

Because the Time is Short – Love Fervently

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Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 4, continuing to look at this section we began looking at two Sundays ago, 1 Peter 4:7 to 11, these five verses. We've titled this series in these five verses, "Because Time is Short." Because time is short and so today, the subtitle, "Because Time is Short, Love Fervently." That's the title of the message today, "Because Time is Short, Love Fervently." The passage begins with a declaration, a stunning declaration. Actually, the end of all things is near. The end of all things is at hand, literally has come close. Peter begins verse 7 with that statement, and on the basis of that statement, then he makes two strong exhortations. We've noted that the two imperatives in the passage are to have a sound mind, to be of sound judgment, to be sober. Those are the two main verbs in these five verses and everything else flows from that. He's saying essentially, because time is short, wake up, be alert, be attentive to what really matters, and then he lays out for us those three things that he wants us to get to work on.

So we've said "Because Time is Short" is the title of the series, last week, "Because Time is Short, Pray." The first thing he says that the shortness of time drives us to is prayer. We see things as they are. We see that the end of all things is near. We see the nearness of eternity, we should pray. This Saturday morning, we mentioned earlier in the announcements, if you weren't here, we are going to apply that message by having a time of prayer on Saturday morning from 9 to 10:15, a service of prayer. We're going to have a brief devotional, five or 10 minutes. We're going to read the Scripture and pray, read the Scripture and pray, read the Scripture and pray. We're going to walk through Holy Week in the Scripture, starting off with Palm Sunday leading up to the cross and the resurrection, and we're going to devote ourselves to prayer. So we hope you can join us Saturday at 9 o'clock in the morning.

But today we move to the second instruction that he gives in this passage. After calling us to sound judgment in a sober spirit, he says he wants us to love one another fervently, and so let's read the text together, and we'll begin unpacking what it means to love fervently in the light of the shortness of time. 1 Peter 4:7,

7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for

one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we exalt Your name. We acknowledge that all glory and dominion belong to Jesus Christ, and through Him, O Lord, we pray that You, Father, might be glorified and magnified. We pray that it might be true this morning as we unfold Your Scriptures, we pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts to see things as they are, to see not just the shortness of time, but to see the greatness of our Savior, to see the wonder of Your sovereign plan, to rest in it and to be about Your business, to do Your will. May we, those who belong to You, become more faithful followers of our great Savior and those who do not that are here, may they come to know Christ even today. We pray this in His name. Amen.

So because time is short, pray. Because time is short, pray. He says the end of all things is at hand, that is, Peter is saying that everything that needs to happen before the end comes has happened. The plan of God that spans the ages, all of the key events that need to happen have happened. He speaks in the wake of the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and now all that remains is for Jesus to return. And so he reminds us that the end of all things is near, and he tells those believers in the first century to be aware and to live in light of the nearness of eternity. The reality is that this is true from a cosmic kingdom standpoint. Nothing remains but for Jesus to return. He could return at any moment. Besides that, you and I don't know what tomorrow brings. None of us knows if God is going to call us home today, and even if we are to live to be 70 or 80 or 90 years old or 100 years old, God willing, our lives are still just a vapor, here today and then gone. The Scriptures exhort us a number of places, you know, to teach us to number our days David prays. Paul in Ephesians 5:16 says, "Lord, help us to know because of the shortness of the time, help us to redeem our time for the days are evil, to make the most of our time." And here Peter is exhorting us to that same sense of urgency. We don't know how long we have. If you knew that tomorrow you would meet the Lord, how would you live today? That's the kind of force he wants these words to have for us and he wants us to live in light of that.

