



Christian Love-Part 2
Loving God's Flawed People
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well I know that many of you are way too healthy to eat at Five Guys Burgers and Fries, but for the rest of us, man, it sure is good, isn't it?

Man, it is really good. Those burgers are nearing perfection and if you've been there of course you know they try to tide you over, before you get your perfect burger, with peanuts.

Right? They got the big boxes of peanuts and the little things you put them in. You take those peanuts to your table, and what I've realized about the Five Guys Burgers and Fries peanuts is they're not Planters-worthy.

Mr. Peanut would not approve of the peanuts they try to serve you at the Five Guys because, though sometimes I sort through to find what looks like a very promising peanut, you know, it's got a good shape, looks like there's something good inside, I'll crack that thing open and find this measly little, shrunken, shriveled, horrible excuse for a peanut sitting inside.

And I keep cracking through them. I want to find those nice, you know, good peanuts and I just don't seem to find them. And that burger's always taken a lot longer than I want it to take anyway. Right? And as I was thinking about how long it's taken to get my burger while I'm eating these imperfect peanuts I thought to myself this is a kingdom parable idea.

I sat there thinking this is going to preach right here, this is a perfect kingdom parable. Because I know that what's coming for us as Christians and Jesus was crystal clear about it, it is going to be flawless, a perfect place that he is going to take all the sin, all the imperfection out, he's going to strip the reality from all those things that are corrupted and wrong and he's going to bring us into a kingdom that's perfect. Jesus promised it, he guaranteed it by his life, he proved it by his resurrection, he's even planted in my own conscience and heart, just like he has in yours, that the perfect is coming. And yet between now and the perfect we're stuck with a lot of peanuts that are less than perfect. And sometimes we reach out for these experiences in this imperfect world and sometimes they have a promising shape. We think this is it, I mean, this is going to be good and we get through a few layers of that, whatever it is, and often times the most hopeful situations we have are in relationships, our families, our friends, our church, our small groups and you crack those open and you find out they're a whole lot less than you anticipated. Expectation is often times crushed. You get disappointed that things aren't better than they are.

And that's where we live between now and the coming kingdom. And Jesus would be very, very careful to instruct us as to how we're to go about living with all these imperfect and flawed people between now and the kingdom. It's going to be perfect but for now, how do we deal with these people and I guess the repeated refrain of the New Testament is you need to learn to love your flawed brothers and sisters in Christ. You need to learn in an imperfect world with imperfect people to have a very loving disposition toward them, which is not a feeling, there may be some feelings involved, but this is all about this volitional decision for us to have a perspective toward them that's going to include as a big facet of that love something the Bible calls forgiveness. And if we don't have forgiveness and we don't get good at forgiveness we're never going to be able to manage between now and the coming kingdom when all of our hopes, desires will be satisfied in a perfect place with perfect relationships. So for now I better be good at forgiving, which is what our passage



this morning is all about and if you have your Bibles, I need you to turn there, Luke Chapter 17. We're only going to look at two verses, verses 3 and 4, remembering as you turn there where we were last time we were together, looking at verses 1 and 2 that reminded us of what a big deal sin is and how we ought to be vigilant about the fact that not only that we don't sin but that we don't become the cause of sin in anybody else's life.

And that's why it makes real good sense that verse 3 begins with this phrase right here, "Pay attention to yourselves." Pay attention to yourselves. So you need to watch out, need to be vigilant and need to be careful how you live. And then he says this, "If your brother sins, rebuke him." That's a big heavy Bible word, we'll get into that in a minute. And then it says, "if he repents, forgive him." So your brother, if he sins, you rebuke him, if he repents, you forgive him. So far so good. Verse 4. "And if he sins against you seven times in the day" comma. Find some new friends. No. I mean that just seems unreasonable right there, doesn't it? Nope. If he "turns to you and says seven times, 'I repent,'" then it might be a good idea to forgive him. Underline it might be a good idea. Do you see that there?

What's the word? Must. "You must forgive him."

Now you don't have to be very long in the Christian life to read the passages in the Bible that speak of forgiveness and to see with what weight and emphasis these passages come. So much has hung on the fact that you must forgive. And in a passage like this it reminds us that sometimes you may have someone who sins against you many times. In this passage it seems almost comical. Seven times in a single day one person comes and sins against you. You'd better forgive. You must forgive, it's non-optional. So we better get good at this. Now, I admit an understanding of how to exegete this passage, I can see there in verse 3, I could talk to you about the command to pay attention to yourselves, I could tie this to verses 1 and 2, I could tell you, you know, let's talk about when your brother sins, rebuke him and I could just speak about what it means to do that and how to do that. And that's great. But what I want to do, while I look at those realities and commands, is I'm going to see them through the lens of where we're going. In verse 4 the real challenge of this text, the meat of this text, the core of this text, the most difficult part of this particular passage is having a kind of forgiveness that is so big, it's so tenacious, it's so strong that even if someone sins against me seven times in one day I'm going to forgive them.

