

Unveiled Faces: Judgement and Justice
2 Corinthians 13:1-10

If you've got your bible would you do me a courtesy and turn to 2 Corinthians 13:1-10. Let me go ahead and read our text for us tonight.

A couple months ago I was playing a show and ended up in an interesting conversation with a girl who had come to see us. Over the course of us talking, it sort of came out that I was a pastor. Let me just tell you that while I'm not ashamed of my job, it really does make people treat you differently once they know what you do for a living.

-They start apologizing after cuss words, they start treating you as being too frail to deal with criticism of Christianity.

-She didn't respond like that, but she explained to me that she was, "Spiritual but not religious. Although I used to go to church."

As a Pastor, but really just as a Christian, I'm always interested to hear what leads people away from Christianity. So I asked her, "Why don't you consider yourself a Christian anymore?" And she gave a pretty familiar answer, "Theres things in the bible I don't agree with. Like hell, I don't understand how a loving God could judge anyone or condemn anyone."

Maybe you're a Christian in this room, and these objections sound ridiculous to you. That's fair, but you know I've found that the most difficult questions my skeptical friends ask are not the technical ones but the simple ones. Because they're so simple that you almost cant figure out how to respond.

-Or maybe you're not a Christian here, and these concerns deeply resonate with you, and what we've just read from Paul makes you even more concerned, with all his talk of Judgment and not sparing the corinthians in his visit.

But when we look at this text carefully, I think we'll see that the judgement of God and the way that it's mediated towards Paul isn't like the judgement that so many modern people think of.

The Charges and The Witnesses: You'll notice that Paul begins by telling the Corinthians that all the charges must be established by two or three witnesses. This is in keeping with Jewish law, which required multiple witnesses before someone could be accused of something, you can't just go around saying that people did things without proof.

One of the great classics of American literature is, "To kill a mockingbird." You've either read it or pretended to read it if you went to public school during high school. But one of the central themes of the story is a black man who lives in the town being falsely accused of a horrific crime. And as you read the book, or the wikipedia summary, or watch the movie there is this deep sense of outrage that builds in you.

-That outrage is not, "I can't believe that the state would be so judgmental!" Instead, it's, "I wish that this judgement were just!"

We all have a longing to see justice, to see wrongdoing punished and the innocent vindicated. While we may fight it kicking and screaming, we all agree that justice requires judgement.

Paul in his final approach to Corinth models what God's judgement looks like. It's not baseless, it's not flippant, but careful and measured. Nobody gets off for what they have done, and nobody is accused of what they have not done.

I warned and am warning: Paul mentions that the sort of things he will be passing judgement on won't come as a surprise to the Corinthians. He has warned them in the past. He is warning them again in this letter. Nothing should be shocking when the hammer falls.

-It seems that there are a few things at work here. The first is the people who have rebelled against Paul. There's also the issue of sexual immorality, and wrapped up in that is incest. So there's also sorts of problems here.

But this statement also begins to undercut our concerns about judgement. Because when we talk about the judgement of God, or just judgement in general, we have this fear that we'll be held to rules that we weren't aware of.

Most of us are in college, some of us are teachers all of us have been to school. You know the big question that gets asked is, "Will this be on the test?"

-Of course, nobody likes tests, but we recognize that they have their place. What frustrates us is not that we are held to standards, but when we're held to the standards we weren't aware of...that's where things get frustrating.

Paul is abundantly clear with the Corinthians of the expectations, they know what is expected of them as they live out the Christian life. But their problem is our problem in the modern world, "It's not that we're ignorant of the standards, we just don't like them."

I wonder if what we mean by saying, "God isn't judgmental" is really just, "God would never disagree with me or the things that I think are important or true."

I can't help but notice that when we say, "God would never judge someone for that" we are always referring to the exact issues that we think that we're right on. The exact issues that are socially acceptable. ***But the sort of God who never disagrees with you is no God at all. You might as well worship your own reflection.***

Of course at that point we're not dealing with God at all, we're dealing with selfishness, and an idol that we've given a different name.

Paul gives us a picture of God's own judgement in his dealing with the Corinthians. He calls us to live lives of righteousness, and if the rest of the Bible is to be believed about how sinful we are and how good God is, we ought to expect that this will mean we are wrong on many things and it is not God who must change but us.

Crucified in weakness, raised in power: If you're new to the church, you may be starting to notice a pattern. Everything that we talk about somehow is rooted in Jesus or it finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

-We speak of wisdom, and Jesus is the truly wise man

-We speak of kingship, and Jesus is the only good king
-We speak of anger, and Jesus is the only one to ever display righteous anger perfectly.

Paul here says that to understand how his authority and judgement works, we are to look to the cross, where Christ was crucified in weakness.

In my office there is this painting that hangs above my desk from a German painter named Grünewald. It's a well-known piece because it is so shocking. It depicts Jesus hanging on the cross with his mother, Mary, and John sitting at the foot.

-What tends to shock people most is how broken Jesus looks. If you go online to look at the details you see that his hands are contorted, his feet and toes are bent at unnatural angles. His face is in absolute agony.

Of course, that in part is due to the crucifixion itself, but Christians have always understood that something deeper is going on here. Jesus is not just under the judgement of the Romans who crucified them, he is under the judgement of God. He hangs on the tree not just under the curse of the state but the curse of God.

-It is not his own judgement he endures, it is ours. For the sins of the world

I wonder if we aren't so much afraid of judgement as we are of being judged unfairly, by someone who doesn't understand our condition. Jesus has borne the judgement of God in our place, he is able to execute judgement rightly. ***If anyone has a right to judge the world, it is the one who was judged on behalf of the world. Crucified in weakness but raised in power.***

Examine yourselves to see: This whole time Paul has been under the microscope of the Corinthians. They've been judging him, based on things he didn't do, based on unfair standards yet he asks them to look inwardly. To examine themselves, to see if their concerns about Paul might not actually be issues in their own heart.

-There is a strange thing about people, we see our own flaws most clearly when they're expressed in other people. We don't see how bad our bad is until it's done to us rather than by us.

This is instructive for you and I, because so often the things that frustrate me in other people are just problems in my own heart that I can finally see clearly. Before you sit down to correct someone, examine yourself to see whether your criticism of them isn't also true of you and repent.

And finally see the heart behind Paul's judgement and his authority. It is for the building up of the church and the hope of repentance. This is profound, because his judgement in Corinth is an act of kindness. His discipline is an act of love.

The least loving thing we can do is to fail to name evil. It is an act of mercy to call something destructive.