



## **Fighting for Peace – Part 2**

### **The Right Kind of Forgiveness**

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Maybe you recall each year as we read through the Bible the little Old Testament book of Amos. Most people don't remember much about the book but there are some things we remember and maybe you remember the context that he is one of the two Old Testament prophets who went to the northern tribes of Israel, and he had prophecies against them. This is in the mid-eighth century B.C., before Christ, and during the reign of Jeroboam the Second. And he is prophesying, he's a shepherd turned prophet, and he is getting them ready to understand why the Assyrians are going to come in 721 B.C. and destroy these ten tribes of Israel. But he starts the book with something you probably do remember, a pattern that he repeats over and over and over again. Eight times he repeats it and he starts with Damascus and he says this. He says, "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke your punishment." Of course, he's speaking here for God in this writing prophet. He goes on, "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke your punishment." "For three transgressions of Tyre and for four, I will not revoke your punishment."

And he explains all the punishments that are coming. And he goes through it all from Ammon, Moab, then he gets to Judah and then he says, okay, and now you, Israel. And the rest of the book is about that. It's a paradigm that's hard to forget once you get it in your head. Yes. For three transgressions, yes, for four, I'm not going to stop with the punishment. Now, the rabbis took that paradigm and by the time of Christ they said, well, that's a good rule of thumb, right? For three transgressions and, you know, for four for sure you're over the line there, that's when you should just go ahead and write things off. And that's what God did with these nations, of course. Well, that was a bad reading of the text, by the way, because it really misunderstands the fact that this society was filled with hundreds and thousands of transgressions. But the things that were being pointed out there in this poetic expression of judgment, I can see where the rabbis might say, okay, this is a good rule of thumb. If someone wrongs you once, forgive them, twice, forgive them, three times, certainly not for four, you don't forgive them.

That was pretty well known in the first century. The rabbis were teaching that in the synagogues. So in Matthew 18 verses 21 and 22, when Peter comes to Jesus, he thinks he's going to get a gold star when he says, hey, Jesus, because he knows Jesus is a very forgiving person. How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Do you remember what Peter recommends? Seven. You can just see his chest. Like seven? I mean, that's better than the rabbis give to someone. That kind of reflects your very forgiving nature, doesn't it Jesus? Seven times? And you remember Jesus' response. A math equation, right? No, no, no, "I tell you not seven, but 70 times seven." I mean, this blew people's minds. 70 times seven? I'm going to lose track by at least 250, 280, 300. I'm losing track of how many times my friend, my neighbor, my brother have wronged me. And yet Jesus says that's how your forgiveness should be. It should be an endless well of forgiveness that flows from your heart towards your brother when he sins against you. Amazing. That was just a crazy thing.



Now, do you ever hear pastors, by the way, get up before a sermon and they say things like this? They say (in a whisper voice), "Hey, whatever's gone on in your week this week, I just want you to forget about everything. I want you to think just about the Lord right now." You can tell by the way I said that, I never want you to think that way in church. I'd like for you to remember everything that happened this week. And that's the whole point of preaching. I should be able to speak God's Word to you about all the stuff we go through all the time. And here's one thing you go through in a world filled with sinful people, they wrong you, they offend you, they sin against you, they hurt your feelings. I'd love for you right now just to remember all of that. The whole point of preaching is for you to put this into practice. I don't want you to compartmentalize the preaching and think about this as some isolated thing we do, and then we get back to real-life thinking. No, no, no. This is supposed to be the lens through which we see everything that happens to us. I want you to think about the people who wronged you. Think about people who just tweak and tork or whatever words you use, they tick you off. You are not pleased with them. And I want us to think about forgiveness. I want you to think about how hard it is to do it once. Then I want to think about how hard it would be if they did it again and to forgive them twice. I can see where the rabbis were on to something. Three times seems like, you know, it's good enough for baseball, right? Three strikes and you're out. You don't get another crack at this, my friendship is revoked.

Forgiveness is hard. We need help. And the help that we need this morning, I think is clearly found here in Philemon verses 8 through 16. And I want you to look at this because we have some very helpful things that the Apostle Paul is saying to this man, Philemon, the citizen, a wealthy citizen of Colossi. The church meets every Sunday morning in his house, a big house. He had servants, slaves, which I did promise you I would mention the difference between the Greco-Roman slavery of the first century. I can even go back to the ancient Near Eastern slavery of the Old Testament and what you think about when you hear the word slavery. You think about the American practice I'm assuming unless you're a historian, you think about the American practice of ethnic slavery. And certainly that was birthed in the renaissance of thinking in Europe. And one of the shoes to fall in modernistic thinking is the Darwinistic thinking of how we came to be. Racism as we know it comes from the idea that we are evolved creatures and that you can look at others that may share in some kind of humanity but not full humanity. And so we think less of them and were able to, whether it was during Nazi Germany with the Jews or whether it was American slavery and Africans, you can start to say, well, they're not as evolved as we are. And so it was easy. You could see that even in Margaret Sanger's view of abortion and how that worked, the eugenics it's called, making sure we have the right genes reproducing in our country.