So if that's the real challenge of this text, though I could preach differently and spend all of our time just talking about paying attention, vigilant, having a very careful, circumspect life and I could talk about, let's go about all the things that deal with identifying sinner, rebuking sin. We'll look at those concepts. But I want to see them through the lens of this: we need to learn to really be strong and proficient at forgiving. So let us take those two statements and understand that we could preach about them differently but today let's look at those through the lens of that and say, how can those things help us be good at forgiving when it's really hard to forgive. So number one, let's just start with this first phrase where it says pay attention to yourselves. Let's just ask the question why we could talk about you being circumspect and careful in making sure you don't cause someone to sin, making sure you don't sin yourself.

And, you know, live a life that's carefully trying to exemplify the kinds of things that Christ demonstrated for us and live holy lives and all that. How does that statement help us be more forgiving toward those around us who are hard to forgive? Well, I think, hey, pay attention to yourself, that's common.



You've been a Christian very long at all I hope you've heard sermons, you open your Bible in the morning, you read passages that make you feel like I need to be godly. God is pro-righteousness, he want you to live a righteous life. All week long I hope at some point you felt the burden to pay careful attention to the decisions you make, the words that you say and so that you're careful to try and live a righteous and godly life. I just want to stop this morning while we head to the command to be very good at forgiving others, ask the question how are you doing at the thing you know you're supposed to carefully give yourself to do? And that is to be godly. How godly are you? How well are you doing at this very high standard? The high standard is for my life to be conformed to the image of Christ. I am to be like Christ. So here's the standard and if I'm a Christian I'm praying, I'm reading my Bible, I'm listening to sermons. I should keep seeing that standard way up here and I just want to know how was my week? How well did I do? And I just want to see if there's a gap, is there not, between what I aspire to be and how carefully I'm trying to live the Christian life and then how I actually live the Christian life. Jesus said you ought to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I can't be perfect in terms of a linear résumé but I can certainly be perfect in terms of what I do on Tuesday, what I do on Thursday, how I deal with that situation on Friday. So if this is the standard, you ought to aim for doing it just right. That's the Greek word, teleios, perfect, I do it just right. I need to look at how I live my life this week and it wasn't just right in a lot of areas.

So there's a gap between those two.

So as I prepare myself to get good at forgiving others I want to start with that observation right there. And I want to say it is helpful sometimes to see the gap between what I aspire to do, what I am careful to try to do and where I actually end up in my life and I want to say that can be helpful in helping me to become a much better forgiver.

So I'll put it this way. Number one if you're taking notes and I wish that you would, jot this down. You need to sadly recall your failures. You need to sadly recall your failures.

Now, I'm not saying that you become obsessed with them. I'm not saying every morning you wake up, look in the mirror and go there's a loser right there. Right? Big failure. I'm not saying this becomes an obsession for you and there may be a few of you that are prone to that and I say stop it but that's a different message. But for most of us that don't spend as much time seeing our failures the way that we ought to, which may help us become good at forgiving, I need to have you stop and say, I need to think of that and how I fail. And even the word that I'm using, failure, because those are the kinds of words we use when we look at ourselves. "Yeah, I failed at that, I stumble at that, I didn't quite live up to it. I made a mistake, a little boo-boo. I did a little something wrong." But it's funny how when we look at other people who sin against us and wrong us, it's funny how all those "boo-boos" and "did a wrong thing" and "stumbled," those words go away and we start to replace it with these really heavy theological words like "sin," "transgression," "Phil committed iniquity against me." I mean we come up with words that just like look at the grievous nature of this transgression and his heart is so wicked and dark. It's easy for us to impugn other people with grave words of sin and yet for us it's just... I just want to know how we deal with the gap of what we aspire to be and what we actually are. It's funny how kind and merciful we seem to be in living with that gap and yet when our friend, we want them to be here and our coworker, we want them to be here, our family member... then they end up here. It's amazing how violently we respond to that gap. I talk about this often but there is a double standard when it comes to your failures and your friends or your coworkers or your small group members and the way they fail. When they fail, it's a



big, big deal and there seems to be very little excuse for that. Traffic is a great way to test this theory, right? Have you ever been at a stop light where the light turns green and the car in front of you does not move? I have given these stats before when it comes to how long people will wait before they honk the horn. I guarantee you the national average is a lot bigger than here in Southern California.

You get about a second, maybe a half a second, to get the gas pedal going and when it doesn't happen and you look up there and if their back window is not tinted and you can see their head and you can watch them, you clearly see they're texting up there. And when you find someone in front of you at a traffic light who doesn't respond right away because they're busy texting, I just wonder how you feel about them at that particular point. All the other lanes go and you're waiting there and then you lay on your horn and then finally they say, "Oh, sorry!" and off they go.

How do you feel about that?

Because I know you'd never text and drive. You've never... "Well, I mean, come on, maybe, but it's an important text and I, you know, I had to and I just didn't realize and I..."

See, I think we can almost, as it says in Romans 2, find any area of sin that we get angry about in someone else's life, where we're so intolerant of it in someone else's life, and you could, if you look carefully in your own life, you can see yourself doing the same things. If not the kind of things then the same exact things. I just think would be helpful for us to become good forgivers to at least look at ourselves in the mirror and say we've done the same thing.

