



## **Fighting for Peace – Part 1**

### **Glimpses of the Goal**

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Picture yourself, if you would for a moment, as a brand-new Christian, you're a brand-new Christian in the middle of your life. You didn't grow up in church. Some intelligent, caring coworker starts talking about eternal things with you. God's Spirit starts to work on your heart. You start to feel the guilt of your sin. You recognize the fact that you're subject to a creator who you're going to have to stand before. You get that conviction that you deserve his just response to your sins. You learn through these consistent conversations with your evangelistic friend that Christ has paid the penalty fully. And you throw yourself on the mercy of God. You cling by faith to Christ and you just are flooded with a new feeling of relief that your sins have been forgiven, that you are a new creation in Christ. You're excited about the fact that you for the first time feel like everything's right between you and your maker. And then your evangelistic friend says hey, you know what you need now. You've got to go to church. You got to get involved in church. And so he brings you to church.

You've never been to church, right? You maybe for Christmas as a kid you went but this is not a part of your upbringing. And so you come for the first time and you pull into the parking lot and there's parking. People point you where to park and you get out. You start walking and you see people with kids in tow and Bibles under their arms all flooding to the lobby. You walk into the lobby, it's buzzing with people, people standing in line for coffee. And you look the other direction, men and women thumbing through Christian books. You walk into the auditorium, you hear Christian music lightly playing in the background you never heard before, and people are greeting one another joyfully and lovingly, and you just think, this is amazing. You think this is crazy, it's amazing. All these people who are just like me, forgiven. They love each other. They love God. You feel like you're now in a new family. It's just almost euphoric. You sense that this has been going on your whole life and you knew nothing about it and now you're here.

Well, that would be a great feeling. But it's the skeptic in the back row who watches you wide-eyed and so optimistic who says, "Yeah, right. Just give it some time. All this new Christian needs is a year, maybe two, at the most five and they'll realize just what a mess this church really is. How the people are not always as nice as they seem. They'll stab you in the back and there's going to be problems and you're going to get your feelings hurt and you're going to have issues with people who make you angry. There's a lot of passive-aggressive behavior in the church and some of it not so passive. And you've got people who are leaving upset and groups that are splitting and all kinds of problems between these people. Now, that would be a sad thing for a new convert to hear from some curmudgeon in the back row. But I'd have to say his prediction is probably true. There are going to be problems and there are going to be people who don't like each other. I mean, we are after all a bunch of Christians who may be forgiven and may be right with God, but we're not yet glorified. We're not perfected. There's a lot of trouble and there are going to be hurt feelings and there are going to be people taking sides. And there's no doubt that given enough time you're going to have problems with people who you feel like should be your spiritual family and it's just going to happen.



And really the difference between a church that encounters those things and lets them fester and divisions and fissures and factions all kind of fall into place where you eventually get to kind of a civil war in the church that ends in a church split and the church that still has these imperfect people, sometimes stepping on each other's toes, sometimes hurting feelings, but they deal with them one by one. One conflict at a time. One strained relationship at a time. And they settle those and move forward. The difference between that church that gets through their problems and the church that just kind of compounds their problems is the difference between a church that is going to be fruitful and effective, albeit imperfect, and one that's going to implode. There are always issues between Christians. And what we need to do is make sure that we handle those things that crop up and get into our relationships and threaten to mess up a relationship that will soon turn to people aligning with others and causing all sorts of problems. We got to prepare for that by responding rightly to them.

We finished the book of Acts last week. Acts Chapter 28, you remember he's under house arrest. And Paul, we saw for the two years he was there with the freedom to share the gospel with people as they come and go and write letters of the New Testament, he wins a lot of people to Christ, including one man named Onesimus. Onesimus he learns is a runaway slave. And what a small world Paul realizes it is when he finds out that he ran away from Colossi, a city that Paul knew very well and he ran away from a man named Philemon, who Paul's eyes must have gotten big. Who? Philemon. I know Philemon. Philemon's the wealthy man in Colossi who hosts the church in his home. And now he's got a dilemma on his hands. Here's a new brother in Christ, Onesimus, with a sordid past. And he surreptitiously ran away. This wasn't buying his freedom or trying to shake hands and agree that it was time for him to move on. This was basically theft in the Greco-Roman world. And he is really by Roman law a fugitive. And Paul knows we just can't sweep this under the carpet. So he writes a letter to the church at Colossi. We know it as the letter to the Colossians. And along with that he writes another small letter, the letter that we call the letter to Philemon. And he says to Philemon in this letter you got to fix this problem. This problem needs to be resolved. You guys need to get in the room and face-to-face and resolve this problem.

It's just a great template. But the very extreme wrong that was done and something that's just not going to be easy to do, to really forget and forgive the kinds of things that should separate people in any other organizations and in any other situation. But in the Church of Christ, we need to deal with this because we're not like every other organization. And I think this extreme template of solving problems can be a great roadmap for us to make sure we're the latter church and not the former church, the latter church that works through every conflict and makes sure that we come out the other end still unified and in harmony with each other, prepared and knowing we're going to have problems, but we know how to solve them. We know how to solve them because we have great examples like Paul's divine wisdom to Philemon and Onesimus to solve the problem. So we finished Acts 28, and one of the letters I wanted to tackle was one of Paul's prison epistles that probably is not as well known as Paul's other writings. It's the little book of Philemon. And if you could look it up, we would find Hebrews, turn back one book and you'll find the book of Philemon which we're going to study for three weeks. And this week we're just going to deal with the introduction. And it's a rather



long introduction for a book that is so short. Paul will make his appeal and get to the meat of his instruction in verse 8. But the prelude to this is all the foundational theological, just it's the supporting rigor. It's the reason that we should do everything that follows.

So we need to take time just to focus this morning on those first seven verses. And if you have your Bibles, I want you to turn there. We're going to look at this and I hope we're going to leave more equipped either to deal with the problem we have right now, whether it's actively aggressive, passively aggressive, or whether it's just something that torks you and you can't look at that person or maybe you're in the 11:00 service because they go to the 9:00 service. Or better yet, maybe you've run from the Saturday night service here and you're like, I don't even want to see that person. We're going to do the difficult work in the next three weeks trying to make sure we can be a unified church. So take a look at these seven verses with me. And if you're new to the church and you think I don't have any problems yet? Well, stick around. (audience laughing) I hate to be the curmudgeon in the back row but it is coming. So we're going to equip you ahead of time. Read from the English Standard Version. Follow along as I read it. It's printed there on your worksheet too. If you just want to follow along there.