Well, godless thinking has led to a lot of terrible things, including ethnic-based slavery. But slavery as an institution, let's go back, way back to the ancient Near East was often used as an act of mercy to those who are conquered in war. Instead of slaughtering you how would you like to work for us? Now you don't work like a normal worker might work with the same rights and privileges of what you think of when you think of an employee who can quit at any time. No, you'll become conscripted workers. We see that through the Old Testament. We see that even as we start the venture of the Israelites into their land, the whole Palestinian



covenant as we call it in the book of Deuteronomy was about them being freed from the slavery of the Egyptians who had to do whatever they said. They couldn't turn in their pink slip and say I'm done, I'm not going to work here anymore. This was the conscription of people instead of slaughtering them, utilizing them in conscripted labor.

There were plenty of rules for that when it came to the Israelites. You've got to treat your slaves properly, right? That may be an act of mercy in war, but you've got to be reasonable. You have to be good to them. You have to recognize their full humanity. And so often they were stuck with the fact that this arrangement is so equally beneficial that you've got slaves who don't want to stop being slaves. You've got people who say, "Well, this is good. You take care of me," just like you might think of your employer giving you health insurance. Talk about insurance. You don't only get health insurance, you get everything you could possibly want, right? I mean, you get food, you get shelter. Yeah, you have to work and you are owned by this master, but you get an arrangement that sometimes was so profitable that there had to be something in the Mosaic Law for what do you do when a person doesn't want to leave? They can earn their own freedom. They can buy themselves out but they don't want to. Well, there was that ceremony, you might remember, of putting your earlobe against the edge of the doorframe and having it pierced with an awl and that picture of that hole in your ear was that you were a willing servant of your master and you don't plan on leaving.

By the time of the Greco-Roman world after Alexander the Great and into the Caesars, you've got a kind of slavery in the first century that goes across just people who are carrying water or are woodcutters for you. Certainly not as you think about American slavery just out in the fields picking cotton. That's not how this worked. This was something that you decided to do to advance yourself in some way, at least not to care about all the things you might care about because you're not a wealthy person. You don't come from a wealthy background but you can go to school as a slave. You can get a profession as a slave and you can be very important in terms of some rich person's estate. You can become an accountant or a dentist or a doctor or a lawyer. These things were often and frequently people who were slaves. It wasn't looked upon as well you're less than. It's certainly you didn't have the same privileges in the socioeconomic strata of the first century. But some people say there were over half a million slaves in the Roman Empire by the time we got here to the pages of the New Testament. But the master had the rights. The master had a power position.

And of course, Philemon had a power position and Onesimus said I'm done. And he didn't buy his freedom. He stole from his master by saying, I'm out of here. Who knows what he took? But he took himself, which is thievery, and he was a fugitive from justice under the law of the Romans. And so Paul here is in a quandary, as he's about to explain, at least as it relates to Christian-to-Christian dialog. He's going to say, I'm in a bigger quandary than you might think because not only does he need to make this right, but we're all three Christians now because I just led Onesimus to faith in Christ, and I'm going to send him back to you, Philemon and we've got to work this whole thing out.

So, you know this is going to be hard for Philemon. The last thing he had thought about Onesimus and probably continues to think as he pounds his fist on the table is that this guy



ripped him off. Talk about being wronged. He was wronged and there was some monetary value attached to the wrong. And now Paul's going to say you know what? I love you Philemon. You're a man who's brought great joy and peace and refreshment to people because of your love. You're a loving guy.

Now, verse 8 accordingly. Take a look at your text here. Philemon verse 8, it's printed on your worksheet or if you want to turn in your Bible to do it, I'll read it from the English Standard Version, we'll read through verse 16, "Accordingly," based on the fact that I get great joy and comfort from your love Philemon, "though I'm bold enough in Christ," verse 8 says, "to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you -- I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus -- I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment." Just like Paul talks about being the father of Timothy. Right? He's a spiritual dad. He's the one who evangelistically led him to faith in Christ. Verse 11, "(Formerly," Onesimus, "he was useless to you," right? He was a runaway slave. You were never going to see him again. He was lost in the metropolitan crowds of Rome. "But now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I'm sending him back to you, sending my very heart." I love this guy. He's a disciple of Christ. He's helpful to me here in Rome under house arrest. Verse 13, "I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf."

Now, I know you, Philemon. I just happened to run in by God's providence to this guy. I lead him to Christ. I realize he's a runaway slave. I could have just kept him here as a brother in Christ. He could have served me. He could have made runs for me. I'm stuck in this house and he could have been very useful to me here. But I'm sending him back. Okay. Verse 14, "But I prefer to do nothing without your consent," because that wouldn't be right, "in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but by your own accord. I don't just want to say I got your runaway slave here but I'm keeping him. No, I want you to agree, but I'm really not thinking about him staying, I'd like you to be reconciled with him. Verse 15, "For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever." Talk about reconciliation. Forever. "No longer," as a slave, as a "Doulos," as a bondservant is translated here in the English Standard Version, "but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother -- especially to me." Think about it. He's going to serve you. He's been great to me, a beloved brother to me. But how much more to you? "Both in the flesh," he's your servant, but he's also your brother, "and the Lord." That's great.

