

God Loves What He Condemns

Dear saints of God,

Being a judge has got to be tough. Deciding what's the right sentence for each person. If judges see a guilty person who looks they he will reform, they'll want to see that the convict gets that chance. It should be a fair sentence, but provide the person a chance to change his life.

But there are some people who come before a judge who won't get a second chance. Those who commit a heinous crime and show no remorse. Those who say they're sorry, but it's obvious that they are simply saying what they think will get them out of jail soonest. A judge won't be so eager to help that kind of person. Judges make some decisions based on what they see in a person.

What about the greatest Judge of all? How does God judge people—how does God judge us? Today St. Paul reminds us of a couple truths: *1) Our sins make God condemn us; but 2) His love makes God save us. God Loves What He Condemns.*

Consider Paul's amazing words: **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Unimaginable! **“God demonstrates his love...”** What do you love? Normally, we love things or people that love us back. We like that person—so long as they are kind to us. We love the Detroit Tigers, or the Buckeyes—especially when they are winning. We love pizza—that is, until that spicy pepperoni keeps us up at night. Really, our love can be pretty selfish.

Paul mentions a type of love that is not selfish and yet plausible. Someone **might die for a righteous person or a good person**. Soldiers, for example, are willing to fight, even die, to defend their families, their nation, the liberty we enjoy. They may have to fight abroad, but even there, they are fighting for us. I don't think many Americans stationed in the Middle East would say they are fighting for a repressive Muslim country. No, they fight for our country—whether it's for our basic freedoms or simply for their family back home. Such a love is very admirable; but it is something we could imagine.

But what about our God? **“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** And Paul goes on to make it clear—this was **“while we were God's enemies.”** Would you die for your enemy?

OK, if we think hard we could come up with a situation. Imagine an American soldier guarding a terrorist. They talk. The soldier learns a bit of the man's life. The man doesn't know much about America, but he learns through this soldier; and his hatred starts to fade. The soldier might have a little less hatred for the man—he may be more willing to protect him, even willing to die for him. But—that's because he had stopped viewing the prisoner purely as his enemy. He had started to see him as a friend.

And here we have the contrast—Jesus Christ died for his enemies! His complete enemies. No mitigating circumstances there.

We look for reasons to care for or love someone. And we assume God does the same. So when we think of our relationship to God, we put out of our minds the reasons God might not like us. I'm not so bad, we think. But, the truth is, yes I am bad! I am a poor, miserable sinner. Nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

We aren't basically decent, lovable people who make mistakes that need to be cleared up. We didn't just drift off course and need a little help. We aren't children who in a momentary fit say something naughty—and then smile at our parents and let them know, yes, we were wrong, we didn't really mean that.

No, when we sin we are enemies of God. *Our sins make God condemn us.*

Now, that's a strong statement: "Enemies of God"—we can understand that for some people. It was true of Paul, back when he was the man who persecuted Christians. "Enemies"—that described Paul's audience before they became Christians: many of them had committed horrible sins. That kind of sinner is God's enemy, sure.

But what about us? What about those of us baptized long ago, maybe raised in a Christian home, maybe attending worship week after week for years?

Scripture says that our sins make us enemies of God, too. Every sin is a rebellion against God's sovereignty. And if we don't repent, we will continue in those sins, in fact, they'll just grow.

Yes, our sins, every one of them, make God condemn us. But then we are confronted with the paradox of our faith: *God Loves What He Condemns. Our sin makes God condemn us; his love makes God save us.*

We were complete enemies of God—but Jesus died for us. We were powerless to save ourselves, powerless even to pay for one sin—but Jesus sacrificed himself for us. He willingly was born a real human. He humbled himself to live under the law. He went through the agony of beatings, the humiliation of rejection, and faced death by crucifixion. All this he did—for us.

Paul tells us what all this means for us. **"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"** "Justified" means "declared not guilty" by the judge. It's like a parable Jesus told about a servant who had run up so many debts he could never repay them—only to be told that his debt was cancelled, completely gone.

