
Covenant Reformed News

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Judge Not! (2)

In our last issue of the *News*, we considered the judging that is not forbidden (and the righteous judging that is required). We need now to consider the judging that is forbidden: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1).

We must not judge someone with regard to “adiaphora,” that is, in things indifferent. Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 teach that this is a biblical category. For example, if a person eats only vegetables it is not per se sinful, so one should not judge or despise him or her for it. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

We must not judge in matters that do not belong to us or enter into quarrels that are none of our business. “He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears” (Prov. 26:17). Thus Peter exhorts, “But let none of you suffer as ... a busybody in other men’s matters” (I Pet. 4:15).

We must not judge without being aware of the pertinent facts of the case. If it truly belongs to you to adjudicate on a matter, you need to hear both sides (so to speak) of the case. Without hearing both sides, you are in no position to judge. Just because one side is forward in presenting his or her view to you is no guarantee that he or she is in the right. “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him” (Prov. 18:17).

We must not judge other people’s motives. Do you know who was guilty of judging someone’s motives in what is perhaps the most famous biblical example of this sin? The devil! Satan judged Job’s motives: “Doth Job fear God for naught?” (Job 1:9). So wicked and hardened was the devil in this evil that he made it a charge of sin against holy Job, a charge Satan made to God Himself! But the devil was dead wrong! Contrary to Satan’s accusation (10), Job did not serve God for what he could get out of it. He served God because he loved and feared Him (1). God alone knows man’s secret motives. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (I Cor. 4:5).

We must not judge without mercy. Love requires us not to impute evil motives to good actions. Love requires us to put the best construction we can on doubtful actions. We must not “make a man an offender for a word” (Isa. 29:21). We must also remember mitigating circumstances and that we too are weak and sinful. “How would I have reacted in that difficult situation? Maybe I, too, would have ...”

We must not judge out of hypercriticalness. Some people love to judge, to criticize, to put down. They are always looking for a fault which they promptly magnify out of all proportion. They are glad when they have something to criticize and they are sad when they can find no fault for then they have nothing to say.

We must not judge out of self-righteousness. This is the sin of the Pharisee in the Lord’s parable: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:11-12). When we put down others, it is often to make ourselves look good and feel good, for when we are pointing our finger at the sins of others, it is hard to remember our own iniquities. If we are not confessing our sins to God, and thereby experiencing forgiveness by Christ’s cross and Spirit, this is a sort of substitute. “I must have relief from the guilt of my sins, but I’m not going to humble myself before the Triune God. Instead, I’ll talk up how bad others are and then I’ll not feel so guilty.”

We must not judge as if we were the final judges. God alone is the supreme judge and He judges according to His Word (John 12:48). Our judgments are provisional. Jehovah is the judge of all the earth and He is my judge and your judge too. So we must never think or speak as if our judgments are supreme and final.

Having seen the types of judging that are sinful, we must also consider the sphere in which sinful judgments are especially forbidden. Let us read three verses that follow almost immediately after our Lord’s prohibition in Matthew 7:1: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in *thy brother’s* eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to *thy brother*, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine

own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of *thy brother's eye*" (3-5). Your brother! Not so much your physical brother, but your spiritual brother (or sister) in the church!

Obviously sinful judgment is prohibited in all spheres: family, home, workplace, school, neighbourhood, etc., but in Matthew 7 it is especially forbidden regarding one's fellow saints in the church. These are the ones we should especially love (I Cor. 13:4-7) and so be least judgmental about (Matt. 7:1-5).

But if we are not walking with the Lord, the exact opposite is often true. We show patience and kindness to almost everybody else, but we sinfully judge our brothers and sisters in the church. These things ought not be!

We must not judge unkindly the motives of our brethren, or judge them rashly or unheard, or look askance at every word or act. We must not be hypercritical about an elder, a minister or deacon so that everything or most things they do are viewed with suspicion or a jaundiced eye. Nor must we judge them out of self-righteousness to make ourselves look or feel good. Instead, as those redeemed by Christ and "born again," let us "love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Pet. 1:22-23). *Rev. Stewart*

Moses' Flight From Egypt

"And when he [i.e., Moses] was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not" (Acts 7:23-25).

In the last *News*, I answered the original question: "Was it right of Moses to kill the Egyptian in the light of Acts 7:24-25 or was it murder?"