It's a great text that I think has a lot embedded in it that may help us forgive. If you think about those people who have wronged you and there are plenty of them, probably some just this week who have tweaked you in some way. Well, what do I need to say about that? I need to say what Paul said in verse 8. I could command you and we could have a very, very short sermon here just by saying you've got to do what's required. And before I leave that I want to make sure you understand that it's required. Some people think forgiveness along with a lot of other things like baptism or whatever it might be, they think those are like extracurricular activities. We're going to have baptisms coming up, I think next week. And some people think stuff like that was just extra credit, right? Sharing the gospel, extra credit. Like saying no to



sin, extra credit. Or in this case, forgiving Onesimus and taking him back, extra credit. It's not extra credit. Look at those words. It is required.

Jot that down, number one, you need to know that "You Are Required to Forgive." That is a requirement as clear as any other requirement in Scripture. It is not optional, non-negotiable. It is not an opinion and it is not a suggestion. God doesn't say, I suggest you forgive people because that would be better... if you have it in your heart somewhere please just forgive people. This is a command. How clear is it? I think you know the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Do you remember that line? "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." "As we?" Okay, so we forgive our debtors, people who have wronged us and we're asking you to forgive US for wronging you God. Now you probably have that memorized. Have you memorized the bottom of that passage? How about verse 14? It says this in the Lord's Prayer. It's a clarification by Christ. "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." It's funny how we don't memorize that part.

If you forgive others their trespasses, when they've wronged you, then your heavenly Father will forgive your trespasses, but if you do not forgive the trespasses of your brothers against you, God is not going to forgive your trespasses. Could you think of a stronger way to say this is required for Christians? Required. Last week I took you to First John, which is all about many things, it's about obedience and the fruit of salvation. But the key thing that's put on a pedestal and a spotlight is love. You can't say you love God and don't love your brother. We've seen that and we emphasized that last week. Love is foundational. That's the thing that he praises in Philemon, you're a loving man, you've brought great joy to my heart because you're loving. I see it. You're a loving person. And we talked about how that is just a hallmark of Christianity. And he goes so far as to say if you don't love your brother, then here's the thing, you're a liar. You don't know God, that's for sure. That's huge.

Well, you do know a subset of that virtue of love is forgiveness. Remember, I took you to the passage there in First John Chapter 4 when he talks about a new commandment I give to you. Well, it's not new. It's old. You've had it, but it's new. Remember all that? And he said, the difference there, you might remember, is that the standard has changed. The old standard from Leviticus is "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Jesus now says in the gospel of John, no, no, "Love your neighbor as I have loved you," which is better than how you love yourself. But let's just go back to the old standard because we can certainly find forgiveness embedded in the old standard. "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Here's one thing you do every single week, every week. You forgive yourself. You may yell at yourself in the mirror. I don't know. You may say I can't stand what I have done. You may. But you get along just fine. Well enough to feed your face every day. Well enough to get yourself some sleep every night. Well enough to put deodorant on and hope that people don't think you're stinky. Right? You do a lot of things. You brush your teeth so they don't rot out of your head. Right? You gals put on makeup so you look good. Why do you care? Right? Because you forgive yourself.



All the things that make you mad about what you do. All the things you failed to do. When you look at your life, you say I don't measure up. You continue to love yourself. Forgiveness is embedded in the virtue of love. You can't have love without forgiveness. And if you say you love your brother and you're unwilling to forgive their trespasses, you don't love your brother. So let's just make this clear. You have to forgive because the number one virtue and fruit of Christianity is that you love your brother. I got to forgive my brother. It's got to be coming out of me and it's got to be generously coming out of me so much so that like Peter, I got to know, I got to be more forgiving than what I'm hearing at the synagogues. I got to be more forgiving than what the scholars say I should do. You know Christ long enough like Peter did, you say well I'm sure he wants me to forgive a lot more than the rabbis say. But his mind was blown and he said, no, you have no idea. 70 times seven.

It's a clear requirement in Scripture. Love includes forgiveness, partly because if you think about who your brother is to you, I mentioned it in announcements this morning. I talked about the interchange of the words "part" and "member." Member in Scripture, First Corinthians Chapter 12, means a part of the body, you're a part of the body. And in your church you have people in the church who are seen organically by God as a part of you because you are a part of Christ. You all relate to the head. And the imagery there in the book of Ephesians is he is the head and you all are his body. First Corinthians, same thing. You could be a thumb. The other person in your small group could be an ear and someone else can be an eye. All these different parts of the body. But just like you love yourself or as Paul put it in Ephesians Chapter 5, you nourish and cherish your own body, that shows the love you have, you forgive, and you recognize that. You continue to recognize that you forgive.

I cut my finger this week. Can you see my Band-Aid here on my finger? It was pretty bad. You can ask for the picture later if you want me to text it to you. Not only have I nourished it as best I can with Neosporin and Band-Aids, but it's pretty gross. It bled almost for 24 hours. I got more stories about it I'll tell later. But here's the thing. The hands that look at that finger that got in the way of my pocketknife problem, I do have a problem with my pocketknives. The body doesn't want to continue to bring damage to the finger because it got in the way. Right? Or my left-hand doesn't think well the right hand was carrying the pocketknife when you cut the finger. So the left hand doesn't want to punish the right hand. Both of these hands wanted to work together all day long because they're connected to the head. So all week long, I cut myself on Monday, I'm still nursing it on Sunday, I'm still trying to make sure that the body just works together. I don't want any grudges between hands. That would be a nightmare. And God says you are the body of Christ. "Yeah, well, I don't like the damage that this did to me." Right? And the left hand should be really mad at the right hand because the right hand was very careless in how it handled the knife. And yet the left hand is as for the right hand as it's ever been. Matter of fact, it's praying for the right hand to handle that pocketknife carefully. We don't want to forget that we're organically connected as the body of Christ. We are parts of one another. Members.

