

Bitterness

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[0:00] Ephesians 4, 25-32 For putting away lying, speak every man the truth with his neighbour.

For we are members one of another. Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stalls feel no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have to give to them that need of. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender heart to forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. Let it be life to us. Let it be truth that we can then apply and take home with us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

[1:32] Please be seated. Welcome again to the word of God. I want to talk about a subject tonight that is very important. Very important.

Now, I'm a trained occupational health and safety rep. I know all about occupational health and safety. Now, my message tonight is about ecclesiastical health and safety.

Ecclesiastical health and safety. How can we have an environment of fellowship, a fellowship where there's a safe and healthy atmosphere, where there's a well-being for the people that are fellowshiping together?

How can we make church fellowship and that environment of fellowship something that's a blessing, an encouragement, and relationships can be built and flourish?

How can we deal with one another in a good, godly way? How can we handle disappointments and offences and hurts? You know, these are things that are common in workplaces as well as in church places where people have friction and, you know, sometimes there's sandpaper people in our lives, isn't there?

[2:44] They help to keep us on the ball, you know, help to keep us godly because people can sharpen us and make us hopefully more spiritual in helping us develop grace in how we deal with others and such like.

How can we handle those offences and hurts that are commonplace and actually can happen in church life? Now, I think one good place to start is, firstly, not to have unrealistic expectations so that we don't think that the world revolves around me and it's all about me, it's all about my needs. And it's realising that everyone is human and the human beings in our lives, Christians and non-Christians alike, will let us down from time to time. People will fail us at one time or another. And it helps to not take such things personally and get offended. You know, taking offence is something that is a problem in churchdom. It's a problem in life in general, taking offence, getting hurt and holding on to hurts and resentments and such like.

An offence can be like a seed that is planted which grows into the tree of bitterness. An offence can become a bitterness. And it's one of the biggest problems in, if you like, I'm calling it, as I say, cynically or kind of sarcastically, ecclesiastical health and safety because we want our fellowshiping together to be a place of well-being and blessing and encouragement and uplifting.

[4:22] Not a place where there's murmuring or bitterness and such things as that. So bitterness can show up in all kinds of ways, in unpleasant ways. When we think of, for example, something that's bitter to taste.

It's hard to swallow. It's something that's bitter. If you have a drink of squeezed lemon, there's a bitterness there. It's something that's hard to bear.

Bitter cold. There's a bit of that around lately, isn't there? Bitter cold is hard to bear. You know, if you were living in Antarctica, you would know what bitter cold is all about. When we hear the expression, bitter truth, it's an expression about when telling the truth is painful, can be uncomfortable.

Bitter enemies of people that are people in our lives whose names strike fear in our heart. Bitter enemies. The Bible talks a lot about bitterness.

It talks about bitterness and the bitterness of spirit. It tells us of that which produces a bad taste of unpleasantness and it shows up in resentment and anger.

[5:26] Bitterness is something that we ought to deal with in our lives and Ephesians 4 tells us just that. It tells us let all bitterness and wrath or anger and clamour, you know, noise and argument and such like, let all of those things, those things of bitterness, those things associated with bitterness and a bitter spirit, Paul says let them be put away.

Put away from you. Bitterness. It's unpleasant. People can get bitter against God. Things happen in their lives and suddenly they blame God.

They resent something that's happened and they seem to have a problem with what God has brought into their lives. Bitterness towards God. Bitterness towards other people.

Maybe someone's looked at you the wrong way and you think, oh, they don't like me or something is said or done or not said or done and you suddenly, it snowballs and becomes bigger than Ben-Hur and it becomes magnified and amplified and multiplied.

Bitterness is self-destructive. Bitterness is not good for us. It's harmful for us. It's been said that a ratchel snake, when it gets cornered, will sometimes get so angry that it bites itself.

[6:44] Bitterness is like that. Bitterness is like that. We get so angry, filled with hatred, filled with resentment, harbouring hurts and ill will towards others.

It's like we're biting ourselves because it doesn't do us any good even when we think we're harming others by having those feelings of resentment and maybe they're justified feelings to some degree.

Maybe we are. We have been hard dug by. We have been done wrong. But those feelings, if we harbour them, will cause deeper harm to ourselves. Bitterness is a problem in the church.

Bitterness is a problem in individual Christians' lives. We need to deal with that bitterness that sometimes can be so hidden and it's something that we can not always notice or be perceiving of. But it's there, deep down, deep seated in our lives at times. Bitterness destroys people. Bitterness is a sin. And bitterness will make you sick.

[7:44] It's interesting. Modern medicine has found, they've made some discovery that bitterness and those feelings of emotional anger and resentment can build up and create a health impact.

