

September 17, 2017

The Most Excellent Way

"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." I Corinthians 1:4-9

Throughout the history of Christianity there has been an ongoing struggle not to let worldly standards and attitudes pollute the faithful. Our world is never static and because it is constantly changing so are the basic moral values by which the world lives. Mankind's basic values are constantly changing. What was horrifying 25 years ago or even a decade ago would not even raise an eyebrow today.

A lot of us look back on the past believing that somehow mankind had better morals back then, than we do now. That really isn't true. Yes, in some matters our standards have become looser, but in others our moral values have become much stricter. Our attitudes about appropriate dress have loosened way up, but our attitudes toward those who are different than us are much, much stricter than they used to be.

The truth of the matter is that our values as a whole are constantly changing and adapting. Our values in the church should, however, never change because God does not change. It is and has always been, I think, a constant struggle among believers to maintain God's standards for our conduct.

The Corinthians were a perfect example of this struggle. In that city every type of sexual immorality was openly practiced and much of it was even cast as part of religious ceremony. The people of Corinth had become accustomed to these outlandish sexual behaviors in their communities and so as they became believers it was hard for them to distinguish what was morally right from God's perspective and to keep those standards.

Paul chastizes them for knowing that one of their number, for example, was practicing sexual immorality and doing nothing about it. He commands them to withdraw from the unrepentant sinner. One of the hardest things to do in a church is to discipline those who are sinning and will not repent.

Jesus would tell us, ***"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector."*** (Matthew 18:15-17)

In our day these actions are seldom if ever practiced among believers. We tend to deal with those caught up in sin very differently. Our reaction to those who sin against us, whose sin we have personally experienced, is with vengeance or with indifference. Few of us would go to someone else in the church and explain to them one-on-one that we think they are sinning. The truth of the matter is we don't want to get that personally involved with others.

Among the believers in Corinth the pressure to accept behaviors that were completely acceptable in the community in the church as well was almost overwhelming. Paul wants them to

understand that doing so is not now, nor has it ever been, acceptable to God. God's standards are unchanging and he expects us to learn them and then to keep them.

So, in the face of a constantly changing world what do we do about the pressures that we all experience to accept behaviors that God has clearly said are not right? First, we are not given permission to judge or condemn the world. That is not our job. Paul would tell us that that job belongs to God (I Corinthians 5:9-11)

Our task, as Paul would describe it, is to intervene for good in the lives of fellow believers when they are caught up in sin. He wrote to the Galatian believers, *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:1-3)

