

Small Group Study Week 3

Is God Two-Faced?



On the surface:

1. Have you ever known someone who could be both tough and gentle? How is that different from being unpredictable?
2. When your parents punished you as a child, did they ever say, “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you?” What did they mean? Did you believe them?

Going deeper:

Rosie Grier of the 1960s Los Angeles Rams is used in the sermon as an example of a person who exhibits both strong (even violent) characteristics as well as very gentle ones (needlepoint). He seems to trust that his character is not in question. Do you have the strength of character, where you feel comfortable revealing both a strong and gentle side depending on the circumstance?

3. It has been said (on talk radio) that if “God doesn’t judge San Francisco, He’s going to have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.” Genesis 18:20 – 19:13 Do you think God owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology? Do you agree that God needs to judge San Francisco? What should that look like? How about Ventura County?
4. Have you ever changed a behavior in a way that others had a hard time accepting, i.e. no longer smoking or drinking – do your friends feel you are judging them?
5. What are stories from the Old Testament (like the flood or the total destruction of Canaan) that most bother you with what they say about God? Why?
6. Are there any parts of the New Testament (like the Book of Revelation) that bother you with what they say about God? Why?
7. Are there any stories in the Bible you would be happier about if they were not there?

8. People suggest (Karen Armstrong in “The Biography of God”) that God didn’t really say or do some of the things He is described as saying and doing in the Old Testament – but that primitive people with a primitive view of God simply ascribed words and actions to Him. Does that make sense to you? Why or why not?

Digging in:

Read James 1:17

9. Do you believe that God’s character changed between the Old and New Testament? Why or why not?

10. Do you believe that God judges people today the way He does in the Old Testament? How is that shown?

People sometimes ask, “How could a God who loves send people to Hell?” But in Ezekiel 18:23 & 31-32, God sees His people heading for destruction and cries out, “Why will you die O house of Israel? I do not delight in the death of anyone who dies. Turn to me and live.” What, if anything, does this say about God sending people to Hell? If God doesn’t rejoice in the death of anyone who dies, why doesn’t He just save everyone?

From the sermon: *Throughout the Bible, we see God lovingly and mercifully calling people into a special relationship with Himself, not because they deserve it, but because He is gracious and merciful. Yet we also see a holy and righteous God who is the judge of all those who love darkness instead of His light. We see the doctor who is willing to cut out the cancer that would destroy His good creation.*

I wouldn’t want to go to a doctor who is so gentle and mild that he or she isn’t willing to hurt me. Sure I want a nice doctor but I also want a doctor who will do what it takes to make me whole – even if it means cutting on me, clobbering me with chemotherapy or zapping me with radiation. God loves us enough to use the knife. For evil is a cancer that must be removed.

11. The sermon uses the image of a God as a surgeon who is willing to cause pain in order to heal. What is God looking to heal? Why is it necessary? Isn’t there another way to do it?

12. God’s wrath and judgment come down to purity of motivation. James 1:20 says “for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” Why do we sometimes walk in dangerous territory when we express our anger with others?

God by His very nature is unchanging. We might see one aspect of His nature revealed in certain passages of Scripture more than other aspects. But God Himself does not change – and He never gets up on the wrong side of the bed and never has an off day.

13. Why is it important to you in your prayers that “God never gets up on the wrong side of the bed and never has an off day?”

From the sermon: *The Lord’s Supper shows the connection between judgment and grace very clearly. The Supper reminds us of grace. The Supper reminds us that we stand before God as forgiven people. But the table also reminds us that the wrath of God was poured out on His innocent Son for our sake. The Supper speaks of the new covenant between us and God but it also tells us that the new covenant was created by the shed blood and broken body of God in the flesh. Judgment and grace always go together.*

14. The illustration of grace and judgment in The Lord’s Supper is a powerful one. Share with the group a time when you have had a personal experience with both grace and judgment in some situation or event.

It has been said that the cross is good news and bad news. It is good news because in it God says, “Here is how much I love you.” It is bad news because the cross says, “This is what you deserve for your rebellion against God.” Do you view your sins as deserving death apart from the intervention of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

From the sermon: *But the character is the same. With God, the invitation is also the same. The story of Noah and the flood is a story of judgment. But it is in connection with the Ark that we first hear God’s great invitation of mercy. It is when the Ark is finished that we hear for the first time the voice of God speaking His favorite word – the word with which redemption begins and with which the Bible ends – God’s greatest and favorite word: “Come!”*

“Come in the Ark, you and your sons and your wife and your son’s wives with you.” “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

“Listen, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.”

“Come to me all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.”

“Come follow me and I will make you become fishers of people.”

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who thirsts come. And whoever wills, let him or her take the water of life freely.”

The wrap:

15. When you come to worship or in your prayers, are you more likely to forget that God is holy or that God is love? How can your church (or small group) help you come to a balanced understanding?

16. What do you think it would be like to meet God face to face?

Prayer:

Righteous and holy God, thank you that you are an entirely wonderful and consistent presence in our lives. We are so grateful that we can count on you to watch over us with love and caring, and sometimes punishment if we shirk our responsibility to pay attention to your guidance. Thank you that you open your arms to each of us and that we merely have to come freely to you to receive our salvation and everlasting life. In Your Son's precious name. Amen.