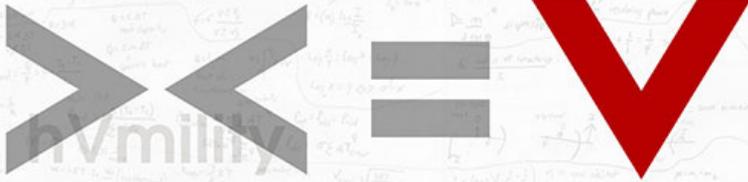


Thinking more of God



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

February 25, 2018

Discussion Guide

JUDGE, JURY, AND EXECUTIONER

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- HAVE YOU EVER FELT JUDGED? WHAT WAS THIS EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR YOU?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD. TAKE CARE TO NOTE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PRESENT AND FUTURE JUDGMENTS OF GOD AND INTO WHICH THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE INVITED.
- READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3.1-4.6 ALOUD. THIS IS A LONGER PASSAGE. IT CAN HELP TO PROVIDE BACKGROUND AND THEN SEEK TO LISTEN AS IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL

AUDIENCE HEARING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME. PERHAPS, YOU CAN SEEK TO HEAR THE TEXT AS A MEMBER OF ONE OF THE FACTIONS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE SEEKING TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT EFFECT THE TEXT HAS UPON YOU AS YOU LISTEN.

- IN WHAT WAYS WERE THE CORINTHIANS JUDGING THEIR LEADERS AND ONE ANOTHER? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY EXAMPLES AS POSSIBLE.
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, WERE THESE JUDGMENTS CROSSING OVER FROM PRESENT JUDGMENT TO FUTURE JUDGMENT?
- DO YOU SEE GOD'S PEOPLE ENGAGING IN SIMILAR ACTIONS TODAY? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- DO YOU FIND YOURSELF TEMPTED TO ENGAGE IN THIS KIND OF BEHAVIOR? WOULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- PAUL NOTES THAT THIS KIND OF BEHAVIOR DESTROYS THE CHURCH (VSS. 16-17). DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, IS PRIDE INVOLVED IN PASSING THIS KIND OF JUDGMENT WITHIN THE CHURCH? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY ANSWERS WITHIN THE TEXT AS POSSIBLE.
- PAUL URGES THE CORINTHIANS TO TAKE THE ROLE AS PATIENT SERVANTS IN ORDER TO COMBAT THEIR PRIDE. HOW MIGHT THIS WORK? WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE TODAY?
- TAKE SOME TIME TO DISCUSS HOW YOU MIGHT SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO TAKE UP THE ROLE AS PATIENT SERVANTS OF GOD. CONSIDER PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS FOR ANY JUDGING IN WHICH YOU HAVE ENGAGED AND FOR HEALING OF GOD'S CHURCH

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

JUDGEMENT

JUDGMENT IS THE PROCESS OF EVALUATING THE MERITS OF SOMEONE OR SOMETHING FOR THE PURPOSE OF REWARDING OR CHASTISING. THIS PROCESS IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT A PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS AND THAT DIFFERENT ACTIONS REQUIRE DIFFERENT RESPONSES FROM A HIGHER AUTHORITY. IN SCRIPTURE, GOD IS PORTRAYED AS THE HIGHER AUTHORITY, THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH (GENESIS 18.25), AND PEOPLE ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE BY HIM (GENESIS 2.17); THAT IS, GOD DECLARES THAT ALL HUMAN ACTIONS ARE SUBJECT TO HIS DIVINE JUSTICE. THESE ACTIONS INCLUDED PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS (1 CORINTHIANS 4.5), WORDS (MATTHEW 12.36), AND THEIR DEEDS (2 CORINTHIANS 5.10).

THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, GOD'S JUDGMENT IS TWO-FOLD: PRESENT AND FUTURE. GOD'S PRESENT JUDGEMENT IS DISCIPLINARY, A MERCIFUL RESPONSE TO HUMANKIND DESIGNED TO MOVE PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE (LEVITICUS 26). THIS JUDGMENT IS INTENDED TO PUNISH THE WICKED AND REWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, TEACHING PEOPLE THAT HOW THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES MATTERS (DEUTERONOMY 8.11; PROVERBS 29.25-27; GALATIANS 6.7). HOWEVER, EXPERIENCE REVEALS THAT GOD DOES NOT JUDGE EVERY ACTION OR ATTITUDE OF PEOPLE IN THE PRESENT. RATHER, AS REVEALED BY THE PROPHETS, GOD RESERVES A TIME WHERE HIS FINAL JUDGMENT WILL BE REVEALED, REWARDING THE JUST AND PUNISHING THE UNJUST. SCRIPTURE REFERS TO THIS TIME AS THE DAY OF THE LORD (ISAIAH 10.20; HOSEA 1.5). THE BOOK OF REVELATION BEAUTIFULLY DESCRIBES THE INTERPLAY OF GOD'S PRESENT AND FUTURE JUDGMENTS THROUGH THE USE OF SYMBOLISM AND REPETITION. IN REVELATION, JOHN USES A THREE-FOLD PATTERN OF PROGRESSING JUDGMENT Poured out upon the earth which comes to a climatic end because of people's refusal to repent and turn to God. THAT THIS PATTERN IS REPEATED THREE TIMES IN THE BOOK SEEMS TO INDICATE THE CENTRALITY OF THIS NARRATIVE TO THE PROGRESSION OF HISTORY.

GOD'S PEOPLE, THE CHURCH, ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE WITH GOD IN HIS ACTIONS OF JUDGING IN THE PRESENT INsofar AS IT INVOLVES THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 5). THIS INVITATION IS EXTENDED BECAUSE GOD'S PRESENT JUDGMENT IS DESIGNED TO TRANSFORM THE INDIVIDUAL, LEADING THEM FROM A LIFE OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS. IT IS MERCIFUL AND REDEMPTIVE IN ITS SCOPE, A TESTIMONY TO GOD'S LOVING AND GRACIOUS CHARACTER. HOWEVER, GOD'S PEOPLE ARE FORBIDDEN FROM PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT (MATTHEW 7.1-2). GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT EVALUATES THE RESPONSE OF PEOPLE TO GOD'S PRESENT JUDGMENT AND ASSIGNS ETERNAL REWARD

OR PUNISHMENT TO THE INDIVIDUAL. THIS JUDGMENT REQUIRES A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEART, MIND, AND LIFE OF THE INDIVIDUAL, SOMETHING WHICH ONLY GOD POSSESSES (JOB 34.21; 36.7). THEREFORE, GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE NO PART IN THIS FINAL EVALUATION AND EXTENSION OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.

BECAUSE GOD'S PEOPLE ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REDEMPTIVE MOVEMENT OF PRESENT JUDGMENT OF OTHER PEOPLE OF GOD BUT EXCLUDED FROM THE ISSUING A FINAL JUDGMENT, CARE MUST BE TAKEN WHEN ENGAGING IN IN THE PROCESS OF JUDGING. FIRST, CARE MUST BE TAKEN NOT TO ISSUE JUDGMENT, EVEN IN A REDEMPTIVE SENSE, OVER THOSE WHO ARE NOT OF GOD'S FAMILY. GOD'S PEOPLE MAY NOT EVALUATE AND THEN REWARD OR PUNISH THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY OF FAITH IN AN EFFORT TO INFLUENCE RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR. GOD ALONE HAS THE RIGHT TO REWARD OR PUNISH THE UNRIGHTEOUS FOR THE PURPOSE OF WOOING THEM TO HIMSELF. THIS PROCESS IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT NOT PEOPLE. SECOND, WHEN JUDGING FELLOW PEOPLE OF GOD, CARE IS TO BE TAKEN SO THAT SUCH JUDGMENT IS REDEMPTIVE NOT PUNITIVE IN NATURE. JUDGMENT WITHIN THE PEOPLE OF GOD IS MEANT TO DEAL WITH SIN, LEADING ONE TO TAKE UP THE LIFE OF CHRIST. HOWEVER, THIS JUDGMENT CAN EASILY BECOME A MEANS OF PUNISHING SOMEONE FOR TRANSGRESSION (PERCEIVED OR REAL) WITH NO DESIRE FOR TRANSFORMATION. THIS KIND OF JUDGMENT IS FINAL IN ITS SCOPE AND BELONGS TO GOD WHO ALONE HAS THE WISDOM AND INSIGHT TO ISSUE SUCH JUDGMENT. FURTHER, JUDGMENT OF GOD'S PEOPLE MUST SEEK TO AVOID REWARD FOR THE PURPOSE OF ELEVATION RATHER THAN TRANSFORMATION. THIS KIND OF JUDGMENT TYPICALLY LEADS TO THE CREATION OF CLIQUES OR CASTES AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE, WITH SOME BEING PRAISED AND OTHERS EXCLUDED BECAUSE OF THEIR ACTIONS OR ABILITIES. HOWEVER, THIS KIND OF JUDGMENT IS FINAL IN ITS FOCUS AND NOT TRANSFORMATIVE. TRANSFORMATIVE JUDGMENT AS IT PERTAINS TO REWARD INVOLVES THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO FURTHER GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION RATHER THAN ELEVATION.

