

Judging others on private lives

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Judge not, lest ye be judged.

So Edward Nottingham, the chief federal district judge in Colorado, dropped \$3,000 at a downtown strip club. So he paid \$150 to an Internet "dating" site featuring some tawdry pictures of the opposite sex.

Why would these revelations cause so much consternation?

Sure, the poor guy testified he couldn't recall what happened to his money from Sept. 6 through the morning of Sept. 7 because he was intoxicated.

Reminds me of summer 1987-early fall of 1988. If you haven't lost a couple of days to alcohol-induced blackouts, a stripper and an empty wallet, you simply haven't lived.

It's true that unlike you and me, Nottingham sits in judgment of other people's lives, fortunes and futures. Should he be held to a higher standard? Shouldn't his personal business become ours?

This brings us to a larger political question: Is it our right to know what any public servant is up to in his or her private life? What if the behavior he or she engages in is completely legal - like frequenting a strip club and getting plastered?

"It's part of his character, obviously. People who sit in judgment of others have a duty to be above reproach," explains Tom Minnery, senior vice president of government and public policy for Focus on the Family - rather unsurprisingly.

If there is anyone above reproach, I believe He probably took earthly leave of us approximately 2,000 years ago.

Personally, I'm not concerned about a judge's strip-club fling. Then again, I do believe it's fair to wonder whether a public servant can lead an exceedingly chaotic personal life and still be counted on to make momentous decisions for all of us.

Judging from polls, most voters ask similar questions.

"I guess once someone puts something like that on their shoulders and steps up and says, 'Vote for me,' it becomes our business," says Minnery. "President Truman once said, 'If a man cheats on his wife, how can I trust him to do anything?' If someone wants your vote, explaining his moral failures in a repentant way is a good first step. It's true that all of us fail, but then again, not all of us run for president."

"Character" is going to be an important question to many in the evangelical camp this upcoming election.

Some of the leading Republican candidates have led, um, *full* lives. And while "character" is important to the average voter, it's almost the whole enchilada to others.

"Yes, we think character is vital," explains Minnery. "I think that extends to the presidential campaigns and presidential candidates with multiple marriages. Divorce, it signifies that somebody's promise hasn't been kept. It's not an easy thing. Though I realize divorce is growing and a fact of life."

I've never thought of divorce as a moral issue or a failure of someone to keep a promise. Most of the divorced folks I know are upstanding and moral and simply couldn't make a bad situation work.

As Judge Nottingham's handlers have claimed in their statement, his issues are a "private and personal" matter involving "human frailties and foibles" and all of it was the result of "a protracted, bitter divorce" proceeding.

Divorce can be ugly. One spouse will often nitpick the worst the other spouse had to offer in their time together.

So then, does a night of lap dancing and tequila shots mean you're toast for human eternity?

"There is another aspect of being a Christian - repentance and forgiveness," Minnery explains. "Some people like to accuse Christian people who fail of being hypocrites. But the Christian view is that all of us are sinners and we all fail. But we all have the ability to seek forgiveness. So a candidate who has had failed marriages and been able to convince people that he has learned his lesson and seeks forgiveness, especially of the other spouse, is important - that goes a long way."

Well, I guess that leaves us non-Christians looking forward to a toasty future down below.

As for the Republican candidates who dabbled in divorce early in their careers, time to get their act together. Some old-school Jimmy Swaggart bawling might get you the holy vote.

So, actually, I guess, I do have something to look forward to.

Not that it's any of my business.

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