

Appropriating the Power of God in the Pursuit of Peace

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The Doctrine of the Church

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 3. We're going to be reading from verse 14 into chapter 4, verse 3. And before we begin, I want to just say a word of welcome to some special folks that are with us today, Ray and Deborah gentry and Allison here on the front row. They're dear friends of many of us for many years. Ray, in fact, was used by the Lord to introduce biblical counseling in our church. Deborah and Barbara Enter had been close friends, schoolmates at the Master's University, and that connected us to Ray and he came in, I think it was 2006, done some investigation, there are people who are here when you came and didn't come until 2006. So Ray was thinking it was a little farther back than that. We're both getting older, we're not quite as old as we think, I guess. Anyway, he came and did a seminar on what biblical counseling is which really biblical counseling is just discipleship, it's applying the gospel to the real problems of life. We're all called to do that, that's what one-anothering commands in the New Testament are about.

So Ray, we've known him since then and he's here with us this weekend to help us, you know, many of you filled out the survey we sent out a while back, we're trying to kind of do some inventory of our ministries and our effectiveness and things that we feel like the Lord wants us to do and wanted to hear from you and you did a great job of responding. We received 69 surveys, a lot of helpful input, and that was part of the project Ray is helping us with. So he's here this weekend to be a part of that so pray for him and pray for us as we continue, we have meetings this afternoon, deacons and elders with Ray, and so just wanted you to be aware of that be praying that the Lord would use this process to help his church be more faithful to the calling he has given us, and also I hope you get a chance to meet Ray and Deborah and Allison this morning.

Also you will remember many of you have been praying for April Witkowski, that's Ray and Deborah's daughter that is in Virginia, her husband Peter is a pastor there. She's been battling cancer so you've seen some prayer requests even recently, and she has upcoming scans this week so be praying for her that we'll get a good report on how the cancer is responding to this new treatment.

Well, turn with me, as I said, Ephesians 4, you've turned in your Bibles to Ephesians 3 and 4, kind of bridging the passage, bridging the chapters in this message and we are continuing our topical series on the church, the doctrine of the church. We've seen that the church is the temple, the true temple of God is the people of God now in this era of God's saving work through Jesus Christ; that the building is not a physical building, it's a spiritual building and we're all called to build that and part of the work of the church we've been talking about the last several weeks, the work of the church we said a number of weeks back is to pursue peace and to pursue holiness, that's how we build, we build the body by pursuing holiness and pursuing peace and we've seen that we need the power of God to do that, on Easter Sunday we saw that the power of God is the key to us doing what God has called us to do. We have to have the eyes of our hearts opened to understand and to see things that are invisible to us. It's invisible about how much mighty power is available to us in our fight against sin and our pursuit of holiness and oneness in the body of Christ. We can't see it but we need our eyes open. We saw that two weeks ago, and then last week we talked about the appropriation of the power of God to the issue of holiness. It's one thing to know about the power of God, it's another to appropriate it, to make use of it. And we talked about that last Sunday, appropriating the power of God in the pursuit of holiness, today the title of the message is "Appropriating the Power of God in the Pursuit of Peace." Appropriating the power of God in the pursuit of peace. You and I are called to pursue peace every day, to pursue the peace of God that we have in Christ with one another and we're going to see we're called to do that and to exercise great effort and energy in that endeavor. It's not something that's easy, it's something we have to fight for, just like we have to fight for holiness, we have to fight for peace, and we come to a passage which shows us the relationship of the power that we have available to us for peace and how we actually appropriate it.

This is another wonderful prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3. On Easter Sunday we looked at his prayer in Ephesians 1 when he prayed that the eyes of their hearts would be opened to understand the hope of his calling, the riches of his inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe, and we come to another time where Paul in the middle of his letter again breaks into prayer. He prays for those to whom he writes and this prayer is, again, a glorious picture of who we are in Christ and it's a prayer that ought to be echoed in our hearts every time we think about it.

We come to this prayer in verse 14 and then the prayer concludes in verse 21 at the end of the chapter, and then based on what he just said, he then applies this to our lives particularly in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 4. So let's read this passage together, appropriating the power of God in the pursuit of peace. Paul says in Ephesians 3:14,

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which

surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A glorious prayer that Paul offers to God for the Ephesians, again asking for the same thing, a lot of what he said in chapter 1, that they would be granted by God the ability in their inner man strengthened to know something. It's not something that comes without prayer. We have to seek God fervently that he would give us this understanding and if we have that, then we're going to have a supernatural oneness and be able to preserve that.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we do come echoing the heart and prayer of the apostle. We know, Lord, that we need You according to the riches of Your glory to enable us to know what is ours in Christ. We thank You that we have a God who does far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or can even imagine according to His power and yet we settle, Lord, so often to live in our own strength, to live so far below the calling with which You have called us. We come asking that You would open the eyes of our hearts, grant us deeper repentance, deeper faith, and make us one for the glory of Your precious Son. We pray in His name. Amen.

