

Sweet Relationships in the Body

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Ephesians chapter 4.

How many of you have ever wondered what it would be like to come to a church and not hear! I would like you to turn in your Bibles.

A man who says that believes that God has spoken clearly to His people and that God wants to be heard and that hearing God makes a difference in the lives of His people.

Amen? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. This morning, Holy Father, we gather because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We gather as people who have been blessed beyond our full comprehension at this point because it doesn't yet appear what we shall be, but the day is coming when we will stand in the presence of Christ and enjoy Him forever.

[2 : 06] And as we wait, we are blessed to have Your Word in our hand, to have Your Spirit in our heart.

And so with humility, we ask that You would work in us, that Your Word would have free course, and that it would bear fruit in us. That as a result of hearing the preaching of the Word of God, that our lives would be affected, that we would be different, that the unbelieving world would see that difference and ask us a reason for the hope that lies within, and that we, as the woman at the well or the man born blind or so many other individuals, would be able to say, it's because of Jesus that I am the way that I am.

There was a time, but that's gone and passed. And I know Christ as my Savior, and He's the one who makes a difference. Now give to us the power of Your Spirit that Christ would be exalted.

Amen. Well, as we look at Ephesians chapter 4, verse 31 and 32, I would like to, in some ways, compare it to what happens in a fairly good Bible lesson.

If you are reading through a book at the end of some books, the author will put some summary statements, little things that help you kind of remember and press it together so it's fixed in your mind.

[4 : 03] And what we are looking at here in the last two verses is Paul giving us just a little overview of what really takes place when the work of God is playing out in an individual's life.

And incidentally, he touches on something that every single one of us here are far more familiar with than we'd really like to admit. Let me read the passage and have you follow along in your own copy of the Scriptures.

It says, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from among you with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Now, I'll tell you in advance that our attention to the particulars of these two verses really are going to show us an example of how powerful the inner thoughts of a man really are.

[5 : 11] Now, we could recite a passage such as Proverbs where it says, As a man thinks in his heart, what? So is he. Or we could also recite another passage where Jesus says this. He says, A good man out of a good treasure brings forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure brings forth evil things.

Out of the heart, we could say that one as well, couldn't we? Out of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And so we recognize this morning as we take up this passage that what we think about works its way into what we do.

What we think about works its way into what we do. And so you can stop just for a moment right at this moment and kind of take a millisecond to stop and think, Okay, so what are most of my thoughts like?

What do I think about the most? What occupies the space and time of my inner thoughts? Now, we may be thinking things completely different than anybody else's suspicions.

Am I right? Shakespeare rightly said, he says, This, one may smile and smile and still be a villain.

[6 : 22] Right? I can smile and have the most devious and deceitful of thoughts. And Paul says here, Hey, listen, understand, what's inside comes outside eventually.

Now, I don't want to be overbearing on a little bit of literary device, but very interesting, actually, 31 and 32 are kind of a beautiful illustration of something that we tend to miss today.

When we want to highlight something so that we remember it, or we want to really draw attention to it for the sake of sticking it in our minds, what do we usually do?

We take out a pen, and what do we do? In our own copy, we underline it, or we grab a yellow marker or something like that, or if we were actually working on the computer or something, we would bold the text and maybe put it in italics, you know, things that, ooh, that's important.

In the ancient world, they didn't have those things, and so they had to rely on audible signals or means of handling the text or the passage so that people really, oh, this is important.

[7 : 35] Now, one of the most obvious ones that you know is when Jesus, if you're reading in the King James, He said what? Verily. Verily. So a double verily means what?

It's bold with underlining. You got that? What we're dealing with here is a very interesting pattern of thought that was used in the ancient world so that people could, oh, yeah, pay attention.

I got this one. Let me just give you a broad overview. What we have here is that Paul moves from the inner thought of a man to his behavior, and then in that's verse 31, the inner thought, right, bitterness, work our way into behavior.

Then verse 32 is the outer behavior then coming back to the matter of what the inner heart is like.

I'm not going to overplay that, but just kind of remind you that this is a passage that the Spirit of God really wants to get soaked in.