Turn to Luke 17 real quick. Luke 17. I don't think duty is a bad thing. You need to remember that we have some duties. One of the duties is to love. One of the duties is to forgive. You must forgive. We are slaves of God. That's one of the reasons this is not an inherently horrific

analogy. Does the New Testament say if you can get your freedom as a slave in the Greco-Roman world then get your freedom? Yes, of course. It would be better for you to not be a slave. I don't want anybody to be enslaved. That's a good thing. But I am enslaved as a Christian to Christ. That's the whole point of the logic there in Romans Chapter 6. I am a slave of Christ. I've become a willing slave. I've leaned my earlobe against the door post and I've let him put an awl through it and I've said forever I will be your slave because I have a perfect master. In this text, though, Jesus wants to remind us what that implies.

Verse 7, "Will any one of you who has a," slave, there's the word "servant," bondservant, *doulos*, the same word, "plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he's come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at the table?'" That's what I want you to do. Well, sit here, you look sweaty. Let me bring you a handkerchief. No. "Will he not rather say, 'Prepare supper for me and dress properly,'" clean your face, wash your hands, and then can you bring me some food tonight? You're my servant. You're my slave. And after I eat and drink, well, then "you can eat and drink." Yeah, that's what a master does with a slave. "Does he thank the servant because he's done what is commanded?" No, this is a *quid pro quo*. It's just like it's nice when your boss thanks you for doing your job, but that's what he's paying you for. This is even greater than that. Talk about insurance. You got insurance in every area of your life from your master. He is your life source for you, your wife, your kids. And he's not going to say thanks. He certainly doesn't have to.

"So also," Christians, "when you've done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we've only done what was our duty.'" We have duty in the Christian life. And here's one of the duties and if you want to resonate on that for a minute, let's resonate on that. And Paul could have skipped it altogether but he says, you know, I could "command you," as an apostle just, "to do what is required." This would be a very short letter. But instead I'm going to appeal for a better way. Duty is not a bad thing, and sometimes duty gets us through. But look what he says in verse 9. This is what I'd rather have you do is to let love motivate all this. "Yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you," and he goes on to explain that. We're going to look at the dimensions of that in just a second. Phillips Brooks, a preacher from yesteryear put it well. I remember quoting this for you when we were going through Proverbs and talking about the Christian work ethic. Phillips Brooks preached, "Duty makes us do things well," when we understand our duty, "but love makes us do them beautifully." That's a good distinction.

And here's what Paul wants. A beautiful reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus. I'd like this to be beautiful. Because love will make it beautiful. I think Phillips Brooks is right. It will be much better if you're motivated. As a matter of fact, let's get to the end of this discussion in verse 14. He says, "I prefer to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but by your own accord." The key word there is willing. I want it to be of your accord. I want you to decide to want to do this. And I want it to be motivated by love. So let's get both of those concepts in the second point. Ready? Number two, "Willingly Forgive for Love's Sake." That's what Paul is setting him up to do. I want you to be willing and I want love to motivate that. And that can be a much better motive than just saying, yes, sir, I'll forgive.

Now, if you have to say yes, sir, I'll forgive, I guess there are days I obey God out of duty. I understand that. But God would have you do it better. As a matter of fact, let me throw three quick verses at you regarding that. How about First Corinthians Chapter 9? First Corinthians Chapter 9 verse 16. Paul says, you know, I'm a preacher, and, "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no grounds for boasting." Jesus does not say to Mike Fabarez this morning, thank you so much for preaching there at that church. No, this is my job. This is my, what we would say even more sacred, it's my calling. Paul says, "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I don't preach the gospel." So Paul's a missionary. Of course he's got to preach the gospel. That's his job. And as servants of Christ we know it's our job. It's our duty. Verse 17 now, "If I do this of my own will," if I willingly do it, "I have a reward, but if not of my own will," if I just do it because of duty, "I'm still entrusted with a stewardship." Because I'm still a slave. And I'm a steward. A steward who is indentured to my master and... But it would be better. It'd be better. It'd be better because God loves to reward people who get their will involved in this.

I said three passages. How about First Peter Chapter 5 verse 2? You can just jot that down. He talks to pastors there, Peter does, and he says, "Shepherd the flock of God," that word "Poimén," shepherd, the noun we're used to shepherd but it's used here as a verb. "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight," that's not always easy, it's not always fun, "not under compulsion," because that's your job, "but willingly," and I love this, "as God would have you." God would have us do things willingly. It would be good to be willing. How about one more? Second Corinthians Chapter 9 talks about giving. Now, giving is a compulsion by the way. Galatians 6:6, talks about it in First Corinthians 8. You have to give to those who sow spiritual things in your life, your church, you have to give to the church. You have to, the Bible says it. But it says, I would love for you to give "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." I mean, talk about your will, I would love for Philemon to cheerfully take back Onesimus, that would be so much better. God loves that. It is what God would have you do. It is what comes with the reward. And it's better.