So we saw that if we want to make the most of our time, we need to pray. But secondly, if we want to make the most of our time, and here's the theme of the message today, we need to love one another fervently. We are to devote ourselves to love. That's the focus that he brings in verse 8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." We see here the prime importance of love. You see this throughout the Scriptures, you know, how will they know you're my disciples, but by your love for one another? Paul says in 1

Corinthians 13 that, "If I have the tongues of men and of angels, if I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Think about that. Speak with the tongues of men and of angels but without love, it's worthless. It's just noise. He goes on to say in the next verse, "If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge." Think about that, know all mysteries and all knowledge. And he goes on to say, "And if I have all faith so as to remove mountains." I mean, this is a tremendous blessing he's talking about, eloquence of men and of angels, knowledge and insight that boggle the mind. He says, "If I understand all knowledge and have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Love is the supreme value. He goes on to end that chapter after he talks about all things are passing away, he's speaking about the gifts, that some will pass away, and he says, "Now abide three things, faith, hope, and love." Three things are eternal, he says, faith, hope, and love, "but the greatest of these is love." Greater than faith, greater than hope is love for God is love. His love is at the essence of his being. The Scripture doesn't say any other attribute God is that. Only love. God is love like that and God is holy, of course, but he is love. It doesn't say God is wrath. God is justice. It says God is love.

So love is so important and that's, in fact, the first point this morning. There are five points we're going to talk about, five attributes of the love that we are called to display, and the first is the primacy of love. The primacy of love. He says in verse 8, "Above all." Above all. Literally in the original, "before all things," literally it reads "before all things, keep fervent in your love." It's before anything else is the idea. Of first importance. Now think about that. You have a limited amount of time, he's saying. You only have a tiny amount of time. What can you do with that? The first thing you must do, that's what he's saying. Get your priorities right. The first thing you must do is love. Before anything else, keep fervent in your love.

So the primacy of love, the supremacy of love, the urgency of the moment calls for love. Again, it's counter-intuitive. If you think about, if you really knew the world was ending tomorrow, what do you need to do today? I mean, when you think of other things that you need to do, then love the brothers and sisters in Christ. I mean, to me, it seems like you would go, we'd be running around, we'd be praying, we'd be praising, but he says, no, actually love one another actively. Serve one another. That's what you should do. The shortness of the moment requires the greatest investment, and the greatest investment is love. You only have so much time, what can you do that's going to redound for the greatest impact for eternity? You can love. That will last. Faith, hope, love, these three, the greatest of these is love.

Jesus on the night before he was crucified, today is Palm Sunday, the day when he was hailed as the King of the Jews, the Jewish people recognizing him publicly and affirming his Messiah-ship. "Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Yet five days later, they would be calling out to crucify him because he came to be king by dying on the cross. The cross before the crown. But Thursday night, the night before he was crucified, he gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room. Time was short. Think about that. He's spent three years with these men, probably three and a half years, best we can tell as we put the gospels together. A three and a half year

ministry. pouring into these twelve and now, the cross is the next day. This is the end of his earthly ministry. His time is so short and what does he do? He gets up from the table, girds himself with a towel, takes the form of the lowliest servant, and he washes his disciples' feet. He humbly serves them. Time is short. Isn't there something more important to do than to wash their feet?

Jesus takes the time, and I love the way John introduces it. In fact, it's worth looking at that again, because it just staggers the mind at what's going on in Jesus' mind at this moment. In John chapter 13, the first few verses of John 13, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come," listen to this, "Jesus knowing that His hour had come," his time is up, "that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world," what did he do? "He loved them to the end." He kept on loving them. "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." He knows all of this. This is all pressing upon him, all of these eternal realities. What did he do? He "got up from supper," verse 4, "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." We know the story, Simon Peter objects. The author of the book we're reading right now objects, "Lord, You shall not wash my feet." And Jesus says, "If I don't wash, you have no part in Me." Peter then flips from one extreme to the other as he's wont to do and he says, "Not only wash my feet, but wash my head and my body also." And Jesus says, "If you've been washed, you only need to wash your feet." And he continues to wash all of their feet, and then he sits down at the table, takes back, puts on his robe again, sits at the table. In verse 13, he says, "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." Then later, he says to them in chapter 13 verse 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." One of the things he's doing in, it's the washing of the feet is a lived out parable right in their midst, that the greatest is going to serve, the greatest is going to meet the needs of those he loves. Love meets practical needs and he says, "As I have loved you, you love one another. Time is short. I only have a few more hours to talk to you. What I want to talk to you about is your need to love one another and I'm making this my command to you, the new command that you love one another." Peter was there that night, he heard those words, he's reflected on it, and now in 1 Peter chapter 4, he's saying the same thing, "The end of all things is near, above all keep fervent in your love."

