

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Respectable Sin of Bitterness

Selected Passages

Keywords: bitterness, forgiveness, gospel, anger

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: There are sins that are often overlooked by Christians which should never be overlooked. They are commonly accepted within the church and therefore seldom dealt with. However these sins are faith destroying and a cancer in the health of the church body. Today Pastor Henry deals with one that he has personally shipwreck the faith of many—bitterness.

I. Introduction.

- A. There is a book by Jerry Bridges called, *Respectable Sins*.
 - 1. Though I have yet to read it through I have had the chance to peruse it to a degree.
 - 2. We focus easily on big, societal sins to the point that we lose sight of those many subtle, personal sins.
 - 3. These sins, such as anxiety and frustration, pride, or selfishness, often flourish in our hearts as we rename them and make friends with them.
 - 4. But what we fail to understand too often is the terrible cost of doing this.
 - a. It dishonors God.
 - b. It dishonors the salvation that we have been given through Jesus Christ.
 - c. And the harms us in untold ways.
- B. Today I want us to consider bitterness which is closely connected to the issue of anger. The “anger” family.
- C. But I don’t want to merely consider the sin, I want to then teach about the antidote for it.

II. The Respectable Sin of Bitterness.

- A. A basic understanding of bitterness.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

1. The key passage would be Ephesians 4:31-32.
 - a. Note in this list that the first deals with an attitude, the second and third deal with dispositions (your mood, your typical temperament), the next two deal with speech and finally the last one deals with everything the first five didn't include.
 - b. Along with this, there is a movement seen in the word order. Bitterness is the very soup from which anger and wrath arise. They lead to clamor and slander. And all of it is part of plain, simple malice.
 - c. But also note how the antidote is given to us as well.
 - d. Bitterness is more easily experienced than defined.
 - (1) It is a difficulty in accepting something, a resentment that things are not a certain way.
 - (2) There is a smoldering in your heart over some issue that is unresolved (at least in your mind) and tends toward a desire of revenge.
 - (3) Aristotle said that a bitter person is one who is hard to be reconciled.
 - e. But all of this fits under a larger point in vs. 17.
 - (1) Bitterness needs to be put away because it is of this world.
 - (2) "The world has two solutions. Keep the bitterness in, and make yourself sick, or let it out and spread the sickness around."
(http://www.pbministries.org/Newsletter/2000/Jun/cook01_06-00.htm)
 - (3) The Christian has been saved from this age and are now partakers of the new.
 - (4) And so we are to put on the new man and put off the old (vs 24).
- B. So how why is bitterness so bad and how? Four thoughts.
 1. First, it is a work of Satan against the people of God.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- a. Bitterness is something the world lives with. Many people find themselves growing more bitter as time marches onward.
- b. But for Christians, Satan uses this sin to blind us to the glorious realities that await us.
- c. Ephesians 4:26-27.
- d. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.
 - (1) You see, if they did not welcome this man back into fellowship fully, then Satan would have a wedge in the Body that he could exploit.
 - (2) Notice the words Paul uses: “forgive **and** comfort him” (7); “reaffirm you love for him” (8).
 - (3) So to refuse to forgive; to refuse to love; to harbor bitter thoughts is simply to join arms with Satan himself.
 - (4) You are working his works and you have become a participant in his war against God’s people.
- e. How does this work itself out practically? How do we give a foothold to Satan by being angry and bitter?
 - (1) We just saw one way in 2 Corinthians, we can destroy people in the church by not forgiving.
 - (2) We are acting as if we are God.
 - (a) Something has happened and we don’t like it.
 - (b) So we decide we know better than God on what to do. And we act on that decision.
 - (c) This goes all the way back to the Garden.
 - (d) But there are also times when we cannot act on our desires and plans, and the bitterness only grows.
 - (3) We break down the unity that we are expected to preserve.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- (a) Ephesians 4:1.
- (b) Romans 12:18.
- (c) Titus 3:10.
- (4) We participate in Satan's plans because bitterness denies the gospel.
 - (a) Remember that the whole basis for this is vs 17, and then bookend that with vs 32.
 - (b) Did God hold a bitter heart toward you? Though He was infinitely right to do so?
 - (c) Or did He richly and graciously love you by pouring His wrath upon His beloved Son that you might be saved?
 - (d) When we are bitter, we work with Satan to deflect the gospel's power.
- 2. Second, it grieves our Lord God.
 - a. Ephesians 4:30-31, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."
 - b. Though our flesh takes much delight in holding onto that bitterness, as it poisons our heart and soul, there is no delight in heaven over it.
 - c. The key point to be made here though is that our speech and attitude affects not only the health of the church but the person of God.
 - (1) He is not distant and uncaring about the state of the Church.
 - (2) It is in the Spirit that every Christian is brought into the Church. Remember that because of this fact that we all unified by the Spirit.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- (3) It is He who seals us all until the day of redemption.
 - d. And our speech day to day affects Him. It becomes something for our good or is unprofitable for us.
 3. Third, it is a mark of unbelief.
 - a. 1 John 2:9-11.
 - b. Galatians 5:20 “. . . enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.”
 - c. This is not a lifestyle that is consistent with a regenerated heart. 1 John 3:17, “But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the **love of God** abide in him?” How do we show God’s love that is supposedly within us when we choose to hold on to bitter thoughts?
 - d. Therefore, no believer ought walk in bitterness. It must be set aside, it must be hated with a holy hatred.
 - e. Because it is inconsistent with a redeemed life.
 4. Fourth, it is the same as murder.
 - a. Matthew 5:21-24.
 - b. 1 John 3:11-18.
- C. Beloved, is your heart prone to be bitter? Do you find yourself dwelling on evil, harsh, unkind thoughts toward another? Do you find it easier to think of a bad thing about a person; rather than some good and positive? Consider these questions.
 1. Will it win a single soul for Christ?
 2. Will it show the love of Christ?
 3. Will it promote godliness in your life?
 4. Will it build up the spiritual lives of others?
- D. What is the cure? It is simply to be a man or woman whose life is given to forgiveness.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. The life of forgiveness.

