

“To See People as God Sees Them”

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Paul’s second letter to believers in Corinth is to me, the saddest letter in the Bible. Not sad like Lamentations, which is a lament about one’s circumstances – specifically the destruction of the temple in 586 BC. But sad in that it had to be written. For most of 2 Corinthians Paul has to defend his character to Christians. Why? Because after Paul left Corinth, false teachers came in and spread lies that Paul was a hypocrite, that he was in it for the money, that he was only there to build a personal following, that he wasn’t really an apostle like Peter, John and the others ... and all kinds of lies that the false teachers were actually guilty of!! It’s a good thing they didn’t have social media back then!

Not surprisingly this is one of Satan’s tactics – which is next week’s message [‘Open our eyes to Satan’s schemes’] – to distract God’s people from their ministries through criticism and false accusations. How much time and energy is wasted by God’s people when they have to defend themselves or their ministries because of false information or criticism. And this skews the way we see people; God’s as well as the unsaved, and even ourselves.

So we need to pray that God would open our eyes to see people as He sees them. Here in the middle of defending himself Paul gives us some helpful insights in to how to handle false information or criticism directed towards us and others so that we continue forward in living a life for God’s purposes. Here in v.11 Paul is transitioning from meditating on our great hope and secure home with God in the future (5:1-10) and how our security affects the way we think and view people. Surprisingly, Paul begins by showing us that if we’re to have our eyes open to see people as God sees them, we have to start with ourselves. And it’s amazing how many Christians do not see themselves as God sees them. So, to see people as God sees them we have to start by

Having a Healthy View of Ourselves **(5:11-13)**

Paul has just finished reminding believers about our future. He writes in v.6

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience

To “fear the Lord” means to have a healthy view of God. He is God, we are not. He says faith in Jesus alone saves us and so we must agree with Him and place our faith in Jesus if we want to be saved. Being saved, we are secure in Him yet we are also accountable to Him for how we lived for Christ. The Judgment seat of Christ is the believer’s assessment not the Great White Throne Judgment of God mentioned in Rev. 20:11. That is when unbelievers will try to prove by their good works they should get into heaven, God shows they fall short because they never professed faith in Jesus and repented of their sins

Paul has had to defend himself to the Corinthian believers who already knew Paul but were now questioning him based on false accusations made about him. Paul is now having to “persuade” people about who he was, which he knows is plain to God. Paul is speaking about persuading people about who he was here. He’s not talking about the gospel yet. The context of vv.11-13 is clearly about his own testimony because it affects how he will persuade people about the gospel. So Paul is being open and honest with people because he

Remembers we are accountable to God (v.11; 5:1-10)

Paul testifies that ‘he is to plain to God’ in that he has nothing to hide and he prayed that they saw him the same way. Yet he also reminds his hearers that those who lie about others will have to give an account to God also. Paul had a healthy view of himself because he feared God. By fearing God he also trusted God who knew him (and knows us) better than anyone. Paul knew that ultimately no ones’ assessment of us has any long lasting value. It doesn’t mean people’s comments didn’t bother him – they did obviously because we have this letter – but it bothered him because what they were saying about him affected his ministry for God. And that’s a good thing to keep in mind for ourselves. When people say things that hurt us are we bothered by their comments because it hurts us or because it hurts our opportunities to serve God? For Paul that was the real issue. When we read 4:7-12 we see all the ways Paul suffered. Verbal abuse was just another way Paul suffered for the gospel. The reason Paul was maligned was because these people didn’t want the gospel spread.

People are going to speak against us. The best response to that, Paul stated was to

Live honestly before people (v.12; 4:1-6)

He said in v.12,

¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.

Paul was saying, remember how we lived among you? Compare that with these lies they are spreading. When we live honest and open lives, that will disprove the false accusations against us.

^{1 Pet. 2:11} Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹⁵ For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Paul has already reminded the Corinthians of that. At the end of Ch. 4 he recalled that in spite of the sufferings and the verbal abuse,

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Another way we maintain a healthy of ourselves and don’t focus on ourselves is to

Stay God-focused (v.13; 4:16-18)

¹³ *If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*

Some of the verbal abuse stated that Paul was not in his right mind. Paul said if they conclude we are crazy because we love and serve God, that's fine. But since he isn't crazy, it's for God's glory and the Corinthian's good.

So why did Paul continue in ministry in spite of all the persecution and the untrue things people were posting on their Facebook pages (same thing just different venue)?

¹⁴ *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.* ¹⁵ *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Paul continued to live for God's glory and people's good by

Staying Motivated by Christ's Love for the Lost **(5:14-15)**

Paul wouldn't allow any self pity for his trials and abuse because of how much Jesus loved him. Our hurts pale in comparison to what Jesus did for us on the cross. When we grasp that Jesus lived for the sole purpose of dying for us how can we focus on ourselves? We have to have something greater than our self to motivate us to live with purpose and the greatest thing we can live for, is for Jesus whose death and resurrection (meaning ours as well) gives us hope and purpose. If we allow people's insensitivity to us to cause us to lose purpose in life then we are only living for self. Surely we can include this as one of the many 'things that hinder us' from fixing our eyes on Jesus. As the author of Hebrews commands us in 12:2:

let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Paul just said in 4:17,

*For our light and **momentary** troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