Now the word "love" here, it's important to take a moment and talk about that because we so twist and distort words from what they really mean because of our sinfulness and worldly environment and there's no word that is more demeaned than the word love, right? I mean, when you talk about love and God's love, and then to think of the way that we use the word love, the way that people think of what love is, but this word agape that is used here, the noun agape, interestingly enough, the noun is only found one time in

ancient literature outside the New Testament but it's 110 times in the New Testament, the noun. I'm at the verb. The verb agapao is found outside the New Testament with more frequency but the noun itself, only one time. And when you look at the way the word love was used in Greek culture, there were four words for love, four nouns, storge, eros, philos, and agape. Storge was kind of a familial kind of love, the love of a parent for a child. Eros was romantic love. Philos, brotherly love, deep affection. And agape or agapao, like I said, the verb was used in Greek culture, was actually kind of a catch-all word. It didn't really have a particular focus. It was used sort of synonymously with all three of those. The New Testament authors take that word and then fill it with meaning. They take the verb and the noun and now agape becomes the word they use for the love of God. God's love. Supernatural love. Sacrificial love. Love that the world cannot understand. True love which seeks the benefit and blessing of the object of its love. Human love seeks to get something. Human love is focused on something that we derive from the object of our love. Yes, we want to give, but we also want to receive. Agape only gives. That's why it's God's love. We're not like that. He is like that. And it is unconditional. That is in the sense that it does not depend on the person that it loved. God sets his love upon us not because we deserve to be loved, because we are lovely, not at all. He sets his love upon us because he chooses to love.

So this is the love and Peter is saying, this is the first thing that you need to do. It's the primacy of love. The second point, back to our text, is not just the primacy of love, but the priority of love. The priority of love. "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." Time is short. Focus on love. And here again, this is somewhat counter-intuitive, at least to me. He says, and he makes this emphatic, "Love one another." He says, time is short. Think about this. Time is short. You might think we need to go out loving unbelievers, right? And certainly we need to be making the gospel known, and certainly the Scripture calls us other places to love unbelievers. We're to be like our Father, who, we're to love our enemies. We're to pray for those who persecute us. We're to share the gospel with every creature that we can. But here he says, because time is short, not love them, love one another. In fact, in the original, the word order is even more emphatic. The way that this says, the way he says this literally is, the verb in the passage is actually not love. This is one of the interesting things about the way that we have to translate from one language into another. Literally, the verb in the passage is the word hold or as the NASB, the New American Standard I'm reading says, keep. Keep, hold, maintain That's the verb and it's a participle. It's not a main verb. It's drawing its imperatival force from the previous imperatives, which we remember back in verse 7 be of sound judgment, be sober. Now what does that look like? If you're seeing things rightly, if you're seeing things as they are, to be sober, to be a sound judgment, to see what really matters, then you will be holding love.

I love this actually that he says it this way because it really is holding. In fact, it's a continuous tense verb here. It's the Greek present tense, which means go on holding love. Literally, he says, "Before all things, before everything else, keep on holding love for one another," and "one another" is the focus. He's basically saying, "If things are about to end, and you knew they were, then love your brothers and sisters in Christ." In fact, the emphasis on "one another" is really powerful. You look at verse 8, "keep fervent in your

love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to," who? To who do you be hospitable to? "To one another." And then to use your gifts, in verse 10, in serving who? One another. He's saying the focus of Christians ought to be on believers if time is short. Isn't that counter-intuitive?