Paul begins with something that's familiar to us. It's where we left him in Acts 28. "Paul a prisoner for Christ Jesus." We learned there were several people with him and at this point Timothy is with him. He says, "And Timothy, our brother." Now, at the bottom of verse 1, he addresses those who are the addressees of this letter, "To Philemon, our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister." Because the bottom of verse 2 and the way the syntax of all this works, we won't bore you with all that, this is probably his wife. So we have Philemon and Apphia, his wife. And probably because of the bottom of verse 2 Archippus is probably their son who is still living there in the home. So "Philemon, our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house." He's well-to-do. And he's

so well-to-do that he's got a big enough home to host the church as it gathers together throughout the week and especially on Sunday. A very familiar salutation is in verse 3. If you've read any of Paul's letters, you know he often starts this way. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, in English, modern English at least, we don't distinguish between second-person singular and second-person plural pronouns. So I've got to read this in the Southern edition so you know, we're dealing with a plural second-person pronoun. "Grace to y'all and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Why do I need to say that? Because the pronouns shift really fast in verse 4. He's addressing now Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and the church. So we know Colossians, the Colossians Christians are going to read this, they're going to know this. And they probably already, those who are close to Philemon the host of the church, probably already know that he's had a runaway slave. But now the runaway slave's encountered Paul. He's gotten saved by an intelligent, caring evangelist, and now he's being sent back with a rolled-up scroll in his hand to say, hey, Paul says we got to fix our problem. And Paul says, you know what, "Grace to you all and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." But look at verse 4, "I



thank my God, always when I remember you," singular. The second person pronoun here is singular, "I thank my God always when I remember you," singular, "in my prayers" and verse 5, "because I hear of your," singular, "love and of the faith that you," singular, "have toward the Lord Jesus." It's a choppy way to read it but we've gone from our "grace to y'all" to "I thank my God," for Philemon because I think about you, "I remember you in my prayers, because I've heard of your love and of your faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints."

Well, it's obvious to say, okay, I know how love transcends the vertical relationship to Christ and I see how you can love your brother. But it's interesting that the word "faith" is coupled with this. Well, there's obviously a kind of faith that we have in Christ. I mean, we're trusting that his life and his death and his resurrection are all applied to my account, as Romans 6 says, so that I can be right before God. I have faith in Christ. But there is a sense in which we can say we're supposed to have faith in each other. Even the basic command about love says love is supposed to cover "a multitude of sins." Even the sense in which we should be giving each other the benefit of the doubt. And he knows that Philemon is setting a good example in that regard. I'm grateful that you love and you trust in the people of God, just like you trust in Christ. Not the same quality of faith but you do. You have a good relational ethic in the church. Verse 6, "And I prayed that the sharing of your faith may become effective to the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." I read that quickly. It's a mouthful, but it is really the key to all that we're going to see in this book. This particular verse, it's the hardest verse to translate. It's the hardest verse to interpret. And sadly, I think the New International Version and the English Standard Version and a few other English translations translate it this way. And if I use the phrase, hey, this Saturday I was sharing my faith with someone you would say I know what you mean. It's what we do on Saturday morning here, go door to door and we share our faith. We share the gospel. We share the good news of Christ.

That is not what we're talking about here. As a matter of fact, the word, if you get your Greek New Testament out, I know some of you do that, the word here is the word "Koinonia." And if you grew up in the church or been around the church very long, you know that word. It usually translates into our English word "fellowship." And if you were around back in the old days in Acts Chapter 2 when we were studying Acts Chapter 2 verses 42 and following, you remember that whole sermon on fellowship. And we talked about it in two senses. There's a sense in which the early church, they fellowshiped in an active sense and it can be translated "sharing," just like in this passage they shared with each other. I mean, even in Chapter 4, the end of Chapter 4, when Barnabas was selling property and sharing its proceeds to help people in the church, they were sharing, whatever persons had needs they met those needs. And just like when we say, well, our small groups not going through the questions as we're having a fellowship night and you're saying, okay, what do I bring? I'm going to bring some food or we're going to sit around and I'm going to bring some conversation. I'm going to bring some stories. We're going to hang out and we're going to fellowship. That's an active sense of the word.



But then there's a passive sense of the word. See, we're in the fellowship, right? We share in the Fellowship of Faith. We have a participation in it. And we are, we would say, of the fellowship. And in this particular passage sharing is not a bad word, but the sharing shouldn't be considered in an active sense, but a passive sense. And if you dig into this text and a lot of translations will put it this way, the idea is that we have a share in the faith. That's a good way to put it. We have a fellowship, a *koinonia*, a sharing in the faith. And he says, look at how it's put now, "I pray that the sharing of your faith," so that you're a part of this thing, "may become effective." Right? If I'm a Christian, I'm sharing in this faith, well, then I want it to do stuff in your life. I want it to work its way out first through your brain "for the full knowledge," I want you to know what you should be doing. Just like we learned at the men's retreat this weekend, the whole point of a transformed mind is to know the truth, that we can discern what the will of God is. We need our minds to be transformed. I want it to go through your brain "the full knowledge of every good thing," I love this now, "that is in us," something that God has put in us. He's changed our hearts. The New Covenant promise was to take your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. God's going to change you from the inside out. And in a sense, we want all of that connection with the Spirit of God within us to create, as it says in Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, this outworking of good works that God has set out before us. We want these things to be organic in our lives.