Paul goes on to say that we **"were reconciled to God through the death of his Son."** "Reconciled" means that our argument is done; we are one with God again. Think of Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son—how the wayward son returns and is welcomed by his father with open arms.

Now, stop and think of what the world around us says about those two ideas; forgiveness and reconciliation. To wash the slate clean; to forget about someone's sins--that sounds dangerous to most people. Here's how one best-selling parenting book put it: ***"Forgiveness is equivalent to overlooking offenses. Overlooking offenses is dangerous to one's health. Therefore, forgiveness is dangerous.....Such disregard for justice places forgiveness outside the moral realm."*** Forgiving people, in other words, is wrong; it's unfair; it denies the reality of what the person has done. People have to pay for what they do. And reconciliation based on forgiveness is wrong; if we're going to be reconciled to someone, it should only be when that person changes.

But what did our God do? He didn't just overlook our sins. He did not deny the reality of what we've done in any way. We committed real sins; and those real sins had to be paid for. God sent Jesus to pay the price. Justice was not disregarded. Justice was done on Mt. Calvary, where the holy Son of God suffered and died for us.

We have been justified, God declared us Not Guilty for Jesus' sake. We are saved from God's anger. And we are reconciled to God because nothing stands between us and God. *His love makes God, forces God to save us.* And, **“how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”** Jesus has risen from the dead, and he has a place prepared for you in heaven. Eternal life is yours already.

If you are feeling guilty over anything in your life, please speak with me, and I can help you find the peace God wants you to have today.

And when you realize how much God loves you, then you can forgive others as you have been forgiven, and work to be reconciled to others.

You know, a lot of people won't try to be reconciled because they think that shows weakness, or is an admission of guilt. They think, “Yeah, I hurt Frank; but when he came and tried to make up with me, that proved that he was really wrong too. Either he knows he was wrong, or he's a pretty weak person to give in like that.”

But God is not wrong, and God is not weak. Yet God took the steps to be reconciled to us. God promised to forgive us. Then God followed through by sending Jesus to remove the barrier of sin between us. And God the Holy Spirit reminds us again and again of what Jesus did so we trust in him. From beginning to end, our reconciliation is all God's doing.

We can forgive others, we can keep working to be reconciled to others, because of God's love for us.

Back in the 1920's, a boy named David LeRoy grew up in Louisiana. His dad owned a grocery store, saved up money for years to buy a brand new 1928 Buick. It was the family's greatest possession. Even though David LeRoy was only 11 years old, he could drive the car around the yard, moving it from one shady spot to another. Now kids, don't get any ideas, that was 100 years ago, and it didn't turn out well. One morning, his mother said she was going to the cleaners, and David LeRoy said he'd bring the car for her, and ran outside. He was so excited as he backed the car out that he forgot to close the door; the door smacked against the garage and was ripped completely off. Can you imagine how the boy felt? That night he didn't come to supper after his father got home. He stood around the corner as his mother told his father what happened, and he was ready for the worst. But he was surprised to hear his father's response: “Well, you're right, Ruby, that car was precious to me, but not as precious as David LeRoy. He didn't mean to do it; he was trying to help. We can get the car fixed. The main thing is that no one got hurt. David LeRoy must feel awful right now; we'll have to love him through it.” That boy grew up to be a famous preacher, D.L.Dykes. He would tell that story and say that in his father's response he learned something of what God is like: the meaning of grace.

As we forgive others, they can learn something of what God is like.

God is not like a human judge. Human judges follow the law, they mete out justice. And they look at what the person is like—how sincere, how impressive, how humble. God doesn't look at how sincere you seem; God judges us justly. *Our sins make God condemn us.* But how God feels about us is not based on us; it's based on Jesus. For

Jesus' sake, *God Loves What He Condemns. His love makes God save us.* Thank the Lord that he judges you in Christ to be Not Guilty. Amen.