THE TEXT

1 CORINTHIANS 3.1-4.6: JUDGMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS A LETTER TO A CHURCH IN CRISIS. NEWS HAS COME TO PAUL INDICATING THE CHURCH HAS DISSOLVED INTO A NUMBER OF FACTIONS WHICH ARE QUARRELING WITH ONE ANOTHER (1 CORINTHIANS 1.10-12). WHILE THE CAUSES FOR THESE DIVISIONS ARE NUMEROUS, AND DEALT WITH SUCCESSIVELY THROUGH THE LETTER, ONE OF THE MAIN ISSUES INVOLVES THE MISAPPLICATION OF JUDGMENT. THE CHURCH HAD WRONGLY PARTICIPATED IN THE PRESENT JUDGMENT OF GOD TO ITS FORMER LEADERS/PASTORS (1 CORINTHIANS 3-4) AND ITS OWN MEMBERS (1 CORINTHIANS 5). THE PRESENT JUDGMENT OF GOD IS MEANT TO LEAD ONE TO A RIGHTEOUS LIFE THROUGH REWARD

AND DISCIPLINARY PUNISHMENT. HOWEVER, THE CORINTHIANS HAD WRONGLY PARTICIPATED IN BOTH REWARD AND DISCIPLINARY PUNISHMENT, LARGELY IN PART TO THEIR FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF GOD'S PRESENT JUDGMENT.

PAUL BEGAN TO DEAL WITH THE MISAPPLICATION OF GOD'S PRESENT JUDGMENT AS IT PERTAINED TO FORMER LEADERS IN CHAPTER 3. AS THE FOUNDING PASTOR, PAUL NOTES THAT WHEN HE PASTORED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, THE PEOPLE WERE INFANTS IN THEIR FAITH. AS A GOOD PASTOR, PAUL HAD GIVEN THESE NEW CHRISTIANS WHAT THEY HAD NEEDED TO SUSTAIN THEM WHERE THEY WERE IN THEIR FAITH. HOWEVER, YEARS HAVE PASSED AND NOW PAUL IS WRITING TO THEM AND THEY ARE STILL INFANTS IN THE FAITH. PAUL IS SHOCKED AT THE LACK OF GROWTH IN THE MATURITY OF THE BELIEVERS AS EVIDENCED BY THE CONTINUATION OF WORLDLY BEHAVIOR. PAUL HAS HEARD REPORTS OF JEALOUSY AND QUARRERING FACTIONS WHICH CLAIM TO FOLLOW PAUL OR APOLLOS.

CARE MUST BE TAKEN TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION TO WHICH PAUL IS REFERRING. IT APPEARS THAT IN THE CORINTHIAN CONGREGATION, FACTIONS HAD ARISEN WHICH CLAIMED TO FOLLOW THE TEACHING OF PREVIOUS LEADERS. AS PAUL NOTED, THE MINISTRY OF THE VARIOUS LEADERS OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH LOOKED DIFFERENT. PAUL PLANTED, AND APOLLOS WATERED. THIS WAS IN LARGE PART DUE TO THE REALITY THAT PAUL PLANTED THE CHURCH AND APOLLOS CAME TO AN ESTABLISHED CHURCH. HOWEVER, THE CORINTHIANS FAILED TO RECOGNIZE WHY THE MINISTRIES OF THESE MEN DIFFERED IN THEIR SCOPE AND CONTENT. RATHER, THEY HAD EVALUATED THE MERITS OF THE CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE MINISTRIES OF THESE TWO MEN AND HAD DECIDED WHICH ONE WAS BETTER. THEY THEN PASSED JUDGMENT BY ELEVATING THE MINISTRY LEADER THEY FOUND MORE HONORABLE TO A PLACE OR STATUS ABOVE THE OTHER LEADER. VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION THEN CALLED THEMSELVES BY THE NAME OF THEIR ELEVATED LEADER AND LOOKED DOWN UPON THOSE WHO CALLED THEMSELVES BY THE NAME OF ANY OTHER LEADER. IN EFFECT, THE CORINTHIANS HAD NOT JUST CREATED A HIERARCHY OF LEADERS IN THE CHURCH, BUT THEY HAD CEASED TO BE KNOWN AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST BUT HAD BECOME FOLLOWERS OF VARIOUS MEN.