"Sharing the faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us," for your sake, no, "for Christ's sake." There are some things we do that come from within that don't win us any points in our lives. They don't make our lives any better. Matter of fact, it feels sacrificial. It feels like I'm not winning in this. Forgiveness in general is a theme which we're going to get into next week in the heart of this letter. I mean, that seems like I'm losing. I'm letting something go when I feel like I need my pound of flesh out of this. I really want to tell him off to get back to the concepts within our church. I feel like I need to bear this grudge for the next 20 weeks or 20 months but I'm going to let it go. That feels like a loss. But we're doing it for Christ's sake. We forgive each other for Christ's sake. I want all of that participation in the faith of the gospel, the truth of Christ, I want it to "become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." And there's one good thing Paul has in mind when he's writing to Philemon. Right? You're going to take Onesimus back and forgive him. You guys need to make up over this. I know it's a problem. He wronged you. We're not talking about restitution here. I'm talking about you accepting him back as a brother. We'll get into all that next time. That's what he has in view.

Then he's not done with the introduction, verse 7, "For I've derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother," talking to you specifically Philemon. When I was there I preached in your house. It was so great. Your love brought me "joy and comfort," and not only that, "because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you." You're blessing all kinds of people in this church. Can you see he's kind of setting him up for where he's going? I think Onesimus might have given this letter to someone else, so you go in there and have them read it first before I walk in. And these seven verses are going to be foundational. If we can understand these seven verses, if we can put into practice of these seven verses, it's going to put every other conflict you ever have with another Christian, I'm not talking about apostasy, I'm not talking about doctrinal... Trust me, a lot of people blame their personal conflicts in the





church on doctrinal issues when it really is not a doctrinal issue. It's a personal issue, your feelings got hurt. You got bent out of shape because they wronged you.

Now, are there doctrinal issues that should divide us? Yes. But that's rare. About 90% of the time, if not 99% of the time, the issues are personal they're not theological. We try to find a theological branch to hang the conflict on, but stop. If it's apostasy, great. Come to the pastors. We can deal with that. And if we have to part ways, we'll part ways. But most of the problems you have with people in your small group, in your sub-congregation, people who you come to church with, the problems with those people are issues that need to be dealt with, dealt with because of who we are in Christ and these seven verses are so great in helping us think that through.

Let's start with the first two verses. The way that he describes all the players in this book and even the person he's standing next to here in the prison. "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus." Now we know that's very literal. He was literally a prisoner in Rome. "And Timothy our brother." If you said, Mike, how many brothers do you have? I'd say I have one brother. And you know what you mean by that. And you know what I would mean by my answer. I have one genetic biological brother. That's it. That's all I got. But if you said no, no, no, no. I'm thinking the way the Bible means it here. Right? Is Timothy Paul's brother? The answer is no, not literally, but metaphorically, because we know he's a fellow Christian. Matter of fact, he's an up-and-coming pastor who's going to take the reins of the church in Ephesus and he calls him in Second Timothy, his son. Well, he's not his son, but he's his son in the faith. But he's not a brother. This is a metaphorical use of language. It's a familial use of language, as you see in verse 2 when he says, "Apphia our sister," right? Is Philemon Paul's brother-in-law? The answer is no. We're not talking about a biological sister we're talking about a metaphorical sister. Again, familial words in the body of Christ are very common. So we have the familial metaphor.

And then Philemon is described here as our "beloved fellow worker." If I said worker or business or marketplace, you know, task, I would say, what is Paul's marketplace task? What does he do for business? Well, at least on the mission field he was making tents. And that was very important, particularly in the city of Ephesus, where there was a lot of need for that with all the pilgrims coming to the temples there and he made those tents. That was his business. Am I supposed to think that Philemon is literally in business with Paul and a fellow worker? The answer is no. This is metaphoric language, right? It's not like they both are running a tent business, certainly not making that kind of money with that kind of house making tents. So we're not literally saying your fellow workers, we mean metaphorically workers. We're talking about some other kind of work.

And then he says, hey, your son or maybe it's just someone in the church who was close to him, "Archippus our fellow soldier." Well, I know one thing about Paul because I've studied his life with you through the second half of the book of Acts. He is not a Roman soldier, right? He's not a Roman soldier. So there's no way we're talking about him being a fellow soldier as though he's in the Roman army. He's not. This is metaphorical language. So let's think about the metaphorical language employed in this introduction in the first two verses as he thinks



about the work that's being done in the church as it meets in his house. And let's think about what that says to the whole issue of what we are going to deal with in the book, and that is interpersonal conflict in the church. Let me just jam those all together. I've already run through them, right? We have familial metaphors, we have business metaphors, we've got marketplace metaphors, and we've got warfare metaphors. And all of those might help me if I jam together, particularly if I take the business and the warfare because in the sense of if you're a marine or whatever, this is your business is to be a fighter and let's just jam those two together. There's a mission and it's a mission of fighting and we'll talk about that.

And then siblings. Well, that's what we are in terms metaphorically we're siblings. So these things will help us. Jot this down as we jam it together in one phrase. Number one, you need to "See Yourselves as Siblings with a Mission" in this church, in your small group, in your sub-congregation that is going to help us if we just start there. Okay? Let's untangle all three of those really quickly. Okay, let's start in Romans Chapter 8 and talk about the family motif. How profound is this that the person you have a problem within the church or will next month is a brother or sister in Christ? How important is that? It couldn't be more important. Go to Romans Chapter 8 and drop down to verse 14. Romans 8:14. Let's read through verse 17. Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Now, Jesus often says "you'll know them by their fruits." Do we earn our salvation? No, of course not. It's a gift of grace. But one of the things that happens is the Spirit invades our life and also now it's the Odd Couple because I like to sin and the Spirit likes to do what's righteous, he's called the Holy Spirit. So all of a sudden now he starts winning the battles in my life, not perfectly, but I start doing more holy things than I did before I was a Christian. And if I'm led by the Spirit that's a sign that I'm a Christian and that means I'm a son of God. It's the proof of it all. "You'll know them by their fruits." "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear." It's not as though I want to do right because if I don't do right I'm going to be smacked around by God, my master. Now, is he my master? Yes. Am I a slave? Yes. We'll talk about Greco-Roman slavery, by the way, next week, because it's a very, very different than the ethnic slavery of American history. A very big difference here. We'll get into that next time.