Have you ever been on a baseball team? Most of the guys, most people play softball. I just wonder the times you've been out on that softball field or that baseball field, I mean did you ever make any errors at all? I'll bet you did.

Have you ever been to a game where you've watched someone commit an error on the field and how you felt about that? And it sure would be interesting if every time someone made an error, on the big screen there they played all your errors before you get a chance to respond to that error on the field.

Let's just say the error was a egregious, right? That the shortstop pulls out his phone and starts texting while the ball goes right through his legs. You'd go nuts, right?

This guy needs to get tossed off the team, he needs to be put on the stretching rack, you know, under the stadium, this guy, he needs to be tortured for this terrible, an egregious error. And all I'm saying is if you could just for a second look at all the times you are not who you are supposed to be and the things that you did. At least it would help us in this regard to say, you know, I've been kind of the same way in my life.

Now, I can say that to us by taking that one phrase "pay attention to yourself" and I can say, listen, when you hold the standard that you have to your own life to other people and they don't live up to that and you start to get really angry and you want to hang on to bitterness and frustration, you want to, you know, somehow impugn them because of their sin, I just want you to say, I haven't paid perfectly well attention to myself either. But you can take that and you can run and in our culture you can make that the thing that gives you an excuse to let every error go and to where you're looking at the professionals on the field like they're little leaguers, T-ball players and all of a sudden



now someone makes a mistake and you say, "it's all right Johnny, we all make mistakes. It's OK." And you can start making excuses to where now the standard doesn't matter at all. So I do think it's helpful that the next phrase in verse number 3 is "If your brother sins, rebuke him."

Now here's the balance. I just want you to find the tension in this particular point. You need to recall your own failures, which may help you deal with the failures of others in a little bit of a different way, a tempered way. But don't let it become something where now all of a sudden the errors don't matter. You need to care about the errors. Why is that? Jot this reference down, Romans Chapter 2 verse 24. Romans Chapter 2 verse 24. Here's why. Because if someone pulls out their phone and starts texting while the other team hits a ground ball through the legs of the shortstop because he's texting on the field, you know what's going to happen now? All the people that hate our team are going to stand up in the stands and jeer and mock and make fun of our shortstop. And here's the thing about our Christian lives, we are the minority. As a matter of fact, the cheering section we're in and this part of the stadium is very small.

We're surrounded by people rooting for the other team. And anytime they see a Christian mess up what do they do?

You know what they do. They mock us and malign us. And in Romans Chapter 2, the passage I had you jot down, here is Paul saying, you know what, there are a lot of hypocrites out there having high standards for everyone else, and then they do the same things, and you know, here's the problem. That causes, and he quotes this text from the Old Testament, he says the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. The crowd stands up and jeers against the players on our team. Now that's really not a big deal I suppose if it were just about us but you know who the coach is in the dugout coaching our team. When they make fun of us, they make fun of the coach, when they make fun of the coach, they make fun of the owner in the sky box. All of them look bad. And God the Father sends his son to coach us through life. He sends his Spirit out onto the field to convict us to do right. And the Triune God is actively involved in having you live a righteous life.

And when you don't live it or your friend doesn't live it, it gives the enemies a great cause for blaspheming us and it makes Christ look bad, it makes God look bad and our reputation should matter, not because it's our reputation, but because it's God's reputation. And therefore you need to care when someone sins whether it's against you or someone else in your church or small group and you ought to say I need to rebuke him. But all this does in remembering your past failures that you haven't lived up to your standard when you watch someone not live up to Christ's standards, all I'm saying is how you rebuke them now is going to be different. If you could, as you walk out on the field to talk to the shortstop, say I know that shortstop, I'm going to talk to him, just have some of those images on the big screen out in centerfield just remind you of the ways you've messed up.

Just head out there with a view for the honor of the coach and the honor of the owner and how they should have responded to the base coach, if I'm really going to stretch this analogy to the Spirit, telling them what to do, and you say, you know what, you just can't do that anymore. You have to do the right thing.

Rebuke seems like such a heavy biblical word but it's a really simple word in the Greek New Testament it's the word that we came across it in Luke Chapter 8 verse 24 when Jesus stood up in the boat and there was a storm on the Sea of Galilee and the Bible says, he "rebuked the winds in the raging waves." What was that about? It wasn't some emotional tirade. We're not talking about you going out on the field and reading this guy the riot act for sinning against you or someone you



know. It's simply saying, stop it.

Stop it. When Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves he says, stop. That's what he says. And so I need to say to those who sin against me and sin against others, because the reputation and honor of the Triune God is at stake, I need to say you need to stop that. Now a lot of Christians are saying, "hey, everyone makes mistakes, we're just all sinners and, you know, grace and love and we're going to fail and it's not a big deal." It is a big deal to God. But having the balance as to how I respond to people sinning against me in my own mind, it starts with knowing that I can't ignore sin, but I've got to approach it with a very humble, and here's a good word, gentle disposition. I get that from Galatians Chapter 6 verse 1. If you're taking notes, Galatians 6:1. It would be a good one to read before you go to your small groups this week. We need to talk about how to deal with sin in other people's lives with a spirit of gentleness. Here's how it's put, you know the passage. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression." There they are texting and the ball went right through their legs. Then "you who are spiritual," you knew this was the wrong thing to do and you know how to fix it, "you should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

Why? Because I'm always keeping watch on myself lest I too be tempted. I remember that I am weak before I go and talk to the guy that just struck out in the Christian life.