God's way is for us to care for each other and to keep building each other up as the day draws near and the wonder of it is, now Jesus said back in, we read in John 13 earlier, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another." What's the next thing he says? "By this all men will know that you're My disciples by your love for one another." And then in chapter 17, same night, right before his crucifixion, Thursday night, chapters 13 to 17, or the Upper Room Discourse, and then his prayer, a high priestly prayer, he prays that the world may see the oneness of believers and know by seeing our oneness, that is our love, our fellowship, the world may know that God sent Jesus into the world. It's the quality of our relationships that powerfully evangelize the lost. It's our relationships with each other because they've never seen anything like that. They've never seen real love in action. This means when you're serving, you know, when you go to visit someone in the hospital, brother or sister in Christ, or you go to their house to take them a meal when they're sick, or you go over and you do something practical, maybe you go and do some work at their house, you know, their neighbors notice and they have the opportunity to tell them, "Yeah, that's somebody from my church." And then they get to see us interact and they see something inside of us that they don't have, that the world doesn't understand. God intends this to be the laboratory. The love is being developed here in the house, in the family, and it has an incredible, attractive power. The priority of love is love one another. Emphasize loving and serving one another.

The primacy of love, the priority of love, thirdly, the intensity of love. The intensity of love. To come back to, "Above all, keep or holding love, fervent love." He adds the adjective, fervent. It reads as an adverb in the English, but it's really an adjective describing the noun "love" in the original, and it is the word "fervent." It's a word which pictures intensity. It's not just, you don't just hold love. He's basically saying, listen, if you want to know what you need to do because time is short, and here's the word picture, take love and hold it and carry it with you wherever you go. You know, somebody says, "Hey, will you hold this?" And they hand it to you. And you know, what are you thinking when you're holding that? "When can I put it down? This is heavy." He's saying, keep on holding love. He says God has given you love, keep on holding it. Walk around with it. Carry it. Now if somebody gives you something to hold and they say, "Hold on to that, you're going to need it." Okay, I'll hold on to it. I don't know what I need it for. If you're on an airplane and somebody gives you a parachute and says hold on to it, hold on to it.

God says hold on to it. Hold on to love and not just hold on to love, hold on to fervent love. He's saying you want love that is fervent. It's a strong word here. This adjective comes from a verb which means to stretch out. So he's describing the quality of love. Love is not a complacent, just sentimental attitude. It does come from the heart, but it is active. This word pictures love is in motion. In fact, it's interesting. When you look at 1 Corinthians 13, you see there are 16 descriptive terms about love, starting with love is

patient, love is kind, right? But when you look at that in the original, those 16 sometimes translated adjectives are actually 16 verbs. There's no adjectives. When it says love is patient, it literally says love suffers long. It's a verb. And when it says love is kind, it literally says love acts with kindness. Every single one of them is a verb, 16 verbs. Love is active, and he's saying love is fervent. It's fervent love that you're to hold on to. Active love.

So I have stretching out. A couple of examples where this verb is used. Mark chapter 1, Jesus encounters a leper and the leper looks at Jesus and says, "If You are willing, You can cleanse me." And the text says Jesus stretched out his hand. Stretched out his hand and touched him and said, "I am willing. Be cleansed." He could have healed him without stretching out his hand, but he stretched out his hand, think about that, and touched him. You know the one thing that a leper has not known for all of the years of his leprosy is the wonder of human touch. Jesus seeing the leper's heart, knowing his need, reached out his hand and touched him. The unthinkable. Lepers were supposed to announce their coming by saying, "Unclean, unclean," so that people know to keep a wide berth around them so that they would not come close to anywhere close to touching them. But he stretched out his hand and said, "I am willing. Be cleansed."

This verb is also used in Matthew chapter 14 when Jesus is walking on the water. And back to Peter again, remember, Peter's always the one that get out there out in front and what does he do? He says, "Lord, let me walk on the water with You. Command me and I'll walk on the water." So he starts walking out on the ocean with Jesus, walking toward Jesus, but the text says as he's walking, he notices the wind and the waves and he begins to look around him rather than looking at Jesus and what happens when you look around you and you stop looking at Jesus? He begins to sink and he cries out in the danger because the storm is still brewing. He cries out in the moment and it says Jesus stretched out his hand and grabbed him and pulled him up and said, "Oh ye of little faith." But he stretched out his hand and grabbed him. Love stretches out. Love sees need and it stretches out.

