



"When you hate, the only person that is suffering is you because most of the people you hate don't know it and the rest don't care."
—Medgar Evers

06-Mar-26

The Bitter Truth (Part One)

Many dangers begin small or unnoticed. A tiny ember in dry grass. A hairline crack in a foundation. A root beneath the soil. But what starts unseen eventually surfaces.

Scripture calls one such danger a "root of bitterness"—a spiritual fault that begins unseen but eventually affects everything it touches ([Hebrews 12:15](#)). Roots grow covertly, beneath the surface, long before anyone becomes aware of their existence. Structurally, these roots form the foundation of the body they support.

Bitterness is no different. Jealousy and envy are often its seeds. Left unchecked, they fester into bitter resentment, fueled by internalized anger, unmet expectations, and feelings of being overlooked. When bitterness takes root, it rarely stays contained; it spreads, infects others, and reshapes the direction of their lives. Resentment is toxic and leads to negative effects physically, mentally, and spiritually. It can make people quick to anger, jealous, judgmental, and even physically sick.

As with many "inconspicuous" sins, our carnal, misguided human nature often overlooks or dismisses them as "no big deal." We believe that as long as we are not hurting anyone overtly, it cannot be that bad, right? The truth is that all our attitudes and behaviors affect others, whether we express them outwardly or not. Our covert actions or feelings are often just as consequential to the outcomes of our daily relationships as the ones we openly demonstrate.

When we harbor negative or jealous thoughts of one another, whether we act on them or not, we deceive ourselves and damage God's church. As followers of [Christ](#) and prospective teachers of God's truth, we must make every effort to weed out attitudes of envy, jealousy, and the eventual bitter resentment they build.

I once heard an interesting description of the progression of bitterness. What starts as jealousy often leads to resentment. Years of resentment lead to a lifetime of bitterness. Described another way, the jealous man envies the accomplishments of those around him. There is still time, however, for the man to realize his error and reverse course, finding the motivation to succeed in life through his own accomplishments. Resentment, however, manifests when the man suppresses the desire to apply himself in the first place, finding satisfaction instead in the jealousy and envy he harbors for others' achievements. After a lifetime of resentment, the man developed bitterness and hatred for every facet of life. While this is a simplistic description of a complex set of emotions, the lesson is that a life lived in resentment, for whatever reason, will ultimately end in perpetual bitterness.

[Hebrews 12:15](#) reads, ". . . looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of [God](#); lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." The Greek word for bitterness used in this verse is *pikria* (*Strong's* #4088), meaning "bitterness, harshness, resentful spirit." *Pikria* also appears in [Ephesians 4:31](#): "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

We may not even be aware that years of disagreements, judgment of others, labeling, and inferring about another's character and accomplishments might be building up bitter resentments. Little by little, these feelings spread like a

corrupting disease, poisoning thoughts until they consume the host completely.

The antidote is ultimately forgiveness after prayerful self-examination, neither of which we are innately prone to do. With the help of [God's Spirit](#), we must get to the point where we desire to apply godly [love](#) to the situation. As the apostle Paul describes in [I Corinthians 13:4-5](#): "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil." Such a process is not easy, but it is necessary.

One of the best-known biblical examples of bitterness lies in the story of Esau and Jacob. The firstborn of [Isaac](#) and heir of Abraham's covenantal blessing, Esau lost everything in a short-sighted bid to satisfy his immediate physical hunger. After selling off his birthright, Esau's younger brother, Jacob, with the help of their mother Rebekah, succeeded in securing Isaac's blessing.

"When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me—me also, O my father!'" ([Genesis 27:34](#)). Esau realized at that moment that he had lost everything to Jacob. Further, Isaac told him that what had been done could not be undone.

[Genesis 27:41](#) describes Esau's impulsive response: "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of [mourning](#) for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" Driven by regret and bitter jealousy, Esau vowed to kill his brother in response to his own sins and mishandling of the birthright.

However, unlike the murderous fruit of Cain's resentment over Abel's offering, Esau does eventually reconcile his bitterness toward Jacob, and the two of them mend their broken relationship. It took around twenty years, four hundred miles of separation, and God's providence to soften both brothers' hearts enough to turn their relationship around. Had it not been for God's ultimate plan, the passionate, quick-tempered resentment that had poisoned Esau's heart could have ended quite differently.

In Part Two, we will consider another biblical example of bitterness and other factors that play into making bitterness so difficult to overcome.

- Steven Skidmore

New Transcripts

[1845s: The Unchangeable Promise](#)

Given by Craig Sablich on 08-Nov-25

[1861: Psalm Genres \(Part Five\): Psalms of Praise](#)

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From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Bitterness Can Kill](#)

by Mike Ford

Ahithophel was David's trusted counselor and later the champion of Absalom. The desire to avenge the crime committed by David against his granddaughter Bath Sheba and son-in-law Uriah consumed him, ultimately turning his heart irreversibly bitter and treacherous. Interestingly, the etymology of the proper noun Ahithophel means "brother of a fool," appropriately describing his alliance with Nabal, whose name means "fool." David's adultery with Bath Sheba and his murder Uriah to cover up his moral

turpitude may have provided more gall than Ahithophel could process. He perhaps did not feel God's judgement on David was strong enough, and therefore determined to take matters into his own hands. Obviously, Ahithophel's treachery blindsided David, inspiring him to compose Psalm 55. David, instead of praying for revenge, prayed that God would turn Ahithophel's counsel to nonsense. God granted David's request; Ahithophel, having lost Absalom's confidence, withdrew and committed suicide, seeing his years of plotting for revenge come to nothing. A desire to take revenge is a strong part of our carnal nature. Yet, God has not delegated to individuals the duty of taking revenge; He claims that "vengeance is Mine." Ahithophel serves as a poignant example that we should not permit a root of bitterness to undermine our faith that the sovereign God is able to bring justice to all.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[All About Edom \(Part One\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The twin sons of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, are perhaps the classic model of sibling rivalry, and their contentious relationship has had a tremendous impact on history. Richard Ritenbaugh introduces the ancient people known as the Edomites by examining the life of the original Edomite, Esau.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 06-Mar-26) will be **Abraham (Part Six)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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