Appropriating the power of God in the pursuit of peace. We're called on a daily basis to be pursuing holiness and pursuing peace and this is not an atomistic thing, it is but it's not merely that. I mean, you're supposed to pursue personal holiness, yes, you've got to fight sin, we talked about that last week, Romans 6, how we apply the power of God to our pursuit of holiness but it's not merely that, you're to also on a daily basis pursue peace, to live in harmony particularly with your brothers and sisters in Christ in the church. You are to pursue peace outside by loving unbelievers and taking them to the Prince of Peace, proclaiming the gospel of peace to people who are at enmity with God. That's taking the gospel out but in the church we are called to be pursuing peace to live in light of this oneness, this supernatural oneness that the apostle is talking about. He talks about a four dimensional love that you can comprehend with all the saints. He's talking about the four dimensional love of God, the breadth and the width and the height and the length and to know the love of Christ, but you don't know that love apart from being together with all the saints. It's not an individualistic experience of this four dimensional love, it's a love that happens as the people of God interact with one another and labor to pursue peace together. This is where you experience the supernatural love of God and this is what we are called to, this is our inheritance and this is what we must be about.

So I want us to look at this and consider it under two main points. The first point is the power available for peace, and then secondly, the application of that power. So the first point the power available for peace. That's really what the focus of verses 14 to 21, this prayer, and it's very similar in structure to last week. You remember last week we said that to pursue holiness what you have to do is, how do you lay hold of the power of God in your life in the battle of sin, remember how do you appropriate the power of God, do you remember in a word what that word was? Faith. You appropriate the power of God by faith. You believe what God has said, you know the truth, remember there are three components of faith. Knowledge, you have to know the truth, the objective truth about Christ. You have to know it, that's the first part, secondly, you have to assent to it, you have to agree that it's true, not just know the facts but agree that they're true. Knowledge and assent and then, thirdly, trust. It's not enough just to know and agree, you must trust and act. It's like trust/act. You must, if you really believe you will walk by faith, you will take the step, you will cast yourself on Christ and salvation, in conversion that's what happens, you come to know the truth of the gospel, you come to know your need of Christ, that we are all sinners dead in our trespasses and sins, that we need to be saved and that Jesus has done everything necessary to save us. He lived a perfect life. He died a death in our place on the cross. He suffered the wrath of God for us all that we don't have suffer it and he gives us his righteousness in exchange, and he rose again from the dead after he died on the cross to prove that God had accepted his offering. You come to know the facts of that and you then assent to that, you agree that it's true, and then you trust in him by actually casting yourself upon him. It's not merely knowing, it is trusting in him. You don't trust in your works anymore. You don't trust in your religiosity anymore. You trust in Christ alone. That's saving faith and sanctifying faith is the same way. We are sanctified, we are made holy by faith. Remember we talked about that last week. You have to know what our union with Christ is, Romans 6. You have to assent and believe that we are truly united with Christ. His death is my death. His resurrection is my resurrection. And then you act on it by not letting sin reign, by presenting yourselves to God, presenting your members to God.

So that's last week's message. I won't go into any more review tonight, today. How do we apply these same themes in the pursuit of peace. You have to know all that Christ is for you to pursue peace and unity with one another. You have to believe it's true and then you have to trust and act on it. Christ is our peace. To come to him is to be at peace with God and at peace with others. We're going to see that sin separates, sin divides. I mean, think about this. When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, you can read the story, what happened? Do you remember what happened? Their eyes were opened. They knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together. Before they had been naked and unashamed. Now the awareness, sin has brought a division and separation of the man and the woman. They now feel vulnerable. They feel unsafe with each other. Sin did that in an instant and what happens when God comes in the garden, where are Adam and Eve? They're hiding from God. They who had loved every moment they could spend in his presence, they who delighted to know the pleasure of his company now are hiding from him. That's what sin does, it brings separation, it divides. Isaiah 59:2 says your transgressions have made a separation between you and God. Sin is not merely just doing something we don't like and doing something ugly and filthy, sin is a personal affront

against God; it leaves you with guilt that alienates you from God, makes you afraid. That's why they were hiding, they were afraid of God. That's what guilt does, it makes you afraid. When you're the offended party, bitterness is a problem and so what we're going to see is that to overcome and to pursue peace, we have to actually deal with sin in our lives in our relationships and we have to appropriate the power of God to give us the faith to do this. The power of Christ to make peace has to be at work in you and me as we do this or we will not be successful.

