

Sunday Apr. 11, 2021  
Lesson 6: Living by New Standards  
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21

**Context:**

As the church continues in the season of Easter, we celebrate how the resurrected Christ continues to show up in our lives. As he does so, he moves us to discover the ways we are called to participate in the ministry of reconciliation. Our lives are meant to be a constant pattern of being reconciled to God and to one another.

What better example of reconciliation is to be found than letters addressed to the early church. The church in Corinth, as discussed in previous studies, had several conflicts to arise. The conflicts were not just between believers as they were overtures of what was taking place in the city of Corinth.

The beginning of this passage appears to be as part of Paul addressing those who have criticized him. He speaks of the divine judgment and is thus conscious of judgment and its role in community. If the Corinthians realize Paul takes judgment seriously, they will also realize he exercises his ministry as God wants it to be exercised and not in the selfish behavior his critics have attributed to him.<sup>1</sup> Paul wants the people to know his efforts are genuine and come from a place of wanting to honor God because he knows God will judge him for his efforts and decisions.

Paul ties it all to the love of God and what is found in Christ's giving of himself. Fear may make us do what another demands, but it never affects conduct in the same basic way as does love.<sup>2</sup> Love has a power of its own which transcends fear. The ministry of Jesus Christ was brought about in the life and death of Jesus who came to love and forgive.

Carrying Christ's love forward, Paul goes on to emphasize his greatest conviction that Christ died for all. Verse fifteen points to how this transforms us. Christ's death invites us to a response as he died and rose for our sake. We live by his life, and his love then controls us.<sup>3</sup> Paul starts with himself as an example and then draws in the Corinthians to bring them into the mission as well.

As a result of Christ's love motivating and moving us, Paul calls for the Corinthian church to see how they are a new creation both individually and corporately. As part of the new creation they are to function differently and to remember as much in their interactions with one another. They are called to forget how things were done in the past and to look to new ways of being in the future.

The people are called to reconcile with God. This "ministry of reconciliation" comes as a fruit of our relationship with God, which plays out in our peace with one

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Best, "Second Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

another. The God of the cross is also the God of resurrection who calls us to new life.

### **Application**

If you ever go to Coventry in England, you will find there is a sprawling industrial city, more modern than perhaps some of the other parts of the country. Yet near the center of the city is a strange site. On one side is a modern church with artwork from the 1960s. Beside the magnificent structure are the wide spacious ruins of Coventry Cathedral, a once beautiful medieval structure at the heart of the city.

Coventry Cathedral was the target of the German Luftwaffe in a particularly hard bombing of the city during World War II. For many, the attacks damaged the morale of the people. Even in war, there was an unspoken rule of not attacking sacred sites such as cathedrals. Yet as we know, rules in war are meant to be broken and disregarded as wars don't follow rules. Coventry Cathedral was no exception as there were only charred remains of the cathedral including a few spires and remnants of the high altar after the bombing destroyed it and killed over five hundred people in 1940.

Shortly after the destruction, the cathedral's stonemason, Jock Forbes, observed two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen across each other; he tied them together and set them up in the ruined sanctuary as a cross.<sup>4</sup> The words "Father, forgive" were inscribed behind the charred cross. At the same time, local priest Revd. Arthur Wales, created another cross by binding together three of the huge medieval nails that littered the debris and formed what would become the symbol of Coventry's international center for the ministry of reconciliation.

This center has become a place where groups may go to discuss not only conflict, but find ways of reconciliation. The cathedral even features a chapel where there are origami cranes over the altar to signify the forgiveness granted to the British in the bombing of the cities in Japan during the war. All around, the new and old spaces of the cathedral point to how groups and individuals can be reconciled.

The story of Coventry Cathedral reminds us of the journey to forgiveness to reconciliation. Yet it is not some overnight or quick process where we can just snap our fingers, and boom forgiveness is there. Everyone is reconciled and we sing kumbaya. That is not how it works as it often takes reflection, prayer, and time.

Often before we can forgive others, we go to God first. We both seek forgiveness for the sins we have committed and then as we feel that forgiveness sink in, we remember how God forgives us and loves us. And as a result of God reconciling with us, we are reminded we can forgive others. We may have to start with forgiving ourselves for whatever we've done or how we've messed up, but God is in the midst of that process too.

It is as we are reconciled to God, we can see how God calls us to be reconciled with each other. Just as Coventry Cathedral proves to us, it may mean we have to look for the signs about how to go about it or when the conversation or act needs to happen. Sometimes it is symbolic act like writing a prayer of liturgy of repentance and other times it is a conversation we need to go through.

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpts of this narrative come from the Pitkin Guides book on *Coventry Cathedral* and was written by Canon Michael Sadgrove, Vice-Provost and Precentor of Coventry Cathedral.

Reconciliation can and should be a beautiful thing. That does not mean it will always be painless or that part of ourselves may have to be given up in the process. We may feel hurt by what another party has done and we may even be in the right with our pain and frustration. Yet God is at work to remind us we are a new creation and God will lead us to do what needs to be done even if its painful or takes us to vulnerable places. As we are reminded of the cross, we remember how Jesus showed his love in a very open and exposed way. The cross reminds us of the power of love and how reconciliation is part of the Christian journey.

What does it mean to you to be reconciled with God? How do we confess our sins to God? Why do you think reconciliation is so important in ministry? How have you sought reconciliation in your own relationships and life?

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