So he's saying you're having an attitude of love that is ready, it's ready to meet needs. It's not just philosophical. It's not just the idea of love. It's a readiness to meet pressing needs. He's saying hold that. Take that and walk around with that. The intensity of love. We see the primacy of love, the priority of love, the intensity of love, and fourthly, the necessity of love. I mean, "Why do You need me to go on holding this, Lord?" He says, hold this. When can I put it down? No, you can't put it down. Keep on holding it. Keep on holding it. Keep on holding fervent love. Why? Here it comes. Verse 8, because love covers a multitude of sins. The necessity of love. Why do you need to go on holding love? Because you are going to encounter sins. You're going to be sinned against. Now, how are you going to go on loving one another fervently? Say, listen, as you get involved with each other in the body of Christ, the one thing that you can count on is you will need this fervent love because to be in fellowship with other people is to be sinned against. To be in fellowship with other believers who love Jesus will be to be sinned against, and obviously to sin against them. But all of you, he says, "go around carrying fervent love because love covers a multitude of sins."

This word for "sin" is important. He's actually quoting here, 1 Peter 4A is quoting Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 12. It's instructive to look at that verse that Peter is quoting from. He doesn't quote the entire verse, but this key part of it he does. Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all transgressions." It's where Peter gets the multitude of sins, covers all transgressions, but it's instructive to realize that the word he uses here for transgressions, love covers all transgressions, I think informs us in what he means in 1 Peter 4 and verse 8. There are a number of words used to describe sin in the Old Testament. There is the word that we normally translate sin, which in its root idea means to miss the mark, to fail to live up to what God has made us to be and do. That's to sin. Sin falls short of the glory of God. There's another word that's translated most of the time iniquity, and it means to wander away. We, as sinners, have the tendency to miss the mark, and we have the tendency to wander away like sheep. We need God to come after us. It's a tendency. It's a sinful tendency to wander off the straight and narrow. But here's a third word for sin in the Old Testament, and it's the Hebrew word *pesha*, P-E-S-H-A, transliteration. It's a word which means transgression, and it has the idea of rebellion but it means a transgression of property or person. It means that someone violates you personally, powerfully. This is the idea. He says in Proverbs 10:18, "Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all transgressions," and the word transgression is the strongest word he could use for an offense.

He's saying that it's the way of the wise to cover these things, to cover transgressions and Peter's saying the same thing. The reason you're going to need to hold love, the reason love is necessary is because you're going to be offended and people are going to do things to you personally that hurt you and so carry love around with you. And if we all do this, because we're all going to sin against each other, then we're going to be able to cover it with love and I love that he says, not just back to 1 Peter 4:8, Peter kind of adds a little intensity to it by saying covers a multitude of sins. It's not just one sin. Remember who asked the question again to Jesus? "If my brother sins against me," remember what Peter said? I love this. I think he was really thinking, "I'm going out there." He says, "If my brother sins against me seven times, I'm to forgive him seven times, right?" And he's like, "Look at me. I am a very forgiving person. I'm getting the message, Jesus. I would forgive my brother seven times." Jesus says, "I tell you not seven times, but 70 times seven," 490 times. And he's thinking in one day, he says, "In one day, if my brother sins seven times and I'll forgive him seven times, right?" "No, if he sins against you 490 times in one day, forgive him 490 times." The idea is, as many times as he sins and comes and confesses, you forgive him because love covers sin. And so he now, thinking about that love, I need to carry love around because it covers a multitude of sins. We're to keep on forgiving and forgiving and forgiving.

Now listen, this passage is not giving a balancing truth. This doesn't say that you never reprove your brother. Of course not. The Bible says that in many places. In fact, the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, the second great commandment, Leviticus 19:18, follows a word that says this in 19:17, "You shall not hate your neighbor. You shall surely reprove him. You shall not hate your neighbor in your heart. You shall surely reprove him." The idea is if you don't reprove your neighbor, you hate

him in your heart. Reprove means to correct. We desperately need other believers to correct us. God's made it so that we are wired in such a way that we need the word of God continually and we need other people to speak God's word to us. We were talking about this in Profile class this morning. Haven't you had the experience where you're struggling with something and another believer tells you something that you already know and them telling you makes all the difference? Have you not had that experience? They tell you, and it's like the Lord unlocks the little prison that you're in at this moment. You're free suddenly and then the next thing you think of is, "Why didn't I already think of that? I know that." God's made it so we need each other. I can't see what's wrong with me the same way that you can. You can't see what's wrong with you the same way I can. And so we desperately need correction.

