we are lying against the Scriptures, against the Son, and against the Spirit of God.

We lie against the Scriptures because they teach that bitterness and resentment are to be put off and put away. We lie against the Son because He commands meekness, humility, and forgiveness. We lie against the Spirit because the Holy Spirit does not lead, guide, or direct us into an unbiblical and ungodly attitude. When we rejoice in

a bad, wicked attitude, we are lying against the Scriptures, the Son of God, and the Spirit of God.

Bitterness Makes It Impossible to Be Right with God

Bitterness is not only incompatible with the Christian faith; it makes real, genuine worship unacceptable, not performable. If you have that attitude, your worship is unacceptable. Why? Because you are overcome with bitterness and resentment, and you cannot render to God that which He deserves, nor that which He demands. He demands that you come with a humble and meek spirit and meek attitude, not a haughty, resentful, bitter attitude.

The fifth point is that bitterness makes it impossible for one to be right with God. Bitterness and resentment make it impossible for an individual to be right with God. Look in James chapter 3 again, and hold that, because we are coming back there. Turn back to Ephesians chapter 4. Look what God says in Ephesians 4, verse 31: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”

What is God commanding? That all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from us with all malice. In other words, we are not to do that; it is to be put off. Verse 32 says, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

That is to be put on. So God tells us to put off all this bitterness.

James 3:11 asks, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” It continues: “Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”

It is impossible to be obedient and disobedient at the same time. It is impossible to be in submission to God and in rebellion at the same time. How can we be right when we are wrong? Can a fountain send forth sweet water and bitter at the same time? No. One at a time. Can a fig tree bear olives? No. Can an olive bear figs? No. What is he saying? You can only have one attitude at a time. You can only be one thing at a time. If we are bitter, resentful, hateful, and full of ill will, we cannot be right with God. When we are right with God, we

put those things off. We cast them from us. We do not want them around us or near us.

If we want to hold on to our bitterness and resentment, one of several things will happen. Either we will cease performing our duties as a child of God as we ought, or those duties will dry up altogether. Are you commanded to read your Bible? Sure. Are you supposed to read it every day? Sure.

I do not necessarily endorse Dwight L. Moody's theology, but he wrote something in the flyleaf of his Bible with which I agree: "Either this book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book." That is true. You let somebody get their heart in a knot and their attitude wrong, and they are not going to be reading this book. Why? Because this book will condemn their attitude and their actions.

Do you remember what David asked in Psalm 119:9? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" "By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

So, if we hold on to our bad attitudes, we will either cease from our duties, or our duties will dry up altogether. I have seen this a hundred times: people who get their attitude wrong, their heart wrong, used to sit on the front row.

Next thing you know, they are out in the middle. Then they are in the back, kind of like the Baptists are today, and they get on the back row. The next thing you know, they start skipping one service, then two services, then three services, and then they are gone. You do it gradually. You either drop or, if you stay, you do what you do grudgingly.

Application and Conclusion

"I have to do it. I might as well do it anyhow. I mean, get it over with." Because it is impossible to be right and wrong at the same time.

Removing people or removing problems will not help our bitterness. Why? Because bitterness is a personal sin. Until bitterness and resentment are repented of and dealt with biblically,

they are simply going to continue. If I say, “I do not like Dr. Homer. Bless God, he caused me to do this and he made me do that. I do not like him,” he could move to Timbuktu, and I would still be a bitter person. If I got rid of him or moved to Timbuktu and left him in South Georgia, I would still be a bitter person. Some of you remember Pogo the Possum, who used to be on the water tower here. You remember his famous saying: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

And that is a fact, folks. Bitterness, resentment, and bad attitudes are personal sins. You remember Esau was so upset with Jacob that he was going to murder him. What did Isaac and Rebekah do? They sent him to Padan Aram, and he stayed there for years—seven, seven, fourteen, and then seven more, so at least twenty-one years. He was gone for twenty-one years. Here is my question: Did that change Esau? No. Esau was still wicked and ungodly. It did not help him at all.

I have heard men say, and I hope they said it jokingly, “I could be the best husband in the world if it was not for my wife.” Or, “I could be the best wife in the world if it was not for my husband.” Or, “I could be the best parent if it was not for my children.” Well, you know.

