

A Bitter Root

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon warns against the destructive nature of bitterness and emphasizes the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in the church and personal lives.

Duration: 23:40

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8, Hebrews 12:15

Topics: "Bitterness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the issue of violence and shootings that have occurred in churches in Texas and California. He emphasizes that the root cause of these tragedies is bitterness and offense taken by individuals. The preacher quotes a verse from Hebrews, urging Christians to not fall short of the grace of God and to prevent bitter roots from growing and causing trouble. He highlights the importance of addressing this problem within the church and taking necessary precautions to ensure the safety of congregants while also trusting in the Lord.

Transcript

So let's talk about the word of God today. On November 5th, the country was shaken because in Texas, somebody walked into a church and like fish in a barrel, they couldn't move. If you've seen pictures of the church, there was nowhere to move.

And a crazed bitter man shot 26 people dead. About 10 days later, on November 15th, somebody in California shot his wife, shot some others, five dead, and a baby wounded. And the cause of both those shootings, even though one happened in Texas and one happened in California, was caused by the same problem.

And this problem is so huge now in our society that it's getting out of control and people are worried. People came running to us and we got phone calls after the shooting in the church. Are you going to put metal detectors in the lobby? Do you need more of a police presence, etc? Because pastor, the people want to feel secure in the building.

We have to trust the Lord, but we have to be wise and we're doing what we can in ways that some of you are not even aware of. This problem is so huge that it is also true that the church of Jesus Christ is susceptible to it. I don't mean the murder and the mayhem, but it's true that it can ruin churches and ruin lives.

And see these little children? It could eat these children up for lunch. The same problem, same thing that ate those two men up and caused them to bring such carnage. Look at this one single little verse in Hebrews, the writer we don't know, but it says, see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

See to it that no one, man or woman, falls short in the church among Christians of the grace of God, God doing for you what you can't do for yourself. He saves you by grace, but he also keeps you by grace. He provides strength and love and patience, etc.

But if you fall short of it, make sure that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. You see, what happened in both the shooting in California and in the shooting in Texas was the same. Somewhere, somehow, on some day somebody took offense at something that was said or done to them.

That's the genesis of all that bloodshed. Somewhere, if you trace it all the way back, someone said something to that man, did something to him, turned away from him, and caused him to be wounded and he took offense at it. Like, who are you to talk to me like that? Or, why do you shun me? You think you're better than me? Or whatever.

It could be one of a thousand things. And God tells us that when we are offended, if we're not careful, a root of bitterness can spring up within us. If we don't deal with the offense, if we don't deal with that problem that our husband, our wife, or a mother-in-law, father, whoever, if you don't deal with it in a biblical way, you now have given place for Satan for something to grow.

The Greek word that's used there for root speaks of not something big like this, but it talks about a little sprig, just a little little thing, but it's alive and living things grow. So it just starts so small, maybe just a little hurt, but then you lay in bed at night and you think about what the person did to you. Now that baby is growing.

Now you've been offended. You're the offended party. Now you've made yourself a victim.

You're a victim. I'm a victim of what somebody else said or did to me. And now that poison, that bitterness begins to grow and grow.

Now it affects your worship of God because how can you worship God who is love when you're full of poison toward another person? How can you read the word and hear what God wants to say in the word when you have to skip certain pages because you get convicted because you know God is speaking to you? Let it go. Let it go. So this bitter root is the cause of who knows how much havoc throughout history.

Think wars have been fought between nations based on someone taking offense at something the other country did, whether it was real or perceived. And you have to remember the way Satan works. It doesn't matter if the person meant to offend you.

Satan's always going to tell you they meant to offend you. Sometimes people offend us and they don't even know they're offending us. How many know what I'm talking about? Say amen.

And you and I can offend someone. We don't wake up in the morning. I want to offend somebody.

No, but we offend them because we're human. And the human condition is such that people are sensitive. But beside wars and world wars and every other kind of thing, you know, I was talking with someone who's

a little bit of a World War II buff as I am.

And, you know, Hitler played in the early 30s as he was rising to power. He played on the idea of taking offense of the whole German people after World War I. They had it really sucked to them at the Treaty of Versailles in France when the allied powers said, you caused this war. Now the reparations are going to be this.