- A. A theological foundation regarding forgiveness (**ten aspects**).
- B. First, understand that forgiveness is linked to a rebuke and repentance. (Luke 17:3).
 - 1. “Be on your guard” This is a warning that the words he is about to teach will be difficult but very important.
 - 2. Note the flow.
 - a. Sin.
 - b. Rebuke.
 - c. Forgiveness.
 - 3. Here is how it happens too often:
 - a. You are living your life, minding your own business. All of the sudden a fellow believer comes and sins against you without care. What are you going to do?
 - b. Some will whine and complain. They will become bitter and self-centered. They will have the famous pity party. But that isn’t what Christ said to do.
 - c. Others will explode in anger. Their wrath will be heard and seen far and wide. They will retaliate or simply go break something. But that isn’t what Christ said to do.
 - d. A third group will show amazing restraint. Instead, they will go around to other believers and show their black eye. They will say, “Now, you understand, I don’t mean this as gossip as I tell you what so and so did; I just don’t want it to happen to you too.” But that isn’t what Christ said to do.
 - e. What did He say to do? You go and rebuke him.
 - (1) Now a rebuke is not just chewing him out.
 - (2) It would also give him a chance to explain his actions.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- (3) But then you ultimately confront him on his unbiblical actions.
 - f. If he repents, then you forgive. And we will see what that entails in the next several aspects.
 - (1) But right now, I want you to know that if you have been sinned against and it is too great to overlook then bitterness, gossip, or anger are not the right options.
 - (2) It is to rebuke, and forgive.
- C. Second, it is a refusal to entertain any thoughts or emotions that ultimately lead to hate and murder (Matthew 5:21 ff).
- D. Third, regardless of the offense you have suffered, the offense is even greater against God (Psalm 51:1-4).
 - 1. Therefore, if God forgives someone and you don't, it is simply idolatry.
 - 2. You have set yourself above the Lord. Your feelings are above His; your glory is higher than His; your standards are greater.
- E. Fourth, you cannot have God's forgiveness.
 - 1. Matthew 6:14-15.
 - 2. This is a passage that so many struggle with because of the strongness of the words.
 - 3. The common thought is that this is not related to salvation but in fact it is speaking of salvation.
 - 4. To hold onto bitterness will destroy your heart and your faith.
 - a. Forgiveness is one of those things that are part of being a Christian. It flows from a heart made new by the Spirit.
 - b. But a bitter, unforgiving heart is one that is denying the gospel.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- c. The arrogance of the unforgiving heart is great. This person can proudly declare that they are forgiven by God yet jealously hold to no forgiveness by a fellow human.
 - d. God says, no, not the way it works.
 - e. To say, “I want Christ, I want life, I want forgiveness and salvation . . . but I don’t want that man to have it.” This only means you have not yet turned from your sin to Jesus.
- F. Fifth, you have taken over the authority of God.
- 1. Romans 12:14, 17-19.
 - 2. You assume that you are proper and right to be bitter. You have the right to punish this person and harbor hatred in your heart.
 - 3. Whether you know it or not, you have said in your heart, “God, move aside. You are not dealing with my situation properly. Either you don’t care, or you are able to, so move over and I will take care of the situation.”
 - 4. Such is the arrogance of the one who does not forgive.
- G. Sixth, to not forgive renders you unfit to worship.
- 1. Mark 11:25, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have **anything** against **anyone**, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”