Removing the person or removing the problem does not change us. We have to change. We have to repent, confess, and acknowledge our sins. We must put away our bitterness, resentment, anger, and ill will, and replace them with biblical obedience.

One of the men in the Bible whom everyone knows is the Apostle Peter. You remember how he denied Christ three times. Christ told him, "Before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." And Peter did. When that old cock crowed the third time, the Bible says in Matthew 26 and Luke 22 that he went out and wept bitterly. He was repenting: "Lord, You were right. I was wrong."

That is where we have to come with our attitudes: "Lord, You are right. I am wrong. I want my attitude to be right. I want to be humble, meek, thankful, and obedient. I want my life brought into conformity to Your words, and I want my life to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ."

Bitterness and resentment do not harm our enemies. They harm us, they harm our ministry, and they dishonor Christ.

Father, we are thankful for Jesus Christ and for His love, mercy, and grace to us. Lord, we must confess and acknowledge that each of us has had problems with attitudes, bitterness, resentment, ill will, hatred, and hard feelings. I pray that You would help us bring our lives into conformity to Your Word and help us realize that when problems come, they are not for our detriment, but for our benefit. If we respond biblically, they will strengthen us and build us up in character. Help us, Lord, to love You, live for You, and bring our lives into conformity to Your Word. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

The Sin of Bitterness

Part Two

So let's open our Bibles today to the book of Hebrews chapter 12 again. Hebrews chapter 12. And I will take a few minutes and review from last week, and then we'll just take right off. This is the second part on the subject of bitterness and resentment. So look at Hebrews chapter 12, and let's once again read verses 12 through 17. Hebrews 12, verse 12, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed."

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. 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. Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Review of Part 1

Now last week we looked at five introductory truths concerning bitterness and resentment. I also pointed out to you that the Greek word for bitter literally means sharp, pungent, bitter, venomous, and it denotes bitterness that is usually associated with grief, disappointment, hatred, and malice. Now, we do have the tapes from last week, but very quickly, I'm going to give you those five truths again. First of all, bitterness is a word that is used in Scripture to describe the unconverted. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

You'll remember what the Apostle told Simon the Sorcerer in Acts chapter 8: "Thou art in the bond of iniquity and in the gall of bitterness." So it is used then to describe the unconverted, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament as well.

Secondly, bitterness and resentment are in reality an attack upon God and His providential dealings. We looked at the life of Esau and how he did not like what God had ordained and brought to pass. Although he directed his anger at Jacob, in reality he was angry at God.

Thirdly, bitterness is a source of individual and corporate problems. He said, “lest any root of bitterness springing up and trouble you individually, and thereby many, plural, be defiled.” So it is not just an individual problem; it is an individual and corporate problem as well. The Bible teaches us that resentment and bitterness are contagious. It is like cancer; it is like a serpent’s venom. It spreads very rapidly.

Fourthly, bitterness is utterly incompatible with the Christian faith and makes real worship impossible. No one can worship God correctly and acceptably with bitterness and resentment in his life. Fifthly, bitterness and resentment make it impossible for an individual to be right with God. The Bible teaches very clearly that we cannot be right and wrong at the same time. No fountain, he said, sends forth sweet water and bitter at the same time. So you are either right with God or you are not right with God. It is that simple.

There is one real problem with sin: regardless of what that sin is, it is never alone. Sin always breeds more sin. Bitterness and

resentment always breed other sins as well. We should never be surprised, then, to find other sins involved with bitterness and resentment.

Connection Between Chastening and Bitterness

The connection between verses 12 through 17 and the preceding verse is important. These things actually connect, and we should never be surprised that other sins are involved with bitterness and resentment. Hebrews 12 says, “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” Then he talks about this root of bitterness in verse 15, Esau in verse 16, and the result of that in verse 17.

Now you have to ask yourself this question: What is the connection between verses 12 through 17 and that which precedes those verses? Beginning with verse 4, the subject under discussion is chastening. “You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin.”

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” The word for chastening, or chastisement, is the same Greek word, paideia, which literally means child training. “My son, despise not thou the child training or the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth or child trains. And scourgeth or child trains every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons?”

“Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to this Father of spirits and live? For they, that is, the earthly fathers, verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we should be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous,

but grievous. Nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them that are exercised thereby."

Now, let me show you the link. Verses 4 through 11 deal with chastening. Why are we chastised to begin with? It is because of our sins, our disobedience, and our rebellion. The Bible asks, What son is there whom the father chasteneth not? Is there anyone, particularly any son in this room, who never got a whipping coming up? I got my share of them. We had a peach tree behind our house, and it never did bloom until after I left home. My daddy had to break so many limbs.

Lacey's big brag is that she is the only grandchild I have never, ever whipped, and I never have. I am not going to ask her if her father ever got hold of her, but her grandfather never has. Usually all of us have been chastened, and the reason we are chastened is that we will not listen.

What God is telling us in verses 4 through 11 is that if we live right and do right, we do not get chastened. We are chastened when we do that which is wrong. According to verse 10, the only reason God chastens us is for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Verse 11 tells us that it is not fun to get whipped, but afterward, when God whips us, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby. I only wish my chastisement of my children had been as successful as God's chastisement of His children. Because when He does it, it works.

Look what He is saying: if you live right, you do not get whipped; if you live wrong, you get whipped. An interesting thing is found in verse 5, where He admonishes us: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Do not faint when God rebukes you.

Let us stop for a moment and examine that. I have fainted one time in my entire life, just once. When I was stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, we got a little break from the CBR range—chemical, biological, radiological. The sergeant was teaching, and, as usual, they said, "Take 10, expect 5, and get 2." That was the way it worked, because I was all the way across the field. I was going

to the latrine, and before I reached it, they started blowing the whistle: “Get back, get back, hustle, hustle, hustle.” I turned around and started running back to the bleachers.

The grass was cut smoothly. There was a hole about that deep and about that big around, but the grass had grown out of it and had been cut, so you could not see the hole. My foot went in the hole and turned, and as I fell, I heard it snap. I limped up to the sergeant. You remember I had those boots on. I said, “I just broke my foot.” He said, “Can you sit out the rest of the lecture and march back to camp?”

What a stupid idiot I was. I said, “Well, yes, sir, I guess so.” Camp was two miles away, but I hopped and limped back to camp. When we stood in formation and he said, “Fall out,” I did—not really. I just leapt inside and told one of the boys, “You have to take this boot off because it is tight. I don’t think I can even take it off.” When he loosened the string and pulled the boot off, the foot that had been held in by that tight boot suddenly swelled out. The pain hit me, and the next thing I knew, I was smelling ammonia.

The point I am trying to make is this: when I had fainted, that sergeant could have stood over me and said, “Present arms.” I would not have done it. He could have said, “About face,” and I would not have done it. He could have said, “At ease,” and I would not have done it. I was unable to discharge my duties. Why? Because I had fainted. He said, “When you’re chastened of God, do not faint under His chastening.”

Remember Esau in Genesis 25. He came from the field and told Jacob, “Feed me some of that pottage; give me some of those lentils, some of those beans.” Jacob said, “Sell me this day thy birthright.” Esau said, “I’m at the point of death; I’m weak and I want to faint.” What does that birthright profit mean? It is when you and I are at the point of faintness that we are tempted to apostatize.

To apostatize means that we either deny or leave the faith. Fainting under chastisement is one of those simple things that will lead us to apostasy, because when we faint, we are unable to discharge our duties. When our duties are neglected, we either dry up, forget them, or eventually despise them.

God chastens us in different ways. Sometimes He chastises us by bringing our problems upon us, compounding them, and multiplying them because of our rebellion, because we will not listen or learn. When we are inundated with problems, we want to throw up our hands and say, “I give up. What’s the use?” or, “I’m not going to do this any longer because no one understands and no one appreciates me. Everything I do is unappreciated. I just want to quit trying.” What are we doing? We are fainting. When we say, “I’m just not going to take it anymore. I’m quitting,” we are fainting, and it is leading us either to deny the faith or to leave the faith.