It wants it to be kind of formative, and it wants the Spirit of God. It's not an it. Apologize for that theological mistake. The Spirit of God wants you to be this way.

[8 : 47] It wants you to be this way. And as I said, we are all, every one of us, familiar with the two little statements, passages that we're looking at in verse 31 and 32.

So let's begin there in 31 and recognize that what the text is telling us is that we're to refuse inner attitudes that produce harmful fruit. As Paul really brings this whole section of chapter 4 to a conclusion, he places emphasis on what we are like inside as believers.

I do want you to recognize that this passage was written to those who know Christ. And it's a reminder to us who have received the blessing of salvation that even though we are saved, if we are not careful and obedient to the Lord Jesus, we can allow some pretty nasty things to fester inside.

Isn't that right? We're called to clean out every bit of bitterness from our mind and heart. Look at the passage.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from among you with all malice. Amazingly, just a small bit of bitterness will end up doing what any infection that is unchecked in the human body would do.

[10 : 12] Bitterness is a spiritual infection. And just like unchecked infection ends up being challenged to the entire being, so unchecked bitterness becomes something that has a profound influence on the soul of an individual.

The Greek word that is used here for bitterness is one that is descriptive of something that is inedible or poisonous. The Greeks used it to describe not only something that was inedible or poisonous, but also the poisonous inner attitude of an individual who had a longstanding resentment and an inner animosity towards a certain individual or individuals.

I want you to recognize that a bitter person nurses the offense that took place at one time. The bitter person longs subtly and internally to see righteousness descend and judgment come down on the individual who has harmed and caused them grief.

And that bitter person has a tendency to view life in relationship to that person that they are embittered towards with a cynical and a sharp, ill-spirited attitude.

I want you to turn back just for a moment to Romans chapter 3 verse 14 and recognize that Paul actually uses the issue of bitterness as an identifier, one of the characteristics of the unregenerate soul.

[11 : 54] There in verse 14 it says, Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Have you ever been around individuals and learned that over time what's inside comes outside?

Isn't that right? I mean, out in the lobby when we're having our brief little discourses out there, for the most part, none of us really dump our laundry out there. I mean, our conversations are civil. They're courteous. We talk about things that are really meaningful like the weather and how the Buckeyes did. You know, things that the world revolves around. But inside, what could be going on? There could be a whole lot of baggage. And here Paul identifies the fact that one of the things that really characterizes the unregenerate person is that the issues of the inside really eventually come out and can be seen.

Now, sadly, and we recognize this is the reason the passage is written, is that believers can fall into bitterness as well. And bitterness is something that Paul points to here as an inner mindset that we as believers need to guard ourselves against because to allow bitterness to fester is something that is...

[13 : 04] Now, listen to me carefully. And all of you, I want you to stop just for a second and do a little bit of check. Are you saved? Don't... I am, I am. That's not what I'm looking for.

Are you saved? I'm saved. Oh, good. So, how are you doing at managing bitterness? That's what we're dealing with this morning.

Those who are believers have the instruction of the Word of God that bitterness is not to be an operating principle in their life. Will we have reason to be bitter?

If you're drawn breath, things won't go your way. Surprise. And when things don't go your way, sooner or later, you begin picking up some of the iron filings and nails in the tires and other things that can lead you to become an embittered person.

And Paul says, stop, stop, stop. Don't be doing that. Let all bitterness be put away. Here are a couple of signals that bitterness has a foothold in your life.

[14 : 12] Are you following me? You keep remembering the hurts and offenses and hold on to them like Shylock thirsting for judgment.

You keep on holding on to the offenses and hurts of life, and you keep on nursing them with a desire for revenge.

You find it hard to hope good for those that have offended you. In fact, you're a little irritated with the fact that God is far more patient with them than He should be.

Right? If I were God, I would have done the Sodom and Gomorrah thing, or at least I would have let them have the experiences of Job.

You know, there are actually a great deal of challenge in the area of life in relationship to bitterness because of this.

[15 : 19] We know that relationships and life itself is marked by incredible disappointments and heartaches. And invariably, when these things strike our heart and our being, there is the natural tendency to allow bitterness to grow.

