

# **The Bitterness Trap – Free From Bitter Jealousy**

2/17/19 – Pastor Randy

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In March, 2013 I performed a funeral for a young 24-y old man who was murdered by the ex-husband of a lady he had begun to see. He was murderer was consumed with jealousy. This man also murdered his ex-wife. His jealous attitude was, "If I can't have you nobody can."

## ***The Bitterness Trap***

***What is Bitterness?*** – Persistent feelings of resentment or animosity that result from:

- **Mistreatment**
- **The Perception of Mistreatment**
- **Misfortune**
- **Jealousy and Envy**

***Why is it a "TRAP" and What Kind of "Trap" is it?*** – A Disguised Device of the Devil Designed to Distract, Discourage, or Destroy You by:

- **Poisoning Your Spirit**
- **Paralyzing You Mentally & Physically**
- **Provoking You to Vengeful Acts**

Last Sunday we learned that the motivation to forgive and the power to be free from bitterness comes from:

- **An awareness of, and appreciation for, God's mercy extended to us.**

Bitterness only sees what's been done TO me. Healing from the poison and freedom from the trap comes from seeing what's been done FOR me!!

Today we are going to learn about a second source of freedom from the bitterness trap.

- **A confident trust in God as the one who determines Your destiny**

This week I want to talk to you about a cause of bitterness that comes from inside of us, not outside of us. What do we do when we discover our hearts are full of persistent animosity and resentment, not due to any wrongs committed against us or any experience of injustice, but as a result of our own envy and jealousy?

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Joseph's behavior and the behavior of his father Jacob provoked Joseph's brothers to jealousy and hatred. Their jealousy led to bitterness.

*"Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe. But **his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them.** They couldn't say a kind word to him." - Genesis 37:3,4*

*"But while **his brothers were jealous of Joseph,** his father wondered what the dreams meant." - Genesis 37:11*

### James 3:13-18

*Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

These instructions are part of James' address to people who want to occupy the position of teaching others. He was addressing a situation where those who were tasked with teaching God's truth to Christians, in order to help them know how to live as faithful followers of Jesus, had allowed selfish ambition and bitter jealousy to corrupt their task.

Moral, ethical and judicial arguments that claim to be grounded in wisdom and claim to reveal the truth about righteousness and justice, end up proving to be unwise and foolish when they are infected with a spirit of...  
Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.

Jealousy and envy are symptoms of selfish ambition which is a symptom of greed and pride. If we are selfishly ambitious, we are apt to become afflicted with envy or jealousy when someone else:

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- Achieves or accomplishes what we did not, or could not, achieve or accomplish. (i.e. Educational & Vocational Achievements)
- Acquires what we did not, or could not, acquire. (i.e. Possessions, Relationships)

Envy and jealousy describe the experience of grief and pain because we do not have what another person has. Envy and jealousy turn into bitterness when they mature into persistent feelings of resentment towards those who have what we wish we had or threaten to take away what we have.

The bitterness of jealousy is a trap designed by the Devil to destroy us by dividing us. James tells us that *“where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”*

Listen to how Eugene Peterson interprets that statement: *Whenever you’re trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others’ throats.*

When jealousy, envy caused by selfish ambition fill our hearts they disrupt our ability to be objective. Selfish ambition leads to bitter jealousy create a conflict of interests. My interest is supposed to be set on listening to the Spirit through the Word in order to know God and His will and to help others. But if I am motivated by selfish ambition I am conflicted. The interest of selfish ambition is not to be wise but to look wiser than others. It is not to discover truth but to “win” an argument. It perverts the God-ordained call to “contend for the truth and turns it into mere contentious behavior.

Any moral and ethical instruction that is motivated by selfish ambition – to appear smarter, to experience the thrill and satisfaction of winning the debate, to gain influence, power, prestige, or any other personal advantage – rather than being motivated by a desire to be faithful to the truth of God’s word, is evidence that the speaker lacks wisdom.

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In contrast to this foolish attempt to exploit and manipulate facts and information in a self-serving manner, James tells us how wisdom really manifests itself.

Wisdom from God (Real Wisdom) is infused with the fruit of the Spirit. It is: *...pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*

It pursues truth rather than power, praise, prestige, or any other kind of personal benefit.

Today I want to apply this teaching, which is focused specifically on how the bitterness of jealousy and selfish ambition corrupt the teacher's task, to the problem of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition more generally. Jealousy is evil by its very nature and its' potential destructive powers can be devastating as they were in the case of the young man I buried and the actions of Joseph's brothers.

Envy and jealousy are evil spiritual diseases that cause us to experience displeasure at the success and blessing of others and to experience pleasure at the failure or misfortune of others. Jealousy and envy turns everyone around us into our competition which can devolve into an even more destructive view of them as our enemy. When someone becomes our "enemy" we become inclined to believe the worst about them; to desire the worst for them, and to even act in a manner that harms them.

I will begin with a fairly harmless illustration from the sports arena. I, and many other people, experienced pain and grief at some of the Patriot's past super bowl wins. Why? It wasn't because I had any money on the game. It was because they beat my team, the Raiders, years ago in the playoffs as the result of a bad call. It felt like they "stole" the game from my team. They didn't just win the trophy. They won "our trophy". This bitterness results in:

**Believing the worst about them** – Many Patriots "haters" wanted to believe the reports about cheating against the Jets and deflating the ball in the payoffs and would not have accepted any finding other than that.