So it's not saying there's no correction. It's saying that there's no offended attitude and hostility that you're covering over the acts that are sinful hostility against you, there's a willingness to forgive and forgive and forgive and cover them over, and the idea is the necessity of love. You're going to need to hold this and we're moving into the fifth point, kind of already started into it. The fifth point, it's not just the primacy of love, the priority of love, the fervency of love, the necessity of love, but the glory of love. The glory of love is that love covers. Love covers a multitude of sins.

Back in Proverbs 10 again. It's interesting when you read Proverbs, one of the ways that you can interpret the passage well is to realize that Proverbs teaches, Psalms often do too, Hebrew, part of the Hebrew mindset was to teach in parallelism. Sometimes it says something and then it says the same thing with different words, different image, but saying the same thing. Here, what you have is kind of an antithetical parallelism. It says something by saying the same thing, really, but in two antithetical ways. It talks about hatred and it talks about love. Hatred stirs up strife. Love covers a multitude of sins. He's telling us in both passages what we're to do. Hatred stirs up strife, so it means, hey, if you're stirring up strife, you know what you're doing? You're hating. Stop it. That's what he's saying. In the second part of the verse, he's saying, love, if you're going to love, what you're going to do is learn how to cover a multitude of sins. And you can learn from these parallels, like for instance, to stir up strife. So think about this. Hatred in our hearts is what we're tempted to do when someone offends us. We're tempted to respond the same way. If they transgress against us, they violate us in some way, our tendency is to respond in kind with a measure of harm back to them. You've harmed me, I'm going to harm you. That's hatred. In fact, he says that what that really does is it stirs up strife. And I love the image here. Stirs up is good, but it's actually a little more, another way of looking at that verb stirs up is to awaken. The image is hatred, when something happens to you, awakens strife. It's like a strife is asleep. Conflict is another way of using this word. It's asleep. Somebody does something to me. I'm like, "Hey, wake up. We got to deal with this." That's the image. "Wake up. This guy just violated me. Wake up. Let's get at this. I need your help. We're going to let him have it." We can be like that, can't we?

He said hatred stirs up strife. It creates more conflict. But love covers. The idea is it still deals with sin, but the desire is to cover it, to deal with it in a way that God deals with it. God covers our sins through the blood of Christ and Peter is borrowing the Proverb here

to say this is really the glory of love. Love responds to sin the way God responds to sin. It doesn't seek vengeance. It seeks to heal. It may reprove, but it reproves from a heart of love, not a heart of any animosity or hostility, no bitterness. How can you do that? How can you possibly? You have to be living in light of the cross. The only way that you can forgive others, according to Ephesians 4:32, forgive others as God also in Christ has forgiven you. Put their sin against your sin against God. Look how gracious he's been to forgive you. Look, measure their sin against it. No matter how big it is, it is tiny. "Lord, let me have a heart to forgive."

Now, they need to confess their sin. Yes, that needs to happen. But what should be happening in our hearts is we move toward each other when we've been offended. If you're carrying love around like this, somebody offends you in the moment, he offends me in the moment, what do we do? Well, we're carrying love around, we're thinking about and how we're going to talk about that minute, how exactly you do this, but you're ready then to dispense the love. Hey, that's why I've been carrying this around. I mean, you know, if you had to carry something around and you had to carry it around for three or four days and finally had an opportunity to use it, somebody said, "Don't put it down," wouldn't you be glad you could finally use it? "Man, I've been carrying this for four days. I can finally use it." Well, the good news is you don't have to wait four days. You don't have to wait four hours probably. You're going to be able to use it today. But you carry it around and then you're ready to dispense it, you're ready to give it.

