

ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

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Ours is a time of tolerance. It is, however, a tolerance of sin, however. Leftists say that they are for free speech, but not for hate speech. Of course, they consider the Christian's speech to be hate speech, because the Christian calls certain acts sinful, and offensive to God. Some Christians have succumbed to the pressure of unbelievers, and will not call those acts sinful. For example, Carrie Underwood, who has won many awards for her singing, said, "I'm in favor of acceptance. And I am a Christian person, and I do love the Lord, and I feel no matter who you are, what you believe, how you live your life, it's not my place to judge." Lauren Daigle is a Christian, and has won awards for her singing. When a radio interviewer asked her if homosexuality is a sin, she answered, "I can't honestly answer that. I have too many people that I love, and they are homosexuals." Yet, there are some who call themselves Christians who judge, and who do so mercilessly and discriminately. Westboro Baptist Church became famous for protesting funerals with signs reading, "God hates fags," "Thank God for 9/11," and "Thank God for dead soldiers." Cults like Westboro Baptist Church aside, some devout Christians do judge, and judge quite harshly. The Christian is called to judge, but he is called to judge proportionately, and with the desire for restoration.

When God revealed Himself to Moses, He said:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

With this, God revealed two of His attributes: justice and mercy. Noah Webster defined *justice* as, "The virtue which consists in giving to every one what is his due," and he defined *mercy* as, "That benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves." God is just. He always does what is right, and he gives to every man what he deserves. If a man does good, then God rewards him. If he does evil, then God punishes him. Yet, God is also merciful. So, if a man repents of the evil he has done, then God forgives him and does not give him the punishment he deserves. Moses sang of God, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4) King David wrote in the Psalms, "Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." (Psalm 62:12) Many years after King David, Jeremiah the prophet prophesied that, because of the sins of the children of Israel, the king of Babylon would destroy the city of Jerusalem and take captive the king of Judah. God in His mercy had mightily delivered the children of Israel from the Egyptians, and had brought them into the promised land. Yet they did not obey God, and so incurred His wrath. God would by the Babylonians destroy them. Nevertheless, God would one day restore them to their position of privilege. Jeremiah prayed to God:

Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and

recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 32:17-19)

God is good, not only to them that love Him and obey Him, but also to them that hate Him and disobey Him. He has given good things even to them that refuse to acknowledge Him. When the pagan idolators at Lystra would worship Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas, the apostles said to them:

Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts 14:15-17)

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, told His followers to be like God in this way. He said:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:43-45)

The Christian is to love God just because He is God, and he is to love his fellow man because all men are made in the image of God.

The Christian is to love his fellow man, but some misunderstand this. They think it means never to judge another man’s actions, never to tell a man that he has done wrong. After all, they point out, Jesus said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1) Jesus did, of course, say this, but he did not mean that the Christian is never to judge what another man does. Jesus was not Himself a hypocrite, judging them that judge, thereby doing the very thing He forbade. Jesus did not mean that the Christian is not to judge, only that he is not to judge hypocritically. He said:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 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. (Matthew 7:1-5)

The Christian is not in a position to judge the actions of another if he hypocritically commits the same acts, or worse. According to Noah Webster a hypocrite is “One who feigns to be what he is not.” The Christian who is a hypocrite pretends to be something he is not, and is at the same quick to sit in judgement of others. He thinks of

himself more highly than he ought to think. He may believe in total depravity, but he believes that it applies to others, and not to himself. He believes in the need for grace, but he thinks others need it, and not himself. He does not really understand his own need for grace. He does not understand what he would be without the grace of God.

Not only does the hypocritical Christian think more highly of himself than he ought, he thinks too little of others, even of other Christians. He looks down on them as wretched sinners. He has no compassion for them. He does not regard them as weak, but as depraved. He does not consider what difficulties another might have in his life. He does not think of his struggles. He thinks only of vindicating God's law, and not of extending grace to a sinner in need. Saint Luke relates that Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." (Luke 18:9) A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed, "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." The tax collector, however, would not lift his eyes up to heaven, but beat his breast and cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:11-13) The Pharisee falsely believed he was righteous, and a better man than the tax collector, and he asked God to accept him on his merits. The tax collector knew he was a sinner, and he asked God for mercy. Jesus said that the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, went away right with God.