But please don't become a 21st-century sentimental Christian who often says if I don't feel it, I'm not going to do it. Because duty is always in the background of this command to forgive or any other command. You don't wait to feel like you want to get baptized. Get baptized. If you're a Christian, get baptized. Don't wait until you feel like giving to your church. If you go to a church and it's serving you spiritually, you've got to give, right? If you are a Christian you can't just say well I'm going to wait to love my brother till I feel it. You don't have to wait for that. And I'm going to wait to feel like I can forgive him before ever... You got to do it, it's your duty. But you know what God would want? He'd want you to feel it. He'd want you to willingly do it, volitionally say I want to do that. How do I get there? Well, love can help us do that.

Here's a basic principle we see throughout the discussions about forgiveness. When Paul talks about himself in this passage, "Yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you -- I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus -- I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment." Now he's going to say this later in this discussion, verse 19, if you've got the text open, "I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will replay it -- to say nothing of your owing me even your own self." So he's just reminding him





that Christ has given you the gospel through me. But even as he speaks of Onesimus' salvation and Philemon's salvation, it certainly puts the focus on salvation. And here's the thing about salvation. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son," "while we were still sinners," Romans Chapter 5, "Christ died for us." So we know that what we need to think about first and foremost when it comes to love, you should be forgiving because of God's love for you. Because that's the kind of love that certainly includes forgiveness as a subset of the virtue of love. That's the whole point that you shouldn't perish. Well, you got to have your sins forgiven. The subset of Christ's love for you, of the Father's love for you, is the willingness to forgive you at great expense to himself.

Did Jesus feel like forgiving us in the Garden of Gethsemane? Think now, think. Did he feel like forgiving us? Well, the concept is nice but he said, "God, please let this cup pass for me, but not my will." Guess what? It wasn't a real willing thing at that moment in the garden. Did he get there? Sure he did. He prayed himself through this while his disciples slept through the prayer meeting. But he got to the place where he willingly laid down his life for us. But what's the point? Is it hard sometimes? It's hard. But you can focus on this if it's hard. Christ's love for you. The Father's love for you. God so loved the world that he was willing to give a great high price to see your forgiveness effectuated. Matthew 18. I brought it up, verses 21 and 22 when Peter goes SEVEN times? And Jesus has to say, no, a lot more than that.

Well, then he tells a parable on the heels of this. You probably know this parable, but let's look at it afresh. Verse 23. Kingdom of Heaven. Now your relationship to God and to "heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him and owed him 10,000 talents." So sometimes I think like camp when I was a kid. You had a tally and you'd settle up at the end, right? If I ate endless hot dogs and endless snacks and Tootsie Rolls and all the stuff I would buy at the little, you know, candy store there, Abba-Zabas, of course, all the stuff I would eat at camp. At the end you'd have to settle up. Or even in college we had certain things that way, we'd settle up at the end. So the servants obviously living under all that the master provided when they got extra things that weren't included in the arrangement of being a conscripted slave, then they would rack up a bill and this bill was racked up here and he's going to settle the accounts.

Well, he has one particular slave, verse 24, "who owed him 10,000 talents." Now, 10,000 talents is a ridiculous amount of money. A talent was 20 years' wage for a laborer. I just want you to think about that. He owed 10,000 of those. Think about it. This is absurd. Could he ever work this off? Impossible. That's a debt that no one can pay off. I mean, that's just ridiculous for a slave. No. "Since he couldn't pay," chuckle, chuckle, chuckle because who could pay that? A slave certainly couldn't pay that off. "His master ordered him to be sold." I'm going to cut my losses here. Just sell him, "sell his wife, sell his kids," I'll at least get something out of this and "payment is going to be made," and whatever the payments going to be. "So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him," no, no, no, I like working here, I don't want my wife and my kids separated, no, "have patience with me and I'll repay you everything." Well, that's a joke and you're never going to be able to repay the master. "And out of pity," compassion, a great word, out of a movement in his own soul, "the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt." That's the picture. That's the whole sermon



to let it go. To let it go. To release it. To pay it in full in your own mind even though you're not getting anything back. He forgave the debt.

Now, "When the same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii," a denarius is one day's wage. One hundred, that's a lot. So figure out what a person working at McDonald's, which is 20 bucks an hour now at McDonald's. That'll date the sermon. They'll listen to this sermon 30 years from now and say, "20 bucks? We're making 300 bucks an hour now. Well, back in the olden days, 20 bucks was a lot for an unskilled worker flipping hamburgers." Sorry. A hundred, a day's wage, unskilled worker, one hundred denarii, hey, that's a lot. One slave owed another slave a lot. Now I don't know what kind of deals were going on, gambling debts or whatever, but that's a lot of money to owe for a slave. Now, it's not 10,000 talents. That would be absurd.