Now, if you look at verse 15, you see this connection: our problems, our trials, and our sufferings that are not responded to biblically will turn out to be stumbling stones instead of stepping stones. Here are three truths concerning, really, apostasy. He says in verse 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.” First of all, here is the spring of apostasy: failing of the grace of God. Secondly, its nature is a root of bitterness springing up. Thirdly, the result is that many will be defiled. I will deal with failing of the grace of God in just a moment. Bitterness and resentment, then, are vitally connected with apostasy, because bitterness and resentment develop because we do not like what is happening in our lives.

In light of this connection, note verses 12 through 14 right now. In verse 12, he says, “Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees.” God is instructing us to make right our feeble hands and our knees. The words “lift up” in verse 12 denote the making or setting of a thing right. In other words, what do you do with a broken bone? You set it. You make it straight. You make it right.

Exhortation to Strengthen and Make Straight Paths

You restore it to its proper place or its proper posture. That's exactly what he's talking about. So he's saying you restore yourself to the proper frame of mind and to the proper posture in thinking. In other words, don't you faint. You just do that which is right. So the hands that hang down and the feeble knees are metaphorically

representing then our spirits, our hearts, our dispositions, things that have drooped, things that have caused us to be despondent and despairing.

Now, very quickly, look back in your Bibles to Isaiah 33. Isaiah 33. And let's begin reading there at verse 3. I think that's the passage I want. 35. It's Isaiah 35. Isaiah 35, beginning in verse 3. To show you how this actually refers to our hearts, our minds, our spirits, Isaiah 35, beginning in verse 3, here's what God says, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the weak knees."

Now, this is exactly where the apostle has taken this from in Hebrews chapter 12. So he says, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."

"For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." But note, if you would, he began with, "...say ye to the weak and the feeble knees," and then he talks about the heart, which of course is our mind, our attitude, our disposition, our thinking. So what he's telling us is this, if you have got feeble hands and weak knees, that is if you're fainting under the trials and pressures of life, strengthen yourself, renew your mind, renew your obedience, renew your faith, you walk in the way that God has commanded you. Then he says, watch in verse 13, because verse 13 confirms the interpretation of verse 12 when he says in verse 12, "Wherefore, lift up hands which hang down and the feeble knees."

Now look in verse 13, "And make straight paths for your feet. Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather let it be healed." So what is he saying unless we resort back to the biblical paths? There's a possibility that we're going to be turned out of the way. That is, there's that possibility that our bitterness, our resentment will lead us then either to deny the faith or to leave the faith.

Now, I'm going to explain that a little bit later, too. But he's saying it's much better to be healed than it is to go on in pain and agony.

Every one of you understands this, especially those who are doctors. There have been times in my life when I have been in extreme pain. I did everything I could to stay out of surgery. Finally, I went to the doctor one day and asked, “What in the world is going to happen?” He said, “One of these days, you’re going to beg me to cut on you.”

You know what I did? I laughed. I said, “It will never happen.” Until one day, I was ready. If that was the only way I could get relief, I wanted it. I said, “Put me in today. Do it now.” As much as I dreaded the surgery, it was successful and a blessing. I would much rather have had it and gotten it over with than continued to live in constant pain and agony.

That is what God is saying: You better make straight paths, lest it be turned out, but rather let it be healed.

Now look at verse 14. We are still in the same context. He says, “Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Where did Esau think his problems came from? Jacob. Jacob was not the source of his problems, but Esau thought he was. Where do we think most of our problems come from? People. They treat us wrong, disrespect us, do not appreciate us, will not help us, and will not work with us. They do us wrong, so we think they are the source of our problems.

Pursuing Peace and Holiness

Here is what we are to do: follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. God is telling us to do right even if everyone else does wrong. We are to follow peace with all men.

If Ed and I have a falling out, it will be on Ed’s part, not mine. Ed’s attitude ought to be this: If he and Pastor have a falling out, it will be on Pastor’s part, not his. You do right regardless of what someone else does.

The Duty Enjoined

When he says, “Follow peace with all men,” we must understand this: God knows there are some men with whom we cannot live peaceably. Therefore, there is a necessity for separation at some time. But do not necessarily let it be on your side. You still do what is right. Romans 12:18 says, “If it be possible, if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” There are some with whom you cannot live peaceably. But, if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, you do what is right until the other person says, “I don’t need anything to do with it.” Let the break be on them.