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**Desire the worst for them** – Why do so many people root against the Patriots. Why am I a Raider fan and a fan of anyone who plays the Patriots? Some of you thought that I became a true green Eagle fan last year, but my excitement was mostly because the patriots lost not because the Eagles won. Now this seems all harmless and silly but if you read threads on twitter and comments on news articles you will find some men expressing in the most vulgar terms their hatred for the Patriots, even to the extent of hoping for injuries to their players!!!

**Acting in a manner that harms them** – I am not aware of anyone who has tried to harm a Patriot's player but this happened to Nancy Kerrigan in 1994, at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Detroit. After a practice session, she was assaulted on the leg with a police baton, an attack planned by Jeff Gillooly, the ex-husband of Tonya Harding. He did it because Nancy was a threat to Tonya's success.

Here are some more serious examples of the destructive power of jealousy.

*"Many people have assumed that school shooters target peers who have picked on them. This is rarely the case. Few shooters kill anyone who has harassed them. Rather, as noted with the examples cited above, shooters are more likely driven by envy than by revenge. This seems most true among those shooters I identify in my book as psychotic..."* - Peter Langman Ph.D. in PsychologyToday.com (May 2009)  
His book, *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*, was named an Outstanding Academic Title of 2009 by the American Library Association

The poison of bitterness operating within our current political arena and news journalism industry is utterly pervasive. The desire to win and gain power motivates members on both sides of the aisle to manipulate facts and deceiving the public rather than serving the public. "Power envy" is a spiritual cancer. When it spreads to our heart and brain we can't think objectively and we become incapable of reason and logic. James said the truly wise person; the one who is free from the bitter jealousy that arises from selfish ambition; manifests a wisdom that is "open to reason" and "impartial".

C.S. Lewis in his classic, *Mere Christianity* describes the problem vividly:

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*“Suppose one reads a story of filthy atrocities in the paper. Then suppose that something turns up suggesting that the story might not be quite true, or not quite so bad as it was made out. Is one’s first feeling, ‘Thank God, even they aren’t quite so bad as that,’ or is it a feeling of disappointment, and even a determination to cling to the first story for the sheer pleasure of thinking your enemies are as bad as possible? If it is the second then it is, I am afraid, the first step in a process which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils. You see, one is beginning to wish that black was a little blacker. If we give that wish its head, later on we shall wish to see grey as black, and then to see white itself as black. Finally, we shall insist on seeing everything - God and our friends and ourselves included - as bad, and not be able to stop doing it: we shall be fixed for ever in a universe of pure hatred.*

So, what is the solution. How do we avoid the trap of the bitter jealousy?

### 1. Practice Gratitude to Discover Contentment.

Jealousy and envy condition us to base our satisfaction with ourselves, and our circumstances on superficial comparisons with others.

Let’s say you were blessed with a \$1million home out in the country. But then the land around you was developed and a bunch of \$5 million mansions were constructed around your home. The question for you to answer is: What will your attitude be towards your new neighbors? Will your attitude change towards your home? Will the better homes cause you to feel less blessed by your home? Will you resent your wealthier neighbors? Many would!!!

Stop looking around at others and start looking up at God! Count your blessings!! When I am secure and satisfied with who I am in Christ and what I have in Christ, I can live free from jealousy. The knowledge of who I am in Christ and what I have in Christ allows me to live my life from a place of contentment rather searching for a place of contentment.

### 2. Renew Your Mind to Redirect Your Desires.

The cure for jealousy and envy is not the elimination of desire and ambition. Being content does not mean you no longer have any strong desires. It means that your sense of being blessed is not dependent on the attainment

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of those desires. Bitter jealousy is caused, not by ambition, but selfish ambition. The cure is found in a renewed heart and mind that redirects my desires towards bringing glory to God and blessing to others, rather than towards self-serving ends. My goal is to become who God has called me to be, not to be better than you, look better than you, possess more than you!

Jealousy and envy are evidence of perverted desires; They reveal that selfish ambition has become a substitute for godly ambition.

I want to be a great husband. I want to be a great pastor. I want to be a great preacher. All of those desires can be godly desires; noble aspirations and ambitions....IF my definition of "great" is God's definition of "great"!

If my use of the word "great" is a term of comparison to others than I am operating from selfish ambition. God hasn't called me to be a better husband than "John", or a better preacher than \_\_\_\_\_, or a better pastor than \_\_\_\_\_. But if by "great" I mean "greatly effective" in a manner that brings great glory to God and a great blessing to my wife and the church he has called me to serve...then my ambition is a godly ambition.

We should all want to excel at our vocation or change our vocation. If your vocation is a means of adding value to society than pursue greatness in your vacation. For the Christian, "vocational greatness" is not about wealth accumulation but about making a constructive contribution for God's glory.

I close with a statement I told my sons over and over again. "God called you for something so much greater than just making money or making a name for yourself. He has called you to make a difference for the glory of God and the good of others.

If I am already seated in heavenly places with Christ, I don't have anymore ladder climbing ambitions. If I am already blessed with every blessing, my neighbor doesn't have any blessings for me to covet so, I have no neighbors deserving of my envy. I am complete in Christ; free from selfish ambition and full of kingdom ambition.

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