Let me add a little note here, and I want you to recognize this is worth remembering. Bitterness is the inevitable. Now, what do I mean by inevitable? It's going to happen.

Bitterness is the inevitable outcome of not dealing with offenses biblically. Let me say that slowly. Bitterness is the inevitable outcome of not dealing with offenses biblically.

Now, having said that, I would suspicion that there are some of you here that have a fairly well-developed pattern for dealing with disappointments and heartaches.

In fact, your methodology of dealing with disappointments and heartaches is a lot like the little grade school child who was taught that when your clothing catches on fire, what do you do?

[16 : 26] Brain-dead people know. Stop, drop, and roll, right? And so, remember I said bitterness is the eventual and inevitable outcome of not dealing with the challenges and heartaches of life in a biblical fashion.

So, what does the Bible teach us we should do when we are confronted with difficulties and disappointments and heartaches? What should we do? Don't tell everybody else because they're just thinking it themselves.

But the first thing we should do is what? Remind ourselves of who is on the throne and who is in control and who is doing what exactly needs to be done at the moment.

God abides in heaven. Is there anything at all that comes into your life that has not first been filtered through His loving hands and He decides, you know what? I want to test Tim Knoyer's humility this

morning and so I'm going to allow the schedule not to go His way or I'm going to allow someone to say something.

Do you follow what I'm saying? It happens. And we sing that song, Twilight Paris, God is on the throne. You know, it's a good song. Good theology, just hard to practice.

[17:40] And so, we remind ourselves that God is on the throne and secondly, we remind ourselves that God has a plan. And when He says there's a problem, what do you do? Listen to me. You go and talk to everybody that's not part of the solution and let them know how miffed you are.

I tell you what. We would reduce the periodic ripples on the pond in this fellowship if what we would do is exclusively follow Scripture and when we have a problem, go directly to the person who created the problem and let them know we're happy to help them solve it.

All of God's people said, amen. Okay. So, when you hear someone mouthing off about somebody else being a problem, what should you, God-loving soul that you are, say?

Here, here, here. Here, you say this, hey, how did it go when you talked to Bubba? Is there any Bubba in here? Hold on. Okay. How did you go when you, how did it go when you talked to Bubba? Because I sense the idea that you want to invite me to go with you to solve the problem. No, I just want you to know how irritated I am. Bitterness is inevitable outcome when we don't deal with problems biblically.

[19:08] Third, and mark this down, bitterness ends up affecting others. It ends up affecting others. I want you to look in your Bible to Hebrews chapter 12, verse 15.

How many of you wish that your life was fairly easy? I mean, at least in comparison. I mean, how many of you know other people in this church that have no troubles, no problems?

You kind of look every now and then with envy and think, oh, I wish my life were like, you know, Tom Parsons. He's never had a problem in his life.

I mean, you know, or, you know, I would like to be like Quentin Kenoyer, you know what I mean? And we're always thinking that that person has it easy, right?

That's what we're thinking. Can I tell you something? If you're God's child, he is deeply invested in seeing that you grow in grace. Listen, he will spare no expense to take care of the issues you're struggling with.

[20:12] And sadly enough, most of the issues that I'm struggling with are little sin issues, and guess how he deals with them? First, he taps me on the shoulder.

You know, hey, Tim, I'd like you to work on that. Yeah, whatever, later. Then he goes and gets a little bigger stick. How many of you have been there?

Hebrews chapter 12 is 13. I'm sorry, I said 12. But no, it's chapter 12. Beginning there in verse 7 and carrying on down through 15, it talks about the fact that God uses challenges to deal with us. And when he is chastening us, guess what the temptation is? Verse 15. Underline it in your Bible. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root. Either you get the grace.

All right, I understand you're working in my life, and I appreciate that. You either get the grace, you get the idea that he's doing something good, or you go towards bitterness. That's it.

[21:18] Be careful that you don't fall to the root of bitterness. It springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. The person who allows bitterness to establish in their heart will eventually allow it to fester in their soul, and they will harm not only themselves but other people.

Last month or so, I have ended up reading three or four different articles on the issue of the fact that there is a fair percentage of children who grow up in Christian homes, young people who grow up in Christian homes, and eventually have nothing to do with the church.