But is he my master? Yes. Does Paul even use the phrase in the book of Romans that we are his slaves? Absolutely. We're slaves of God. But he says that's not the primary reason you want to do what's right. It may be one motivation, but I want to be like dad because he's given us "the Spirit of adoption as sons." Right? That's big, I'm his son, I'm a child of God. Now, if you want to think about the profundity of this just go back to when you knew you were rejectable to God, but you've become a Christian and now you're accepted to God. How accepted are you? You are accepted as though you were Christ himself. God said, I accept you fully. I don't see you for your sin anymore. I've taken your sin and removed it from you "as far as the east is from the west," to quote Psalm 103. So you've got this spirit of adoption as sons. I want to be like dad because he's my dad. This God is my father. "By whom we cry."

Now, the context, by the way, of Romans 8 is a lot of suffering in the Roman church. "Cry" here is a good word to use because when you cry out to God, like in the Psalms, that word, that verb "to cry" is usually when I'm hurting in pain and in trouble. And it says your reaction now related to God wanting to please the Lord is even when you're in a jam, the God who



said, I'll be your helper, "I'll never leave you, never forsake you." Right? Hebrews 13. All of that is just reflexively wanting to cry out to God. God help me. And the word he uses here, ABBA, as you probably know, is the dialect that's used in the household of the first century. It's a dialect of Hebrew. We have the classical Hebrew that was taught in the synagogues and you'd have Hebrew you'd read it in the text of the Bible, but you have this dialect in the household, this Aramaic dialect. And the word for dad is ABBA. We cry out "ABBA Father!" I feel a closeness to God. He's my redeemer, right? He's sent his Son to save me. And when I'm in a jam, just like I was in a jam with my sin facing eternal punishment, I cried out to God and he helped me. I'm crying out to God when there's trouble. He's my Father and I know he cares for me.

And all this is internally affirmed, verse 16, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." And I know that God cares about me. And I know God wants to be my rock and my redeemer and my deliverer. This is great stuff. And if you live a Christian life long enough to go through your first trial, you know this is how it is. The nearness of God. "And if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." Why do I get the riches of the Father? Why am I the inheritor of all the riches of God's kingdom? Because I'm related to Christ. Christ is the one who earned it. I'm the one who rides in on his coattails, and I'm seen as though I am in Christ. And so I'm an heir with Christ. I mean, how important is it for me to be a son of God, a child of God? It's the difference between being cast out of the kingdom and being invited to share in the riches of the kingdom. This is amazing.

And then the way he started in verse 14, he ends, right? There's always going to be the outworking of the fruit of salvation, "provided we suffer with him." Right? Do you suffer with him? If the fruit of God's Spirit is in you, he's leading you down paths that won't be always for the convenience and comfort of your life. Sometimes he leads you down paths to stand up as your palms sweat to say I'm not going to compromise and it's going to get you into trouble. You will suffer for following Christ. And he says and if you suffer with him, of course, "in order that you may be glorified with him." See, real Christians are going to follow the Spirit, sometimes down some very dangerous and precarious paths to stand up for what's true and what's right. We're going to love God and when we're suffering we're going to cry out to our Father and in the end God's going to bring us into the kingdom on the merits of Christ. This is a great, great paragraph. And it's true for you. And I hope that you understood that in your own spirit as it says there in verse 16, that the Spirit of God affirmed in your spirit, yes, I'm a "child of God," and as a child of God, I'm special. I'm special to God. That's great. Now, here's all I need to say is when he says, "Apphia our sister," "Timothy our brother," he's trying to remind us of the familial motif is we're ALL children of God. And every problem you have with a Christian in our church you're having with a child of God. That's just a good place to start. I'm having a problem with one of God's children and that child cries out to God, dad, just like I do.

Let's just start there. And parents know how badly they want their siblings to get along, right? You're talking to someone who has all the riches of the Father through the merits of Christ. This should change the way you hold a grudge against someone. Matter of fact, it should start to say what am I doing? How dare I hold this grudge against a child of God? "Yeah, but they





really did me wrong." Well, I'm glad you've never done anything wrong. The Bible says you better learn to forgive the way God forgave you. You better learn to welcome others the way he welcomed you.

The laborer motif. Go to John Chapter 4. The laborer motif. "Philemon our beloved fellow worker." "Fellow worker" translates one compound Greek "Synergos." Synergos means "we work together," like in the field. It's the kind of word you'd use for the sweaty labor of a farmer. I'm out in the fields working side by side with, in this case, Philemon. You're my fellow worker. We're working toward the same goal. We have the same mission. And John Chapter 4, we might remember this is the passage that deals with the woman at the well. And Jesus is plowing right through the center of Samaria. He could have gone around like a lot of people did, but he plowed through, he didn't mind. He stops at Jacob's well outside of Sychar and he goes, he's so exhausted, so famished in the middle of his journey, he sends the guys in to go get falafel or whatever to drive-through somewhere. And as they're out having their, you know, drive-through delivered to them to bring it back across the valley, Jesus is there at the well and he asks this woman for a drink and you know the story. He starts to share the gospel with a woman with a sordid background, living with her boyfriend, been married five times. This is crazy. And he's having this conversation. And look at verse 27, the disciples come back as he's talking with this woman and he's basically getting to the issues of sin and redemption and the call of God to want worshipers to worship in spirit and truth and all that Jesus wanted to do to reconcile this sinful soul to God. And then as the disciples come back, verse 27, they go what in the world? "They marveled that he was talking with a woman," that particular kind of woman, a Samaritan woman, "but no one said, 'What do you seek' or 'why are you talking with her?'"

Verse 28, "So the woman left her jar," just as you would if people start buzzing and raising their eyebrows and wondering why he's talking to this gal. So she's like, okay, I'm out of here. She checks out and, "The woman leaves her jar and she went away into the town and," she goes in that town and she says, hey, guys, "Come, see a man who told me all I ever did," he had some weird prophetic insight into my life, "Can this be the Christ?" Do you think she's convinced that he's the Christ at that point? Absolutely. Masterful theological discussion about the difference between Samaritans and the Jews. All this insight into my life. He knows my moral life. He knows what's going on in the bedroom of my life, this guy must be the Christ. She comes and shares Christ with them. And they went out in mass now, "They went out of the town and we're coming to him." The geography alone, the topography alone, of the well over here and the city over there and the valley, the meadow in between, here come all these people across the valley.

