

TRUTH AND MERCY

Like thousands of other Nigerian Christians in recent years, John Yakubu and his family fled their home to escape repeated attacks by Boko Haram terrorists. But, unable to feed his family in the refugee camp, John returned home to collect some of his livestock. There the terrorists seized him and demanded he convert to Islam. On his refusal, they tied him to a tree, cut his head and body with large knives, and left him for dead. However, he was later rescued and taken to a hospital for treatment. He testified, "I have forgiven the Islamic militants because they did not know what they were doing."

In our hearts, we know John's response is right. It mirrors that of Christ Himself: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

But also in our hearts, when we learn of injustices or even observe them ourselves, we hear another voice. "Father, forgiveness would be unjust. They deserve your wrath. Don't you see what they are doing? Don't you care?"

Is this response wrong? After all, it mirrors that of the Psalmist: "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth ... shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. Lord ... how long shall the wicked triumph?"

Indeed, our innate desire for justice is a trait God Himself imparted when He made us in His image. Why shouldn't we be angry at injustice, when He is?

Yet God has also given us the capacity for mercy, and He calls us to be merciful as He is. He forbids us, as New Testament saints, to execute vengeance on the evildoer. He commands us to forgive. He tells us to bless and pray for our enemies.

So how can we reconcile within our hearts the desire for justice with the call to mercy?

Since justice and mercy are both attributes of God, is He conflicted in His own heart? No, because He has provided a solution to the conflict. And His solution is key to resolving the conflict in our own hearts.

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Mercy and peace were at odds with truth and righteousness, but God has brought them together through the blood of Christ. Envision the scene when a sinner stands before God:

Truth: "He is guilty!"

Mercy: "Forgive him!"

Righteousness: "His sentence is death!"

Peace: "Let him be reconciled!"

Jesus Christ: "Father, forgive him, because I shed my blood for him."

God the Father: "He is a sinner worthy of death, but because he has put his faith in the blood of my Son, I extend mercy; he is forgiven!"

And truth and mercy agree. Righteousness and peace agree.

It is through the blood of Jesus that God can give the sinner mercy and peace without compromising His truth and righteousness. In fact, God declares His righteousness [truth] by providing remission of sins [mercy] through the blood of Christ, so He can be both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

How does the blood of Jesus declare God's righteousness? It tells the world that God views sin so seriously that for its remission He requires the highest price that could ever be paid—the precious blood of His only begotten Son—and He was willing to pay that price. "We often refer to Calvary as a monument to the infinite grace of God, and it is that. But it is equally a declaration of the great holiness and justice of God."

Thus mercy and truth are met together in the cross of Christ. This is how God has resolved the conflict. And it is how we resolve the conflict in our own hearts.

This reconciliation begins with our own cleansing. When we come to Calvary, we see our exceeding sinfulness before our righteous God, and humbly acknowledge that it would be unjust for Him to forgive us apart from the blood of Jesus.

Then when we look at the sins of others, from the pettiest offender to the cruellest persecutor, we remember that the same price was paid for their sins as for ours. If only they would receive the blood, they could justly be forgiven, as we were.

"But," we may say, "They have not believed on Jesus. They still deserve the wrath of God." True. So did we. But the blood of Jesus gave us space to repent. Were it not for the blood, God would have no reason to be longsuffering, because there would be no hope of ever justifying the sinner. But because of the blood, He is holding back the Day of Judgment, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

So if God, to whom vengeance belongs, can hold back His wrath because He earnestly desires to cleanse the sinner, surely we, to whom vengeance is forbidden, can have the same desire. If we are going to hope and pray for something for the sinner, let it not be vengeance, but salvation through repentance and faith in the blood. And in this prayer our desire for justice can find rest, because Christ's blood provides a just way to erase the sin.

Yes, the day of vengeance will come on all who reject the blood. And in that day we will be ultimately satisfied that the Judge of all the earth is right.

But until that day, let us forgive from our hearts, and let us proclaim the Gospel of Christ's blood, pulling as many as possible out of the fire.

In this day of grace, because of the blood, our choice is not truth or mercy. Our choice is truth and mercy.

"The Lord is ris'n indeed,"
Then Justice asks no more;
Mercy and Truth are now agreed,
Who stood opposed before.

~A. Clair Auker