PAUL SEEKS TO CORRECT THIS ISSUE BY NOTING THAT THE CORINTHIANS HAD BEGUN TO FOLLOW MERE HUMANS THUS LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR THE CHURCH OTHER THAN JESUS CHRIST. FURTHER, THEIR JUDGMENT OF PAUL AND APOLLOS WAS MISGUIDED BECAUSE THE MINISTRY OF THESE TWO MEN COULD NOT BE COMPARED. THESE MINISTRIES WERE USED BY GOD FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES BUT ALL FOR GOD'S SINGLE PURPOSE OF CREATING A FAITH COMMUNITY. PAUL THEN NOTES THAT THE MISGUIDED JUDGMENT, MEANT TO HONOR THE PREVIOUS LEADERS OF THE CONGREGATION,

WAS IN FACT RIPPING THE CHURCH APART (1 CORINTHIANS 3.16-17). PAUL ARGUED THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD WERE HIS TEMPLE, AND THAT THE CREATION OF FACTIONS WAS DESTROYING THAT TEMPLE THEREBY OPENING THE CULPRITS TO GOD'S DISCIPLINARY JUDGMENT.

WHAT THE CORINTHIANS HAD DONE WAS MOVE FROM PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S PRESENT JUDGMENT TO ISSUING GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT ON PAUL AND APOLLOS. THEY HAD EVALUATED AND ELEVATED OR DEMOTED THESE MEN TO A PERMANENT HIERARCHY OR STATUS BASED ON THEIR MINISTRY RATHER THAN HONORING THEM FOR CARRYING OUT THEIR RESPECTIVE MINISTRIES AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO FURTHER GOSPEL MINISTRY. THIS SHIFT HAD OCCURRED BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF PRIDE IN THE CONGREGATION (1 CORINTHIANS 4.6). THE CORINTHIANS HAD DECEIVED THEMSELVES INTO BELIEVING THEY KNEW ENOUGH ABOUT THE MINISTRIES AND HEARTS OF APOLLOS AND PAUL TO ISSUE FINAL JUDGMENT. HOWEVER, PAUL REMINDS THEM THAT THE WISDOM OF GOD FAR SURPASSES THE BEST WISDOM OF MEN. THE CORINTHIANS WERE NOT EQUIPPED TO KNOW THE HEART AND MIND OF APOLLOS OR PAUL WELL ENOUGH TO PASS THIS KIND OF JUDGMENT. THIS DID NOT MEAN THE CORINTHIANS WERE POWERLESS. GOD HAD GIVEN THEM ALL THINGS, BUT JESUS AND HIS FATHER WERE STILL ABOVE THE CORINTHIANS.

RATHER THAN PASSING FINAL JUDGMENT, PAUL ENCOURAGED THE CORINTHIANS TO VIEW HIMSELF AND APOLLOS AS THEY TRULY WERE, HUMAN SERVANTS OF GOD WHO HAD BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH THE GREAT MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL. THEY WERE TO BE FAITHFUL IN THEIR HANDLING OF THESE MYSTERIES, BUT IT WAS NOT UP TO THE CORINTHIANS TO JUDGE HOW FAITHFULLY PAUL OR APOLLOS WERE CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTIES; THAT IS, THE CORINTHIANS WERE NOT TO RANK THE EFFECTIVENESS OR WORTH OF THESE TWO MEN. PAUL DID NOT DO THIS WITH HIMSELF OR HIS MINISTRY. RATHER, HE WAITED ON GOD TO ISSUE HIS FINAL JUDGMENT BECAUSE ONLY GOD COULD EXPOSE THE DEEP MOTIVES OF THE HEART. FURTHER, IT WAS GOD'S PLACE ALONE TO REWARD AND CREATE A HIERARCHY OR STATUS OF HIS CHOOSING.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

