

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

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In Acts chapter 18, Paul spent a year and a half in the city of Corinth, and the Lord used him to establish his church there. Thus, Paul was the one who converted most of them to Christ. Yet, in spite of this, many of those very people later turned against Paul and rejected him. In 1 Corinthians 4:15-16, he reminded them, *“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.”* Nevertheless, many of them instead followed “another Jesus, whom we have not preached” (2 Cor 11:4), because of the leadership and teachings of some “false apostles, deceitful workers” who were among them (2 Cor 11:1-23). Of course, none of these people could legitimately point to any misconduct or false teaching that Paul was guilty of. Therefore, they were forced to criticize Paul for outward, physical matters.

Paul’s speech and bodily presence

To the ones in Corinth who were causing Paul trouble, these words in 2 Corinthians 10:7-12 were directed: *“Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ’s, even so are we Christ’s. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”* These people were indeed looking on things after the outward appearance. But this is not unusual at all. Man characteristically judges by the outward man. He looks at many aspects of physical things. In Paul’s case, it was his physical appearance and the sound of his voice. In other cases, it may be the language someone speaks, or their nationality, race, ethnicity, or skin color. In James 2:1-7, certain Christians were favoring rich over poor. All of this falls under the category of respecting persons (literally, *faces*), and “it is not good to have respect of persons in judgment” (Prov 24:23). God’s word has the ultimate solution for this problem.

How God sees

In 1 Samuel 16:7, we have a description of a key difference between God and man: *“For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”* Therefore, we are commanded to judge others as God does, not like man does. To do otherwise is to be guilty of sin. *“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”* (Jas 2:9). We must love others as we do ourselves (Jas 2:8), and we do not judge

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(continued)

ourselves by the appearance. We will be judged by God one day, and if we have judged others unmercifully, i.e. by the appearance rather than by the heart, then we will be judged without mercy (Jas 2:13). We should follow the example of God, and judge only by the heart, according to a person's inner man. Jesus did not "judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness" (Isa 11:3-4). In like manner Jesus commands us, "*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*" (John 7:24). "*God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him*" (Acts 10:34-35; see also 2 Sam 14:14; 2 Chr 19:7; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:24-25; 1 Pet 1:17).

God's answer to the Corinthians

The outward man perishes, "yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). That is why we should "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:18). Though it is natural for us to look on the outward appearance, at the things which are seen, our challenge is to change to see like God does. Through the Apostle Paul, God gave an answer for the ones in Corinth who were boasting in appearance and not in heart, specifically the ones who were doubting Paul's apostleship, demanding letters of approval from him, and despising him for his appearance and voice. He was giving the opportunity to the members of the congregation who were *not* judging him that way to answer and instruct the brethren who were in the wrong. To those good brethren, Paul said, "*For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart*" (2 Cor 5:12). What was the answer? To those who "glory in appearance, and not in heart," the Lord gives the reminder that Christ died for us all (2 Cor 5:14). This love that he had for us constrains us to live only for him and not for ourselves anymore (2 Cor 5:14-15). Part of living for Christ requires our seeing and judging like he does. The old things, including the old way of seeing and judging, must pass away. Though we all used to look on the outward appearance, as a Christian, everything is new and different for us now. "*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (2 Cor 5:16-17). We now have a new way of seeing things: by the heart, not by the flesh.