Well, when he found that guy, "he seized him and he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay me what you owe me.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me,'" *deja vu*, "I will pay you." That's what I said to my master. Well, "the slave refused and he went and put him in prison," debtor's prison, "until he should pay the debt." Now, if he went to the magistrate in town they would put him in jail, debtor's prison, because you're right, he owes you, he should have paid you. He didn't pay. You put him in jail. "When his fellow servants," so now there's a third party, a bunch of other servants watching, "when they saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place." Why were they distressed? Because we know this guy had 10,000 talents forgiven and he won't forgive 100 denarii? That doesn't seem like he remembers what he was forgiven.

Verse 32, "The master summoned him," brought him in, "and said to him, 'You wicked servant!'" You wicked slave. "I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me." You asked for it and I gave it to you. Forgiveness. Full forgiveness, paid in full. "And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" That's the principle, by the way, throughout the New Testament. It should be one of the first things that pops into your mind when you're finding it hard to forgive someone. I don't care who it is. They haven't sinned against you as much as you've sinned against the Holy God from the time you became a Christian. Let's just think about your post-Christian sins, not to mention all the sins before that. God looks at you and "If you confess your sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." And where does that sin go? Right? Think about it.

I know what it feels like when I'm forgiving my brother, like I'm just supposed to say, poof, it's gone and act like it didn't happen. Now, does God act like it didn't happen? Well, he does. But here's the thing. It goes somewhere. The debt goes somewhere. Well, it goes to something we call the propitiation of Christ on the cross. It's why he ended his life with a word here in his earthly ministry to "Tetelestai," which you know the translation of that. What's the translation of the Greek word *tetelestai*? "Paid in full" or "it is finished." Paid in full. It's an accounting term, all paid. So the propitiation, the satisfaction of the debt of justice before the tribunal of a holy God was paid in full. So everything you've done that you've asked God's forgiveness for



God himself paid for himself. And now you feel wronged and you feel like there's a debt owed to you. "Well, you know, wash my car for the rest of my life and I guess I'll forgive you." But you're supposed to just let it go. "Aphiemi," the Greek word for "just let it go." That's hard to do. But it ought to be remembered every time it's hard to forgive how you have pleaded with the Lord to have mercy on you and out of great compassion, with the "great love with which he loved us," to quote Ephesians 2, he made you to be born again. No sin, no transgression, no guilt, no condemnation.

God's love for you ought to be a motive for you. And I can't get away from this without reading at least the end of Ephesians 4 and the beginning of Ephesians 5. "Be kind to one another," verse 32 of Chapter 4 says, "tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." See, there's no just God forgiving you. He has to forgive you "in Christ" because the payment and the debt have to be suffered somehow. And he forgave you. "Therefore," verse 1 Chapter 5, "be imitators of God like beloved children," your siblings here, "and walk in love, as Christ loved us." And guess what he did. "He gave himself for us," as a fragrant, "offering and sacrifice to God." Nothing would please God more than for you to willingly let go the debt of what someone has done to hurt your feelings, to wrong you, to tweak you, to do something against what you wanted.

Duty is good, willingness is better. Love is the motive. And the first aspect of that love is God's love for you. How about this? How about your love for your brother? You should love your brother. That's part of the first evidence of real Christianity is you love the congregation of the redeemed. Jot this down. Proverbs Chapter 10 verse 12. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred," you hate people will, "stirs up strife." Any little offense will stir up anger, strife, hostility. "But love covers all offenses." It's amazing how often a little baby can offend a mother and the mother continues to love, the natural embedded love of a mom for a baby. Let's think about that. How often did your baby wrong you pulling your glasses off your face? Pooping his pants incessantly. Throwing up on your dress. And yet you're going to hug them within moments, within minutes. You ought to forgive because you love God's kids. It covers all offenses. Or First Peter Chapter 4 verse 8, "Above all, keep loving one another." If you can focus on loving each other. That's why Jesus said it's the greatest command of the Old Testament as it relates to our relationships. Love each other. "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."

If you just focus more on I need to love the person, I need to love the person, I need to love the person. First you think of God's love for you. Now I want you to think about your love for that person. You should love them. They are your brother in Christ. Christ loves them so much that he sent his Son to die for that person. You need to forgive them because you love them. Love covers a multitude of sins. How about Matthew Chapter 5? There's one more aspect of love. You should forgive for the sake of God's love for you. You should forgive for the sake of your love for God's kids. You should forgive for the sake of your love for God. Why? Look how God works. Verse 43, "You've heard it said, 'You should love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.'" Well, I don't want to be like God. No, no, no. You love God, right? Don't you want to be godly? Don't you want to be like your dad?



Don't you want to do what he does? I would think that's what you want. So if you love God, why don't you act like God. The most godly thing you can do, think about it, is to forgive because this is certainly what God has done.

Think about the corporate sins and the individual sins that are made up here as an aggregate in the corporate worship of this room with hundreds of people in here. How much sin has God forgiven in this room? If you want to be like God, why don't you forgive a little bit? Why don't you start forgiving? If you love God, you're going to be like dad. Why? "Because he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust," that word "just" is righteous and the unrighteous. "If you love those who love you," verse 46, what do you have? "What reward do you have?" No reward there. "Don't even the tax collectors do the same?" I mean, that's the lowest rung of betrayal in culture. Even the betrayers love those who love them. Even the gang members love those who love them. "And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Don't even the Gentiles," the people who don't know God, don't they "do the same? Therefore, you must be 'Teleios,' as your heavenly Father is teleios." Teleios is not, and I was taught this verse as a little kid in church as though this is just supposed to remind me that I'm a sinner. That's not what this verse is for. This is a command. "You therefore must be perfect."