"Meanwhile the disciples are saying," hey, why don't you "eat, Rabbi? And he said to them, 'I have food to eat,'" verse 32, "'you do not know about.'" So disciples said, "did someone sneak him a snicker bar? Well, how? How? Well, how is he not hungry anymore? You can add the word "duh" to the translation here. And Jesus says, verse 34, "My food," the kind of food I'm talking about, metaphorical food, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his..." Here's our word, "Ergon" which is "work." We have work to do. The church has work to do. I hope you got that through the book of Acts. It took us forever to get through it but this is



all about the work we're called to do. We're continuing the mission of seeing people brought to faith in Christ. My old illustration at the beginning of this sermon. We are supposed to be that intelligent, caring, evangelistic coworker trying to see people won to Christ. That's our goal. We want to see this thing filled with people who are redeemed. And Jesus says that's my work. I thrive on that. That's my food. I can put away a sandwich for a while to do that. That's just fulfilling.

Verse 35, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?'" You know, there's a lot of watering to do. There's a lot of, you know, tilling and fertilization and all that. But eventually the harvest is ready to be harvested. "Look, I tell you," middle of verse 35, "lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest." Now, this is just a great picture. If you get in the mind of how this all worked, you can see in your mind's eye all these people coming across the valley, their turbans, their robes, their light-colored canvas. And they're coming across the valley all these men and this woman in the middle somewhere saying, you know, I left my jar here, let's go see this guy. And all they're coming across. Lift up your eyes, guys. You got your sandwich. It's time to put them down. We got work to do. "Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life." That woman is receiving wages and gathering it says, this is a great line, gathering fruit for eternal life. She is winning souls. She's told people in a very simple way, not a dogmatic way, but a simple way, hey, I think I may have found the Christ. Do you think he could be the Christ? Come and see. And so she is becoming an agent of Christ, an evangelist.

Talk about what he told his disciples. You're not going to catch fish anymore. You're going to catch people. You're going to fish for men. Here's this gal, she's got a whole net full of men she's dragging across the valley. Man, she's earning wages. Fruit for eternal life. "That the sower and the reaper may rejoice together." That's just a great line. So that me, the rabbi, the perfect lamb of God, and this sinful woman living with her boyfriend who now is converted, she's coming back. We can rejoice together. I can see Christ kind of nodding, winking at her. Look at this. You know I'm the Christ, you know I offer eternal life, you know the Father is seeking worshipers to worship him in spirit and truth. Look what you've done and together we're rejoicing. "For here", verse 37, "the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap for that what you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor." Put your sandwich down. We're going to work. We're going to work the work. And even your desire to eat your food, it needs to be set aside. Just like my desire to eat my lunch was put aside because we got important work to do.

Let me say this about your conflicts with people in the church. The conflicts you have, I guarantee you, are not as important as the mission that has been given to us. The work that we have to do. There are souls hanging in the balance. You have work to do this week. I tell you let's use all of our energy trying to be persuasive as Second Corinthians 5 says persuading people because we know the fear of God. Let's set aside our desire for our pound of flesh or setting that straight or making sure she understands she can't talk to me that way. Let's get past all of that with other children of God and let's put our energies on what our task is. The book of Acts made that very clear, to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the way over to Orange County in the 21st century. This is the work we have to do. We



have no time to bicker and bite and devour one another, as Paul put it to the Galatian churches. We don't have time for that. You shouldn't have any energy for that. All your energy is going toward the mission. Go make disciples of all the nations. That's our job. We don't have time to sit here and pick each other apart. The laborer motif, The business motif.

There's one more. The military motif. Do you remember Matthew 16:18? Jesus said it very clear, "I'm going to build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Gates don't come and attack me. Gates are what I have to attack if I'm trying to get into the territory beyond the gate. Do you follow that? So I am supposed to be advancing the cause of Christ in my community and my world. And here's the thing about "the world that lies," First John 5, "in the hands of the evil one." He's out there trying to "blind the minds," and the eyes, "of the unbelieving," Second Corinthians 4. This is a battle for people's souls. And it's not just work it's a battle. The mission we have is an arduous mission. It's one that Satan is going don't you dare. It's the one that puts you on Satan's radar. As Jesus said to Peter and the team, "Satan has demanded to ... sift you all like wheat." I know he's talking to Peter, but he says all of you guys. If you want to advance the cause of Christ into enemy territory, as he writes to the Colossians, he says I want to see people "transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his Son," this kingdom of light. I'm trying to get souls from the enemy territory and bring them back. There are hostages over there that we've got to get released. Do you understand this battle? You will be the target of the enemy. Satan will be there saying you're not going to take another one, you're not going to take another one, not from this neighborhood, not from this office. And you're supposed to go assault these walls, these gates, these electrified barbed wire fences of hell and go in and retrieve the lost. That's our job.

And, you know, when there's something heavy like that involved, when there's something like that just takes our sense of safety and we have to join together. I tell the story. My parents will have to give you the clearer view on this. My mom probably doesn't even know. But when I was a kid, I don't remember how old I was, my older brother. He was designed by God basically as a reflection of the Wonder Years' older brother if you ever watch that show. He picked on me endlessly. I had plenty of reasons not to like my brother. He's a pastor now in another state. But I'm telling you we couldn't get through dinner without some kind of frustration. We were out to dinner one night, at a Mexican restaurant, and of course we had plenty to argue with. Well we come home and as often happened when there was something bad going on in the neighborhood, we didn't run and lock ourselves inside. My dad, who was a cop, would say we're going to go and do something about it.

So we come home and I don't remember what it was, someone jumping over a fence, ski mask, something in our little East Long Beach neighborhood, and Dad drops mom off, puts her inside and has the Fabarez boys drive, I was probably eight, nine or ten. I don't know. Fourth grade? Dad's not on duty. We just went to go get, you know, wet burritos from the Mexican restaurant. And dad reaches into his sock holster and pulls out a little snub-nosed .38. Hands it to my brother, who's riding now in the front seat. Dad reaches into his pocket, pulls out a buck knife, opens it up, hands it to me in the backseat. He takes out his .357 and now all the Fabarezs are armed. (audience laughing) We're chasing down some



hoodlums and some neighbors I don't even remember. And it was just as... I can see it in my mind's eye, as we're chasing these people and I'm sitting in the back seat with a buck knife. And I remember them getting the doors open and them going out and dealing with these guys. And I'm just watching the car with my knife and I'm thinking to myself, I got a lot of reasons not to like my brother but that day we were best friends. (audience laughing) Right? I mean, if you can't shoot them, Dave, I'm going to knife them. That just was like, we're going to get through this.

