

Bitterness

In Ephesians 4, the apostle says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Two things stand out about that sentence. First, he says ALL. Not just some. Not just most. Not just the big stuff. All bitterness. Second, the list begins with bitterness. It seems there is an order here. Bitterness is where it starts. But it never ends with bitterness. What follows is anger, clamor, slander and malice. You won't find a bitter person who is happy. No, they are angry. And, it doesn't stop with that. They have to tell everyone else. They make a lot of noise but do little to make things better.

Some thoughts for us: First, what you allow to dwell in your soul determines whether you will be bitter or joyous. We can hold on to things too long. Negative comments. Hurts. Offenses. Why do we hang on to them for decades? Pitch them. When the Ephesians were told, "Let all bitterness . . . be put away from you," that's a choice. We keep the things that make us bitter or we toss them out in the trash.

Second, bitterness tends to grow and take over our spirit and heart. Some of the cruelest things ever said to brethren have come from other brethren. Bitterness causes a person to say things that are not true, rational, logical or Biblical. Like an angry dog chained to a tree, the bitter person will try to attack anyone who gets too close. Family. Friends. The church. It is a sad, sad thing to witness.

Third, some will leave this planet bitter. Unwilling to forgive. Unwilling to change. Unwilling to give a person a second chance, they will die miserable and mean. And, the trail of destruction that followed them ruins their family and even the congregation they were a part of.

Someone hurt you? They hurt the Lord worse. Someone been mean to you? They were worse to the Lord. Someone ignored you? That happened to the Lord. And, yet, there He was praying that His crucifiers could be forgiven in His final moments.

You are bitter, not because things happened to you. You are bitter because you chose misery over joy. You chose to focus on self rather than the Lord.

- by Roger Shouse
(edited for length)

Gopher Wood or Gopher Forest?

In seeking to impress upon the minds of individuals the importance of respecting the authority of God's word we use the example of God commanding Noah to build the ark of gopher wood. When God commanded Noah to build the ark of gopher wood we note (and correctly so) that Noah would be in rebellion to God if he used any other wood to build the ark. As simple as this illustration may be we still find many who ridicule this example.

Several years ago (November, 1976) F. L. Lemley wrote an article which appeared in "Integrity" magazine entitled "The Law of Exclusion," in which he rejects and ridicules the idea that when God authorizes a particular thing then anything other than that authorized would be displeasing to God. In an effort to prove his point he uses the example of Noah.

He says, "the assumption that gopher wood was a specific variety of wood cannot be proved" and "Some translate 'gopher wood' as 'resinous wood,' which is not a specific variety, but would include cypress, redwood, or other varieties." He goes on to say that one person had suggested that "it could mean wood from a nearby forest known as Gopher."

What Mr. Lemley fails to note is if what he says about "gopher wood" is true the example remains the same. If "gopher wood" simply means "resinous wood" then for Noah to obey God he could only use "resinous wood." To use non-resinous wood would be disobedience to God. Suppose "gopher wood" referred to wood from a forest by that name. Would that change the force of the argument? Certainly not! It would simply mean that Noah was to build the ark of wood from "Gopher Forest." Wood from any other source would not be acceptable.

Let "gopher wood" mean whatever you want it to mean, but the fact still remains that God told Noah to build the ark of "gopher wood" and had he built it of any other kind of wood he would have been in rebellion to God. We can't justify rebellion to God by making foolish quibbles.

- by James Hahn

Carnal Appeals

Free pizza, clowns, hot air balloon rides . . . you name it, and some religious group has tried it as a scheme to draw folks to their services. These things are **FUN!** Who wouldn't like to play ball, eat good food, and be entertained?

But, here's the problem -- these things all appeal to the carnal man, and seek to satisfy his earthly desires. Instead of these, the Lord has made the church the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), and has designed its work and authorized its activities "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body" (Ephesians 4:12). The church, if it is following God's plan, is working to build stronger spiritual men, not better softball players.

When we challenge the 'fun, food, and games' crowd to justify their practices from the Scriptures, they usually refer to Jesus feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes. They conclude that these examples demonstrate how Jesus fed the physical man to make an opportunity to feed the spiritual man (John 6:5-14). Sorry, that won't work! Keep reading. When the people came to Jesus the next day, He perceived that they came for more free food. He rebuked them and told them they ought to be seeking spiritual things rather than carnal ones (vs. 22-27). He **DID NOT** feed them! As a result many stopped following Him (vs. 66), but no food was offered to draw them back again.

Carnal appeals do not lead to true conversion and they are not authorized. The gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). Let's use **IT!**

- by Greg Gwin