One of the things as I've thought about this message in studying this week, you know, we're going to see when we get to the application you have to deal with your own sin to be at peace. I'm getting ahead. Don't write these things down. They're going to come up later. I'm just kind of letting you know where we're going, the destination. But you also have to deal with your brother's sin and one of the things that has been striking to me and surprising, completely counterintuitive, is the Bible spends a lot more time – listen to this – the Bible spends a lot more time talking about how you are to deal with your brother's sin than how you are to deal with your own sin. It's completely counterintuitive. I say it and I'm like that doesn't sound right. It does, though, it's true. Now I'm going to show you that in a minute.

Now why is that true? I think it's true because of our great pride. You and I can't see our own sin. If we could, we wouldn't need someone else to tell us about it but sin is so evil and insidious that the sin I'm most blind to is my own. I need someone else to help me and you do too and you're going to see that the Bible talks a lot more about how you go after your brother when he sins than how you, you know, deal with your own sin. Now it does talk about how you deal with your own sin, of course it does, confess your sins it says over and over, but it's amazing it does talk more about how to go after your brother because you're going to see things about your brother that your brother doesn't see about himself and if he's left to himself he will continue to struggle. Now that's where we're going, so we are going to go back to the text to where we are in Ephesians 4 and then work our way toward that.

So the power available for peace, let's spend a few minutes here, verses 14 to 21. There is tremendous power available to you and I in Christ if you know Jesus. Paul's prayer for us is that we would be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man so that we could know how much unity is available to us, how much power or oneness is available to us. Verse 17, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love," verse 18, "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." The love of Christ in your heart if you are a believer, the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, the same word we looked at a couple of weeks ago when we looked at Ephesians 1. Do you remember when we talked about the power, the surpassing greatness of his power? Same word "surpassing." It was *hyperballo* is the verb. We get our English word *hyperbole* from that, meaning not for one but the idea of *hyperbole* in English is to exaggerate something for emphasis; to say something way exaggerated because you're trying to emphasize how great something is. *Huperballo* means to be over, above and beyond. So he's saying the knowledge of the love of Christ

is over, above and beyond your ability to understand but he's praying that we might be able to comprehend it, verse 18, that we might be able to comprehend it with all the saints.

This word means to lay hold of. It's not actually a word about knowledge, I mean it's talking about knowledge but it's coming at it from a different angle. Literally the word means to grasp down; to be able to lay hands on and firmly bring to yourself; it means to receive to oneself, to take possession of. He says, "I'm praying that your eyes will be opened so that you can take possession of, you can grab hold of that which surpasses knowledge but is available to you, and the love of Christ is this amazing reality that surpasses knowledge that's really is there for you to lay hold of in your relationships with one another."

To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Our lives are supposed to be supernatural displays of the love of God and the power of God and it's supposed to happen in relationship with one another. This is really exciting because, listen, the reality is as Christians you and I are sinners, you have remaining sin, if you're born again you have a new heart but you still have remaining sin and every day you sin and every day you offend one another. We were talking earlier, I was talking earlier with some folks about, well, one of the things somebody observed about the survey results was that there was an inverse relationship between the length of time you've been here and how satisfied you are with the leadership. Now think about this and I say this, we're happy to understand and I'll explain it in a minute, but if you have the Y axis is like, "Hey, we think things are going great," the higher you go, well, the X axis is how long you've been here. So the longer you've been here, the less happy you are with the leadership. Okay, well, there's a sense in which one of the ladies was saying, I was telling her about this and she said, "You know, isn't that just exactly what you'd expect, though, because the longer you get to know somebody, the more you get to know what they're really like." At first they seem fantastic and then you're like, "Well, he's kind of messed up over here, you know? She's not as impressive in that area as I thought she was." Well, that's the reality of what it is to live with Christians who are saved sinners redeemed by the blood of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, able to experience this kind of power but who still struggled day by day. And the reason you need this kind of power is because you're surrounded by people who though they may look good at the beginning, when you get closer to them you're going to see they're not all that and just remember that they're finding out the same thing about you. And this is where the love of Christ goes on display. When you get to know people and you see the unlovely ugly parts of them and you still love them because of Christ's love flowing through you, that's our inheritance, that's our calling, that's what Paul is praying will happen for the saints of Ephesus.

