

## “Looking at Things from God’s Point of View”

### 1 Corinthians 4: 1-6

It is very clear that Paul is talking about judgment in this text. He uses the word judge or some form of the word judge at least four times in just these six verses. That Paul is talking about judgment in this text is very clear to us as readers. And we can also assume that Paul is directing his comments about judgment to the Corinthians. But as we read this text, we have to admit, that we are also all wondering, “Why in the world is the preacher telling us all this? What does any of this have to do with us?”

Well, I’ll tell you. No, I haven’t lost my mind. And Yes, I did purposely choose this Scripture for a reason, granted judgment was not the original reason or way I thought I would be going with this sermon but as I lived with this text this week, I realized that Paul’s words written some two thousand years ago still speak to us today as we continue on our journey of faith and that means talking about judgment in church.

As people of faith, we really can’t miss the fact that judgment is what Paul is dealing with in this text. However, I thought I could gloss over that whole part and talk once again about being God’s servant. Just ask Melissa. The hymns we

originally picked out all had to do with being servants of God. But the Spirit led me in a different direction. So if you don't like today's hymns, you can blame me.

So as I was saying, I thought I would be going with this whole servant motif for today's sermon. However the Spirit of God said Judgment is what we need to talk about today. Now, I can talk all day about being God's servant but when it comes to talking about judgment, I'd rather keep my mouth shut. Not because I don't have anything to say about judgment. It is just that whole concept of judgment makes me uncomfortable. And I know for a fact that it also makes a few others uncomfortable as well.

I have told the Elders on more than one occasion that I am not really comfortable with the Prayer of Confession that we do each week. Every time we say it, it feels like judgment. I know theologically we do it because we need to name the things that separate us from God, name the ways we have not honored our relationship with God so that when we come to the table, we can be free, free from the darkness, free from "sin" if you want to call it that. I know in my mind we do the Prayer of Confession so that we can lay our burdens down and have our arms and hearts open to truly receive God's grace.

See I know theologically why we do it. It is just that I'm not sure that I like saying it every week. Like I said before, for me it feels like judgment, like I'm not

worthy. I come to worship to be lifted up, not reminded how far I am from truly becoming the person God calls me to be. Regardless of what my mind knows, my heart, every time we say the Prayer of Confession, says judgment and that is definitely not part of my theology or beliefs.

So now that I've shared all that, I am sure you are all wondering even more why on earth are we talking about judgment if we are not comfortable with it and all of us would rather avoid the issue. Why on earth does the preacher have to start meddling?

Well, I come from a long line of meddlers, and in that line of meddlers, we find Jesus and we find Paul, both of which were known as really big meddlers, both of which were known as making the community of faith deal with issues that it would rather avoid.

So in honor of that meddling tradition, in honor of Jesus and Paul, we're going to do some meddling and we are going to talk about judgment today.

Now usually when judgment is talked about in church, there are several reactions, reactions that range from uncomfortable shifting in the seats to the rolling of the eyes because the preacher is going to go all hellfire and damnation on us this morning. As the wider Church, we really don't have a great relationship

with the idea of judgment and a lot of the reason for that is we have experienced two extreme behaviors with judgment.

On one end of the spectrum we have people who say, “Don’t judge lest ye be judged” and on the other hand of the spectrum, we have people of faith who feel like it is their right and their privilege to judge. They do this through words of hate, through words of hurt. They judge through actions which have created more brokenness and separation than ever brought someone to know and love God.

And then somewhere in the middle, somewhere between these two extreme behaviors is the rest of us, confused about judgment. We know it is not right. Jesus clearly says, “Take the log out of your own eye before you try to take the log out of another’s.” Jesus clearly says, “Don’t judge lest ye be judge” but let’s be honest we do it.

We try maneuver our way around “real” judgment with phrases like, “Bless her little heart” or “I know no one’s asking my opinion but...” sort of like if we say those phrases that will relieve any wrongdoing in our judgment and gossip.

Or we twist the words of the Bible to fit what we think the situation deserves. We use phrases like “an eye for an eye” or “A tooth for a tooth” when we think the person deserves punishment, not really understanding that in the context that these words were written, they were statements of mercy. At one point in time,

if someone wronged you, you had permission to destroy that person and all his family, including everything that was connected to that person.

The whole eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth was supposed to limit the damage and extend grace. But we have used those phrases to extract revenge or I've even them used to "right a wrong"

But all that has done is leave us with an eyeless and toothless generation. So instead of mercy and grace, instead we are a society whose words spread hurt, whose words infect and block out life, whose words and actions multiply the hate and the brokenness more than they ever show people the love of God. Revenge and Gossip was not at all what Jesus was thinking or talking about when he prayed for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So what I suggest as recovering Christians, is that we take another look at Paul's conversation with the Corinthians and once again see where we find the Word of God for us, a word we know is a word of love, a word of grace, and yes most importantly a word of mercy.

As we all may remember Paul is talking, well, that's not exactly right. Paul is correctly sternly the Corinthians' behavior. And he is fed up with their shenanigans. The last straw for Paul came when they started calling his leadership

and his ministry into question and in response to their remarks, we get this part of the text.

Paul says, “I don’t care what you say about me. I don’t even care what you think about me. You, Corinthians, are in no place to judge. Only God can do that.” He continues by saying, “Yes, I know I’m not perfect and sure there are probably some stuff that I need to deal with but that is between me and God. Because as a servant of God, as a steward of God’s resources, Paul is only accountable to God in his faithfulness. Let me say that again, Paul is only accountable to God when it comes to knowing if he is living out his calling as a servant of God.