In verse 14, we are exhorted to follow two things: peace with men and holiness with God. In verse 15, we are exhorted to avoid two things: a failing of the grace of God and a root of bitterness.

Now we work our way down, and I want to come to verse 15 and look secondly today at the duty enjoined. Here is our duty: “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 Duty of Self-Examination

Verse 15 is a call to self-examination. “Looking diligently” comes from the Greek word episkopeo. I hope that word sounds familiar to you. Episkopos is the noun, from which we get the word bishop. Episcopalian and Episcopal come right from that same root. The word episkopeo literally means to look diligently, to take the oversight over, to look upon, to inspect, to oversee, to look after, and to care for. That is what a bishop is supposed to be doing for his people. He bears the oversight. He looks after them. He cares for them.

Here, in this context, the Word is saying that it is your responsibility to look diligently, to look intently, to watch closely, and to make sure that no bitterness and no resentment are in your lives. Hold Hebrews chapter 12, but look back in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 5. I told you that verse 15 is a call to self-examination. There is a direct command for that in the Bible. The Apostle Paul says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that

Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates." Unless you are a reprobate, you ought to be able to examine yourself and prove yourself in the light of Scripture.

It has to be a call to self-examination. You are to look diligently in your spirit, your mind, your disposition, and your attitude, to make sure there is no bitterness and resentment in your life. It must be a call to close examination, and let me explain why. The Bible says in Jeremiah 17 and verse 9 that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. What does that mean? It means our own mind can deceive us unless we are careful and deal with things very closely. This self-examination is not only a call to close examination; it also includes a duty toward our brethren.

I have never wanted to hurt someone simply for the sake of hurting them. I have no desire to grab hold of Doc Brissey and break his arm merely to break it, nor to slap somebody upside the head merely to slap them. Some folks derive pleasure from that. That is why you have drive-by shootings: they kill simply to be killing. The same should be true emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Why should I say something ugly and hateful that will hurt Doc, merely for the sake of saying something ugly and hateful? I must understand that bitterness and resentment not only destroy my life, but also destroy the lives of others.

One root springing up will trouble many. I must also understand that, among all the people, all the children of God, and all the Christians, I am the one most likely to fail. That is why I must be careful to guard my own heart. It does no good to try to watch over Phil's heart. I do not know what is in his mind or what goes through his mind. I could not watch over his heart. The only one I can watch over is mine.

Now look back in Hebrews chapter 3, since you are very close there. Look in Hebrews chapter 3, verses 12 and 13.

Here is what I mean by not wanting to inflict damage upon the brethren. Hebrews chapter 3, verse 12, says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Verse 13 continues, "But exhort one another daily,

while it is called a day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

I am not only, in one sense of the word, to look after my own heart. I am responsible, and I do have a duty toward my brethren not to hurt them. If I see them heading in this direction, I am to exhort and rebuke them. However, I am not to inflict unnecessary pain upon them by failing to watch my own heart first and foremost. Now go back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 12, verse 15.

Here is what you are to closely guard: "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God." You are to examine yourself lest you fail of the grace of God. The word fail means to lack, to be behind, to want, to come short of, to come behind in, or to be deficient in. Thus the passage says, "Looking diligently, lest any man become deficient in, fall short in, fail, come behind in, come short of, lack, or want in the grace of God."

Ways Christians Fail in the Grace of God

The word fail occurs many times in the Bible. Never once does it mean to fall from. There is a difference between failing in the grace of God and falling from the grace of God—a big difference. The word fail does not mean to fall from. It means to come short of, to be deficient in, or to have a lack thereof.

How can Christians fail in the grace of God? How can they become deficient in the grace of God? Let me give you several ways, and I want you to think this through with me. We can be deficient in, fall short of, lack, or need the grace of God when we fail to submit ourselves to the Word of God. If I were to take the time today to take you to Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, I could show you over and over in Scripture where God tells us to put off the old man and put on the new man. The old man is our old habits, old ways, old thought patterns, and old dispositions.

Those are the things we learned when we were unconverted, and every one of us has a history of how we lived before God saved us. The new man is that which is righteous and obedient and holy and godly. It is that which God commands.

So what does God tell us? He tells us to put off the old way of thinking, the old way of acting, and the old way of handling problems, and to put on biblical methods that are righteous and holy. When we fail to submit to the Word of God and obey, we are becoming deficient in the grace of God.