It's about knowing, though, you see, you have to know the truth and you have to assent to this, you have to believe that this really is God's will for you and me, that we actually are setting our minds to understand, "Hey, of course we're going to as we live longer together, here going to offend each other, we're going to find problems with each other and this is what God intends and, in fact, he really intends it so that without you I won't

know what's wrong with me and I won't be able to fix it without your help. I need you. You need me. We need one another. We all need each other." And as that happens, we know the truth, this is all God's will and Christ is available to us in his perfect love. You know that, you assent to that, "Yes, this is true, this is right. I'm not going to run away when conflict happens." So many people, they just leave when conflict happens. This is what happens in marriage. This is what happens in churches, you leave when conflict happens. I heard an older woman, her husband was a pastor for like 60 years, told me a joke after a funeral, it wasn't during the funeral, after the funeral we were talking and she said did you hear the story about the man who was lost on a desert island for a number of years? Shipwrecked and the only survivor of the ship, shipwrecked and he was on a desert island and so he was a pretty handy guy, though, and so what he did, he realized he was going to be there for a while so he built himself a house, you know, he tried to get really comfortable and have things to do. He then decided he was going to build himself kind of a town. He built himself a store and he built himself, you know, a municipal building, and he built himself a church. And he just kept building buildings and so it was years later, he's rescued and the people who come on the island I like, "Wow, what is all this?" You know, I wanted a store. They're like, "Really, you wanted a store, okay." But they look at all the buildings and they're like, "What is this?" And he says that's my church. "What is this?" This is the townhall. "What is this?" That's my old church. I got mad and left.

The reality is that we're going to offend one another. We are, if we get close enough we're going to and we're going to with regularity but God's gospel work through Christ is so that we can appropriate the power that's available to even though we offend one another more it doesn't create more distance, it creates deeper, more abiding, more supernaturally glorious love. It's opportunities to lay hold of that when you and I offend one another if we do it according to God's word and according to the power of the gospel.

So you have to know the truth, assent to the truth, and you have to act on the truth, and so really the application of this power is the second point, the power available to us in the pursuit of peace was the first point, now the application of that power available to us in the pursuit of peace. That's what he's doing in chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. He's saying, "This power is available. I'm praying that you'll see it. Now this is how you apply it." He says, "I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." The main verb in these verses, these three verses is the verb "walk worthy." It's an imperative. I'm sorry, "implore" is actually the main verb, "I urge you," but the infinity of "to walk worthy" is the main thrust of that "implore."

So he's saying walk worthy. This idea of worthy comes from a root word which meant weight, to give appropriate weight to something. He says your walk needs to have the same weightiness as your calling. Think about a balance. And what he just said in verses 14 to 21 which he's also been saying in the first three chapters, he's just been loading up all that Christ has done for us in the first three chapters, and then chapters 4 to 6 he's going to say now walk worthy of what you've received, but what he even just said in verses 14 to 21 about the love that surpasses knowledge, the power of Christ available to you, think about all that Christ has done, the peace that he's made between us and God.

We were enemies of God. We hated God and we were children of wrath. When he looked at us in his righteous holiness needed to punish us and he felt a desire to punish us. That's his wrath to make things right because we all are wicked sinners in and of ourselves. But you have been taken from being an enemy of God, you've been made alive and you've been brought into the family room of God, you've been brought into, you have access through the Spirit into the very Holy of Holies. God has done that and you have not only access alone atomistically, you have access with every other person who loves Jesus of every tribe and tongue and kindred, every one of us in the presence of God. Now in light of that let your walk have the same weightiness as your calling. Put that calling on one side of the balance and now on this side work at this until your walk matches that. That's sobering, isn't it? How quick we are to give up, be offended, lose heart. Our lives could be so light and there's so much weight in what Christ has done.

Now he tells us how to do this. You are to walk worthy and he gives us clear instruction on how to do it with two participles. I'm reading from the New American Standard and there's a participle in verse 2 and a participle in verse 3. The participle in verse 2 is "showing tolerance for one another in love." It's with all humility and gentleness and patience, those are three key attitudes that you must cultivate, then the participle "showing tolerance for one another in love." That's in verse 2 and then "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit" is verse 3, being diligent. So those are two participles.

First of all, showing tolerance. The other translations, the NIV, King James and ESV use the word bearing or forbearing with one another. I think that's a better word than showing tolerance. Tolerance is definitely a word that's kind of been perverted in the English sense in recent decades. Forbearing has the idea of holding up under a burden; sustaining; enduring. So he's saying put up with one another. He's saying walk in a manner worthy of the calling of which you've been called putting up with one another in love. You're going to have to put up with all of your brothers and sisters and you need to be doing that, actively doing that. The verb tense is present tense Greek which means continuous action. To build the temple, to pursue peace you have to have an attitude that you're going to go about putting up with the people around you. That's how you should come to church, you should arm yourself for action every time you come to church, every time you meet a brother or sister in Christ, every time you spend time together arm yourself with this, "I am going to bear with their sin as I hope they're going to bear with mine." And that mindset, that determination is fundamental and essential.

