

November 12, 2017

## ***The Most Excellent Way***

***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf; be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** II Corinthians 5:17-21

Forgiveness is a hard concept for all of us to apply. I am always troubled when I hear someone suggest that we should just 'forgive and forget' or that we should just 'get over it'. Forgiveness for the hurts others have inflicted on us is really hard for all of us. Forgetting the hurt is really not possible for most of us. Maybe, if we understood what forgiveness really means we might find it easier to obey God's commandments about forgiving.

In our minds I think we see forgiveness as continually putting ourselves in a position to be hurt over and over again by the actions of others because we never stand up for ourselves. In reality forgiveness requires a great deal of strength.

From a Scriptural view forgiveness is about giving up the right to get even, to exact judgment, to 'settle the score'. When someone hurts us in some way by their actions or attitudes we believe that we have the inherent right to exact justice. And we do. The Old Testament standard of fair play; 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Exodus 21:24) is the legal standard set by God under the Law of Moses. God created this system of natural consequences for our sins against one another. If someone knocks out your tooth, you have every right to knock out theirs.

Jesus, however, raises the standard for those of us who would follow him. He tells us that, as his followers, we might have the right to demand justice, but if we would be like him, we have to choose to give up that right. He says, ***"But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn him the other also."*** (Matthew 5:39) And he also teaches us this simple standard, ***"For if you forgive men when they sin against you your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, you Father will not forgive yours."*** (Matthew 6:14-15)

Understand that the 'eye for an eye' standard of justice still exists. Sins have consequences and they should. You and I all sin and we deserve the consequences which we earn because of our sin-filled choices. This standard is true for us and it is true with God.

Because we are all sinners God has every right to destroy us where we stand. That would indeed be justice. However, God loves us so much that he has willingly chosen not to. He has given up his absolute right to exact his just consequences on us. Instead he has let his justice fall on his Son who stood in our place. We have received God's forgiveness and he has rescued us from his righteous judgment. How then can we insist on justice for those who have sinned against us and still accept God's forgiveness for our own sins? We cannot. If God has forgiven us; giving up his right to justice, then you and I must be willing to forgive giving up our right to justice.

Beyond this God has chosen to be reconciled to us. He has chosen to erase the reality of our sins with the blood of his Son so that we can have the same relationship that man did in the

beginning. God has paid the ultimate price in order to remove our sins so that he can be fully reconciled to us and we to him.

To forgive is within my power. I can give that gift at any time regardless of what the one who has hurt me does. Reconciliation, however, requires that the actions which severed our relationship be addressed. I can forgive anyone at any time. Being reconciled will require that we find a way to address the sin that ruined our relationship.

Thankfully our God and Father has addressed our sins through the blood of Jesus so that we can be reconciled to him. Without that blood there is no reconciliation. We have then, a ministry of reconciliation. Our task is to share this amazing news with a world torn apart by sin and its consequences. Our task is to tell those who are separated from God by the reality of their own sins that there is a way back to the Father and Jesus is that way.

