

Judging Others

I don't make a habit of recommending movies. In far too many movies, very little of godly value is present and worthy of recommending. Laced with profanity, making sensual appeals, promoting intoxication – let not our consciences become dulled to such poor fodder for the spiritual mind! But a recent trip down the family aisle provided an exception. A nugget appeared: “The Adventures of Ociee Nash”...a movie set in the late 1800's (rated G!).

Josephine was the child's given name at birth, but her little brother Ben could not pronounce the name correctly, so “Ociee” stuck. This precocious, nine-year-old tomboy from Mississippi made quite a positive impact on many others, especially on her long train-journey to Asheville, NC. Ociee's mother had recently passed away and her widowed father thought it would be best for her to spend some time with her Aunt Mamie to gain a little lady-like refinement.

Progress was gradual at best and several of the women-folk of Asheville gossiped about the not-so-proper niece within earshot of Mamie & Ociee. Later that evening, Ociee was concerned about the overheard conversation. Mamie comforted her, “Pay no mind to a single thing those ladies said today...sometimes, people will judge a person just because they're different; without taking the time to find out who that person truly is. They don't know what they've been through or what a joy they truly are. More importantly, they don't know how lucky they'd be to know them if they had just given that person a chance.”

Of all the things I have observed and learned among the Lord's people in 25 years of preaching, I am profoundly and greatly distressed by the amount of judging that goes on. Don't misunderstand, all judging is not wrong (and I think you know that I know that). Sure, Jesus is not forbidding all kinds of judgment in Matthew 7:1. Righteous judgment is commended in John 7:24. But don't miss the point Jesus makes in Matthew 7:1-5 and on more than one occasion in the gospel narratives. **All judging should be carefully done.**

Do we become content with our Christianity because we worship regularly with the people of God? Do we feel good about ourselves because we refrain from error in regard to worship and because we do not misuse the contributed funds on the first day of the week? Do we become complacent about spiritual growth and growing in the likeness of Christ because we “know our Bibles” as a result of sitting in thousands of Bible classes?

While all of these should not be left undone, I wonder if we settle for less than our calling to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29), particularly in the matter of how we regard one another. Equally important to the aforementioned matters are such admonitions as “but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself...” (Philippians 2:3), and this sparingly-quoted, oft-overlooked warning: “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor” (James 4:11,12).

Notice James does not feel the need to qualify, as I did earlier, that righteous judging is not prohibited (again, we should know that). **Let what James says here sink in!** If I am guilty of this behavior without penitence, will it really matter in the end that I attended all of the assemblies? The instruction here is similar to 1 John 4:20,21 about loving your brother. We can claim all day long that we love God and that it is evidenced in our “faithfulness,” but what is faithful about harboring hatred in our hearts for others?

So again, **all judging should be carefully done.** Ocjee had a fine heart but the snobbish and unkind women only looked down upon her. Much like the Pharisees could not begin to imagine that the tax-gatherers and sinners would get into the kingdom before them or why Jesus would waste His time on such filth. How could that be? Because they “viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9). They prayed many prayers and assembled for worship many times, but their religious service did not rise any higher than the ceiling. They had self-exalting, self-elevating, self-loving hearts.

“Better than” thinking is dangerous! As Simon the Pharisee needed to learn, we must not deal in **sorts** of people, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). We are all the sinner-sort! Christians are simply those who have been forgiven and who should give great effort to help others to do the same, and do so even if they are *different*. The gospel erases *differences* and brings us all into one body (Galatians 3:27,28)! Another 25-year observation: The Lord’s body is made up of all kinds of different people. Anyone willing to cleanse one’s self all defilement of flesh & spirit and perfect holiness in the fear of God deserves my help, admiration, support and service (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Restoration of the sinner does not mean second-class citizenship in the kingdom either, even if “he/she should have known better.” While few sins may become public knowledge, how many believers are exempt from having been overtaken in a trespass

and have lived error-free since one's conversion to the Lord? All of our sins are shameful and all believers ride in that boat together. None of us are "better than," we are just forgiven. I want to appeal to every believer – be less judging of your brothers! Instead, be more merciful, tender, more helping, caring, and more prayerful for each other. With whatever standard you use to judge others, the Lord will judge you with the same (Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:36-38)!

Our regard for others, our treatment of others, particularly our brothers (Galatians 6:10) will have a lot to do with our receipt of an eternal reward (Matthew 25:31-46).

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