

AHEAD TOWARD RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS

Thomas Robinson, *He Goes Ahead of Us 3*, May 4, 2014

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21

¹⁴ For the **love of Christ** controls us, because we have concluded this: that **one has died for all, therefore all have died**; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that **those who live** might no longer live for themselves but for him who **for their sake died and was raised**.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

¹⁸ All this is from **God**, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**; ¹⁹ that is, **in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself**, not counting their **trespasses** against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**.

²⁰ Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God**.

MATTHEW 5:23-24 (JESUS IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT)

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. **First be reconciled to your brother or sister**, and then come and offer your gift.

MATTHEW 6:10-15 (JESUS IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT: THE LORD'S PRAYER)

"... ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and **forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors**. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For **if you forgive** others their **trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you**, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

MATTHEW 18:21-22 (PETER ASKS ABOUT FORGIVENESS.)

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, **how often** will my brother sin against me, and **I forgive him? As many as seven times?**"

²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."

MARK 11:25 (WHEN TO FORGIVE)

²⁵ "And whenever you stand praying, **forgive**, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may **forgive you your trespasses**."

COLOSSIANS 2:12-14

¹² When you were **buried** with him in **baptism**, you were also **raised with him** through **faith** in the powerful working of **God**, who **raised him from the dead**. ¹³ And when **you were dead in trespasses** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made you alive together with him**, when **he forgave us** (gave us grace in) all our trespasses, ¹⁴ erasing the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, **nauling it to the cross**.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ **Bear with each other and forgive** (give grace to) **one another** if any of you has a **grievance** against someone. **Forgive** (give grace) as the **Lord forgave** (gave grace to) **you**.

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on **love**, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Jesus' Resurrection Creates a New Kind of Life

The great challenge of Christian faith and life is translating the core events of the Gospel into everyday life. Especially Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection! It is not new philosophical concepts or advice or legislation, but the discovery that our lives have been changed by what God has done in Jesus, who is both God and Us. His death and resurrection become ours. We died! We were raised! A new Creation! No words are big enough. Life is Quest.

When you read early believers like Paul, you watch them helping others to grasp this transformation. Its is not defined by free association but by Jesus' identity and teaching. Jesus' love for us shapes and defines us, challenges us, trains us, gives us hope and power in spite of our weakness, gives us new vision, a new framework for thinking and acting.

As Paul looks at Jesus, he sees the dawn of a new world, not of conquest and mastery but of reconciliation and renewal – a resurrection life that we begin to participate in even now. We're ambassadors of God's reconciliation with his world and with you and me personally.

Jesus Lives Reconciliation and Forgiveness

After 2000 years it's nearly impossible to sense how new Jesus' message was. In the OT there is much about God's forgiveness, but not a single command for humans to forgive each other. The closest is the idea of Jubilee (Lev 25), the release of debts and enslavement every 50 years. Jesus for the first time makes forgiving and reconciling central in his teaching. Reconciling before sacrifice! We ask God's forgiveness as we forgive?! Really?!

The idea is so startling that Jesus must express it forcefully for us to hear it. In reality, God was already in Jesus doing everything to forgive and reconcile his creatures. This is God's core reality of love breaking into the world. He wants us to share in that ultimate Good.

Releasing Obligations and Giving Grace

The idea of forgiveness is hard for us moderns. It merges with tolerance, excusing things, especially for ourselves. Rather, forgiveness is the recognition of real wrong that does not deserve toleration and still forgiving it. Jesus often speaks of releasing a debt (*aphesis*).

The debt is real. Someone will bear the cost. Someone has really hurt us. We want to respond with anger, revenge, justice, make them pay. Forgiveness is sacrificing the payment we are entitled to, releasing the debt, bearing the cost ourselves, letting go.

Peter knows how hard this is going to be. He asks, is this a regulation with a limit, even a generous limit – seven times. Jesus response: not a rule, but a new life, a new age.

The core of forgiveness is giving grace (*charizesthai*). We have experienced God's astonishing love and grace toward us. We alienate ourselves from God by corrupting our own lives. In Jesus, God has given grace by taking on himself our evil and pain, releasing our debt.

Calling us, allowing us to participate in his love and grace is one of God's greatest gifts to us.

Forgiveness is Hard. Do it Today!

But it doesn't feel like a gift. It rubs against our instinct for fairness especially to ourselves.

That's why Jesus pushes us so hard. Do it! Only after we experience the freedom that forgiveness brings can we realize that holding on to anger, revenge, retribution is a prison.

Jesus urges his disciple to begin stepping into resurrection life now! Every time you pray, forgive. Don't wait for the perfect opportunity, the right response. Forgive beyond what you can bear. Release the just revenge you're owed! Find the Freedom of God's Grace.