You're going to owe us this much money. You're not going to be able to be armed. And they took a mighty, proud German nation, German people, and they reduced it to nothing.

To like paralyzed state. Their economy went crazy and they could never pay these numbers back. But the winners dictate to the losers.

So they gave unrealistic numbers thinking now we're really going to grind them in the dirt. But what happened was while they were grinding them in the dirt, the German people couldn't take that kind of stuff. And then Hitler saw it and played on it.

He took the spirit of offense that the German people had and he used it to get to power. He didn't have answers for their everyday problems. He just kept talking who has a right to do this to the German people.

And then he blamed a lot of the troubles on the Jewish people which started the whole Holocaust. And this is the way this all begins. But listen, on another scale, I have relatives all passed on to be with the Lord.

But I have at a wedding many, many years ago. I was little but I remember it. One of my aunts did not like where she was seated with her husband at the wedding of her own brother to another woman.

She really didn't care for that woman I don't think at that time. And that's the way those things go. And she didn't like the table.

Do you get it? The table that she was put at. It was too far away from where the main table was. So they didn't talk for the next 10 years.

That's right, 10 years. Why? Because somebody took offense. And then the bitter root begins to grow.

Now it blocks out the sun. Now you can't enjoy God's presence. Now you can't enjoy the Word.

Now you can't. In fact, there are people, I still see it to this day, who have a root of bitterness towards someone. And if you mention the name of that person in their presence, you can tell by the body language.

They can't even hold it in. They have it in for that person. But it started sometimes with just a little thing.

And God is warning now the church and saying, make sure now among the brothers and sisters, no one falls short of the grace of God. He will help you to show mercy. He will help you to forgive.

He will remind you what you've been forgiven of. Can you imagine how the angels must look in amazement when they see us holding roots of bitterness on people who have hurt us after God has forgiven us what? God has forgiven us things that nobody in the world would understand except us and God. Am I correct? Do I get an amen? And God's given us freely.

Does He bring it up to us every time we talk to Him? Does He say to us, oh, you're coming for prayer. You have needs now and all of that. Let's talk about what you did to me 11 years ago when Peter denied the Lord three times.

What if the Lord would have held that against them? Hey, you boasted that you would never deny me. Then when I'm arrested, you said you would be loyal, that all the other guys would fail at crunch time. But you not only denied, you cursed and said you didn't even know me.

No, the Lord isn't like that. Thank God. But imagine, as the parable says, how God must feel when we hold things on people after what God has forgiven us for.

You remember the parable. I'll put it in our numbers. There was a guy who worked for someone.

He owed him half a million dollars. He went to the boss and he said, I don't have the money to pay. The boss was moved with compassion and he said, you know what? I'm going to write it off.

Forget the five hundred thousand, half a million. Let it go. The man left.

He was so happy. He found someone who owed him 250 dollars. He said, where's my money? The guy said, I'm sorry.

I'm a little short right now. It's hard. My kid got sick.

Hey, if I want stories, I'll go to the library. I don't like stories. I want the money.

I don't have the money. You know what? Lock them up. When the master heard about it, he said, what? You wicked servant.

I forgave you half a mill and you lock somebody up for 250 miserable dollars? Throw them in the place away from God's presence. Lock them up. Send them away.

And that's the way it is with the root of bitterness. We forget how quickly do we forget and judge other people and hold it against them, but we don't want God. How many are happy God has not only forgiven every wrong thing we've done? How many are happy he's forgotten it too? Wave your hand at me, please.

There's no mention of it in heaven. If you think about it and you start melling on it, it's because Satan's making you think about it. God has forgotten it.

He does not want us thinking about how we failed him 10 years ago, five years ago. It's under the blood. Thank God for the blood of Jesus.

But this root of bitterness, this root of bitterness, you be honest with me and tell me what you feel up in the balcony or downstairs. What hurts churches more? Drugs, alcohol, immoral sex, or roots of bitterness? Hands down. The first ones, they slay their thousands.

But roots of bitterness, which then leads to gossip? Notice what the verse says. Beware lest any of you fall short of the grace of God and a root of bitterness springs up and defiles many. Notice it doesn't just defile me.

Sooner or later, I'm going to talk about it. Oh yes, I will. And you will too.