For instance, in 2 Corinthians 10 and verse 5, we are to bring how many of our thoughts into captivity to Jesus Christ? Every thought. When we begin to think unbiblically, we are coming short of the grace of God. We are not thinking as we should, because God has been gracious to us.

Consider the passage in Romans 12: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service and be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind." When we fail to present our bodies and fail to renew our minds, we become deficient in the grace of God. It is not that God's grace is insufficient; it is that we are not making use of that grace in our lives. We are failing in it. God has given us grace, but we are not acting graciously, not acting as if we have the grace. We come short of it in our lives by not submitting ourselves to the Word of God.

Secondly, Christians fail in the grace of God—that is, they become deficient and fall short in it—by not persevering in the outward means of grace. What does that mean? We fail to pray. We fail to study. We fail to be faithful to the preached word. We fail to do all those things God has commanded us to do. We simply do not persevere in them. There are some people who will go all week and never even read their Bible, much less study it—sometimes for months. How can we know the will and Word of God if we do not read it? How can we know the mind and will of God if we do not commune with Him and ask Him to teach, instruct, and show us?

Think about this for a moment. I am not saying this is necessarily right all the time, but it does have a certain amount of truth in it. I have pastor friends who refuse to do counseling Monday through Saturday. Why? They say, "I give you counsel Sunday morning, Sunday night, or Wednesday night. If you want the counsel, you need to be there." What are they saying? That is when God is

instructing us. If we fail to persevere in that outward means of grace, receiving the counsel of the things of God, why are you asking someone to do something extra when you will not do what is being taught?

I am not saying that is my position, but my position is that folks need all the help they can get. I am willing to talk to anybody, anytime, about Christ and about the Word, and about bringing our lives into conformity to it. But I am simply saying this: when we fail to persevere in those means that God has ordained, we are coming short of the grace of God. How in the world can we act right if we do not even know what is right?

Thirdly, Christians fail of the grace of God by not improving that which God has already bestowed upon them. Let me ask you a question: Is there anybody in this room who would say, "I know all truth"? No. But everyone in this room knows some truth.

Every one of you has gifts, and you can improve upon those gifts. Stop and think of the gifts that God has given us that are undeveloped; graces that are unused or neglected; faith that is unexercised; light that is unwalked in and unappreciated. Look at all the times we fail to make application of the Word of God to our lives. When God gives us truth, we are to use it, build upon it, and improve upon it. When God gives us gifts, we are to use them. We fail in the grace of God when we do not use that which God has given us.

Fourthly, Christians fail in the grace of God by hardening their hearts against the Word of God. Go back in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 3 and look at verse 15. After he tells us in verse 12 that we are to take heed, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and after he tells us in verse 13 that we are to exhort one another daily while it is called a day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sins, he says in verse 15, "While it is said today, if ye will hear his voice"—that is, if you will hear God's voice in his Word—"harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."

If I were to ask you, What in the world is he talking about?—"Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation"—I hope you will remember when God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt

into the desert, how they provoked Him. He said, This generation is not going to get into the Promised Land, but their children, whom they said would be victims, are going to get in. This generation is not going to get it. They have provoked me.

The Greek word for bitterness is pikros, meaning bitter, pungent, sharp, or venomous. The Greek word for provocation is parapikrasmos. Did you hear pikras in the middle of it? How did the children of Israel provoke God? They were bitter and resentful at God's providence. If we go back and examine their history, we find that they became fed up with the manna and said, “Our soul loatheth this manna.” The manna was everything they needed, but they wanted quail and meat. God said, “You want meat, I'll give you meat,” and He sent quail up to their eyeballs.

When they began eating them, He slew the fattest of them. He killed them. Psalm 78 speaks of this: He gave them their quests for their stomachs, but He sent leanness into their souls. They hardened themselves against God. They would not listen to God or take His word; they provoked Him. You will find it in Exodus 17, Psalm 95, and Psalm 78. The provocation was bitterness. It was their bitterness and resentment that caused them to harden themselves against God.