The problem with some Christians is that they are proud. The Puritan minister, Richard Baxter defined pride as "... an inordinate self-exalting; or a lifting up of ourselves above the state or degree appointed to us." (Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 1.4.5) Some Christians are proud, and think themselves better than they ought, and better than others. The proud man is always comparing himself to others, and judging himself superior, and others inferior. The proud Christian does not compare himself to God, but man. He does not compare himself to God's standard as it is found in Scripture. He compares himself to another man, and naturally judges himself to be righteous. This is what the Pharisee did in respect of the tax collector. The Pharisee compared himself, not to the law of God, but to the tax collector, and judged himself to be a far better man. The tax collector took no notice of the Pharisee, however, but, comparing himself to the law of God, judged himself to be a great sinner. It is in a man's sinful human nature to compare himself to others and then to conclude that he himself is good. If a man compares himself to other men, then he will exalt himself. If a man compares himself to God, however, then he will be humiliated. The Puritan minister John Flavel wrote, "From how vile a root pride springs. Ignorance of God, and of yourselves, gives rise and being to this sin: They that know God will be humble. Isaiah 6:5 They that know themselves cannot be proud. Romans 7:9" (John Flavel, Sermon XXIX in *The Method of Grace in the Gospel Redemption*) So, when Isaiah the prophet saw a vision of God, he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5) Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Romans 7:9)

Jesus did judge the actions of others, and sometimes did so with severity. He said to the Pharisees, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33) When He first cleansed the temple, He made a scourge of cords and drove out the moneychangers, pouring out their money, and overturning their tables. (John 2:13-15) Saint Paul rebuked the church at Corinth, not for judging, but for failing to judge. That church tolerated in their fellowship a man who was with his father's wife, and they boasted of their tolerance. Saint Paul told them, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked

person.” (1 Corinthians 5:13) Jesus judged others, but he severely judged hypocrites. Them that are weak, and broken, and sorry, he judged gently, as with the woman at the well, who had had five husbands, and was living with a man who was not her husband. (John 4:1-26) When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery, He said to them, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” When they left, He said to the woman, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” (John 8:1-11)

Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) Nevertheless, this did not make Him proud, or contemptuous of weak sinners. Rather, it made Him sympathetic to their weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15) So the Christian, who has been tempted in so many ways, and failed, ought not to be contemptuous of a fallen brother, but sympathetic to him. Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. (Galatians 6:1-5)

The Christians sins daily, and some Christians sin greatly. The Christian also repents of his sins, and so God forgives him. Sometimes a Christian repents of his sins without any prompting from another. Sometimes, however, a Christian needs another Christian to admonish him, and so move him to repentance. If a Christian is caught in a sin, then another Christian, one who is spiritually mature, who exhibits the fruit of the Spirit, ought to correct him. He ought to correct him, but he ought to do so with meekness, and not with harshness. He ought to do so gently and humbly, not harshly or proudly. He ought to be mindful that he, too, is a sinner saved by grace, and that he, too, is subject to temptation. In this way, Christians are to bear one another's burdens. They are with sympathy to admonish the sinning brother with the intent to bring him to repentance, and so keep him in God's good graces. This is to fulfill the law of Christ. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34, 35) The law of Christ is to love as Christ loved, and Christ loved sacrificially. Although He was perfect, He bore our burden of sin. Isaiah the prophet said, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4, 5) Just as He bore our burden of sin, so Christians must bear each other burdens by humbly and gently, although firmly, helping them out of their sins. No Christian may think himself better than another, because no man may think himself invulnerable to temptation. No man ought to compare himself with another, but rather let his good works stand or fall on their own. Each man is responsible for his own sins, and for his own good works. Some Christians are zealous to vindicate God and his law, but they are not zealous to restore sinners to fellowship with God. The Christian must be both: he must be zealous to vindicate the law of God, but he must also be zealous, not to destroy a sinner, but to reconcile him to God.

Let us not tolerate sin. Let us judge sinful acts, and warn sinners of God's judgment. Let us, however, call sinners to repentance. Let us hope to reconcile sinners to God, and not to ruin them.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*