A bitter spirit, modern medicine tells us, can affect our health. Bitterness can cause physical problems. Bitterness, as a writer, a Christian author who wrote a book called None of These Diseases, says that anger, unhandled, will show itself in at least 50 diseases.

So maybe, sometimes, not always, but maybe some of those tensions and frustrations and that building up of emotional baggage can affect our health in harmful ways.

Doctors tell us about unforgiveness. Doctors tell us that unforgiveness can disturb the nervous system. Unforgiveness can hinder the digestive process.

You know, there's 30 feet of digestive process within you from one end to the other. And those things, that tension, that anxiousness, that frustration that builds up can affect the digestive process.

[9:01] And it can hit the blood in the heart so that the entire body is first overheated and then forced into depression. So all of these things can be tied together.

And even health professionals recognise that link, that bitterness can be a part of that. And bitterness can show itself too in our mental condition.

Bitterness is really displaced anger. Anger can come from bitterness. Bitterness has been medically linked to glandular problems, high blood pressure, cardiac disorders, ulcers, and even insanity.

So it's a problem. It's a problem. The world says it's a problem. One leading psychiatrist wrote, 90% of people, all people in insane asylums could be released immediately if they would learn how to forgive or how to be forgiven.

That's an amazing quote, isn't it? Lots of people have the capacity to have some of these conditions dealt with if they would just deal with forgiveness.

[10:07] Forgiveness. Learn how to forgive and how to be forgiven. We know that spiritually too, bitterness is an issue if it's not resolved.

It's so obvious in the Word of God as much as said about forgiving, about forgiving others, about holding onto unforgiveness as something that's dangerous and unhelpful.

That resentment that builds up, that shows our disposition and distract us from what really matters, the things that we can productively be using our energies to do. And the Word of God tells us that we ought to deal with such issues.

In the context of prayer, in James 5, verse 16, it says, Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed.

It goes on to say the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, availeth much. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed.

[11:10] Interesting that link there, isn't it? Between confessing your faults and receiving healing. Someone said some people's favourite meal is stew.

They stew about everything. They swallow up every of things and boil it inside. They just want to stew on things. They just mull it over and chew it over and turn it over in their minds and hearts and they just won't let it go.

Now, this is not to say our feelings can't get hurt. They can. They are often hurt. I know people do us wrong and it hurts. it's human to feel hurt.

misunderstandings happen and misunderstandings happen too. When it's just something innocently said or done and those misunderstandings happen and then it just snowballs that feeling, those sensations are and they just build up and snowball.

Bitterness is something unless we deal with it it can fester and it can build up and we can get hardened. A hardness comes in our life. A touchiness comes into our life because that bitterness has not been resolved.

[12:32] Now, trouble is like it's been said that no matter how long you nurse a grudge it won't get better. You know, you can nurse a grudge you can hang on to it and cherish it you can have that chip on your shoulder that you have a look at every day in the mirror and you won't let it go.

That hurt that feeling of resentment that something someone's done you wrong and you just want to cherish it you just want to hang on to it and not let it go.

No matter how long you nurse a grudge it's not going to get better. So let me show you a way of picturing how bitterness works. I saw this illustration of how bitterness can work in our lives and we see firstly a fellow called Billy Bitterness Here's Billy Billy Billy Bitterness Billy Bitter and Billy Bitter unfavourable circumstances happen circumstances happen in Billy's life unfavourable circumstances they come into Billy's life and they exert pressure on Billy pressure is exerted on Billy circumstances come to test him pressure is exerted in his life pressure that's designed to purify him and make him whole but Billy reacts against the pressure

Billy reacts against that pressure that is designed to test him but he responds with resentment he responds with resentment he reacts against the testing he draws up his past memories of hurts! that trigger his negative emotions he reacts against the circumstances in a negative way he just gets more and more angry anger grows he gets more and more angry and resentful at God allowing such things to happen and as a result God is not glorified because Billy bitter gets bitter because he resents the circumstances designed to purify him and make him whole because he gets angry at God and resentful God is not glorified Billy is not edified and those around him are not encouraged his character is not transformed that's what happens to

[15:23] Billy when he gets bitter now we're going to change our picture now and have a look at another person instead of Billy bitter we're going to look at somebody else we're going to look at Sandy Spiritual Sandy Spiritual unfavorable circumstances happen in Sandy's life and Sandy Spiritual has the same experiences that come into her life as Billy

bitter does unfavorable circumstances exert pressure in Sandy Spiritual but what does she do Sandy does something different Sandy puts her life in God's care she places her faith in God no matter what the circumstances are saying