That's why the writer says the whole unity of the church is at stake. You can't let a root of bitterness stay there because now you will talk and you'll defile other people by talking evil about the people that you have it in for, that root of bitterness. Now, I don't even want to think of the children, and this is a good word for all you parents that dedicated your babies, think of the parent of the children who have grown up in a house filled with poison.

Oh, the parents are proud that they raised them and bought them nice clothes and they didn't know they were poisoning them every day of their life. They gave them the best food, best clothes, best education, send them to prep school or something, and meanwhile they were poisoning them every day because the children heard that root of bitterness spoken out, acted out, just constantly. And then guess what? Then those kids grow up and guess how they act? Bitter.

They're bitter at the world. They now have made it legitimate. Mom and dad had it in for certain people because of what they did or perceived faults.

It doesn't have to be real. If you perceive it's real, it's real. The only thing of reality in people's lives is what they perceive is reality.

You can't dismiss it and say, but what are they thinking about? To them it's real. Now they've taken offense. So God says, don't let the church be defiled.

Don't let the family, don't let the children, don't let that circle that you're in be defiled by a terrible root of bitterness. Every one of us have been hurt. Would you all agree with that? Say amen.

All of us. Sometimes people do it on purpose. Sometimes they not only hurt, they turn the knife.

Other times we're hurt because people just do it and they don't even know they're doing it. But they hurt us. They reject us.

They criticize us. They do something that just, you know, just so wounds us. You have to learn brothers and sisters not to bring up another passage and another sermon.

You have to learn in love to confront people who have hurt you. Because if you don't, the root of bitterness is ready to grow. The Bible tells us if anyone sins against us, we're to go to that person.

Not to another person. Not to the pastor. People come in my office and say, I gotta tell you what Sister Jones did or what all due respect to any Sister Jones who might be here.

I gotta tell you what this sister did. I go, wait, wait, wait, time out. Have you gone to her? No.

Do not tell me. Do not talk to me. What right do I have to hear something? I don't even know it's true.

You haven't given Sister Jones a chance to apologize. So the Bible tells all of us, whether it's in our own house, how many divorces or separations or bad marriages could have been rescued if the husband just said it instead of letting it build up inside of him. Or the wife just is cooking in there.

Not going to say anything but you know, seething. And then one day, one little sentence or one little thing. Ba-boom.

It explodes. Which is what happened to that guy in Texas. You don't think that happened overnight.

Come on. Who knows? Weeks, months, years. Beside mental disorders and all that taking into account, people get filled with poison.

You hold that poison in. It exerts a pressure. And sooner or later, it just explodes.

And then you say things you wish you didn't say. You do things you wish you didn't do. And brothers and sisters, we're all susceptible to it, aren't we? You don't have to say amen.

It's true anyway. I'm the only honest soul in this whole building. I've just taken offense at you for not agreeing with my sentence.

Are we not all tempted by that? How many know? Come on. We're tempted to get bitter with people. Yes, we are.

But God says to us, deal with it this way. Talk to the person. Say, brother, I just want you to know you hurt me.

How did I hurt you? Here's how you hurt me. This is what you did. It really hurt me.

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. Or, you know, you're right.

You know, but there's another thing inside that we need to talk about. Good. Let's talk.

Let's pray. Let's get it right. This is what kills churches.

I meet pastors who have early heart attacks. I meet churches where the pastor's praying and preaching. It ain't going anywhere.

Because there's such a division in the church because of roots of bitterness. The old are bitter against the young. The young are bitter against the old.

Families are bitter against each other. People are bitter. And now they're praying.

And God can't come because God is not the author of division. He can't live where there's fighting and poison. Come on.

How many say amen to that? And then the pastor just quits and says, I can't take this anymore. Instead of addressing the problem, it takes real courage to address the problem. And that's what I'm challenging you to do.

If you have taken offense with somebody, go to that person today, this week. Call them. And say, you know what? I won victory over this thing.

I've asked God to forgive you whether you meant it or not. And I've asked God to forgive me because I have a root of bitterness in me. It's a root of bitterness.

Come on. We got to humble ourselves. It's a root of bitterness.

And I want to be free from that. Pastor, easy for you to say, you know what happened to me when I was 14 years old? I don't want to know. I get the picture.