Maybe that's a translation that should have been rethought. Does teleios mean perfect? It does. It means perfect, but it means an incidental or episodic perfect. It means that you're doing the right thing in a situation. This is the right thing to do. Not to curse, not to hate, not to respond with anger and retaliation. But even when someone wrongs you, those people that God is sending the rain on their fields and the sunshine on their crops, they didn't ask God for forgiveness, and yet they're sinners. There's an aspect of your forgiveness that needs to be applied even before someone apologizes to you. Forgive for the sake of God's love for you. Forgive for the sake of your love for God's kids. Forgive for the sake of your love for God because you like to be more like him, I hope. And remember this: God loves you back when you love him. When you forgive for love of God, Romans Chapter 12 verses 18 through 21, just remember God is standing over your shoulder. It may feel very unjust. Let God deal with what's unjust. God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." If something really needs to be settled, I'll make sure it gets settled. You worry about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Back to our text, verse 12, so I want to send Onesimus back. I love this guy. I want you to love him. He could serve me here but I'd rather you willingly receive him back. "For this perhaps," verse 15, "is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever." This is not Paul saying to Onesimus, Onesimus go to Philemon, say you're sorry, then you can come back here. This isn't just making restitution. Right? Think about that. This is full-blown reconciliation. It's like you coming to my office and saying you stole hundreds of dollars of merchandise from a store you used to work at. Right? I might think, okay, go back there and make restitution and apologize. Right? They may arrest you, who knows? But whatever, you go make it right. That's one thing. But to say now I want you to work there and be best friends with the boss. That's something else. That's what we call reconciliation. And you know what you're going to have to do if anyone's going to reconcile with you after hurting you, you're going to have to not look back at the hurt.



Number three, you need to "Be Reconciled Without Looking Back." You cannot keep looking back. There are no rearview mirrors in this thing called forgiveness. We just can't look back. Now, once you write that down some of you think this is the typical platitudes of church. They're always saying this. It's not real world. You told me to think real world. I'm thinking real world. And when I think real world, that's hard to say. Do you know what? It doesn't work. Okay. If there's one thing I'm trying to be always is real world, okay? That's my job. So if you're going to make a note under number three, please know that I know that there are exceptions. There are exceptions. It'd be like me preaching pro-marriage sermons, like don't divorce your wife. I could preach that for an hour, and that would be all good. I could go to a million passages. But then you might come up with well there are exceptions. Okay. Yes, right? There are exceptions. Romans Chapter 7, First Corinthians Chapter 7, Matthew Chapter 16. Clearly there are exceptions. But we're talking about the rule. And the rule is you need to forgive.

Now, what kinds of exceptions would there be to forgiveness? I don't think there are any exceptions for a kind of forgiveness. And the kind of forgiveness is the Lord is going to take revenge. It's not me to take my own vengeance. In other words, what we read in Romans Chapter 12 verses 18 through 21, that's true in every situation. I want to be like dad who is still kind to those who are unrepentant. But there is something about repentance, even in Jesus' conversation in Luke 17:3 with Peter. Think about it. He still says if someone sins against you and "he repents, forgive him." Well, it seems conditional. Well, there is a kind of forgiveness that is conditional. What kind of is that? The reconciliation kind. I understand if you have an accountant who steals a lot of money from you, you'd say well, real reconciliations puts him right back in charge, give him all the passwords and the key to the safe. No!

I understand there are things that you do. There can even be aspects of reconciliation that involve trust that you wouldn't do. There are certain people who do certain things you would never have them babysit your kids. It doesn't mean you haven't forgiven them. But there are aspects of reconciliation that I understand cannot be forgotten. And it's not so you can hold a grudge. Let me put it this way. The only thing that I'm talking about here is you should never look back for punitive reasons. It's not punitive. It's not punishment. And people who dredge up the past and women are known for this, by the way, I'm not saying men don't do it, but look at the memes and reels online. Right? You got to leave the past in the past and nine times out of ten it's exactly what God's asking you to do. Does the past affect the present? Sometimes it does. Are there exceptions? Yes. Are there times, as John 20 says, to withhold forgiveness? Well, just remember those are in corporate settings. Right? First Corinthians Chapter 5, John Chapter 10. Is there a time to withhold forgiveness? Here's what God says. You withhold forgiveness, I've withheld it. What kind of forgiveness? The kind of forgiveness that involves reconciliation. And that may be the kind that can't happen without real repentance or real reform in some area. So I get that.

And for not wanting to emphasize the exceptions, I feel like I've already emphasized that enough. But don't use the exception as something to help you somehow not carry out your



responsibility to forgive. Because I say nine times out of ten, it may be more than that, maybe 19 times out of 20, you just need full-throated, complete, absolutely sincere forgiveness and never look back at it again. Be reconciled without looking back.