How do you have that love? You continue to meditate on the fact of what God has forgiven you. Matthew 18:21 to 35 speaks that after Peter asked that question to Jesus, I mentioned earlier, "If my brother sins seven times in one day and I forgive him seven times, isn't that great?" Jesus says, "No, 70 times seven." And then he tells a parable, the parable of the unmerciful servant, about a man who owed his master literally billions of dollars more than he could ever repay in, you know, like 50 lifetimes at his present wage. He could never repay. He owes the master. He pleads with the master. The master is going to judge him for this. He pleads with the master for mercy and he removes the debt. And he goes out and finds a man who owes him \$50,000, significant amount. He tells him to repay him. The man can't repay him. The other slave can't repay him. He throws him into debtor's prison. The master finds out about it and reinstates the debt of this wicked, unmerciful slave, unmerciful servant. What had happened? He went out still thinking he owed the master and he's trying to collect. "I need your \$50,000 or \$60,000 because I owe these billions." He's not come to understand he can never repay the debt he owes his master. And if he had received that forgiveness, his heart would have overflowed with lovingkindness to this servant and so what it proved is he never received, there never was an eternal transaction in this slave's heart.

And so the reality is, the way that we carry love around as we continue to meditate on how much God has loved us, we love because he first loved us. Bask in the wonder of his forgiveness. Continue to stir up, not strive to stir up in your heart, affection for God and amazement at his mercy and then you're ready to dispense that to others. It's a picture of this maybe that would help is because what happens when someone sins against you or if they sin against me is that, you know, we're offended, we're hurt in some way, but a part

of them has been exposed, something ugly. And the idea is, this word "cover" means "to veil." It's like we don't want this ugliness to be set on display. It's a contrast to stirring up strife. You wake up strife so it can get going and let everybody know about how upset we are. No, let's deal with this as privately and quietly as possible because I don't want my brother to be thought of badly by his brothers and sisters. I want to keep it a circle small.

An image of that is in the Old Testament, in Genesis, here when Noah, after they disembarked from the ark and began to repopulate the world, right after they, you know, Noah's had this tremendous move of God in his life to build the ark, to be the man of God preaching righteousness. After they get off the ark, he plants a vineyard and he gets drunk with wine and he's apparently in a state of just drunken stupor, his clothes are not on properly and his son Ham sees him in his tent and he looks ridiculous and Ham comes out and laughs about his dad to his two brothers, Shem and Japheth. You know what Shem and Japheth do? They don't want to in any way denigrate the dignity of their father, though he has just now committed significant sin. They carry a garment and they back into the tent and cover their father's nakedness without looking. That's the heart that Peter is describing. It does what God does. It does what's necessary, but no more than what's necessary. It keeps the circle small.

You know, when you've really forgiven someone, when you have a heart of forgiveness, someone has kind of said there's three promises in forgiveness that are helpful, that you think about what it really means to forgive. To forgive biblically means to release your right to retaliate. It also is another word that is used for forgive is the idea of releasing a debt. This debt is no longer charged to your account. But what it means to forgive in practical reality, what does it mean to do this, to cover a multitude of sins? Someone sins against me and my heart is to forgive them. What does that look like? It means this, when I say I forgive you or when you say you forgive me, I sin against you, you forgive me. You sin against me, I forgive you. When we forgive one another, what are we saying? We're saying this, "I promise, brother, that I will not dwell on this sin in my own mind anymore. I'm not going to think about it. I'm not going to dwell on it." How easy it is to keep turning those things over in our minds, isn't it? To say, to hear our heart say something like, "I still can't believe he said what he said." And then to stop and what you're doing is you're meditating on it. "That was really awful what he said." And you keep on thinking about it. And the more you think about it, the more your heart is affected, the more bitterness grows. So you're saying, "I'm not going to dwell on it." That's a promise of forgiveness. "I'm not going to dwell on it. Brother, I'm telling you, I'm going to discipline my mind." When those thoughts come and you have that thought, the flesh will have that thought. There's like a flare that goes across your mind, "I can't believe he said what he said," what do you do? Put it under the blood of Christ. "But I cannot believe that I have said to other people the things I've said. I cannot believe that I've said the things to God that I've said, that I have a rebellious heart. I can't believe God has saved me." And you swallow it up with the love and grace of God.