It's interesting Jesus says this, uses the same verb to bear up, bear with in Mark 9:19. He says, we did this, I did a message on this back in January, it's when Jesus heals the demon possessed young man whose father is interceding for him. The disciples couldn't heal him and Jesus when he hears about this he says to them, "You unbelieving and perverse generation. How long shall I put up with you? How long shall I be with you? How long do I have to put up with this?" Now listen, Jesus did put up with it and the reason he's telling us that is in his humanity he felt that way and he needed us to know what it was like for him to be here with us. For him it was continually bearing with our sin. I mean, the people there if it had been us it would have been exactly the same. He had to deal with the disciples' unbelief, the people's unbelief, the disciples' sinfulness, the people's

sinfulness. He had to bear with it and to save as he had to put up with it for more than 30 years and, "You're to love one another as I have loved you." Put up with one another. Don't run away. Put up with the ugliness, the nastiness that comes out of people's lives and hearts. Now it doesn't mean leave it that way. No, God wants us to address it but you first of all have to be willing to put up with it.

Secondly, being diligent. That's the second participle there, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The NIV says make every effort. The ESV says eager. The King James says endeavoring. I think it should have an ing on there. It's a participle again and participles support the main verb. They're not the main verb but they support the main verb. The main verb is walk in a manner worthy, I implore you to walk worthy bearing with one another and being diligent. This word being diligent means to hurry, to hasten. In fact, we actually transliterate the word, the etymology of the word comes into English in the word speed, spudo is the Greek word. It means to hurry, to make haste, to give diligence.

So he's saying, "Listen, bearing with one another and hurrying to preserve." It's kind of counterintuitive, how do you hurry to preserve? The word here some of the translation say keep, maintain. The idea for the Greek word for preserve or keep is guard. Hurry to guard. It means to attend carefully to something, to watch intently over something. The idea is to protect something that is precious. So he's saying hurry, being diligent, hurrying to guard the unity of the Spirit, the oneness of the Spirit that God has given you in Christ. It is precious. It is something that you have to guard and the reason you guard something is because something may be lost, it may be damaged, it may be stolen, and the unity of the Spirit is under attack. Satan wants to steal it. The world wants to damage it and sin wants to destroy it but you've got to be diligent to guard it. It's not something you create, you can't create unity, you can't make yourself feel the love of Christ for your brother or sister, but if you are in Christ it's available to you and will flow through you if you just believe. Christ's love will come through you. You may not feel it for a while but at some point even your feelings will follow if you're faithful.

So the idea is to hurry up to guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, in the binding power of the peace we have in Christ. When you've got peace with God, you were alienated from God, think about sin, you were alienated from God, you were running from God even if you were a religious person, you were still running from the true and living God. You were using your religion to keep God away from you so that you could come to him on your own terms, and when he opened your eyes to the gospel, then you stopped being at enmity with God because he showed you your sinfulness and he granted you repentance and faith and you came to him, and now you came to peace with God. He becomes your Father. He sends his Spirit into our hearts, we who used to be enemies and we cry out, "Abba, Father, Daddy." You are now at peace with God and you're also at peace with every other person who belongs to him because they're your brothers and sisters, your true and eternal brothers and sisters. They have the same Daddy that you have forever. They love the same Master and Lord Jesus and so everything else, all the other things that would separate us, this one common reality defines and it creates a peace and a oneness that is precious but still must be protected. The experience of it in

our lives, Satan is trying to destroy it, sin is trying to destroy it. Damage it, destroy it, steal it, that's what they're after and you and I are to be on guard for this, expect that there are enemies coming around to try to damage this oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace and sin is one of the biggest ways it happens because sin always brings a breach. Sin separates. It alienates. Sin made Adam and Eve hide from God and sin makes you and me hide from each other.

Guilt makes you want to hide. How many times have you had this experience, really close close friend even sometimes in your family, your spouse, your children, parents, suddenly there is some kind of wall between us. We just can't get through anymore. There is a distance. I don't know what it is. I don't know how it happened. I just can't get to them anymore, the feeling, and it's such a powerful reality, that separation. It is, it's not easy, you don't just pretend that everything's okay. The gospel is not a call to some kind of Pollyanna unity, to pretend that we're one. No, we don't pretend anything. We base our unity on the facts of the gospel, the facts of what Christ has done, and we obey him by obeying his specific precepts and commands and instructions depending on the power of the Spirit, trusting in the power of his word, and he does the work but it is not pretend. Now in a sense you deal with sin. This is what this means. How do you apply hurrying to preserve the unity of the Spirit? Deal with sin.

