

**Because Christ is Our Judge
1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34**

May 25, 2008

“A community of blind men once heard that an extraordinary beast called an elephant had been brought into the country. Since they did not know what it looked like and had never heard its name, they resolved to obtain a picture, and the knowledge they desired, by feeling the beast - the only possibility that was open to them! They went in search of the elephant, and when they had found it, they felt its body. One touched its leg, the other a tusk, the third an ear, and in the belief that they now knew the elephant, they returned home. But when they were questioned by the other blind men, their answers differed. The one who had felt the leg maintained that the elephant was nothing other than a pillar, extremely rough to the touch, and yet strangely soft. The one who had caught hold of the tusk denied this and described the elephant as, hard and smooth, with nothing soft or rough about it, more over the beast was by no means as stout as a pillar, but rather had

the shape of a post ['amud]. The third, who had held the ear in his hands, spoke: "By my faith, it is both soft and rough." Thus he agreed with one of the others, but went on to say: Nevertheless, it is neither like a post nor a pillar, but like a broad, thick piece of leather." Each was right in a certain sense, since each of them communicated that part of the elephant he had comprehended, but none was able describe the elephant as it really was; for all three of them were unable to comprehend the entire form of the elephant.”¹

We don't get the full picture because we are limited with what we know and what we don't know. We make assumptions and make decisions based on perceptions, misunderstanding, miscommunication, or lack of understanding and absence of communication.

Often times, conflicts in relationships, in families, in churches and in the workplace, occur because we insist on the right-ness and certainty of our position without fully knowing and

¹ http://www.kheper.net/topics/blind_men_and_elephant/Sufi.html

understanding the full picture or knowing the stated position of the other.

In our relationship with one another and in our relationship with God, what is called for is an extra dose of humility, modesty, patience and, in the case of our human-to-human relationships, mutual forbearance.

The apostle Paul's concern in our text in 1 Corinthians is about judging one another. The apostle is assured in the fact that God is his judge. The thoughts, secrets, and motives of his heart will be judged by God. When judged by human beings, we will fail by our own standard or won't apply standards consistently. As human beings, we are prone to inconsistency, favoritism, or an overly legalistic hand that applies the rules and standards so harshly that there is little room for grace and compassion. The Lord knows our situations and knows our hearts.

It's not that we shouldn't hold one another accountable. We certainly should, particularly within the household of God. We are to see that each one in the family is growing mature in the faith and

their love for the Lord. But, our judging of one another's characters, conduct, and lives are to be done with a measure of humility and compassion because we don't have all the facts, we don't know the secret motives of the heart; we may have 90% or 95% of the facts, but perhaps due to non-disclosure or shame or just plain "too much information" the full facts are not made clear. And while a judgment is rendered in a case, we don't possess the fullness of what has happened.

I think of the hundreds of death penalty cases that are being reviewed around the country because of new DNA technology. For decades, many in our prison system have been falsely imprisoned, accused long ago of heinous crimes. Yet, under DNA review, many have been released from prison because the fuller picture was made clearer. They were not the perpetrators of their alleged crimes. The fuller picture has been revealed.

I have some good friends in California who a few years ago heard some gossip about one of our other friends. It turned out, one of our so-called friends had been gossiping about others within

our circle, trying to drive a wedge between relationships, borrowing money and lying about how much was owed. We discovered her deception, but we stuck close together because we knew each other's characters and we knew one another. We had a tight bond.

One of the beauties of close, tight-knit relationships is a deep trust in what you know about the other person. If someone came up to you accusing your loved one or best friend of some bad deed, you would say, "I don't believe it. It can't be. Because I know my loved one or best friend to be a kind person of great integrity and I know him/her through and through, I must excuse your talk as misinformation or plain gossip."

The apostle Paul's pastoral letters, particularly for the difficult and stubborn church at Corinth, are of this kind. He places his reputation, his proven love and care for them, and what they know of him – he places it on the line and says that he and his companions are only about the Gospel, plain and simple. They are desirous to teach people about Jesus Christ – crucified and risen –

that is their only agenda and motive. All false accusations and gossip are to be shut out. He, in essence, pleads to them, “You know me. You know what I am about.” And it’s based on their close relationship that they are to welcome him and the message he brings.

To the Corinthians, he gives that same advice. They are members of the family of God, stewards of the mysteries of God. They are not to judge Paul nor one another. They are to trust each other because of this relationship based upon and whose foundation is Jesus Christ. They are to give the benefit of the doubt to one another and leave the judging to God for God knows the secrets and thoughts of the heart. Act and react based on the close relationship you have with one another centered on Christ.