And the same can be said for us today as modern Christians. We know where our journeys have taken us. We are the ones that know our gifts and talents. We are accountable to God for our faith, for our ministries and for how we live out that faithfulness.

Paul tells the Corinthians that they have been acting and speaking out of half-truths and gossips. That they need to get their facts straight before they start running their mouths off about something they don’t know.

As servants of God, as God’s stewards, as God’s managers of God’s creation, we are accountable to God for our service in ministry. Everything we do, everything we say, all of our relationships must come from that fact because God

has certain expectations of us. God expects us to love our brothers and sisters as God has loved us, to recognize the image of God found in each person, to proclaim that all are God's Beloved, claimed and named. And when we fall short of these expectations of God's, we are accountable to is God.

Which leads us to that whole judgment thing once again. Now, I'm not denying that there is not judgment in the Bible. There is. Story after story confirms this but it is always God who judges. I fully admit that on that Last Day there will be that conversation with God, reviewing our life, talking about where we met God's expectations and where we fell short. That's what it means to be accountable to God. That's part of our relationship with God as God's servants but we know, through the life and death of Jesus Christ, in those conversations, there will also be grace. There will also be mercy. And most importantly, there will also be love.

Basically what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is "Let God deal with God's business about eternal things like faithfulness and accountability for service. What we are called to deal with is the all too important business of God down here on earth, like treating each other with respect, dignity and love. And for us to do that, for us to fully live out our role as God's servants, as God's stewards here on earth, we must look at all things, all situations from God's point of view. Before we jump to conclusions or pass quick judgment, we need to get all the facts. And to do that,

we must look at things from God's point of view because then and only then will we learn the whole Truth.

For Paul, and for the rest of us, living out our calling as servants of God, living from viewpoint makes all the difference for us as we try to live out our faithfulness here on earth. When we look at things from God's point of view, no longer will we be quick to judge but rather we will be quick to bring justice for all of God's children. We are not called to judge. That's God's business. What we are called to do is to make justice for all of God's creation.

It all goes back to that whole being accountable to God thing and knowing that God has certain expectations of us as God's servants. We are called to speak out when we see an injustice. We are called to speak out when we see that the bonds of community are being broken through people's words and actions. We are called to speak out when we see more brokenness than reconciliation. Now the world will call this judgment. However, that's not judgment. That's justice. It's a fine line but that line makes all the difference. That line separates and prevents our words and actions from creating more hurt and brokenness. That line connects us and binds us together as a community. That line connects as the Body of Christ. The line is the Love of God.

Let me explain. As Christians, we have this misconception that we shouldn't call each other's behavior into question. And that is simply not true. It would be harmful for all of God's creation if we followed that literally. Case in point: Jesus did. Think of his conversations with the Pharisees and Sadducees. And Paul certainly did. All we have to do is finish reading the rest of first Corinthians to see that. Both Jesus and Paul felt that it was important to call out people on their behavior. Now here is where the difference comes in.

They were doing it in the name of justice. They were addressing behaviors that were tearing and breaking down the community of God. They were addressing behaviors that were ripping apart the unity of the people of God.

that is what was important for Jesus and for Paul and what should be important for us as well. What is important is The community and the unity of the Body of Christ. When people's behaviors destroy that community and unity, Paul says we, as people of faith, have every right to call them out on their behaviors but, but...it must be done in love. And not just any love, but done in the same love that God has shown all of us when God claimed us and named us as God's very own.

Judgment according to the world says an revenge which only causes more hurt and hate. Justice, according to the Kingdom of God, says that community and unity are too important for us to ignore behavior and words that destroy these

things. Justice causes love, mercy and grace to come down. Justice causes the bonds of community to be strengthened.

As servants of God, as stewards of God's creation, we are called to practice justice tempered with love, a love that has its eyes wide open and a willingness to be frank in all its experiences. We are called to practice justice tempered with a love that showed us how much we mean to God, a love that reminds us we are accountable to God for all of our words, for all of our actions. We are called to practice justice tempered with love that reminds us God has certain expectations of us as caretakers of God's creation.

Yes, We are called to speak out. Yes, We are urged to call out other people's behaviors. Yes We are called to stand up for the community and unity of the Body of Christ. Not because God has given us permission to judge and find people wanting. But because God has called us to be God's servants, to be God's stewards and we are accountable to God for our actions and our words. And because we are accountable to God, we are also accountable to each of our brothers and sisters in faith. We are accountable to God and to each other. And in that accountability we are reminded that God has certain expectations of us, like loving one another as God has loved us, like finding the image of God in all of God's children, like speaking out when we see actions and words that destroy and break down the community and unity of the Body of Christ. That's not judgment. That's justice.

Yes, judgment exists but that doesn't concern us. That is God's business. And we are not God.

As people of faith we need to let God deal with the business of eternal things. We are called to something else. WE are called to deal with the business of being God's servants, God's stewards here on earth. And for us to do that, we must look at things from God's point of view, so that we can meet and exceed all of God's wonderful life-changing and life giving expectations. Because then and only then, can we truly understand the Truth about God's grace and God's love.

As people of faith, as Christians, We are not called to pass judgment. We are called to make justice.

May we always remember the difference between the two. Amen.