Tell him to keep his elbow up, keep your eye on the ball, swing through it, twist your hips, all these things I try to tell him to do so he can get on base next time, I need to remember, you know, next time I'm going to be in the batter's box in a little bit here. I'm going to be facing temptation. I better be very gentle and careful. You see where Christians in our modern era, we can't find that balance? We're either one way or the other. We're either casting aspersions and calling people, you know, these terrible names and having this very bitter attitude toward people whose sin, either that or we're like this, "Oh, you know, I struck out. You know that everyone does. It's OK, Johnny."

It's not OK.

We need to respond with a gentle rebuke and the word rebuke may bring up the wrong images. We need to gently tell people to stop doing the wrong things. That's what rebuke means, stop. Stop doing the wrong things. And do that as you recognize your own weakness. Because that's how God sees you. Almost comical words and they're true, from Psalm 103:14. Speaking of God's view of us, "he remembers that we are just dirt." I mean that's the Hebrew word, "dirt". Or "dust" as it is translated in the ESV. He knows we're just dirt. He knows how weak and frail we are. But we're supposed to go out there as weak and frail players and do our best to encourage one another to do what is right. Just remember our weakness, sadly recall your failures. That can help you be a good forgiver because when someone sins and you do tell them to stop. And they say, "Yes I'll put my phone away. I'll pay much more attention, I'll keep my elbow up, I'll swing through it, I'll keep my eye on the ball, I'm going to do better next time," then the Bible says, the bottom of verse 3, then you ought to forgive him.

And whenever I speak about forgiveness up here, it's hard for me not to, I mean a study in these languages and I realize that the language that translates from the Greek word, *aphiemi*, into English, "repent," that word is a bit of an accounting term of a word that's used in finance and I often talk about that, that forgiveness is a great word, *aphiemi*, because it has this sense of a debt that is forgiven. And so I like to start with that in our thinking whenever we talk about forgiveness because we are very concerned about people that owe us money and so forgiveness is that sense of forgiving the debt. So let's put it down that way when it comes to forgiveness and this is something that's



going to get us to exercise our muscle of forgiveness and we'll start with this statement. Number two, we need to wholeheartedly, from the heart as the Bible says, release the debt. Release the debt. If someone sins against you, if someone sins against your friend, if someone sins against God you go to them with the spirit of gentleness and you say you need to stop doing that. And if they say, you know what, I repent, which is again another Bible word. Maybe I should simplify it for you here. Here's what we're looking for, two phrases.

OK? Are you ready? "I was wrong." That's the first half of repentance. "I was wrong" and "I'll do right." I was wrong and I'll do right. I did something wrong and I admit it and I own it and now I'm going to resolve to do the right thing. I'll do right. Now I know we can't guarantee that we won't stumble again as the next person is going to say but I'm going from admitting the wrong to resolving to do right. Repentance involves confession, "it was wrong" but repentance is a word that talks about a reversal of my direction. That's a resolve then to say, "I'm going to do right." So, if you say you shouldn't do that anymore and they say, "I'm sorry. I did the wrong thing and now I'm going to do the right thing." Then the Bible says you release the debt.

What about those that don't? Hang onto that thought. But before we talk about that if someone does not repent, they don't say they're wrong because I think most of you right now say, well a sermon about forgiveness that would be great, but I you know ninety nine times out of 100 they don't say that they're wrong and so this passage doesn't apply. Well it does apply. But before we get to that let's try and define the concept of forgiveness and do it more in a full-orbed way this morning. Because I often talk about the financial aspect of this but let's make this a little bigger. Let's start with that and maybe create a little chart, if you will. If this is letter "A" for instance and we start to fill this in, think in four categories here. First of all, if I'm going to talk about *aphiemi* as the command, that will be the second column, then what's the first column? It's the problem. What's the problem if I have a debt to forgive? Well that there is a debt. In other words, let's put it this way, when someone sins against me I feel like they owe me. They owe me, that's the problem. I feel like you owe me. Forgiveness, *aphiemi*, that first analogy that represents forgiveness, is the concept of releasing the debt.

So I've got the problem, I've got the command. Here's the next column now. As I think about this first analogy of forgiveness, right, what's the result? What's the result if you owe me something, I say I forgive the debt? Well, here's the thing. It's no longer owed. Very simple. You don't owe me anything. You don't owe me anything. We don't have to settle any scores here. We are now even. The word that sometimes used, particularly in old translations, you'll still see it in the book of Esther, but the word that speaks about our forgiveness in terms of financial concepts is the old word "remission." Remember that? Remission. Talk about the remission of sins, the remitting of this thing. It's done. It's paid for. So maybe that's a term we can build that fourth column. So it's very simple here. Here's the problem: money owed. Here's the command: release the debt. Here's the result: you don't owe me any more, we're even. Here's the word that's used, the concept that's used and that's remission, paid, done. Ok, we get that all the time but that creates our baseline. Here's letter "B". Here's the second row. I'm going to think through other ways the Bible gives us a sense of what this forgiveness is, which if we can define it we will get the target.