ONE OF THE MOST PAINFUL THINGS A PASTOR WILL EVER UNDERGO IS THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING COMPARED TO ANOTHER PASTOR, WHETHER ONE FROM HIS CONGREGATION OR WITH ONE FROM ANOTHER CONGREGATION. HOWEVER, THIS EXPERIENCE IS FAR FROM INFREQUENT. IT TAKES DIFFERENT FORMS. IT CAN COME AS A REMARK ABOUT HOW A TELEVISION PREACHER OFFERS MORE ENGAGING SERMONS OR HOW A FORMER PASTOR USED TO DO THINGS IMPLYING THE FORMER PASTOR GOT IT RIGHT. WHATEVER FORM IT TAKES, THE POINT IS CLEAR. THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE EVALUATED THE MERITS OF THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES OF FAITHFUL MEN AND WOMEN OF GOD AND RANKED THEM, ASSIGNING

PLACES AND STATUS AS THEY DEEM APPROPRIATE. THIS EXPERIENCE IS PAINFUL BECAUSE IT COMMUNICATES THAT A PASTOR IS NOT ENOUGH OR EFFECTIVE EVEN AS HE IS DOING EVERYTHING GOD HAS GIFTED AND ENABLED HIM TO DO.

AS I HAVE PASTORED IN VARIOUS CONGREGATIONS OVER 25 YEARS, I HAVE HAD MY FAIR SHARE OF THESE EXPERIENCES, BUT I HAVE DISCOVERED THAT PASTORS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO ARE TREATED IN THIS WAY. CONGREGATIONS HAVE A FINE WAY OF EVALUATING AND RANKING THE WORTH AND VALUE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, MINISTRIES, AND EVEN EMPHASES WITHIN A CONGREGATION. HE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE HE GIVES A GREAT DEAL. SHE IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE SHE CAN TEACH. HE IS UNIMPORTANT BECAUSE HE STRUGGLES WITH ADDICTION. SHE IS UNIMPORTANT BECAUSE SHE HAD MENTAL ILLNESS. THESE ARE THE EXTREMES, BUT EVERY MEMBER OF A FAITH COMMUNITY HAS THEIR PLACE AND MOST KNOW WHAT THAT PLACE IS. THIS KIND OF RANKING OF WORTH AND VALUE IS A NATURAL HUMAN TENDENCY AND IT IS WRONG. IT IS NOT JUST WRONG. IT IS DANGEROUS.

WHEN WE EVALUATE AND RANK THE WORTH AND VALUE OF PEOPLE WITHIN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH, WE ARE TREADING ON DANGEROUS GROUND FOR WE ARE TAKING THE MANTLE OF GOD AND PLACING IT UPON OUR SHOULDERS. ONLY GOD HAS THE WISDOM AND RIGHT TO EVALUATE AND RATE THE WORTH AND VALUE OF OUR LIVES AND MINISTRIES. OUR PLACE IS TO JOIN HIM IN WOOING PEOPLE TO LIVES OF GREATER CHRISTLIKENESS, NOT ASSIGNING THEM A STATUS. FURTHER, WHEN WE EVALUATE AND RANK INDIVIDUALS WE TEAR THE VERY FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH TO SHREDS. PEOPLE WHO ARE FAITHFUL AND NEEDED FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE CONGREGATION ARE DISCOURAGED AND PUSHED ASIDE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT MEET SOME UNSPOKEN STANDARD WHILE PEOPLE WHO ARE CHARISMATIC BUT EMPTY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARE GIVEN SEATS OF AUTHORITY AND VOICES OF INFLUENCE. THE EFFECT IS DISASTROUS. HOWEVER, WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO STOP. WE NATURALLY FIND OURSELVES EVALUATING AND RANKING PEOPLE, CHURCHES, DENOMINATIONS, MISSION AGENCIES AND THE LIKE, ASSIGNING THEM STATUS AND WORTH. HOW CAN WE STOP?