In light of eternity Paul knew our troubles were only temporal. Paul may have lived 60 years on earth. He's now been living with Jesus for 1960 years approximately! But once Paul got saved his whole perspective on people changed. Now he sees them as Christ sees them and that's why Christ's love compelled him to absorb the sufferings because eternity was at stake in the lives of men and women. He says so in the next two verses;

¹⁶ *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.* ¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

We forget that Paul and Jesus lived at the same time. Paul was about 10 years younger than Jesus but if Paul was a budding rabbinical student under the mentorship of Gamaliel - a member of the Sanhedrin - Paul would have seen and heard much of Jesus' ministry. At one time Paul saw Jesus from a worldly point of view. At the very best a good teacher but as most Pharisaical leaders Paul shared s hatred for Jesus because He was different. He was a 'Law breaker', a Sabbath breaker, a charlatan taking the people away from God. That's how Paul once viewed Jesus. But then he got saved and everything changes when you get saved; your heart and then your mind. So as a miracle of God himself Paul now saw

Fellow Believers as God's Miracles **(5:16-17)**

He compares us to new works of creation. Like the creation of the world, at one time there was no life there. Now, like creation God does the miraculous work of creation through Jesus. Old things are gone. This is how Paul views believers as fellow miracles of God. That's why he began most of his letters thanking God for the living miracles in Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica and that's why we should do the same for the miracles God has done that are in Westport, Elgin, Perth, Kingston, etc. *"If anyone is in Christ he/she is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come."*

Any and every disciple of Jesus is a miracle. You and I are miracles of God who once looked at Jesus as the world did. Now He is our Lord. Now He lives in our hearts by His Spirit. Now He can change us to be more like Him. We were once dead to sin but now we are alive to God in Christ Jesus. That's how we are to see one another. Sometimes we don't. We see what we're not doing or shouldn't be doing or misunderstanding because we don't have the full information about one another and we revert back to seeing from a worldly perspective. I think that's why Paul always thanked God for believers in his letters. Even the Corinthians with whom he had to do a lot of correcting.

Now we see the flow of thought that gets us to vv.18-21. Without a godly perspective of ourselves (we are accountable to God not man; live a life of open integrity what the Bible calls blameless and staying focused on God), a proper motivation from Christ's love who died for everyone, looking at those who receive that message as fellow miracles of God, only then can we be open to our mission:

To Know our Role as God's Messengers **(5:18-21)**

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul says we are God's ambassadors to take His message of reconciliation to the world; namely that forgiveness of sins is available through faith in Jesus Christ. Again we need to see people as God sees them; people in need of and worth saving.

People need reconciliation with God (vv.18-19)

Paul likes this word since he uses it 5 times here! The word itself means "the action of reestablishing friendship between two persons who are on bad terms, to replace hostility with peaceful relations". This is interesting because it means that people had some kind of relationship with God. In the sense that God made us unique and we belong to Him. But because we all have a sin nature we are separated from God. The only way to have peace with God restored is through faith in Jesus.

When Jesus came He said He didn't come to judge. In-stead He was 'not counting their sins against them' but rather paid the price for their sins. This is a helpful perspective to have. The people

we need to witness to have a broken relationship with God that they don't know. That God doesn't want to count their sins against them and in fact has already made the step towards reconciliation. God has done His part through Jesus making reconciliation available, most of them don't know that. That's where we come in. It's our job to

Help them become right with God (vv.20-21)

God put sin on Jesus, who never had sin in His life, so that we could find forgiveness from the sins we've never been able to get rid. And now God wants to put us in a place that He no longer looks at our sins at all. That's how people become right with God. Forgiveness of sins.

That means we have to share these words with them. Not always easy but it's what they need most, reconciliation with God. God's plan involves us taking seriously our role to be His ambassadors, speaking for Him and sharing His purpose and plan with those who don't know they need to be reconciled to God. This is one of Satan's favourite tactics. Many people just presume God will allow them into His presence because of their good deeds or because they've had a hard life or because they aren't terrible people like criminals. All of us need reconciliation. All of us need peace with God through faith in Jesus. You and I are God's plan to get the message out. But if we're too focused on ourselves motivated by the things we want out of life, we won't see the world as God sees it.

Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday, a day set aside to help us look at all people the way God sees them. His valued creations who need to be reconciled to God. Paul said he once regarded Jesus from a worldly perspective, which means he also regarded people from a worldly perspective. When God saved him, He changed him and his perspective changed. He began to see people as God sees them. Perhaps we've had a hard time seeing people as God sees them. What if we took v.16 seriously today and challenged ourselves to say "*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*" Fellow believers are new creations that we thank God for. Unbelievers are lost people in need of reconciliation, totally unaware that God in Christ does not want to count their sins against them.

Memorizing this verse will help us look at our co-workers, classmates, lost family members, store employees, neighbours and world leaders all from God's perspective. Perhaps we should pray something like this:

'Lord, forgive me for not looking at _____ from your perspective. I have been looking at them the way the world does. Allowing what people or media say about them and not looking at them through Your eyes. Help me to be a better ambassador for You, to see their need for reconciliation with You and forgiveness of their sins. I pray for their salvation and I pray I would be open to be used to share Your words with them.

And Father, forgive me for not looking at my brother or sister as Your creation, Your miracle. Like me, we are not yet fully like Christ. Help me to show the same grace and mercy that You show me. Help us both to become closer Christlike disciples than we were so that we can glorify You together."