

Bitterness

Bitterness is a crushing, self-destructive mental condition, which often gives rise to a variety of other sins: acrimony, animosity, derision, disagreeableness, hatred, hostility, rancor, resentment, spitefulness, sullenness, vengeance, and vindictiveness.

In the New Testament, this idea is communicated by a family of related words which are derived from the Greek word *pikros*. The verb *pikraino*, occurring 4x in the New Testament, means “(1) to cause to become bitter, make bitter in physical sense; (2) to cause bitter feelings, embitter, make bitter, in affective sense.” Similarly, the noun *pikria*, occurring 4x, refers to “(1) state of being bitter to the taste, bitterness; (2) state of being bitter in an affective sense, bitterness, animosity, anger, harshness figurative extension of 1.” The adjective *pikros*, the root of this word family, occurring twice, “(1) pertains to being bitter to taste, bitter; (2) pertains to being bitter in feeling or attitude, bitter, embittered, harsh, fig. ext. of 1.” Finally, the adverb *pikros*, which occurs twice, signifies “bitterly.”

This article will consider the various passages where these aforementioned words occur. Due deliberation of each will help us understand the bitterness of sin, and the sin of bitterness.

The Bitterness Of Sin

The Bible clearly communicates the bitterness of sin. Regretful bitterness is the byproduct of sin, at least for one who is tenderhearted (Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 22:54-62). However, the callous and coldhearted feel no pain of conscience (Ephesians 4:17-20; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). Sin bears a poisonous and bitter fruit, both collectively (Deuteronomy 29:14-18) and individually (Proverbs 5:1-6). When divine judgment is poured out, bitter suffering is inescapable (Jeremiah 9:12-16; Revelation 8:6-11). Even faithful messengers experience anguish in fulfilling their commission (Revelation 10:8-11; cp. Jeremiah 15:16-18; Ezekiel 2:8-3:15).

The Sin Of Bitterness

The Bible also warns against the sin of bitterness. Bitterness is a transgression of the heart (James 3:13-17, esp. v. 14) and the tongue (Romans 3:9-18, esp. v. 14; James 3:2-12, esp. v. 11). Bitterness is also a sin of behavior. In attempting to buy the gift of God with money, Simon the Sorcerer was in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity (Acts 8:9-24, esp. v. 23). Esau, manifesting hostility toward his brother Jacob, allowed a root of bitterness to spring up and cause trouble, through which many [i.e., his descendants — the Edomites] were defiled (Hebrews 12:14-17).

One overcomes the bitterness of sin through godly sorrow leading to repentance and subsequent obedience (Proverbs 28:13-14; Acts 3:19-26; 2 Corinthians 7:6-11). One also overcomes the sin of bitterness through adopting the mind of Christ Jesus (Mark 11:25-26; Luke 23:33-34). Therefore, we need to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving

(Ephesians 4:31-32). We need to be loving and patient (Colossians 3:18-21). We need to be wise and understanding (James 3:13-18). This applies in every relationship you have: marriage, children, brethren, neighbors, and coworkers. You have to get rid of your bitterness!

“The sin of worry’s much too heavy And not meant for us to bear; Our great Shepherd’s there to lift the load ... As we rest it in His care.”

“The sin of bitterness destroys our joy And affects the way we live; It completely steals the victory ... May God help us to forgive.”

“The sin of pride keeps us from the Lord, It comes before destruction; Oh, how we need to humble ourselves ... Obeying God’s instruction.”

“The sin of selfishness grips the soul, Causing hurt and misery; Freedom from sin and self can be found ... At the cross of Calvary.”

“As we come to Christ, heavy laden, He will cleanse and make us whole; He’ll lift The Weight of Sin completely ... And give sweet rest to the soul.” [Bratcher].

Adapted from Mark Mayberry