And it's been interesting, the different propositions that have been put out there as to what would radically change this. And I've got to tell you, it's not programs or place or anything else.

At the heart of it, I think one of the things is, is there are many kids who end up in the car on Sunday morning and come to church but never come to faith. And so when they can drive on their own, guess what many of them do?

They follow where their heart is. But I think another thing that is a real contributor is that kids grow up and watch their dads and moms not solve problems biblically.

[22:36] And when they watch that model over time, they think, well, hey, I don't know why I've got to put up with this. Can I tell you something, parents? If you let bitterness fester in your life, it'll affect the ones you love the most.

That's what the Bible says. Well, as we look at the passage, we recognize that going back to that text in Ephesians, and let's go there if you would, please, that where bitterness is allowed to fester and it's unchecked by the work of grace, it will end up producing some very recognizable fruit. And he uses a couple different words to describe these things. You look there at the passage in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 31, it says, let all bitterness, and then he says, and wrath and anger. I'll just break it down. The word wrath is talking about something that is an explosive nature, just blows up. And I've actually been around individuals who kind of excuse their blowups by, well, that's just the way I am.

Okay. Well, here's the wonderful news. If you are a believer, you don't have to stay the way you am. Do you understand that? In fact, if you am the way you am still after you've been saved, there may be a problem in what really you think happened.

[24 : 09] Because when Christ gets a hold of our life, change had better happen. And Paul says, hey, listen, you've got to get rid of that bitterness because wrath.

And then anger, anger is a smoldering inner fire that seethes on the inside and only in time produces its fruit. Believers can live with wrath and anger, but eventually it comes out.

Eventually. I'll never forget several years ago in pastoral ministry, there was a situation where I ended up in a family's home. This was 10 years ago.

And I remember I was visiting because they'd said to me, well, we're going to leave the church. I said, why? And after we had talked and gone through the civil courtesies of, well, I'm glad you're here and blah, blah, blah, I said, what's really the cause?

Do you know what they said? They said, well, this person did this to me. I said, oh, I am sorry. When did this happen? When we got down to the reality of it, the event had happened 17 years behind them letting me know.

[25 : 27] The individual who had created the offense, I think it passed away or it left. And here they were festering over this thing that had taken place.

Remember what I said? Bitterness is the outcome of not dealing with problems, what? Biblically. 17 years. Eventually, unchecked bitterness will produce unhappy fruit.

Well, we also recognize that bitterness boils out on the lips. There in 31, it says, wrath and anger, clamor and slander.

The word clamor is a word that's just talking about those outbursts that are loud, abusive, and insulting. I kind of chuckle at people who tell me, well, I just say what I think.

And I have come to realize that people who say what they think are actually in most cases pretty selective about where they are when they say what they think.

[26 : 30] As we were driving back yesterday evening from the men's retreat, Darren and I were in the car, and we actually saw, what was it, two or three state police officers that were, they'd pulled people over for speeding.

Now, I didn't pull up next to them to hear how the conversations went. But I imagined that the conversations were marked by a certain level of civil courtesy.

Do you know what I'm saying? Things like, yes, officer. I'll get that out. I've got it right here in the back. Yeah, here's my license. You say I was going 80 and a 40?

Yes, officer. Okay. One of the things that I have noticed is that these people that just say what they think, for the most part, they don't.

They say what they think they can get away with. And Paul says, listen, don't be one of these individuals that's shooting your mouth off. Now, the word clamor is backed up by another word.

[27 : 38] It says here slander. And slander is that which attacks the character and the well-being of another individual and aims to do them harm. Is that something that should characterize believers?

And what's the answer? The answer is absolutely not. So here's the question. How many of you in the last, well, being that you're such a good group of people, I'm going to give a wider, how many of you in the last entire year, 365 days, have had to go to someone else in this fellowship and say, would you forgive me?

That's not what I should have said about my brother. How many of you had to do that? Raise your hands. I'm counting right now. One, two, three. I got my hand up.

You know, I've had to ask forgiveness. Four. Boy, the rest of you, your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. I'm impressed. Okay? So, clamor, blowing up.