It's often spoken of when someone sins against you, like something like a garment, like a shirt is stained. So let's put it that way. A garment stain. The first problem is money owed. The second problem here that illustrates sin is a garment that is stained. And when a garment is stained, let's say you come up to me on the patio and you take a big bottle of French's yellow mustard and you squirt it all over the front of my shirt. That's what sin feels like when someone sins against you. You've



messed this up. What does the Bible say about what I'm supposed to do when in a relationship someone has sinned and they've stained the garment. Well here's the command. The command is not only aphimi, release the debt if it's a financial illustration. But here's the analogy when it comes to the stain of sin.

OK? Here are the words that are used in the English translation, "to blot it out." To blot it out. Psalm 51, for instance, when David is praying about his sin of adultery he asks God to blot out my transgression. Blot it out. It's there, now make it go away. Scrub the stain out. So if the problem is a garment stain and the command is that I'm supposed to reflect God's forgiveness by blotting out that, what would be the result if I look at my shirt after I've taken care of this stain? Well, I wouldn't see it anymore. It's no longer seen. Another concept or another word that's used in the Bible to describe that process is this: "washed." There is row "D". Washed. In other words, I'm to look at my life as it relates to God forgiving me and as it says in Isaiah Chapter 1 verse 18, "Though my sins were as scarlet." That's a bad stain. Now it's washed and it's "white as snow." Now when you sin against me it's like you've stained my shirt. My command is to blot it out. What's the result? I don't see it anymore. What's that concept? Washing away of the sin.

Thirdly, sin is often seen as a crime. A crime that has been tried and sentenced. You are guilty. It's something that you did, the facts are not on your side, you blew it and you now have done something wrong. It's like you're a criminal. That's the problem.

What's the word that relates to sin being forgiven when it comes to that criminal analogy? Well, in the Bible, it's to pardon, to pardon the criminal. Passages like Psalm 25:11. I'm asking God to see me as a guilty criminal in the morality of heaven and to have him pardon me. I know I should be going to jail but I need you to pardon me.

What's the result of a criminal being pardoned? Well, they're no longer guilty, they're let free, they're let go.

Well that's the image in terms of the command or the word that describes it throughout the scripture. It's the freedom, we're freed from sin. In Revelation Chapter 1 it says, that we are freed from our sins. And that's not a picture of sanctification that I'm no longer doing them, although the Bible has a lot to say about that, it's the picture of justification, that I am guilty as a criminal but God looks at my sin and because of my repentance, he pardons that and now I'm freed. There should be a penalty but I don't have to serve it because sin has been pardoned.

Two more. How about this one? A reputation that's been damaged.

Sin is often seen as a reputation that has been damaged. When a reputation has been damaged it's like, speaking of baseball analogy, it's like a bubble gum card, you know, a baseball card and on it are the errors and here are the errors, look at how many errors in this. When you see the shortstop and you got a bunch of errors on his baseball card, well that's terrible. That is how this is seen that, now, all of a sudden, that player, his picture on the front... Man, he's not a very good player. I thought he was a good shortstop, now he's a terrible shortstop. Look at his stats. Look at how many errors he's had. Well, the Bible says when we're seen in that way as our reputation now is sullied because of our sin, I hate to mix metaphors, sullied or tarnished, but the idea is now I'm seen as not as great as I was before.

The Bible says I need to, let me use a Biblical phrase here from Jeremiah 31, when he looks at us



and he says, you know what, you guys are sinners, your reputation should be here. But here's the thing about you, I'm going to remember your sins no more. Remember your sins no more.

Therefore the command is, if I'm going to reflect God's forgiveness, is to take a look at someone who's got 15 errors this season and say I'm going to remember them no more. Done. I will not have those things in my mind on your baseball card because I'm remembering it no more. And if it is remembered no more, guess what I don't do? What's the result of that? I never play the tapes back. I never go on to say look at this, went right through his legs. Look at him pull out phone. There he goes. I don't recall it. I don't keep reliving it. I don't keep bringing it up in my mind. The word for that, I wish I could translate that with one word, but the Greek word in the New Testament, which we see it's equivalent the Old Testament, especially because the one I'm thinking of is from Romans Chapter 4 verse 8 when he quotes the Old Testament psalm, it's the Greek word "logizomai." Logizomai is a word, I guess you can translate in these three words: "Not counted against." Therefore, it happened but we're not going to count it like it happened. Logizomai. How blessed is the one to whom the Lord does not logizomai his sins and transgressions. They've not been counted. It happened but I'm not going to count it. Why? Because I remember it no more.

So sin is often seen when someone sins against me like they owe me money, like they stained the garment, like they're a criminal, like their reputation, I thought you were this kind of friend and now I see you are this kind of friend because of all these things you've done.

And I'm supposed to release the debt, I'm supposed to blot out the stain, I'm supposed to pardon the criminal, I'm supposed to remember it no more, so that I can look at them and say, sins remitted, sins washed, freed from the penalty, not counting it against you.