Fifthly, we fail in the grace of God when, instead of repenting and turning from our sins, we stubbornly hold on to them and demand our way instead of God's way and our will instead of God's will. None will ever prosper in the faith who disdain repentance and obedience.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God,” and then, “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled.” This call to self-examination, this call to look diligently and closely observe, is given lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled. There is a connection between failing in the grace of God and the root of bitterness springing up and troubling you. The warning joins these two matters together: failure in God's grace and the bitter root that troubles and defiles many.

He who is bitter and resentful has already failed in the grace of God, because bitterness and resentfulness are evidences of failing in the grace of God.

The Root of Bitterness

Verse 15 says, “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.” The Greek word for root is rhiza, and it literally means root. Why is that word so important? Before there could be a root, there must be a seed. Roots come from seeds. What is the seed that sows the root of bitterness? The seed is a failure on our part to respond and act biblically to our problems. I don't care what our problem is—financial, emotional, mental, physical, or spiritual—when we fail to respond biblically, we're sowing a seed in which a root of bitterness will arise.

The Bible says, “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.” Observe something else about roots: they're underground. You can't see them or observe them until they spring up, until the plant actually sprouts out. Christians oftentimes carry the seed and the root of bitterness in their lives undetected for months and sometimes years. But all of a sudden there will be a springing up. It will come to light. There will be a growing up, and once it has grown up and sprung forth, it will be there for all to see. There will be a manifestation.

The Scripture says in Numbers chapter 32 and verse 23, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” Be absolutely sure. When the root of bitterness does spring up and manifest itself, usually it will be over something extremely trifling or insignificant, some tiny little incident. Those observing from the outside say, “How can you get so blown out of shape over some little tiny insignificant thing?” The problem is not the problem. Bitterness and resentment are the problem. The little trifle, the insignificant incident, was just there when the root sprung up. I've known people who got bent out of shape because the toothpaste was squeezed from the wrong end or the toilet tissue was not put on the roll just right. That's not the problem. The problem is the bitterness.

It was there all along. This small, insignificant trifle just brought it out. It was time for it to spring up. If the bitterness, resentment, or problem initially had been dealt with biblically, the bitterness and resentment would not be there. The Bible says in Ephesians 4, verse 26—and this is a command, by the way—“Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” What does that mean?

It means we are to settle our problems on a daily basis. Husbands and wives should never go to bed mad. Friends should never go to bed mad. If I have a problem with Phil, I had better call him or go see him before the sun sets. When we start going to bed angry and upset, with ill will in our hearts, bitterness and resentment are being sown. They will spring up. Bitterness and resentment never, ever solve our problems; they only compound them and make new problems. Yea, they are a problem in and of themselves.

Now, look back in verse 15: “Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.” Look at the word trouble. That is a very interesting word. It means trouble, but it is also interpreted from the Greek to mean to excite, annoy, and disturb. The word trouble is the same word used figuratively for a poisonous plant.

Thus, someone who through bitterness and resentment corrupts his own faith and piety will, if you touch him or if he touches you, corrupt you as well. It spreads. It is like poison ivy; it is extremely contagious. It is like a virus; it is communicable. So he says, “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.” Where does the root of bitterness come from? It comes from the seed sown in our lives when we fail to handle our problems in a biblical, scriptural, and godly manner.

The third and last point is the warning given in verses 16 and 17: “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”

Warning from Esau's Example

The word lest is a primary particle of qualified negation. What does that mean? This primary particle of negation is often translated in our Bibles another way. You remember the Apostle Paul said it like this: “God forbid. God forbid.” That is what the word means. Look at verse 16: God forbid.

“That there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” In simple language, what he is saying is this: God forbid that any of us turn out like Esau. What is

God showing us? He is showing us the ultimate end of bitterness and resentment. Bitter and resentful people are like Esau, who are spiritual fornicators and profane in the fact that they live their lives outside of God.

Everyone knows what a fornicator is, but in this context it is not just physical; it is spiritual, because Esau hated spiritual things. He was willing to trade his birthright for a bowl of beans. Now look at the word profane. We get our English word profane from the Latin pro fanum. The word fanum means temple, and pro means to or toward. If you were to or toward the temple, what would that mean? You are outside the temple. The word profane means someone who is outside the temple—someone living his life apart from God, outside of God, or without regard to God.

