

Judging Others

BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Billy James Hargis, a Tulsa evangelist who has been a favorite whipping boy of the secular media for many years, recently introduced me to the readers of his newsletter as "a man who is known for his frequent kicking of his former friends who are now fallen brethren."

My first response was to prick like a porcupine. Then I searched my mind to try to determine which fallen brethren I had kicked. Finally I remembered something I had written years ago: All criticism, even unjustified criticism, has a nugget of truth at its core.

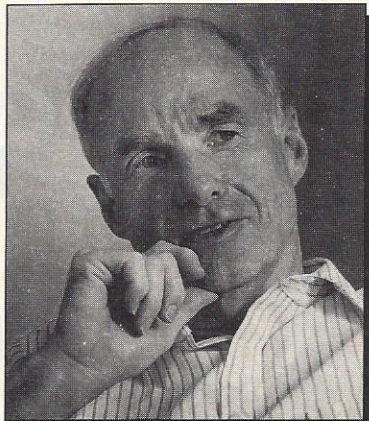
Even though I may think of myself as a great defender of fallen brethren, if I give the impression that I am the opposite, then in the mind of the person impressed—I am the opposite.

What can I do about it? I probably can't argue Hargis into seeing things differently. Any man who's been kicked around by the press as much as he has thinks all columnists are self-righteous creeps who love to spit on fallen Christian leaders. (Just as many people, wounded by the church or influenced by slanted news, believe all preachers are money-hungry Pharisees.)

What I *can* do is examine myself to see if there is in me even the shadow of one who loves to see people in high places brought down. If there is a smidgen of that attitude in me, it needs to be dealt with harshly as sin.

Last summer, when I thought I might be dying, I came face-to-face with my own self-righteousness. Like young Isaiah who had seen the Lord "high and lifted up," I heard myself weeping one afternoon: "I am a man of unclean lips...and of an unclean pen."

I discovered something. It's impossible to come into the presence of a holy God and still judge others. I had a choice: enter



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and stay in His hallowed presence with thanksgiving, or sit outside the gate and judge others.

I chose the former.

What does that mean?

For one thing, it does not mean the

Christian journalist—or the prophetic pastor—should close his eyes to "wrongs" in the kingdom. Today's leader is obligated to police his own precinct in the kingdom, rather than wait for the secular media to point out our glaring errors to a sneering world.

Wrongs must be pointed out and corrected. But the method must follow the outline Jesus described in Matthew 18. First go personally to the offending brother (or sister). Then involve others. Only as a last measure do you make it public.

Of course, if the offending person has already gone public, then public correction is necessary.

More important, before you hit the track in the "correcting ministry," make a pit stop and check your own spiritual dipstick. In other words, before going on the attack, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have an agenda for the lives of others?
- Does this person love Jesus? If so, do I have the right to "judge another man's servant"?
- Am I intending to hurt or heal?
- Do I enjoy seeing others squirm?
- Do I love those I am writing (or talking) about?
- Would I say the same things about my mother or father?
- Have I adequately prayed for this person?
- Most important, ask yourself the Jesus Question: What would Jesus do?

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