Sandy Spiritual handles that same experience in a different way she puts her faith in God's care she trusts in God's wisdom she doesn't understand the trial but she wants in everything to give thanks she gives thanks and praise she puts into practice the scripture that says rejoice in the Lord always rejoice in the Lord always she doesn't understand the trial but she keeps her spirit sweet she keeps a sweet spirit and she begins to praise God and rejoice in him and as she does that grace pours into her life grace comes into her life she learns to develop grace she learns to grow in grace grace pours into her life and it frees her from the entanglement of past bitterness and she gets a greater freedom in her soul so with Sandy spiritual the testing produces endurance and God is glorified in the life and the world is in awe as Sandy is transformed and as Sandy responds to those circumstances of life she is transformed she develops a message and a ministry she responds to the same circumstances with sweetness and not bitterness and in Sandy's life the testing produces endurance the endurance produces sensitivity the sensitivity creates a ministry and the ministry multiplies God's glory and the cycle goes on and on on and on that the faith grows the praise grows and God's glory grows now both people are experiencing the same kind of circumstances one is free from the bondage of bitterness the other has chosen to remain a prisoner of his own anger to

Billy bitter the trial produces bitterness but to Sandy spiritual the trial produces strength bitterness we all face uncertain circumstances we all face circumstances that are unfavourable things that we don't like we can respond with bitterness or with sweetness now bitterness is costly it's costly if we choose that pathway of bitterness bitterness is costly someone said this we cannot live with bitterness because first it will manifest in our spirit then in our emotions and finally in our bodies a bitter spirit will rob you of a blessing a bitter spirit will rob you of peace of joy of power hurt feelings can be like a poison it's not good for our health and well being as a person and as a church to be overwhelmed with anger and hatred it will paralyze you and poison you if you don't get rid of bitterness it will become an entrenched part of your mindset of your behaviour it will show in un-disciplined anger it will show in that uncontrolled tongue in that hurt spirit that you want to hurt others because you are feeling hurt we see that in

Acts 8 verse 23 where there's a man who is described as having that flow on effect of bitterness Peter was there he was talking to Simon and he says I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity and that word gall it relates to bile the gall bladder it relates to poison effectively Peter says to Simon you're poisoned by your bitterness and you're in the bondage of your sin bitterness can be deep seated as top of bitterness in Hebrews 12 verse 15 it speaks of lest any roots of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled any root of bitterness springing up trouble you bitterness can be deep seated under the surface yet growing growing growing and it can lead to many being defiled a preacher said this the longer you allow the root of bitterness to grow in the soil of your heart the more love it will devour bitterness will devour your love bitterness will devour your energies that could be used for spiritual things for godly things get rid of your bitterness today sister get rid of your bitterness today brother don't hold on to it the opposite of bitterness is forgiveness forgiveness our text in Ephesians tells us of forgiveness forgiveness how can we find forgiveness in that biblical sense of the word you know god has given us the mathematical definition of forgiveness the lord jesus says when he was asked how many times should i forgive he says seventy times seven now the rabbis at this time they taught that forgiving someone three times was sufficient now give them three chances three strikes and then they're out but nothing in the jewish talmud required people to forgive more than that now knowing that peter doubled the number and that added one to boot he thought maybe seven times was a spiritual number to forgive someone who had wronged him he thought he was impressing jesus when he said seven times but jesus answered not seven times but seventy times seven four hundred ninety times now it wasn't so much the number that lord jesus was making the point of but basically he was saying don't count peter just forgive don't count no matter how many times someone wrongs you forgive forgive forgive keep on forgiving forgiving is about releasing people from those things those hurts that bitterness those things those ways that have wronged you stopping feeling angry about it and wanting to get back at them forgiveness it's about grace it's

about

[23:13] God's forgiveness how much does God forgive us do we stop and think of that God forgave us when we did not deserve it despite our willful sin in his great grace he forgives he forgives us generously unconditionally freely while we were yet sinners Romans 5 verse 8 while we were yet sinners Christ died for us that's the extent of his love of his forgiveness now many people believe that only good people will go to heaven wrong only bad people will go to heaven only bad people will go to heaven because there is none good no not one there's not one good person certainly no good person who will go to heaven only bad people will go to heaven who have found Christ's forgiveness who have come to him and asked for his grace who have asked for that redeeming blood on their behalf only those who are forgiven can go to heaven and forgiveness is something