Turn to Matthew and I'm going to show you how the emphasis is more on dealing with your brother's sin than your own sin. Here we are going to find one that's dealing with your own sin. Matthew 5:21 to 24. "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Jesus is basically saying that to call someone a fool in anger and a sense of disdain and looking down, and biblically you can call someone a fool in the sense of love, "You are being what the Bible says is a fool," you can say that out of a desire to help them repent, but if you're saying it with disdain like he's talking about here, you know, "You good-for-nothing. You're valueless. You're worthless." What you're saying is you're committing murder.

Verse 23, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." You're presenting an offering to God, you want to be right with God and he's saying, "Listen, you can't be right with Me unless you're right with your brother. You've got to leave your offering and go and be right with your brother." And this is so much weightier than we imagine because for this to be carried out as Jesus is talking about, there was one place you could make an offering and that was Jerusalem in the temple, so you'd go all the way from wherever you lived, how many ever days away you journeyed bringing your animal with you, you go all the way to Jerusalem and you're ready to make your offering and God doesn't say, "Hey, it's okay, just commit to go make it right." No he says, "Stop what you're doing. Go back home," several days again, "go find your brother, make it right

with him, then come back several days again to make your offering." That's how important peace is on the horizontal to God.

So you have to deal with your sin. We have to deal with our son. We have to be willing to confess our sin. Now look at chapter 7, turn over to Matthew 7. We're going to look at a passage that is often, this is one of the most misunderstood and twisted passages in the whole Bible. This passage is used to teach the fact that you should not correct someone else's sin. I want you to see it's not what this passage teaches. This passage doesn't stop you from correcting, it tells you how to correct someone rightly. It teaches that you must correct but you must do it in humility.

Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." So the idea is don't judge someone down, don't just make a railing judgment. You know, "You are just hopeless. You are, you know, so wicked." No, you don't look down on that way but what does he say? "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." He's saying, listen, the problem when we try to confront one another over sin is the biggest problem in the room when I go to confront someone else is my own sin, not theirs. That's the log and the picture is really funny, I mean, hey, you've got a tiny little speck in your eye, you think about it, I love the it's your eye. Who are you going to let mess with your eye? I mean, some of you, I have trouble with that. I couldn't wear contacts because I couldn't even let me mess with my eyes. So he says get the log out of your own eye before you get the speck out of someone else's. You have a log in your own how can you see to get a speck out of somebody else's? But he doesn't say get the log out and don't get the speck out. He says get the log out so that you can see clearly to get the speck out. Do you see that? You haven't obeyed it unless you go ahead. The Lord lets you see some speck in a brother's or sister's life, you're to go get that speck out but you're to do it humbly like Jesus, you're to be like your Savior when you do it.

Well, Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." This is the process of church discipline and the only reason it makes sense is because of how deadly sin is. We're not referees that go around just criticizing other people. We are blood-bought sheep who are called to shepherd other sheep.

Right before that verse 15 he said, if you look back at Matthew 18:12, "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that

one of these little ones perish. If your brother sins, go." Do you see that? The Father doesn't want any of his sheep to perish so if your brother sins, go, you must go. He's in danger. He's a sheep that is wandering. A sheep apart from the flock away from the shepherd is dead meat.

And the weight falls on that, even in Matthew, it's true in the other gospels as well. Look at Luke 17. This resonates with our passage this morning. Luke 17:3, look at that first imperative, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." Be on your guard, if your brother sins, rebuke him, that's what it says, and if he repents forgive him. Look at verse 4, "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." Every time. Be on your guard and it's interesting in the context there right before that he's talking about in verses 1 and 2, the danger of stumblingblocks that would hinder one of these little ones, his precious children he's talking about, spiritual children, Christians, young potentially endangered saints, children. Protect them. Be on your guard. How do you protect them? If your brother sins rebuke him. That's how you protect him.

It's interesting in Leviticus 19:18, one of the most familiar verses because it's quoted by Jesus in the gospels, in Matthew 22 when he's asked what's the greatest commandment, do you remember Jesus is asked by someone what is the greatest commandment? And he says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind," and the second greatest commandment and he gives them a bonus and he says, "I'll tell you what the second greatest commandment is love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang the law and the prophets." That's from Leviticus 19:18. Love your neighbor as yourself. Do you know what 19:17 says? Do not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely reprove him. Then it says then forgive him and then it says love your neighbor as yourself.

Love means reprovng and the problem is we just do it all wrong. We reprove people out of wrong hearts. We reprove people because we want to put them down so we feel better about ourselves. We reprove them because we're not walking in the love of Christ. But if we were thinking biblically, we would reprove one another in humility and love because we care so deeply for our brothers and sisters. And the emphasis, I invite you to keep looking at that in the Scriptures, the emphasis is, I really believe is on looking out for those around you and I believe the only thing I can make sense of it is because you can't know yourself. I've got to look out for you and you've got to look out for me, that's it, because I can't look out for you because I'm too proud, and you can't look out for you because you're too proud and you can't see what's wrong with you.