The problem is, if there is no close relationship with one another, the bond of trust is weaker, but there is still hope because a relationship based on Christ, while not having the benefit of longevity or multiple experiences with the other, a relationship based on Christ will last.

Because God is our judge, we are to treat each other with respect, mutual forbearance, humility, patience and love. We do so because we live as ones who will likewise be judged by Christ, and who have faults, mistakes, transgressions, sins, imperfections that require love and forgiveness from the other. We are not God.

Remembering that Christ is our judge tells us that the Lord has our best interests at heart no matter what we may feel, experience, see or hear. The relationship that Christ has established with us and for us is such that no matter what happens in life, He is always for us. My former Hebrew professor, when teaching our class on the book of Psalms, says that the tone of the Psalmist is that I will always hold God to be true no matter what, and count all other things a lie. That is, when outside conditions, events and circumstances appear to make God to be a liar, or appear to make God to be slow, unjust, unfair, unfaithful...we are to count all those emotions, conditions, events and circumstances as not true...God will always be true and will always care for us no matter what may appear at first.

Our text in the Gospel of Matthew drives that point home. The point of Matthew 6:24-34 is not so much about anxiety or stress and worries. Look at the context. It's about God making a determination about whom He will care for. Because our hearts and minds seesaw back-and-forth between making an allegiance between God and mammon, God and material possessions, God and my existence, God and my time, God and money....because we don't consistently follow God full time, all the time, the text drives home the point that it's not so much about us making a decision or choice for God, or being determined to follow God and therefore not to worry.

Instead, the focus of the text is that God has determined to care for us. We are indecisive about following God, so God has made the decisive decision to love us, to care for all of creation including us, to clothe the lilies of the field and feed the birds of the air. The text is about God and God's deciding for you.

Far too often we advise and scold worry-warts and over-anxious people, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His

righteousness” --- you seek, you follow. The intended thought is that you are not seeking hard enough, you are not following God hard enough, and therefore that is why you are worrying and you are anxious. That seems to say that every character in the Bible that ever worried, that ever was anxious, that ever wondered about the future had little faith, or was unfaithful, or lacked faith. If that were the case, that would be every single person in Scripture, because even Jesus was anxious even up to the point of death.

This text is not about seeking God more, or following God more. This text is about God following you in your life, God seeking you, God serving you by the giving of Christ His Son for the world. This text is about God coming to you in your greatest and smallest needs, when in your life you waver, you wonder, you stress.

There’s no willpower you can muster up. We will worry. We will stress. We will be anxious. Welcome to the human race! You are human, and God knows that. And because Christ is our

gracious and just judge, He knows our weakness, he knows when we are anxious.

Is Christ the kind of Lord who shouts at us because we are anxious and stressed?

That would be like a parent who shouts at their child merely because the child is frightened. We as parents don't get mad at our children because they worry or are anxious.

Will Christ our just and gracious Judge be a mad Judge because we worry about tomorrow or because we are anxious? Will He find fault with the starving people of Myanmar as they wonder whether enough food will come to their villages? Worrying about tomorrow is a real dilemma for them. What about loved ones who genuinely worry about the ticking clock and the dimming hopes of their loved ones being rescued from tons of rubble after the China earthquake? Will Christ be the unkind, unjust Judge who scolds them for worrying and being anxious?

This text speaks to us right where we are...we are anxious beings, we are children who get stressed. Those of our senior

citizens who are on fixed incomes are right in wondering whether with high property taxes, high food prices and high heating prices, if there will be help on the way. Earlier this week, I asked those of you on the email network to pray for Pastor Joseph Yoon, his family and the ministry of Ambassadors Fellowship in Edison, NJ, which will vote next Sunday, June 1 on whether to close...and all indications based on Pastor Joe, is that they will vote to close.

They had moved from Bound Brook to Edison, discerning the call of God to begin a ministry in Edison. Did any members of the Church know that the outcome would be for the ministry to close? Yes, there is hope, but there is the real feelings of anxiety, stress, and wondering about next steps.

The good news in all situations is that God has made the decisive move ...He is always for us, in life and in death, in joys and in sorrows, we will move, we will shake, we will blow to the right and to the left, we won't always walk on the straight and narrow path. But the One whom we can always count on to be with us and to give us the clearer and fuller picture, is our righteous and

gracious Judge, Jesus Christ. Because Christ is our Judge, you don't have to judge yourself and others don't need to judge you. Christ is for you, no matter what.