God puts a great deal of emphasis on can we find forgiveness and love in our hearts Jesus says love one another as I have loved you wow think of that one can you grasp that one in the grey mantle love one another as I have loved you that's the kind of love that's the kind of forgiveness that's the kind of compassion that we ought to aspire to that we ought to hold on to not holding on to bitterness and unforgiveness but finding God's love God's gracious love and the Lord Jesus says if you don't obey my commandments it proves that you don't love me so we better take a hint of that one unforgiveness in Ephesians 4 the context tells us of giving place to the devil I talked a little on that this morning unforgiveness gives Satan a place unforgiveness gives Satan a place in your life and Satan wants you to hold on to it he doesn't want you to let go of your unforgiveness he wants you to keep not forgiving because it's poison for your soul a preacher said this those whom you don't forgive are holding you as a hostage it's not doing you any good to not forgive to hold grudges and bitterness it's going to hurt you it's going to hurt your relationships it's going to hurt your work it's going to hurt your marriage unforgiveness it's a form of hatred really isn't it let's face it it's a form of hatred in your heart unforgiveness it's going to create stress and anxiety it's going to do you harm it's going to hinder your worship it's going to hinder your relationship with God it's going to hinder your prayer life let it go we're to be firmly planted grounded in the love of Christ not minding offences not holding on to hurts against someone if we're doing that we're not walking in love are we if we're holding on to offences we're not walking in love

Christ's love should be flowing through us verse 32 and be kind one to another forgiving one another tender hearted forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake have forgiven you we can continue to live our life as offended people we can get up every morning and have that tip on the shoulder and make sure it's still there when we get up tomorrow morning and still hold some hurt some baggage some weight of unforgiveness we can hold on to that grudge of that one who's done us wrong that one who's oh they should pay for that no I want to get even with them they don't deserve my forgiveness my love those who want to live as offended people have got poison in their soul it's not good for you rather choose forgiveness choose forgiveness even though it doesn't come naturally even though it goes against the grain even though those unfortunate circumstances and those difficult people that are part of your life are hard to forgive choose forgiveness choose forgiveness today stop holding on to the offence life's too short life's too short to hold on to those things

I think our brother Les has passed away Matt's passed away people we don't know how much time we've got what good is it to hold on to that unforgiveness you could be dead tomorrow and those things not resolved wouldn't it be better to bury the hatchet and deal with it to be quick to forgive to not hold grudges even for those who have hurt you the most more so love them more so forgive them as our Lord says pray for those who despitefully use you pray for them bless them who curse you love your enemies it's amazing isn't it it's just contrary to the flesh it's counter intuitive isn't it it's just a total reversal of logic yet God says renounce bitterness let it go thank God God is tender hearted towards us be you tender hearted loving one another as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you think of the great tenderness of our

Lord and he wants us to be like him the word says faith works by love you know some make great claims of faith and yet love is lacking faith works by love love should be evident they're linked they're tied together choose tender heartedness and compassion forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you now this is just getting it down to the personal level now what

can I do with this message I could just file it away in the brain and think that's someone else he's talking to tonight that doesn't apply to me maybe there's people in your life if you really thought long and hard enough about it maybe there's just one maybe there is someone in your life and I'm not putting you under condemnation or anything tonight but maybe God can show you people in your life that maybe there's some things you can let go some hurts from the past maybe there's things that you could resolve maybe there's forgiveness that you could seek or give to another in your life and maybe just make an approach you know put the olive branch out they may refuse it yet fear you tender hearts it forgiving one another even as

[30:42] God for Christ's sake have forgiven you are our relationships right have we taken some offence is there some offence that is yet to be dealt with are we cherishing some hurt or will we be like sandy spiritual that will be something spiritual that will show and shine out of our life when unfortunate circumstances come our way will our lives reflect the hope that will save souls will our lives reflect the glory of God will our lives show the love of Christ that we are called to love others with will it be as Paul prayed for the Philippians I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment friends we've seen how bitterness can be something very ugly and hurtful we're talking about the health and safety of a church of a person of our well being bitterness is bad for you forgiveness is good for you let us pray heavenly father we thank you that your great grace came to us at the cross where while we were yet enemies while we were still sinners you died for us your great love was shown your great grace was manifest when you laid down your life for people such as we undeserving none good no not one yet lord your forgiveness came undeserved unwarranted unconditionally to such as we yet lord sometimes in our lives i know speaking for myself i i sometimes have those people in my mind that have done me wrong those things that at times hurt help us lord each one if there's people in our lives like that to love them to forgive them to show compassion to not hold on to and cherish those hurts help us lord to forgive us you forgive us help us to manifest your glory in how we deal with others in how we deal with unfortunate circumstances of life that will still rejoice will still thank you and praise you even when it's hard to help us lord to have that heart that will not be made bitter but will remain sweet and will be tender hearted filled with your compassion for the people in our lives the people that we've filled our lives with in this short earthly span as people that you've given to us to spend time with to get to know help us lord to treat people like we ought to we thank you lord pray if there's any here tonight that need prayer but they'll pray personally to you they'll seek prayer from a brother or sister tonight they'll seek to reconcile they'll seek to resolve they'll seek to make restitution they'll seek to bury the hatchet they'll seek to burn those things that hinder their testimony we pray in Jesus' name amen