



June 11, 2010

Dear Friends:

### **MIXED EMOTIONS**

One friend recently told me, "Michael, you cannot change hearts. Only God can."

Paul, the Apostle says it so beautifully in 1 Peter 5: 5 and 6, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time". Those are good words of instruction as we seek to walk humbly in blessing and forgiveness.

Although we all face difficult times, we must always remain cognizant that keeping a right spirit and walking humbly in forgiveness is a God Thing; we know it has powerful benefits . . . here and There.

By personal experience and as recipients of some unpleasant onslaughts, Linda and I have tapped into this truth and it has sustained us and strengthened us. It has been health to our souls, joy to our spirits and it continues to bring a good night's sleep. Because of the Word, we have stood strong and faithful. Even our boys have acknowledged God's loving hand.

At times, parts of the Word have literally had to come alive and connect in our core. We've certainly identified with many of the scripture characters and have even quoted their words, "Lord, behold their threats", "They honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me", "Don't be afraid that some plan conceived behind closed doors will be the end of you", and, "I appeal to you, brothers, to be on your guard concerning those who create dissensions and difficulties and cause divisions, in opposition to the doctrine (the teaching) which you have been taught. (I warn you to turn aside from them, to,) avoid them." Does that sound like forgiveness? You bet.

In the real sense of the Word, we should always keep our hearts right while walking in forgiveness, knowing how much we've been forgiven and knowing that God is in full control, it is not our job to exact revenge and a price.

Tragically, many, as naïve and misdirected, believe that they are "loving, obedient and submissive", as they again submit to abusive actions in order to please God. In the gentlest of terms, that's nuts.

Forgiveness, the God thing, YES. Allowing repetitive abuse, NO.

The Word and our own Christian Life walk is filled with actions of forgiveness that brought freedom but did not hide the scars or dismiss the consequences.

You see, the thief is forgiven but he doesn't get to handle the offering. The abuser is forgiven but doesn't get to work in Children's Church. Capiche?

He forgave and blessed Jacob but the limp stayed forever.

He forgave and blessed Moses but Moses got to watch them walk into the Promise Land without him.

He forgave and blessed Samson but he stayed blind and crumbled under the rubble.

Real forgiveness cannot be divorced from love. Sometimes it's tough love but it is always practiced with the knowledge that God is just.

The Word is clear . . . "Hatred stirs up strife but love covers." (Proverbs), "Above all, have fervent love for it covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter)

This concept is broadened as Paul, in his Corinthian love points, deals with the real fruit of real love . . . loving, covering, and not hovering.

The compulsive controllers, who helicopter incessantly, need to be put on notice . . . your self seeking, striving antics don't fly here. That also goes for the calculating, premeditated charade parade of pandering pity. Park the elephants, send the clowns home, the parade is over.

The most vivid story of covering relates to our friend Noah. After years of boat building, animal wrangling, being laughed at and being shut up with all that gang for the wildest cruise experience of all time, I guess the stress finally got to him and his family found him in a "three sheets to the wind" condition. Noah was drunk and naked. We all know, drunk and nekkid (that's how they say it in the South) is a bad combination.

One son walked in and began to laugh and ridicule Noah. The other two sons, although grieved and sad, backed in to cover him. Now, Noah was a mess and was clearly in the wrong but God spoke blessing to the ones who lovingly covered up wobbly Noah. This is the way we have conducted ourselves.

Perhaps you feel like you've been smacked by a Louisville Slugger of meanness and abuse, perhaps you have been threatened, perhaps you have been the target of a clandestine conspiracy to stomp you into the ground and to drag you, perhaps your acts of benevolence and blessing have been discredited and distorted, perhaps you have been betrayed by thieves of money, character and influence, perhaps a co-worker weaseled in to take credit for a job you did, perhaps you've had to cover a drunk, naked Noah a time or two . . . don't be discouraged. God knows. He is there for you. He will lift you and under gird you. Just stop running to get in the "beat up line".

Let these words help you whether facing a cranky sales clerk, the spews of narcissistic entitlement behavior or one of those "Ichabod" moments like we, as a church, have had to face. By experience, we have walked through a vitriolic gauntlet while practicing extreme charity and forgiveness. Our conclusion? God is Faithful.

The Word of the Lord is in my mouth regarding the intentional creation of confusion, the calculated discord sowing, the constructing of mischief and the conscious allowance of smear intended to demean and vilify us as leaders. Much damage has been done to the "church" that manipulated crocodile tears dramatically pledged undying devotion to. Oh, how hollow. Thus saith the Lord, "The sham is over."

My friend was right, we can't change hearts, but we can keep ours in check.

*Michael*

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**LifeGate**