All I'm telling you is you got conflict in the church, you and the person you have conflict with, go out and share the gospel with three people this week and engage in conversation in demon territory and I assure you, you'll have no time for your little petty problems with your neighbor, your brother and sister in Christ. You're going to say our efforts got to be to join together. We're in a battle. We're in a war. The familial motifs, the business motifs and the military motifs. The brother-in-arms, that's a big deal. In a foxhole we're going to get along because we're fighting a common enemy. The setup for this is great. See yourselves as siblings with a mission.

Philemon, it's printed there for you in verse 3. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ." Hey, guys, all of you, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, hey, church at Colossi, grace to you. Grace to you and peace. Where does it come from? From our Father, "God our Father" and, of course, his Son, "the Lord Jesus Christ," applied, of course, by his Spirit. All of that needs to be done. And it needs to come from heaven, God's favor and his peace be given to you. Now, here's the interesting thing about that redemptive work, well here's a good word for that, that reconciling work. We read in our Daily Bible Reading this week from Isaiah 59:2 about the separation our sins make, what we need is a reconciliation with God. We're born sinners. We're born apart from God. We're born as children of Adam. We need to be reconciled. So God goes and reconciles us. He does the work to reconcile. He sends us, "So God so loved the world he gives his only Son" and he reconciles us.

Go to Ephesians Chapter 2 real quick. This reconciling work that is seen as a vertical grace and peace to you. I want peace with God and I want God's favor, God's grace on me. Watch how quickly this turns from vertical to horizontal. It happens all the time in the Scriptures, particularly these concepts of grace and peace which are all about reconciliation. And, you know, at least I trust the Sunday school memory verse from Romans Chapter 5, "That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He didn't die for us because we cleaned up our act, right? He is there in our weakness doing what it takes to reconcile us. Start in this passage, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 11. Let's read nine verses of this. "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the 'uncircumcision,'" you uncircumcised, "by that which is called the circumcision, which," by the way, "is just made in the flesh by hands," human beings, it's not a God-thing to get your foreskin cut off. That's a man thing. But still, the Jews who were circumcised because they were Jews looking at the Gentiles in the church who weren't circumcised, "here's the uncircumcised." So we had problems in the church. We had it in Galatians, we had it in Romans, we have it here in Ephesus. There are problems in the church with people building factions. It may not be as bad as Corinth. I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Christ. But still there are problems. Gentiles and Jews



worshiping the Jewish messiah in the same church. You can see why the Jews might have seen the Gentiles as second-class citizens. And they're talking about this sign of the Covenant, this circumcision.

"Remember," verse 12, you Gentiles in the flesh, "that you were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise," from the covenant of Abraham in Genesis 12 all the way through the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. You didn't even have a sense of that. You didn't think any of it applied to you. You were strangers to it all, "Having no hope without God in the world. But now," verse 13, "in Christ Jesus," the Jewish Messiah, "you who were once far off have been brought near." How? Because Christ died for your sin. You now have approachability to God because Christ died. You can now go into, as Hebrew says, the Holy of Holies, because Christ has died for you, he's laid down his own life for you. "For he," verse 14, "himself is our peace." Peace with who? Peace with God. "He has made us both one." Now, wait a minute. Talking about people within the church. "And he's broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Not only the hostility that I had with God, Isaiah 59:2, but the hostility I have with the people in my church who are different than I am. Broke it down. I know that's where he's going. Verse 15, "By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two." Everyone saw the world as Jew and Gentile. That's the way the Jewish people saw it. And they knew the Bible. They said Jew and Gentile. That's the difference. And we have all these ordinances about what we can't eat because I can't just go to any marketplace and eat whatever is served up in the cafe in any town because I'm a Jew, I got to eat kosher.

And then I got this special day. I can't even work on Saturday. I have all these signs of the covenant from circumcision to the Sabbath to dietary restrictions to a place I've got to go to worship. Even the Samaritans couldn't go to Jerusalem because they weren't welcomed there. You have all these divisions, all these distinctions, but all of them have been abolished it says in verse 15. And now what has that done? It's brought all people together that he might reconcile us, both Jew and Gentile. And you can add to that slave and free, rich and poor, Scythian, barbarian. It doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter your money, it doesn't matter your stature in life, it doesn't matter. All of us, right? He "Might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." If only the hostility was really killed. As people are mockingly saying, "you're the uncircumcised." Stop with the hostility. It's gone. Peace and grace coming from God to us. And if peace and grace come from God to that person, the Scythian, the barbarian, the Roman, whoever it is, a Roman centurion, it doesn't matter who you are, the hostility between us is gone. It just takes that idea of adoption to a whole new level to rethink it in terms of the fact that we were enemies, now we're on the same team, we wear the same uniform, we're in the same army here. The reconciliation now has to be laid flat. We have peace with each other. "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near," the Jew and the Gentile, that "through him we might both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household."





You couldn't have a Gentile even come into the court of the Jews in the Tabernacle or in Solomon's Temple. You just couldn't have that. Now we're in the living room of God, the household of God. That's exactly right. And as that you better work hard. He gets to the practicals in Chapter 4. Are you still in Ephesians? Look at Chapter 4. He says, "I'm a prisoner." There's another prison epistle, it fits right into Ephesians 4:1. "I urge you to walk in a manner that's worthy of the calling." What's the calling? The two become one. Everyone in the church is on equal footing. "To which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience," stop calling each other names, stop having your problems, "bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The peace now is horizontal. And if you're not at peace with your brother, we've got a big problem because Christ did not create the church to have people within the church have hostility with each other. If you got hostility this morning with someone in the body of Christ. We got a problem here. Unless we're talking about all-out apostasy, there's no reason for you to have that. And if you're going to claim apostasy, you better come to pastors and have that fixed and dealt with. That's a top-level. Let's deal with that. But most of our problems are stuff you'd never take to the pastors. Just you have been hurt. You've been wrong. You've been frustrated. God wants his church unified and wants you to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Grace and peace to you has been grace and peace to him and you two should be at peace with each other. That's the picture. Philemon, it's printed there on your worksheet. What does he thank God for? Well, he thanks God, not only is he praying grace and peace to them, that's a prayer. He says in my prayers I thank God that "you have love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints."