And then lastly to wrap it all up, how about this one? Sin is often seen in terms of relationship as wounding the relationship. Money owed, garment stained, crime sentenced, reputation damaged, relationship wounded. When I say relationship wounded and you write that down, you may think about this kind of emotional thing. Listen, wound is an illustration, right?

We use it so often in terms of our relationships is wounded in our kind of therapeutic culture. We don't realize that that is an analogy. What is a wound if we're going to be literal about the word? A wound is like if I had a lacerated arm here and I had a big cut on it or I had a broken bone. That's what we mean by wounded. And then, if I'm supposed to somehow, as it relates to sin and the analogy of sin, have that go away, well here's how it's put in the scripture, Hosea Chapter 5 verse 13. I'm to have it cured.

I'm asking someone to cure it, to fix it, to stitch it up, to splint it, to make it like it's not that way anymore, to cure it. And if something is cured then the damage isn't there anymore. I used to have a big, gaping cut but I don't anymore. It's fixed, see? Nothing's bleeding, nothing's coming out, no bones are sticking out. It's fixed. It's no longer damaged. And the word often seen in the Scripture regarding the concept of forgiveness in those terms is the word healed. Healed. You look at Second Chronicles Chapter 30 verse 20 it talks about our sins or our transgressions being healed.

It's what's in view in Isaiah 53 when it says by his stripes you are healed. This is an analogy of the problem of sin in a relationship. We're not talking about physical healing in that passage, we're talking about the fact that sin damages a relationship, there's a wound there and when there's forgiveness, because of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, then we are healed.



I want you to think about it when someone sins against you it feels like money owed, release the debt. Result? No longer owed, the sin has been remitted, the remission of sins. It's like a garment stain but we're to blot out that stain so that we don't see it anymore and the relationship is washed. It's like a crime that's sentenced and in my mind there's the facts and you are guilty but we are supposed to pardon the criminal, no longer guilty. In my mind, we've freed them from the penalty of that. Reputation damaged?

What's my responsibility? Forget it. What does that mean? Remember it no more.

That means I don't call it to mind anymore and I'm not going to replay this more in my mind. It's not logizomai against them, not counted against them. It's like a relationship that's wounded, it's my job is to fix it, like a doctor, to cure it, so it's no longer damaged and say my relationship now has been healed.

All these things have happened for you, I hope, in relation to God. He's remitted your sins, he's washed away your sins, he's freed you from the penalty of sin, he's not counted your transgressions against you, he's healed his relationship with you, reconciled it because of his forgiveness, and now he's saying, you know what, if someone repents then do that to them. That's the target. That picture there is a picture you need to have in your mind and say that's the goal. Well, if they repent. That means you told me they have to say I'm sorry, I'm wrong and I'm going to do right. I resolve to do the right thing next time. That is what I said, you're right. But most of the time they're not repenting when they sin against you. Am I right? So I guess it doesn't matter. I don't have to do any of this. Well, be careful with that. Well I can't say that everything on this list can be applied to someone who sins against you and does not see that sin or repent of that sin, I am saying a lot of it feels exactly the same. Because there is a release, not into the cross or into infinity or whatever, when it comes to, hey, it's not there anymore, because you don't even see the problem. You sinned against me, you sinned against my family, you sinned against the church, whatever it might be, but you haven't recognized the problem and you haven't repented of it, so what am I doing in my own mind? Well, I can't have the full restoration of a repentant person, but, you know what, it feels much the same. It's a *aphiemi*. It's a release of something. Let me give you an object here. It's a release of those things to someone. When Jesus was being attacked, here's what Peter said about him, "He entrusted himself to one who judges justly." When Jesus was on the cross, he could have a forgiving relationship toward people not because their sins were being blotted out because they weren't repentant but he could in his mind release this, as it says in Peter, to God. Now jot this one down, in Romans Chapter 12, we quoted this recently a few times, but the heart of it there starts in verses 18 and 19, that's the core of it, when he says, live peaceably with all men, even the sinners, peaceably.

How do I do that? By never avenging myself, verse 19 says.

But leaving it, there is a word that's a synonym to *aphiemi*, leaving it, letting it go. Leaving it to where? To nothing because it got zapped by the cross? No, leaving it to God.

Because it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay. You sin against me, you sin against my family, you sin against the church, you sin against my small group, whatever, I would love to have full reconciliation and restoration of the relationship. I may not be able to do that if there is not an ownership of this sin but I can tell you one thing I'm not going to do. I can't hold on to that. I can't say, you know what, I'm going to hold that bitterness and that frustration. I'm not going to retaliate. And I know you think to retaliate, you think of a black ski mask and knifing his tires at night or, you know, booby-trapping his garage at two in the morning. We retaliate in much more subtle ways



than that, but I guarantee you this is always a part of your retaliation.

You have to continue to recall the wrong, you have to continually relive the things that they've done to you and the damage that you feel because of them and you start to paint a little bull's-eye on their forehead even though you're not going to put on the black mask and knife their tires and you continually retell the hurt. You talk about their wrong. When it comes to retaliation it starts with recalling, reliving, and retelling that over and over again. I don't know where it's going to ooze out of your life but it starts with that. And if you see yourself reliving the wrongs that people have done to you, you continually have those things in your mind, you start to paint that bull's eye on their forehead, at least in your mind, and you keep talking about what they've done to you. I assure you, you're on your way to a kind of retaliation in some way that God is condemning in this particular passage and he's saying let it go. "I can't let it go, that feels unjust." I understand but God is just.