Let me give you two verses that are helpful. We read one already in worship, Psalm 103:11-13. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." How complete is the Lord's forgiveness for you? How far is the east from the west? You can't get further than that. How about Micah Chapter 7 verse 19? Micah Chapter 7 verse 19 and we'll throw in verse 20 because it's good too. "He will again have compassion on us," there it is, "and he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea." Here's verse 20, "You'll show faithfulness to Jacob, your steadfast love to Abraham, as you've sworn to our fathers from the days of old."

This is all based on a covenant promise. The covenant promise for us is based in Christ. You are forgiven in Christ. I understand that. And because of that, you can confess your sins today to God. "And he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." I'd like you to start to practice that because real love grants that kind of forgiveness that can bury it in the deepest sea, tread it underfoot and separate it as far as the east is from the west. There's one statement there in Philemon verse 15 that I think is very helpful, "For this is perhaps," I don't know. "Why," but maybe that, "he was parted from you for a while." This is perhaps why there was an infraction. This is maybe why he ripped you off in the first place, "that you might have him back forever, no longer a bondservant but more than a bondservant." So it may be, not just providentially that he'll get saved, but that you'll have a better relationship on the other side of transgression. Think about this now. That you may have a better, tighter, longer-lasting relationship on the other side of forgiveness. Reconciliation. And I don't think anyone has been married more than six months who doesn't understand something about wronging each other. Sometimes with the proper kind of forgiveness and reconciliation can make a relationship stronger, not weaker.

You know the book of Hosea, right? I quizzed you about Amos, but how about Hosea, the other prophet to the northern tribes? Josiah was told to go marry a prostitute. Do you want to talk about a prophet having his head spin around when he gets a revelation from God? Go marry a what? A prostitute. Well, I'm going to have to not tell my mom about that. And off he goes. And have with her children of the whoredom. Crazy. And so he does. And she runs away. Back to harlotry. Back to prostitution. And then God comes to him in the next chapter, Chapter 3, after the explanation in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 3 he says go win her back. What? Think about it. The covenant-destroying act of infidelity here is her job. And you're told to just forgive it? That is the point. It's an amazing point. And why did God have Hosea marry a prostitute and then keep wooing her back? Because he wanted to show this is my love for you guys. You sin against me all the time. That takes us back to the heart of the message. God's love for you ought to be an impetus and a motive and a safeguard for us being unforgiving people.



Some people in the office gave me a car wash for my birthday last month. And it got washed, I finally got around to cash it in. It's not the car wash that you drive through and you have to sit there and wait while other people watch you read or whatever. This is the one that comes to your office. I felt like a king. They showed up on Tuesday and they washed my car. And I love it because my office looks down on my car where I park my car and I just watched them busy cleaning my car. I was just like I felt like Nebuchadnezzar, right? Just like look at this. Amazing. Well, if you walk by my car right now, do you know what you're going to find? That happened on Tuesday. It's Sunday. I could use another one of those. My staff only loved me enough to give me one car wash, but...

But you know what I'll do because I'm a typical Southern California guy. I'm going to wash my car. I wash my car. We're not in Nebraska, right? I mean, we will wash our cars a lot out here. I'd like my car to look good. I even garaged my car. Yes, I valued my clean car over the junk in my garage. I park in my garage every night and try to keep my car clean. I'm not crazy, but I'm almost crazy about it. I want my car clean, don't you? Some of you like your car clean. And I keep cleaning it and I know this, it's going to get dirty again, but it doesn't stop me because I like it when it's clean. Remember in John 13 when Jesus said I'm going to wash your feet. It's all symbolic, right? I mean, it's real, really happening. But Peter goes you're not going to wash my feet. Jesus said I have no part with you if I don't wash your feet. Well, then wash my whole body Peter said. Jesus said stop it, Peter. No. You're already clean because of the word I've spoken to you. You're forgiven. This is a picture here of forgiveness. And he says, I just need to wash your feet because you're going to get your feet dirty. And then he says at the end, go and do the same.

What's the same I'm supposed to do? Why don't we wash feet here? Some denominations do. That's not what the illustration's about. It's about how we sin against each other. Now we got to keep on washing each other's feet. I'm going to clean this off. You've sullied this relationship, I want to fix it. Because Jesus keeps doing that to us every single day. God wants you to forgive. That's the kind of forgiveness we're looking for. It's not like the world's forgiveness which is very conditional. The world's forgiveness is like the rabbi's forgiveness, three strikes and you're out. Let's prove that we're his followers and forgive.

Let's pray. God, help us here as we wrap up this service with one of the hardest topics we could ever preach on. It seems so costly. It seems so unfair. It seems so unjust. The equities gone. How is it that we're going to be made whole? I just got to feel a little loss. I feel like a doormat. I've got all these excuses. Our flesh just wants to just cry out, I can't forgive again. I do pray for sincere repentance. But just like us when we repent and come to you, we find ourselves stumbling again and again as James says, we stumble in many ways, sometimes over the same thing. So God help us today to be more like you because we love you. We'd like to be sons of the most high. We'd like to know how much you love us. And we'd like to grow in our love for each other. Let love motivate us to willing forgiveness. Even now, let us leave in the auditorium right now all the anger, frustration, bitterness, which we know if it grows up in our church it just does nothing but defile many people. So let us leave all the bitterness here in the room today. Let you deal with it all. As we walk out with forgiving hearts.



In Jesus name, Amen.