I know we've gotten quite far into point two without giving the title because I want you to see all the things he is praying, mostly the core of it in verse 6, it's all about the fact that the connection we have with God that brings forth love and trust in other people is something organically given. You share in the faith and therefore all of this stuff works its way out that the organic connection, the divine work that God has done in your life is making a difference outside. And what's the whole point of this letter? Get reconciled, get over and forgive each other. Be unified. Let's give the point, then we'll unpack it just a little bit more. Number two, "Pray for Divinely-Fueled Unification." Pray for divinely-fueled unification. I don't want you just to suck it up and say I'll try to forgive, I'll forgive, I'll forgive. Great. You should forgive. But there's a way for you to have that be divinely-fueled. Jot this down First John Chapter 2. Let's turn there. This is the last service of the day, right? First John. Let's go to Chapter 4. We could go to 2. Let's go to Chapter 4. First John Chapter 4 verse 7. Do you remember this? "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." That's a pretty clear statement as deep and profound and philosophical as it sounds. But the whole point is you draw near to God, God is love. God so loved the world. He loves sinners. He justifies the ungodly. He reaches out and forgives people who don't deserve it. He doesn't have to settle the score with his own children. That God of love, that's the thing that you ought to be doing with each other.

"In this love of God was made manifest among us." How do we know love? Because God defines it. "God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." We get

life. We get forgiveness, even though we don't deserve it. Verse 10, "In this love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be," the payment, "the propitiation," the satisfaction of what justice demanded, "for our sins." That's love. "Beloved," you're loved by God, that's what beloved means, "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." You want to say you love God, then you better be loving each other. We could read it all if we had time, but drop down to the bottom, verse 19, bottom of the chapter. "We love because he first loved us." I hope that's the measure of what you know you ought to bring to other people. "If anyone says," verse 20, "'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. Pastor got a stuttering problem all of a sudden in the third service. You should have seen it. It was weird.

Why am I saying that? Because that's a hard pill to swallow right there. We could hear it another three times. This is crazy. What? "If anyone says I love God and hates his brother," unless, of course, he has a good reason to hate him, "then he's a liar." No, that's the Mike Fabarez translation. That's not it. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother. If you hate your brother, fellow sibling in Christ, metaphorical coworker in Christ, brother in arms, if you've both been reconciled and have peace from God, if you hate that person, you don't love God. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God," we've gone from ought to must, "must also love his brother." What is your problem with your brother or your sister in Christ? You've got to get over that. And stop searching for a theological reason. If there is one then bring it to your pastors. And it better be a big one. If you're going to maintain some distinction, some difference, some distance between the two, you've got to solve this. Paul sends Onesimus right back to Philemon, to fix this face-to-face. And Onesimus is going to ask for forgiveness. We're going to dig into forgiveness next week, this is huge.

Verse 6, Philemon verse 6. I said this is the key verse. "I pray," and I explained this enough as I read it, the koinonia, "that the other sharing of your faith," not evangelism, this is you participating in Christianity, "may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Something in me is coming from my connection with God that is supposed to make me think about doing the right thing and actually doing the right thing, for God's sake, not for my feeling's sake. One passage on this. John Chapter 15. Your koinonia with the Triune God of the universe, that should make you do something. Something positive. Something right. Particularly when you're miffed and your feelings are hurt with someone in the church. You know this passage too, verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." He's the gardener. "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." That's where he's going to go in verse 6. That's a terrible thing. "And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes it." He's going to try and say this is a fruitful branch. Let's cut this back a little bit. Ouch. Why? "That it may bear more fruit." God wants you to be more fruitful. Maybe that's why you have this trial. Maybe the problem you have with your sister in Christ in this fellowship is because God is trying to make you a more fruitful Christian. Well, that sounds weird. That's what the Bible's telling us. Fruit, right? Great.



He's going to put you in situations that feel painful, pruning is not a fun experience, so that you can bear more fruit. "You're already clean because of the word that I've spoken to you. Abide in me." Okay, so you're a Christian now. What you need is an organic spiritual connection with me, "Abide in me, and I in you." If we're copasetic, if we're simpatico, if we're in connection, then you are going to bear fruit as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself. Just laying on the ground it's not going to bear fruit, "unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, it is he who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." And here's one thing you can't do. You can't forgive. You can't make up. You can't overlook it. You can't fix the relational problem you have with another Christian without Christ because it should come from the divinely-fueled desire to make this right.

Verse 6, the bad news. Verse 7, "If you abide in me, and my word abides in you ask whatever you wish, it will be done for you." Do you think the things that we ask for, like at our prayer meetings once a month, we get together, we pray, or you are in your small group and you're praying, you think planting more churches, winning more souls, making this place the way it should be made, an excellent place where worship is done right. Do you think the preaching of the Word on all the platforms that we pray to be fruitful, do you think God is in favor? Of course he is. But there may be some problems. Maybe we're not bearing the kind of fruit we should and therefore we can't ask and receive. "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit." God will be glorified if this church could do all that we aspire to do, "And so prove to be his disciples," his effective, fruitful disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love." We get right to this virtue of love. The very first Fruit of the Spirit. The first thing God has at the top of the list. Love, love, love, love, love. You better have love in your congregation.

"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you'll abide in my love, just as I've kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Don't forget that verse. This is not just a slap you on the knuckles and say, hey, Philemon, I know he wronged you, but let's just all forget it. Nah, nah, nah, you're just going to have to live with it. Lump it. No, this is for your joy. Philemon, you embracing Onesimus, the guy that ripped you off and ran from you, if you can embrace as brothers in Christ as fellow soldiers, do you know what? It's going to be good for you. It's going to be good for God. God's going to feel good. You're going to feel good. It's going to be really great. It doesn't feel that way when we're doing it but it's going to be.