I shared that image before that somebody said, you know, if you had cream cheese on your mustache, this guy is out eating breakfast one morning and he sees this guy who's dressed in a three-piece suit, he's got his computer out on the table and he's working, he's dressed so nicely so I think this guy may be having some big meeting coming up and he's working through stuff and, you know, he's checking if his tie looks great and everything looks great, no hair out of place, immaculately groomed mustache and beard but he has some cream cheese right there. And he's about to get up to leave the restaurant to go to

this meeting, who knows what the meeting is, is it to get a new job, is it to make some kind of big sale, and the man wonders to himself, he's got cream cheese on his mustache, should I tell him? And what's the answer to that? Yes. Rescue the man. It doesn't matter how good his presentation is. I mean, think about it, he goes through the whole presentation, this incredibly slick presentation, it's compelling, it's forceful, but he had cream cheese on his mustache the whole time, no sale. I can't think about what he's saying because he's got cream cheese on his face. Hopefully somebody would have told him there but that takes you down a notch, doesn't it, like something in your teeth. Anybody could have it but let's help one another out with that. Love me enough to tell me that. I'll love you enough to tell you that.

This is really helpful because it helps us understand something that sometimes is misunderstood, something called, I heard a podcast this week that was excellent on the ACBC website. They send out podcasts from time to time. ACBC is the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. You can go on ACBC, I don't know if it's .org or .com or whatever, and you can find some really good materials to help you understand how to deal with life. Stuart Scott was teaching on unconditional forgiveness versus transactional forgiveness and kind of a false teaching in the evangelical world that's really more of the spirit of this age, listen to this, it's more the spirit of this age and the pride of humanity that has incorporated into the church that says what we all need to do is be unconditionally forgiving. Now listen to what they mean by that. There is a sense in which forgiveness is unconditional. You don't do anything to earn it because I give it to you in the same way God gave me forgiveness because of Christ, not because of me, but strictly speaking they are in error. They mean that if somebody sins against you, the truly wonderful spiritual thing is to ignore it and move on and they take Scripture out of context. There are some verses that say things like that, it's the glory of a man to overlook an offense, but that's not the only thing the Bible says about it. It also says Luke 17:7, be on your guard, if your brother sins, go to him, show him his fault. Matthew 18:15.

So unconditional forgiveness is, well, you forgive them in your own heart and don't deal with it, just move on. The problem is they don't understand how bad sin is and what it does in the heart. Unrepentant sin in the heart of a believer leaves guilt. Guilt produces alienation from God and from the offended party. It separates. On the other side, if you've been sinned against and you haven't forgiven, you do need to forgive in your heart but you don't need to merely forgive in your heart. Forgive in your heart and go to restore relationship because you care about this person and you don't want to lose the oneness. To pretend that it's okay and that you're being so big that you just are going to overlook it is to deny the gospel, and to deny the reality what the Bible says about how awful sin is. Sin, listen, unresolved sin and guilt doesn't stay, it's not stagnant, it is like cancer, it's a malignancy that grows. Guilt turns into aversion. If they don't know that they sinned against you, they don't know they've sinned against God too, in some area of their heart there is this pocket of division between you and God that is growing in their life. Do you not love them enough to go help them find that cancer? We must love one another like that.

So transactional forgiveness, when you have a forgiving heart because you've gone to the Lord, you've been offended, you go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I can't hold this against this person because look what You've done for me." Matthew 18:21 to 35, "You've forgiven me billions of dollars of debt and I've got over here a \$10,000 debt, how can I hold that against that brother? I'm going to forgive them as You forgave me." That's what Ephesians 4:32 says, the same chapter we're reading, later on it says forgive one another as Christ also has forgiven you. But how did Jesus forgive you? He did not unconditionally forgive you. He did not just determine he wasn't going to think about it, he was going to move on. How did he forgive you? He came to you and he confronted you with your sin. He showed you how awful it was and then he showed you the graciousness of his provision, the superabundance of his love, and then he restored you, you repented, you confessed, you turned and in faith you were brought to peace and united with him. If God had just merely overlooked it, we would still be alienated and he would be alienated from us.

So forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you. You must deal with sin but in love because, listen, the reason you're going is not to, "I'm going to tell you how mad you made me, you need to understand how much you hurt me." That's all sin. That's wicked. You're not ready to go. You've got a log in your own eye and you're going to go with that log and try to get a speck out. Get that log out. "Lord, help me, I know I don't need to go like that. Whatever they've done to me compared to what I've done to You, Lord, humble me." And then you go because you want to be restored, you want them to be restored to God and you want to be restored to them. You want nothing to hinder the relationship because what happens is when there is unresolved sin, on the one side there's the potential of bitterness, unforgiveness always leads to bitterness. On the other side, there is guilt and both these realities, this is why the invisible wall develops, guilt and bitterness repel one another just like the wrong ends of a magnet, they push one another away and you can't force them together. But Christ has made provision for that which is dividing you. He himself is our peace. You go to them and you say, "Look, you did this, brother." Or you say, it's always good to start off saying, "It appears to me that you did this," because my perception is not 100% accurate and yours isn't either. "When you said this, this is how I took it. Is that what you meant? Do you see how unkind that was?" Yeah, I see how unkind it was. Please forgive me. And the forgiveness of God flows in and there is peace again, restored peace. When you ignore it and you just on your side, it makes you feel better, it may make you even appeal to your pride, "Look how big a person I am that I'm not dealing with that," but in reality you ought to be humble because you are sinning against God and your brother. You're not loving them.

Love confronts. This is why when you read Proverbs what do you hear over and over again? The wise man loves reproof. The fool scorns correction. A wise man knows he can't see everything he needs to see, he's got blind spots. I need you to help me. You need me to help you. And when that happens and we do it like Christ, I want you to turn to John 13 and I'm going to show you this real quickly. John 13 and I want you to read this and meditate on this, this week. Amazing. Verse 1, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God," what a lead in to what's about to happen. This man who had come from God is going back to God. All things are in his hands. Satan has entered into Judas who was sitting at the table, I mean, reclining at the table. Jesus knowing all of that, "got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, 'Lord, do You wash my feet?'" Peter said. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.' Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.' Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.'" I love Peter's enthusiasm. "Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, 'Not all of you are clean.' So when He had washed their feet, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.'" I want to say this to you, it's not about foot washing. That's not the way you apply this passage.

When he says to all of you who are clean and you don't need a bath, all of you have been bathed except one, Judas has not been bathed, all of you are clean, all of you have been saved but you still need your feet washed. This is a beautiful picture of him bearing with them. You know, to wash feet, that task done by the lowliest servant in the household because the foot washing was the most nasty thing that you could do because people in a society where they didn't have, you know, underground sanitation, you walked through filth, sometimes excrement, it got on your sandals occasionally and dust and dirt and sweat covered your feet, some of us have nasty feet without all of that extra benefit, right? And so you get the nasty feet and now you lay down because they didn't have chairs, you laid at the table and your feet are over here by this guy who's about to eat, so you're going to pick food up and his feet are right here. Who wants to eat like that? But Jesus bears and that's what it's like to live with us. Who wants to be with us? Who wants to be with this group of people? Why would we want, why would you want to be with me? I've got nasty feet on a good day. Bear with us, bear with one another being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit, washing feet is confronting sin and forgiving it. It's not just bearing with it, he just didn't sit there with their nasty feet, he dealt with their nasty feet. Do you see that? He washed their nasty feet, that is, he confronted their sin that had happened during the day. You know, you get bathed but you go out and you walk through the world and you have sin that comes. You've been washed, you've been sanctified but every day your feet get dirty and you need someone else to wash your feet. Jesus said, "As I have loved you, now love one another."

That's what we're called to do and when the world sees people, imperfect as we are, when the world sees us living with those imperfections and loving past those imperfections and

truly washing away by grace those imperfections, the world sits back and says, Jesus says in John 13:34, "A new command I give you," this is right after he washed their feet, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are My disciples by your love for one another." That's how they see Jesus and that's our opportunity every day to bear with one another and to wash one another's feet is the opportunity to see the power of God. Now listen, to do that you've got to know that the power of Christ is available. It is. It will flow through you and me as we do that. We need to get to work, prepare our minds for action and draw on the power of Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of the gospel, that You are a God did not leave us in our sins but You did everything necessary to save us by sending Your precious Son, not sparing Him but offering Him up for us all. We thank You, Lord, that You've now made us one with You and one with each other, and we ask You to open the eyes of our hearts to see the reality of what You've done in Christ and see how it applies and give us faith not only to know these things, to assent to these things, but to act on these things. Give us courage to know how to bring up that difficult conversation, to begin that difficult conversation. Give us humility as we do it. Give us love. Help us be ready, help us, Lord, more than anything, help us be ready to be corrected, eager to be corrected. When someone comes, let us welcome that. We know we need grace for that, Lord, because we are prideful sinners, our way is right in our own eyes. Make us like Jesus. Make us people who love one another and help one another and love to be helped, and do this all for the glory of Your marvelous, unspeakable, delightful Son. We pray in His name. Amen.