 - 2. You see, you can’t draw near to God with an unforgiving heart.
 - 3. You are unfit to labor in the vineyard of the King. You can’t conduct the business of our Lord. He will not fellowship with you.
 - 4. Matthew 5:23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. You see, God forbids bitterness just like He forbids murder, He is the One who is most offended in our sins, yet He is also the one who forgives; therefore, to refuse to forgive is to take over what is rightfully God's—vengeance; and ultimately you become unfit to even worship Him.
- H. Seventh, to resent others when you are offended and hurt is failing to remember that they are but tests and temptations.
1. Christ says in Matthew 5:44, "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you **in order that** you may be the sons of your Father in heaven."
 2. 1 John 3:13, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you."
 3. These are all trials that come ultimately from the hand of God. They are designed to test you, to press you, and to cause you to grow.
 4. Events in your life that are hurtful, even harsh are not accidents. They are not times when God was sleeping or busy elsewhere.
 5. They are trials for our spiritual growth.
 6. So be less concerned about the hurt and more concerned that you react to it in a godly manner.
- I. Eighth, it is honorable for you to be a forgiver.
1. Proverbs 19:11 A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.
 2. "I can forgive, but I cannot forget," is only another way of saying, "I cannot forgive." (Henry Ward Beecher)
 3. Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins."
 4. Notice that God does not just forget, He actively chooses not to remember. In other words, He promises not to bring up the matter again.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- J. Ninth, it is inconsistent with the law of love to not forgive.
 - 1. James speaks of the royal law, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (James 2:8).
 - 2. Well, what is a mark of that love. Paul gives us one part in 1 Corinthians 13:5, “does not take into account a wrong suffered.”
 - 3. Proverbs 24:17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.
- K. Tenth, the standard by which we are to forgive is Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Ephesians 4:30-32.
 - 2. Colossians 3:12-13.

IV. Conclusion.

- A. Hudson Taylor, dressed in a Chinese costume, while waiting for a boatman to take him across the river, stood on a jetty. Presently a richly dressed Chinaman came and also stood waiting. When the boat drew near this man not seeing that Mr. Taylor was a foreigner, struck him on the head and knocked him over into the mud. Mr. Taylor said the feeling came to him to smite the man, but God immediately stopped him. When the boat came up, the Chinaman looked at Mr. Taylor and recognized him as a foreigner. He could hardly believe it, and said, "What, you a foreigner, and did not strike me back when I struck you like that?" Mr. Taylor said "This boat is mine. Come in and I will take you where you want to go." On the way out, Mr. Taylor poured into that Chinaman's ears the message of salvation. He left the man with tears running down his face. Such is the power of the Gospel of Christ.
- B. Such is the result of a heart that forgives and not bent on rights, on pride, or on self.
- C. Are you busy with the King's work, or are so you so trapped by bitterness that entangles and chokes your love and your ministry?

V. Benediction.

May you all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Small Group Questions

- Why is forgiveness so hard in some cases? How does Romans 12:17ff help in this matter?
- What are some side effects of bitterness in our lives, both physically and spiritually.
- Does forgiving require the removal of consequences? Why or why not?