"This is my commandment," verse 12, "that you love one another as I have loved you, this is my commandment. Do that. Christ loved us when we didn't deserve it. You're supposed to love the person in your small group even if he doesn't deserve it. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Jesus is about to be killed because he's saying he loves us. How about you swallow your pride to say that you love that person? That's what God says we're supposed to do, to love each other even if it costs us. "You're my friends if you do what I command you. No longer" verse 15, "do I call you servants, for the



servant doesn't know what his master's doing; but I've called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father, I've made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." What kind of fruit are we talking about? "That your fruit should abide," your relationship should abide, your harmony should abide, your unity should abide, "so whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another." Can I just put this very practically? All the things we aspire to, and I hope it's part of your desires for this church and churches like ours to be fruitful, reach their communities for Christ, plant more churches here and across the country to change the landscape of our culture that is barreling toward hell and to see peoples pluck from the fire. Maybe the problem is your relationships with people in this church. Maybe we're not loving each other.

All right. Verse 7, as though we had time, back to Philemon. I want you to have divinely-fueled unification, an organic connection with God. You cannot read your Daily Bible Reading, you cannot do Bible study, you can't pray through your prayers, you can't worship God if you're not imbibing in the kind of thing that creates love and forgiveness and harmony and overlooking an offense and joining together even when it doesn't feel good, for Christ's sake. Verse 7. "For I've derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you." Three things about Philemon's love, Paul says, brought me comfort, brought me joy and I've been refreshed. Clearly he has. But he's saying and you've refreshed a lot of other people. Number three, you need to "Get Excited about the Rewards of Christian Love." I pointed that out in John 15. This is a joy for you. This is a joy for you. If you have a unified church, if you have love in this church like you've never seen in any other organization and couldn't see because we're living by a different set of rules, we have a different kind of internal power, a fuel from God to do this, it'll be good for you. Letter "A," let's put it this way. Unity, here's the word, "joy." It feels good. Do you know how good it feels to be a part of a small group when everyone's got everyone else's back and we are in harmony with each other and whatever has been said or done to miff the person next to you, it's forgiven? It's over. Even if someone steals from someone, it's over. It's done. That feels good.

I put on the back of the worksheet for your small groups this week, Psalm 133. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." How good would it feel for you to be in a church that is really loving each other to the place of real, harmonious and unified connection? Comfort. What comfort do we get from love? Think about that. What kind of comfort do we get from love? If the people in my church love me, I get a great deal of comfort from that. I hope you do, too. If I really have your back and you have my back, it doesn't matter what happens. We are strong together. A cord of three strands is not easily broken and a cord of 3,000 strands will hold a ship to a dock. Think about this. Right? You will be able to have an anchor for your soul, not just in your ethereal theological truth, which is absolutely true but yet unseen, but the things that you can see.

I don't care what happens to my life. Seriously. I could get a disease and be dead by next Sunday. Let's just say I die. I still don't even worry because I know I'll leave behind people, some people like my wife who may miss me and my kids. But here's the thing. I don't worry



about it. "Well, you're too old to get insurance anymore." You're right. I have no life insurance anymore. But it's okay. Shoot me in the head. Because here's the thing. No, don't. (audience laughing) I'm not worried about my wife. Do you think you might take care of my wife? I think so. I don't care what happens, my house can burn down today. I'm not going where I'm going to live. I'm moving to the Holiday Inn. That's not what it's going to happen. I'm moving into your house. (audience laughing) I'm just telling you what... I'm just telling you about... There's nothing to worry about. Talking about comfort. I put it this way. Unity feels good, and unity provides security and I want that security and we need that security as human beings. Jot down Proverbs 17:17 next to that and look it up. Right? "A friend ... born for adversity. We know that no matter what happens, if it's bad, people who I'm right with, people who I'm in love with in terms of the Christian love that we should have in a church, they got my back.

Refreshment. Just jot it down. We won't turn you to it. Second Chronicles Chapter 30 verse 12, Second Chronicles Chapter 30 verse 12, when he says it refreshes the hearts of people, there's nothing more refreshing than this little scene where Hezekiah brings the reforms to Judah, and it talks about all the other tribes and talks about humility and all the rest, things that work, just like we saw there in Ephesians Chapter 4. When there's sympathy and compassion they all pull together. I just want to read you this one verse. "The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord." It's just a great line. The hand of God was on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded, the right things, according to the word of the Lord. I just think if the hand of God... If you want to feel God's hand upon a congregation, a church. Right? Let's make sure that we are of one heart. Let's make sure there's nothing... This is an Old Testament depiction of what First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 10 says, perfectly united in mind and judgment. Our minds are on the same page. We're finding the commonality.

I wish I had more time, but just know the strength of this church, the fruitfulness of this church really comes down to the something that comes up between you and a brother or sister in the church and how you solve it. Let it fester, church split is inevitable. Solve it, we can be fruitful, we can be strong. God can do great things. That was Jesus' prayer in John 17. Look it up sometime today and read it. He wants us to be one. The power of his disciples in this world comes down to our relationships with each other. We'll get into the heavy lifting next week as we start in verse 8. But may God apply this to your hearts. If not presently, may it safeguard you for the next conflict that you find yourself in.

Let's pray. God help us, we've gone a little long here this morning, to process this truth, even as we go to our small groups and go through those questions. Let us be honest in our discussions with each other about the need that we have to sometimes do things for the sake of Christ and not for the sake of my sense of justice or not for the sake of my own feelings. Let us do what's right because you produce in our hearts through that organic connection with you a knowledge of what's right and the power to do it. It's hard to love. It's hard to love. It was hard for Jesus to love in the garden. He showed us how hard it was. It's tough sometimes to do the right thing, and it was going to be tough for Philemon to hear that he needed to forgive the surreptitious thievery of Onesimus. But Paul was going to lean on him to do it. And





he sets it up well with this theological foundation. May we process that this week in a way that prepares us for whatever conflict comes next in our lives.

In Jesus name, Amen.