I do not care what he says, what his commands are, what his law says, or what his instructions are. I do what I want to do. That is a profane person. That was Esau. When those Canaanite wives did not please Isaac and Rebekah, Esau went out and married some more just to spite them. He did not care that God said they were not to intermarry, or that his parents did not want him to do it. He did it anyhow. He was a profane person.

A profane person is one who lives his life as if God had never spoken and had nothing to do with him. He was not going to have God rule over him.

Bitterness and resentment lead to apostasy, and their ultimate end is despising the things of God. They lead us to hold on to our will, our way, and our sins. Look at the consequences in verse 17: "For you know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

In Genesis 25, 26, and 27, you remember how Jacob deceived his father, pretended to be Esau, and got the blessing. The blessing really went with the birthright. Jacob knew Esau was dishonest and would not keep his end of the bargain, so he got the blessing. After Jacob had left his father's presence, Esau came in and said, "Let my father rise and eat of his venison, such is his soul, that he may bless me." His father asked, "Who art thou, my son?" He said, "I am

Esau." Then his father said, "Who is this that has come before you and taken your blessing?"

When he found out what Jacob had done, Esau cried and said, "Bless me, even me, O my father." Jacob said, "Look, I have already made him your lord. I have already given him all the blessings of the field and the dew of heaven, and I cannot change it. It is unchangeable." It was God's providence and God's will. I pointed out before how God had already told Isaac and Rebekah, "Jacob will be the ruler. Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." God chose Jacob and not Esau.

It did not matter to Isaac at that particular time. Isaac was going to bless Esau just to eat of his venison. But he said, "Look, God has brought this to pass. I cannot change it. Nothing you can do, Esau, will change it." Esau wept before his father and said, "Bless me, even me, O my father." Jacob gave him some kind of very bland blessing, but he could not undo what had been done.

Listen carefully. I want you to pause for a moment and think of all the blessings that we as children of God lose because of our sins. There is no way to undo a wasted life. There is no way to undo a wasted day, week, month, or year. All of us have the same amount of time; some will throw it away and waste it by not obeying God and not bringing their lives into conformity with the Word of God.

I can assure you that everyone in this room today would say about something in their life, "Would to God I could do it over again," or, "Would to God I had not done it." But it is done. Nothing you can do about it. It is gone. It is over.

You remember that little couplet: Only one life will soon be passed; only what's done for Christ will last. Alice and I had a dear friend, whom I have mentioned before. He and his wife are now dead. We called him Papa Mars. We were not related, but he played the saxophone beautifully, and he would come over and spend a week, sometimes two weeks, with us.

I almost starved to death when he came, because he would have Alice at the piano, and all they would do was play the saxophone and the piano. I never will forget Papa Marsh's favorite song. He played it beautifully on that saxophone: "Wasted years, wasted years, oh,

how foolish." Papa was in his fifties when God saved him. Before that, he was a drunkard. All he could think of was the years of his life that he had thrown away and wasted. It was wicked, foolish, and wrong.

But you cannot undo it. The whole point is this: if we do not repent, and if we do not deal with our bitterness, resentment, and bad attitudes, we will turn out with a wasted life. We will miss God's best and God's blessings in our lives. We have to learn to deal with sin, our attitudes, and our dispositions. I cannot change Doc, but I can change me. I cannot change Roy, but I can change me. If Roy never does what is right, I have to do what is right. If I never do what is right, Roy still has to do what is right. Bitterness, resentment, ill will, hatred, and hard feelings lead to nothing but wasted lives.

He was supposed to get the blessing, but he did not because of his sin and wickedness. Do not let that be the story of your life. Deal with your sins, bitterness, and resentment. Once you deal with them, diligently observe and watch closely that they do not come back into your life. Make sure the seed is not sown. If the seed is never sown, a root will never spring up.

Father, we ask You in the name of Jesus Christ to help us. It is true, Lord, that most of us—probably every one of us—have the same problem in our lives because we are sinners. We allow bitterness, anger, ill will, and resentment to build up, and it destroys ourselves and harms others too. Lord, give us grace to repent, to respond biblically and scripturally, to do what is right under every circumstance, and to wait upon Thee to work it out for our good and for Thy glory. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

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