You don't know what he did to me and said to me. I know. But God is greater than that.

He can inject love into your heart. And we can be free from bitterness. I don't want any root of bitterness to be in this building today.

If God is a supernatural God, how many believe he can do that? Get rid of. Help us to face this root of bitterness. And don't dance with it.

And don't justify it. I've done that at times. If you got a bad attitude towards someone, just own up to it and tell God, God, it's not right.

It's not right. Go to that person. Even if they're in the building today, wait for a proper moment.

Go to them. Go to them with wisdom, go to them with a gentle spirit, but go to them and say, I'm going to do what the Bible says. You really did hurt me.

Now, listen, if it's someone in the church, you know what the Bible says. If they say, get out of here, I don't even want to talk to you. Get out of here.

OK, fine. I'm going to bring another brother and sister with me so they can hear what you just said. Now you bring them to say, you know, this brother, I try to tell him that we should make this right now.

He didn't want to hear about it. And then in the early church, they actually dealt in discipline to people who would not let go and make peace. Warn those that cause division among you after one or two warnings have nothing to do with them.

Because people who have roots of bitterness and cause division destroy more churches than all the crack cocaine in America. Crack doesn't destroy churches. Bitterness destroys churches.

I'm seeing my mom here today. She lived through 22 years of real hell. And my house was hellish when I grew up as a kid because my dad's drinking.

And I used to say to my mother, why did dad start drinking? I think my dad was born out of wedlock and he had a brother that I think cheated him out of money. And he was a deacon in a church and brought me to church. See, when bitterness is not dealt with, it gives a place to Satan.

How many follow what I'm saying? Where the Bible says, don't give place to Satan. Don't give him a place, a nesting place where he settles. And unconfessed sin or bitterness, especially, is a place for him to come in.

I very well could have been my dad didn't deal with that bitterness and then went to one office party. And someone offered him one drink. 22 years of my mother getting beat and me not being able to go home.

Who knows what the root of that was? But today God's going to inject love into all of our hearts, right? Come on, let's put our hands together. He's going to give us love. Let's close our eyes.

Anybody here say, pastor, that was for me today. It was for all of us, obviously. But it was for me, especially because the enemy's trying to use what someone did to me for a root of bitterness.

Just stand where you are. I want to pray over you. I want to pray for you.

I don't care if you're a deacon, a pastor. I don't know. It doesn't matter who you are.

We are all susceptible to stand where you are and say, I want the Lord to give me victory. I want to be an overcomer over bitterness. That takes some humility, but God gives grace to the humble.

He will help you. All of those that are standing, including the balcony, come run up here. Come on, we'll dismiss with you up in the front.

Don't anyone else move? Come on. I know it's a little bit hard, but walk up in front of everyone. No one's going to judge you here.

We're all human. Lord, I pray for anyone here who has been abused growing up or been abused as a young adult or an adult. And the enemy has told them that they're a victim and that they deserve to hold that hatred, bitterness, open their eyes, touch their heart, heal them.

It's bad enough to have something bad done to you, but then to hold on to bitterness, it's a double, a double defeat. Fill us with love and mercy. Give us the courage to confront where we need to confront.

And for some of us, we just have to let it go. Circumstances are such we can't confront. We just have to let it go and give it to God.

But God, we're not going to live with bitterness. We're not going to have a root of bitterness growing in our lives that defiles us, our families, our churches. No, we're going to love one another.

We're going to follow your word. Bless those that curse you. Love your enemies.

Do good to those who try to hurt you. God, that is something I cannot do. But with Christ, I can do everything.

Live through us. Live for us. Let it be your love.

Let it be your healing, your strength today. I thank you for your word. And this is going to be like a weight off of my friend's back.

All of us are just dropping this weight right now here in the front of the church. We're leaving it with you, Lord. We're walking out here free.

Whom the son says free is free indeed. Free from everything. Free from condemnation.

Free from bitterness. I don't have to live this way. We do not have to live this way.

Make us a blessing. Make us sweet. Make our life fragrant with the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

For we ask this in his name. Everybody in the building stand. I'm going to ask all the brothers in the building to hug about three or four brothers.

Would you do that? All the ladies turn around. Hug somebody. Give them a word of encouragement.

Come on, give them a hug.

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