Slander, oh, saying those little things that are harmful. Well, let's move on. Let's move on. Verse 32 says, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

[28 : 56] Good fruit comes from a forgiven heart. Hey, everybody look up. Don't want you to miss this. Go slow. Good fruit comes from a forgiven heart.

Let me say it again, really slowly, so I want you to get the connection. Good fruit comes from a forgiven heart. Paul refers to three positive spiritual character traits that are clear and can be seen in a person's behavior.

To be kind to one another refers to being polite and gentle, not being abrasive or brusque. I remember hearing someone say to me, well, sarcasm is my love language.

Not true. Not true at all. Any person who says that is a person who needs a check. The Spirit of God does not produce sarcasm.

Would you agree with that? And since the Bible makes it explicitly clear that love is from God, a person who kind of excuses their sarcasm on the basis of, well, that's just the way I communicate, I don't buy it.

[30 : 12] Being kind, polite, and gentle. Tenderhearted. It means to have compassionate feelings for other people and to act on those compassions. When Jean Bowling, my dear sister in the Lord, called me at 1130 on Thursday night, I've got to tell you, I've known Jean for probably 28, 27 years.

There are some of you here who have known Jean and watched her four girls grow up and get married and move off. And when Jean called me Thursday night and just with a broken heart said, my grandson hung himself.

Do you know what I felt like inside? Pastors have a pathological fear of doing funerals for children and for suicides.

Would I do a funeral in either of those cases? Absolutely. Because I was called to be a shepherd. But when Jean Bowling poured her heart out to me, my heart was just moved.

And yours is too, isn't it? You stop and think, oh, Lord. Third, there in 32 it says, forgiving one another.

[31 : 35] Now, stop just for a moment. Why would it be necessary to forgive one another? I mean, after all, Christians are kind of people who have arrived spiritually. We've all got it together. We're all nice all the time.

We never say anything that's misunderstood, right? Or worse yet, we never say anything we shouldn't. We're just, you know, the cat's meow when it comes to perfection.

Well, I only saw about seven or eight of you raise your hand, you know, so I'm thinking the rest of you got it together. But here's the deal. For those of us who don't have it together, we've got to work at forgiving. And forgiving presupposes that something happens in lasting relationships.

Guess what it is? Offenses. There are things that go south when you're close to people. It is much harder.

It is much harder to live in community than it is to be isolated in terms of dealing with the issues of sin.

[32 : 42] Now, what I want you to understand is that I desperately need to be with you. And you help me in my spiritual walk. But let me tell you, keeping you at a distance is one of the ways that you don't offend me and I don't offend you.

But when we get close and we get to know each other, we do things that cause harm and grieve one another. And so forgiveness has to play out. Forgiveness, say this carefully, is absolutely essential for lasting relationships.

Now, let's come to the absolute gem of the text. You look there at the last part, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

I want you to get this. The believer is motivated to forgive by the cross. The believer is motivated to forgive by the cross.

I want to add a little thing here. I want you to turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 18. This, if I were, hey, everybody smile because these are things you're going to use for counseling other people.

[34 : 00] Would you do that? I want you to write down two different passages so that the next time you are around someone, not you, but someone else, who is struggling with forgiveness, you can use these two passages to coach them through the brutality of reality.

Okay? We're in Matthew chapter 18, verse 21 through 35, and we're in Romans chapter 12, beginning there in verse 17 and carrying through to 21.

You got it? I'll say it again slowly. Matthew chapter 18, verse 21 through 35, and Romans chapter 12, verse 17 through 21. Mark what it says.

Going back just for a moment, we're going to be in the Matthew passage just for a second, but in the passage in Ephesians, Paul says this. He says, you are to forgive as God has forgiven.

That little word as suggests that our forgiveness is to be as generous and gracious as God's forgiveness of us has been. But Matthew chapter 18, and I'm going to give you the absolute abbreviated version of this.

[35 : 12] But Matthew chapter 18 is one of those classic illustrations where Peter said what the rest of us were thinking. Jesus has been teaching about, you know, dealing with problems in the church, and Peter, I know, I know, I got it.