TO STOP WE MUST ADMIT THE ROOT OF OUR JUDGMENT: PRIDE. WE HAVE TAKEN THE PLACE OF GOD AND BECOME RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ETERNAL REWARD AND PUNISHMENT OF OTHERS, SOMETHING WHICH IS NOT OUR ROLE AT ALL. THIS IS DIFFICULT, PARTICULARLY WHEN WE ENCOUNTER PEOPLE WHOSE GIFTING OR PASSION DIFFERS FROM OUR OWN, OR WHEN WE ENCOUNTER PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE DIFFER ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH. HOWEVER, IF NO SIN IS PRESENT, THEN WE CAN PRAY FOR PATIENCE TO WAIT FOR GOD TO SORT IT ALL OUT AND FOR GRACE TO AFFIRM EACH AND EVERY PERSON OF FAITH AS A PERSON OF WORTH AND VALUE IN GOD'S SIGHT AND OUR OWN.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WE JUDGE PEOPLE. WE ARE ESPECIALLY GOOD AT JUDGING GOD'S PEOPLE. WE SEEM TO HAVE AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO SIZE SOMEONE UP FOR THE PURPOSE OF LABELING AND CATEGORIZING THEM. IN SOME WAYS, THIS IS PART OF THE WAY WE NAVIGATE OUR WORLD. WE ARE SEEKING TO ASSIGN WORTH AND VALUE AND PLACES TO PEOPLE SO THAT WE KNOW HOW WE ARE TO RELATE TO THEM. SOME PEOPLE NEED OUR TIME AND ATTENTION WHILE OTHERS ARE A DRAIN ON OUR LIMITED RESOURCES. HOWEVER, PROBLEMS ARISE WHEN WE DO THIS WITH OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS. THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, TO EVALUATE AND ASSIGN PEOPLE TO PLACES OR WITH STATUS IS TO ENGAGE IN THE FINAL JUDGMENT OF GOD, AND THAT IS GOD'S PLACE NOT OURS. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, TO RANK AND EVALUATE LEADS TO DISASTER IN THE CHURCH. PEOPLE ARE DISCOURAGED AND PUSHED ASIDE AS UNIMPORTANT AND VOICELESS, LEAVING THE CHURCH WITHOUT IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. HOWEVER, WE ENGAGE IN THIS PRACTICE SO NATURALLY WE DO NOT EVEN RECOGNIZE WHEN WE DO IT. STOPPING BEGINS WHEN WE BEGIN TO DEAL WITH OUR PRIDE. WHEN IT COMES TO OUR EVALUATING AND JUDGING OF OTHERS, DEALING WITH OUR PRIDE IS SOMETHING WHICH REQUIRES SOMETHING OTHER THAN A HEAD-ON ASSAULT. RATHER THAN ATTACKING OUR PRIDE, WE CAN BE MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN WE BUILD UP OUR RIGHTFUL IDENTITY. WE ARE SERVANTS OF GOD. WHEN WE SEEK TO SEE OURSELVES AS SERVANTS IT BECOMES MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT TO PASS JUDGMENT BECAUSE SERVANTS DO NOT JUDGE. THIS IS THE ROLE OF THE MASTER. FURTHER, WE CAN WORK TO SEE EVERY OTHER PERSON OF GOD AS A SERVANT OF EQUAL STANDING AND WORTH. WE MAY HAVE DIFFERENT ROLES AND JOBS, BUT EACH IS NECESSARY IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ONE EASY WAY TO WORK ON THIS IS TO PRAY DAILY FOR THE GRACE TO SEE YOURSELF AND OTHERS AS SERVANTS OF GOD. ANOTHER WAY IS TO REFUSE TITLES WHICH ELEVATE YOU ABOVE OTHERS AND TO USE TITLES WHICH PUT YOU ON EQUAL STANDING WITH OTHERS, LOWERING YOURSELF AND ELEVATING OTHERS. WHATEVER YOUR PATH, AS YOU WORK ON IDENTIFYING YOURSELF AS A SERVANT PRIDE WILL HAVE LESS ROOM TO WORK BECAUSE BY NATURE SERVANTS ARE NOT PROUD.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

©2018 UNION CENTER CHRISTIAN CHURCH