That's the first promise of forgiveness, "I promise not to dwell on it in my own mind." Secondly, "I promise not to bring it up to you to use it against you." Isn't it easy? This is something especially for in family relationships, husband, wife, siblings. We can

constantly when we enter a conflict, one of the first things we do is bring out the record book. "Yes, this reminds me of what you did," and we have a list that we're ready to go through. "This is just like what you did last week, which you did the week before that," and you use it against them. That is not forgiveness. You're bringing up the debt. There it is. No, it's washed away. In fact, we're to forgive as God forgave us. What does that mean? He remembers our sins no more. He's removed them as far as the East is from the West. So when we forgive, we're to forgive like that. You say, "I cannot do what He can do." Well, I mean, he truly, he knows all things. In one sense, he cannot forget anything because he knows everything. What he's saying is, "I choose not to remember it. I choose not to think about it." And we can do that. We can choose not to think about it. When it comes up, it's put out. and cover it over with love and grace and the reminder of God's goodness to you.

So not to bring it up to use it against you. That's the second promise. Not to dwell on it in my own heart. Not to bring it up to use it against you. And thirdly, not to tell others about it. "I'm not going to tell others about it. Someone tells me you did the same thing to them." You know, I say something to somebody and I apologize for it and then I say something to somebody else that's similar to what I said to them, have the same little sin problem or whatever, and they tell this person, what's the natural thing for that person? "He did it to me too." Now, what they should do, they shouldn't say he did it to me too. Right? Because they said they're not going to talk about it. But this person who's been told, oftentimes somebody will come to someone they think maybe is, you know, someone they see as a possible mentor or a person they respect in the Lord, and they'll say, "Listen, this is what happened to me," and this person, if you're the person receiving that information, rather than say, "He did it to me too," you say, "Well, you need to go talk to him about that. Have you shared with him? Well, that's what you need to do. That's what the Scripture says." Now, you now have some information, though, that you didn't ask for, the Lord gave you, and you may also want to circle back with me, too, because they just told you something about me and now you heard it, too. And you may want to come back and say, "Hey, Ty, how are you doing? Just asking. You know, Jim came to me. Has Jim talked to you? Well, he's going to be talking to you. and I just want to see how you're doing." You see, that's love actually serving, but it's not using it against you and it's not bringing it up in any way to use it against you.

That's forgiveness. To forgive as God forgave you, and that is the glory of love. When this starts happening and we start being able to get in each other's lives the more that you get in the lives of other people you can bank on it you will be sinned against. You know, do you want to ruin a friendship? Room together, right? Everybody looks better from a distance. Everybody looks better from a distance. There's only one human being that has ever lived that did not look better from a distance and that man's name is Jesus. You got closer to him, you saw only more and more glory and righteousness and holiness. But all the rest of us, you see sin. And so we need love and he says, "Listen, time is short. There is not much time. Life is going to be over soon. What must you do? What can you do with the short time that you have? Love one another fervently, labor at loving, practice love, serve one another." And he's going to talk about next, Lord willing we'll talk about this Sunday after next, we're to minister to one another now. Time is short, pray, love and

serve. These are the things that will make the biggest difference for eternity. May God help us be faithful to him.

Let's pray.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word. We thank You that, Lord, it reproves us, it corrects us, it exposes our sinfulness. We come acknowledging how easy it is for us to respond sinfully to when other people sin against us. It's so easy to return evil for evil, even in the body of Christ and, Lord, You've made it clear that we are to love each other as You've loved us. Give us a humble heart that enables us to take the form, to take the example of Jesus and become like a servant, the lowliest servant washing our brothers' and sisters' feet. Help us to demonstrate the glory of the gospel in everyday life with our brothers and sisters. We are the family of God, Lord, make us look like this. Help us. We ask You to pour out Your Spirit upon us. We know we need more and more of the ministry of the Holy Spirit filling us because the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is love. We pray that we would be more and more like this so that the world could know that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Lord, in dark days, days are getting darker, we don't know how long we have, we know that You know all things, but we're to live as if we don't have tomorrow and so today, Lord, while it is day, let us love one another like this. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.