Just like Jesus could sit there and have people show up in the Garden of Gethsemane like we just read in the Daily Bible Reading this morning and instead of having Peter try and cut this guy in half, cuts his ear off and you go, "yeah, get em, try the other ear now." Right?

Jesus puts his ear back on, as strange of a passage as that is, because right now he's entrusting himself to his Father who will take care of this guy, who unless he repents will not be forgiven of coming to the garden and arresting the innocent Christ and being a part of the jeering mob that crucified him. No, God will deal with that. But right now, as the next verses say, even if your enemy is hungry you feed him, if he's thirsty give him a drink, if his ear is lopped off and you can put it back on, then put it back on. God will take care of it. Don't hold that bitterness in your heart and I'm telling you that people in this room right now, looking at my face, hearing my words, you're carrying bitterness right now in your life because you've been wrong. You relive it. You retell it. You rethink it. You need to let it go. As I often say palms down, drop it. It feels unjust, I understand that. This may not restore the relationship but it will recalibrate your heart. That's what God would like to have happen for you this morning. It may not restore things the way they were but it can recalibrate the way you live inside your own heart every day.

Let it go. Wholeheartedly release the debt.

"OK, I'll try."

Then verse 4 hits us square in the face. What if he does it seven times in a day?

And he keeps coming back saying, I'm sorry. Or even if he doesn't and I have to keep releasing this to God and entrusting myself.

Well, you must forgive.

I think the way this is worded is helpful for us as we bring this in for a landing. You've got to have this concept in your mind that is the backdrop for all commands for God's creatures to forgive the flawed people they live with, live around and interact with all week long. It's always put against the backdrop of the way God forgave you. Would you agree with that? All throughout the Bible.

I mean you can be a JV Christian and you know this: Jesus keeps taking about the fact that you ought to forgive because God forgave you. When he says in Matthew 18, servants ought to forgive each other because the Master has forgiven the servant. I mean, to quote a few passages, Ephesians



Chapter 4 verse 32: "Be tender tenderhearted, forgiving one another..." Why? "Because God in Christ forgave you." Colossians 3:13: You ought to bear with one another. You have a complaint against anybody. Forgive them. Why? Because "the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." So I'm supposed to forgive in light of what God has done. I'm supposed to somehow mimic that. And all I'm saying, because God put it down the way he did here in verse 4, I'd like you to thoughtfully mimic that forgiveness.

Number three on your outline if you're taking notes. You need to thoughtfully mimic Christ's forgiveness and I say, because of the way he put it, because he said seven times a day and I just wonder if you've ever needed Christ's forgiveness seven times in one day.

Have you? Oh, I bet you have.

"Oh, I don't think so. I may have sinned last Tuesday, I'm not sure." Then you're ignorant. Philippians 2:14, "Do all things without grumbling or complaining." The king of the universe gave you that command. How's that going? "Oh, you didn't need to ask that one. Oh, I guess, I don't know. Is that a big deal? Oh, OK. Well, I guess I did need God's forgiveness." If anyone looks lustfully at a woman in his heart he's already committed adultery with her in his heart.

You need forgiveness for that? Here are some other words from Second Corinthians 12: gossip, conceit, slander, jealousy, disorder. These are the things that put Christ on a cross. Has that been a part of your experience this week? How much forgiveness do you need from God? The more godly you get the more you see your sin, the more you see your sin, the more you're going to come to God and say, "God forgive me. Let's fix this relationship. I blew it again." And how abundant is God's forgiveness toward you? If the template is divine forgiveness, I just need you to recognize when he says seven times in one day, there's some humor in this from God's perspective because how many sins did he see in your life yesterday, I wonder? Oh, you didn't commit any big gigantic sins but I'm sure you fell far short of the glory of God yesterday. And the more godly you get the more you see it, the more you ask God to fix that. God forgive me, just claim what Christ did on my behalf, forgive me.

I want you to compare the forgiveness that you think is so hard to grant to your family member, your coworker, your small group participant that you're sitting next to. You think that so hard. How costly is that from God's perspective to forgive you? Let's think about this. You are concerned about people that have sinned against you. I want to know who you are that this is such a big egregious disruption in the universe that someone has sinned against you. Who are you? Well, you're one of seven billion people in the world right now.

You're one of countless people through history since time began and oh, someone did something wrong that sinned against you? Every single sin that you commit is not against some random person in some group but against the holy, triune, eternal God. You've sinned against the King of Kings. It's one thing to sinned against some, you know, some classmates, it would be one thing to sin against, I don't know, the teacher, it would be one thing to sin against the principal, it would be one thing the sin against the mayor, the governor or the president. You've sinned against the universe King, the Creator. Talk about the insult of our sin to God versus the insult you experience that makes it so hard for you to forgive. How hard must it be, should it be, logically, rationally should it be for God to forgive you? It should be the biggest insult that would be impossible to get over.

