

On Not Judging Our Neighbour (Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



If, brethren, we remembered the words of the holy Elders, if we studied them, it would be difficult for us to sin, difficult to neglect ourselves. Because, precisely as they've advised us, if we refuse to ignore the little things and what appear to be insignificant, then we won't fall into greater and more grievous sin. I'm always telling you that when we say about little things 'What does this or that matter?' we're forming a bad habit in the soul, which then starts to pay no attention to things that matter greatly. Do you know what a great sin it is to judge your neighbour? Really, what's worse than this? What can God hate and abhor as much as condemnation of others? Just as the Fathers have said, there's nothing worse.



And they point out that we reach this great evil by ignoring the little things. If we give credence to a slight suspicion about our neighbour, if we say 'What does it matter if I listen to what this brother's telling me? What does it matter if I throw in my own opinion? If I watch to see where that brother's going, or what that stranger's up to?', then my mind abandons its own sins and gets involved with the life of someone else. From there, you move on to condemnation, slander and derision. And then you fall into the very sins that you're condemning. If you don't take care of your own wickednesses, nor mourn your dead self, as the Fathers told you to, you won't be able to correct anything at all about yourself and you'll always be concerned with your neighbour. Nothing angers God so much, nothing exposes us people so greatly and leads to our abandonment, as condemning, slandering and despising our neighbour.

Because condemning isn't the same as slandering or despising. Slander is when you reveal to others the sins and faults of your neighbour. For example, if you report that so-and-so told a lie, or got angry or fornicated or did something else bad. By doing so, you're already committing slander, that is talking with animosity about someone, discussing their sins with hostility.

Condemnation is judging other people themselves, by saying that they're liars, they're irascible, they're fornicators. Because in doing this you've taken a disposition of the soul and drawn conclusions about the whole of the life of the

other person, saying that that's the sort of person they are. And you then condemn them for it. This, too, is a very grave sin. Because it's one thing to say that someone got angry and another that they're irascible by nature, and, as I said, yet another thing to draw conclusions about the whole of their life. Condemnation is so much greater a sin than any other that Christ Himself said: 'You hypocrite. First remove the log that's in your own eye and then you'll be able to see to remove the speck in the eye of your brother' (Luke 6, 42). And He compares the sin of the other to a speck, but condemnation to a log. Condemnation is so grave that it surpasses just about every other sin. The Pharisee in the parable who was praying and thanking God for his achievements wasn't telling lies, but the truth. He wasn't condemned for giving thanks to God. Because it's our duty to thank God if we've ever managed to do anything good, since He'll have worked with us and helped us. So he wasn't condemned for saying he wasn't like other people- in other words, 'I don't do what they do and I do things that they don't' (Luke 18, 11). He was condemned for turning his gaze to the Publican. That's when he sinned, because he condemned a disposition in the man's soul as if it were the whole of his person. In short, he condemned the whole of the man's life. This is why, when the Publican left, he was more justified than the Pharisee.

There's honestly nothing worse, more harmful, as I've said often enough, than judging others or despising your neighbour. We'd be better off judging ourselves and our faults, which we know full well and concerning which we'll have to answer to God. Why do we take away from God the right to judge? What do we demand of the person He created? Shouldn't we tremble when we hear what happened to that great Elder, who when he heard that another brother had fallen into fornication said 'Ah, he shouldn't have done that'. Don't you know what appalling thing it says happened to that Elder? It says that a holy angel took the soul of the brother who'd sinned to him and said: 'There you are. Here's the soul of brother you judged. He's dead. So where do you tell me to put him? In the Kingdom of God or in hell?'. Is there anything harder than that burden? What else do the words of the angel mean if not; 'Since you're the judge of sinners and righteous, tell me where I should place this humble soul. Do you forgive it, or do you condemn it?'. The Elder fell at the feet of the angel and begged forgiveness, which he was granted, but was never allowed to forget his transgression for all his days.