I'll forgive seven times. That's it. Seven times was the number of perfection. And I got it. Seven times.

And what did Jesus say? Hang around. You got a lot more to do than that. And then Jesus told a story, and his stories were always things that kind of dug in and helped make the point.

And Jesus told the story about a man that owed an insurmountable debt that he was forgiven of. In the passage, it speaks about the matter of owing this 10,000 talents, just a gargantuan number.

He was forgiven. And as soon as he is forgiven, he walks out and bumps into another guy who owed just a little paltry sum to him. And he grabs the guy, and he hangs on to him, and he throws him in prison.

[36 : 20] Because the thing you could do in the old days is when someone didn't pay their debt, you threw them in prison. Now, let's go to the end of the story, because it's always real good to see what happens.

When he throws this other person in prison, the Lord finds out about his unforgiving spirit, and he has him come in, and he says, You wicked servant, verse 32, I forgave you all, A-L-L, all, all, all, all. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. How many of you, when you came to Christ, you bared your soul and said, Listen, will you forgive me for all of my sins?

And Jesus forgave you. Listen to me. He had to die on the cross to satisfy the judgment of God against your sins.

And you cried out and said, In fact, listen to me, nobody ever comes to genuine faith apart from coming with that kind of brokenhearted spirit and says, Listen, forgive me for all of my sins.

[37 : 27] Salvation is not just a little bit of self-improvement. It is a person coming and declaring the absolute spiritual bankruptcy of their soul and saying, Jesus, I deserve to die, and you died for me, and I trust what you've done.

I want you to forgive me. Forgiven? Forgiven. And when the Lord finds out this unforgiving, petty person's attitude, He brings them in there and says, You know, look at verse 33.

Should you not have shown mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? What do you have going for you that you can exercise an unforgiving spirit towards someone else when you have been forgiven of all of your sins through the blood of Christ?

Now we come to verse 34. Verse 34. And in His anger, His master delivered Him to the jailers. Probably a more, I like the rendition a little better, to the tormentors. That's the word, tormentors. Remember what I said at the beginning?

[38 : 43] Listen, this passage deals with something that every one of us in here have to deal with on a regular basis. We are either people who, by the grace of God, are overwhelmed by the forgiveness that we have received in Christ, or we allow bitterness, resentment, disappointment, irritation, to begin leading us to withdraw from fellowship and our involvement.

We begin to distance ourselves, and inside what festers is bitterness. So, if you're sitting here this morning, and truthfully, you can think of one or two people that should have heard this sermon that weren't here.

Or you can think of a couple people that you really wish God would be a little more clear in dealing with, okay?

By the way, here's a nice prayer. When I am praying properly for other people, here's the way I pray. When I'm struggling with a person who's done me wrong, here's the way I pray. Lord, will you be as merciful to them as you have been to me?

Can you say that? Write that down because you don't want to forget this one. Lord, will you be as merciful to them as you have been to me? Did I deserve any of his mercy? What's the answer? No. Has he been long-suffering and patient with Tim Kenoyer?

[40 : 20] Yes. Let's bring it to a close. If you are here today and you are a believer, to put it on the point, you are either overwhelmed this morning by the forgiveness you have received in Christ Jesus, and the outcome of being overwhelmed with that is that your characteristics are recognized in the fellowship as being marked by tenderness and gentleness, compassion, forgiveness.

Or you are here this morning and the Spirit of God takes this passage and says, this is what I want from my children. And you know what you say?

We sing that sweet little song, speak, O Lord, right? As we come to you, we want to receive the Word of God. And here's the key. Be kind preaching.

Preaching is declaring, thus saith the Lord. And then God's people say, all that thou hast said, not Tim Kenoyer, all that thou hast said, we will do.

There are some of you here today that do not know Christ. The truth of the matter is, is that your life is marked by bitterness. And can I tell you something?

[41 : 53] Until you come to the one who grants complete forgiveness for all of our sins, you will never be able to overcome the inner reservoir of bitterness.

So what's the answer? When you've had enough, do you know what you do? You humble yourself and say, I am desperate to have the power of God. First of all, forgive me for my sins and change me.

Let's close in prayer. Without anyone...