

The Blight of Bitterness

by R. J. Evans

“Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb. 12:14-15).

Bitterness is a terrible problem. It can blow out the candle of joy and peace in our lives and leave our souls in darkness and despair. Its effects upon people’s lives have caused a host of troubles. It is often the root problem for churches that are at unrest and have become divided. It can also cause brokenness and destruction in homes. Thus, bitterness keeps us from being vital, vibrant, and victorious as Christians.

Bitter people become caustic, cynical, and hostile. They are over-loaded with resentment and fault-finding. Deep down, they are angry. Generally, they complain a lot and are full of self-pity. They become disinterested and refuse to participate—becoming cool and aloof—while inwardly they are a scathing volcano of anger and hurt. The above text points out that bitterness causes trouble, “and by this many become defiled.” Have you become defiled by bitterness?

Over the past few decades, there seems to be quite a growing number of members of the Lord’s church who have succumbed to bitterness. This includes some with whom I have worked and worshipped in years past. Those who become bitter have usually experienced a bad circumstance in their life. A good number became disappointed and disillusioned with their fellow-Christians. I know of some Christians who left the church of Christ, as such, and decided to start their own group, but it wasn’t long until their embittered group dissolved. Bitterness never builds up, for it is destructive in nature. We see this all along when people become disillusioned, selfish and disappointed—they go out from us. Most have lost their faith and ended up in some denomination or “community church”. It reminds me of what the Apostle John said of some in 1 John 2:19—“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”

Some are very bitter toward the Lord's church for it's "lack of love"—but yet the poisonous vitriol that spews out of their mouths is so much greater and more intense than that of the supposed "unloving" brethren they left. They are "turned off" by what they refer to as "legalistic church of Christ traditions". But, in reality, this usually has to do with brethren who are genuinely trusting in God's grace by faithfully obeying what is authorized by Scripture—that which has been "handed down" to us by God in His Word.

Truly, it is sad when we are seeing more and more Christians developing a mindset of bitterness toward the Lord’s church. Nothing good ever results from this! Their bitterness just moves them farther and farther from God’s Word, and fellowship with

Him and His people. As long as they remain in their state of bitterness, there is no turning back. This is so tragic!

How can we overcome the blight of bitterness? We must start with true repentance, prayer and a change of attitude. When the Apostle Peter told Simon the Sorcerer to “repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you”—please notice how Peter described the condition of his heart— “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (Acts 8:22-23). Also, those who are poisoned by bitterness toward others need to be more loving, kind, and forgiving. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). We must place our trust and faith in the Lord, not man— “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). And, last of all, how can we overcome the blight of bitterness? Refer back to our text—replace it with peace and holiness.

Just as the husband is told to “not be bitter” toward his wife (Col. 3:19), let us not become bitter toward our brothers and sisters in Christ—those who are members of the Lord’s church.