Since then, a Hungarian brother wrote that he would like more light on the matter, especially because of the narrative of the event in Exodus 2:11-15. The impression is left in that passage that Moses fled Egypt because the king had learned of his act of killing the Egyptian and he was, understandably, furious. Indeed, the text reads, "And Moses feared, and said, Surely the thing is known" (14).

The difficulty is that Hebrews 11:27 tells us that "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Hebrews 11, equally inspired by the Holy Spirit who inspired the narrative in Exodus 2 and who inspired Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, says that Moses was not afraid of the king. We must accept that and interpret the other passages in the light of Hebrews 11:27.

Let us come to the correct understanding of the whole matter by applying the great Reformed principle of Bible interpretation: Scripture interprets Scripture.

First of all, let us settle the matter that the killing of the Egyptian was not murder and a violation of the sixth commandment. Stephen makes this abundantly clear. He expressly states that Moses saw an Israelite suffering wrong; that he defended the Israelite; that he avenged the Israelite and that he supposed "that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them" (Acts 7:24-25).

We ought to notice a few things about this speech of Stephen. He was on trial before the Sanhedrin for violating the Jewish law. He was recounting the history of the nation. If he made mistakes in his narrative of Israel's history, the Sanhedrin would have pounced on him and showed that Stephen did not even know the history of the nation. But, apparently, they accepted Stephen's words as true.

Further, Stephen's address stressed that the wicked nation of Israel always was contrary and always opposed God's purpose. This emphasis in Stephen's speech comes to its climax in Acts 7:51: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

The accusation then of the Israelite who said to Moses, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?" (Ex. 2:14) was sheer resisting of the Holy Ghost.

On the other hand, Moses was conscious "by faith" that God had called him to deliver Israel from Egypt, as He had promised already to Abraham (Gen. 15:13-14). And, not only did Moses understand this, but Israel also understood it. They knew what God had said to Abraham as well as Moses did. They knew that the four hundred years had expired. Moses killed the Egyptian because it was the concrete evidence of what Hebrews 11:24-26 describes as his choice by faith not "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," but "to suffer affliction with the people of God"—to whom the promise of Christ had been made.

Moses' sin in killing the Egyptian was the sin of taking the matter into his own hands and not waiting for God's direction and timing in what had to be His work.

When he realized that this particular Israelite wanted no part of the deliverance of the nation from Egypt, and when Moses also realized that his killing of the Egyptian was known (as the text in Exodus 2 tells us), he also understood that the nation would not rise with him against their oppressors. It was the beginning of a long series of events in Israel's history that showed how unbelieving Israel wanted no part of God's work. They rebelled against Moses repeatedly. They complained constantly of lack of water, of their disgust at the miracle of manna, of the difficulties of the way through the wilderness and of their desire to return to Egypt where there were melons, leeks and garlic. Right from the start, they bitterly opposed God's work of delivering them from Egypt.

But we must go one more step back. Moses fled from Egypt, as Hebrews 11 tells us, not because he feared the king, but because he realized, by the reaction of his brother, the Israelite, that he had been presumptuous in taking it upon himself to deliver Israel at the time of his choosing, instead of waiting upon the Lord. This is the force and meaning of Hebrews 11:27: "By faith ... he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

In other words, his faith did not falter insofar as he believed that God would fulfil His promise to Abraham and deliver Israel. But he "endured," that is, he was willing to endure the delay and wait on the Lord for Him to choose His time, call Moses in His own way, leave Israel in Egypt until they were ready to be delivered and wait for Egypt to fill the cup of iniquity so that their punishment and destruction would be clearly manifest as just (Gen. 15:16).

This same sin afflicted Jacob who could not wait for God to give him the birthright in His own time and way, and who took matters into his own hands by buying the birthright for a bowl of soup, deceiving his blind father to get Isaac's blessing and playing tricks in Padanaram in an effort to get as much of Laban's cattle as he possibly could. It was only at Jabbok, wrestling with God, that the Almighty showed Jacob that he could not gain the birthright by his schemes and strength. Jehovah would give it in His own time.

This is a sin that afflicts all of us. We take matters into our own hands out of frustration with what seems to us God's delay and His indifference to what we desire. We want things our way, at our time and by our strength. It is in the awareness of this danger in our lives that the Scriptures repeatedly admonish us to wait on the Lord: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Ps. 27:14). *Prof. Hanko*