How unthinkable we think someone's sin is against us, we think, "we would never do that."



And yet all I have to do is hold the mirror of God's word and say, "Yeah, well I mean I haven't done that but I've done a lot of things like that." The only person that can say that's unthinkable, I would never do that, is a God who has never done that. God has never sinned against anyone. God has always done things or he's the only one who could ever say I had never done an unthinkable thing and yet they've done that to me, and he forgives anyway. The offense against the Holy God versus the offense that you feel as a sinful, fallen, flawed person yourself and what is it exactly that makes this so hard it feels unjust to let it go? Doesn't feel fair? So what exactly is the cost to you to forgive? Feelings? Your tum-tum is going to feel upset if you forgive? I mean let's really think about this. You right now may say, I don't feel inclined to forgive that person. You're hot, you're angry, you're frustrated. So it's going to cost you some feelings to let this go. I wonder what it cost God to release the debt, blot the stain out, pardon the criminal, remember it no more and cure this? What did it cost him? The injustice of seeing his perfect, beloved son, innocent, never sinned, hanging naked on a cross after being beaten almost unrecognizably, pulling his beard out, crown of thorn, completely nude on a cross, bleeding with a freshly ripped up back.

That's what it cost him to forgive you. And you're not feeling it? It's too hard? The cost of forgiveness. I'm not trying to minimize the fact that it is hard to forgive. It's hard to forgive, I know that, but it's nothing compared to the forgiveness God has granted you. "Well, he did this last..." No, I understand. He'll probably do it again. He'll sin again. She'll still insult you, she'll still have that... But if she did it seven times in one day and she repents, completely cure this feeling.

"But I don't know if it's sincere." It doesn't say here are the things you do to see if it's sincere. If she says, "I'm sorry, I'll do right."

Then forgive them. Even if they don't say they're sorry, release the debt. Release the debt and let God deal with it.

Forgiveness is hard for us in part because we know we're forgiving imperfect people that will just do it again. If I forgive that peanut for being a scrawny, poor excuse for a peanut.

I don't want to reach into that box and grab another flawed peanut and I just think, endless! Why do I put up with this?

It's amazing anyone gets their car washed. Have you ever thought about that? I mean, think about it. You get your car washed, it's just going to get dirty again. Newsflash. It's going to get dirty. "I want to put that little slick, shiny stuff on the tires." That will last about three days.

But they do it anyway. You know Americans spend six billion dollars on washing their cars every year? There are 113,000 carwashes in this country.

The average person washes their car or gets their car washed at a carwash about once a month. That's the average. And if you factor in all those people in their trucks, in those places that never get their car washed, then we're doing most of it here in Southern California washing our cars all the time. And you know why Southern California people like to wash our cars? Because we are known as the demographic who love our cars.

We love our cars. And so we wait in line and then they dry. We sit out there and wait for it washed.



We want our cars clean. And we certainly don't want to have the dirty car and risk someone scrawling the words "wash me" on the back window.

You don't want that.

Which, by the way, I looked it up, thirty two million people have reported having someone scribble the words "wash me" on the back of their car.

You love your car and try to keep it clean. God wants you to love his flawed, sullied, tarnished, blemished, imperfect, smudged people. And if you say, "well, they've done it before, they'll do it again" he says wash it anyway, clean it up. Maybe the sermon this morning is God scribbling the words on the back of your life "wash me." You've got relationships that need to be washed.

Release the debt, pardon the criminal, blot out the stain, cure the wound, forget the transgression, let it go. God would have you today forgive and to get real good at forgiveness because between now and the perfect entrance into the Kingdom we're going to have a lot of disappointment. We need to recognize the forgiveness you've received, you need to pass on intentionally, volitionally, with a resolve to be obedient to Christ. It's a lot better way to live than the way you're living if you're hanging on to the bitterness and the frustration of not letting it go. Let it go.

Let's pray. God help us to take these words to heart. They're big words, really big and hard, challenging words because unless people are sleeping in this building, everyone in this room can think of people they need to forgive. And God, it's sad that very few of them will say they're sorry, will say their wrong, will say they won't do it again, that their resolve is to do right. We've got to learn to forgive if it's not that complete repair of our relationship, it certainly needs to be a recalibration of our hearts by letting go of all this. So much so that if our enemy is hungry we're going to feed them, if they're thirsty, we give him something to drink because we don't hold these things there against them. Oh, it may not rebuild everything or the trust or the position, but we're done with holding this against them, retelling it, reliving it, replaying it in our minds. God what a blessing it would be for us to practice more forgiveness. And I know it's helpful for us to remember our own need for forgiveness so I pray maybe that will be part of what we do this week is just recall how needy we are in terms of your forgiveness, to wash us, to pardon us, to forget the transgressions that we've committed. So God, work in our hearts today that we might be able to leave these things behind and experience the freedom that you have for us and just letting go of these things. If we need to say we're sorry, if we need to repent, I pray we do that even if it's just for our part in a sullied relationship to be able to say I was wrong and I'll do right. Let us never lower the standard of what it means to care about holiness in our community and our church and our homes. Let us be quick and ready to wholeheartedly forgive. In Jesus name, Amen