

When a Christian Sins - "What is your response?"

Written by K B Napier

Saturday, 23 November 2019 15:54

It is very easy (and common, so it seems) for Christians to be the least empathetic towards another Christian who sins. On the other hand, many Christians maintain a low profile when it comes to judging others (God commands us to judge others). Why? Because they commit the very same things they have witnessed in others. What they have is not empathy for the sinning brethren, but a love for their own sin. By not condemning another they try to alleviate a grave response to their own sin! Today, we see this refusal to condemn sin in those Christians who have a secret love for porn or other sexual sins. Or, for love of money, status, or power.

Then, there are those who attack the sinning brethren with robust maliciousness, showing outward hatred for the person who sins. Their aim is to castigate the sinner and to make a public show of their hatred of the sin... but, their hatred is obviously not just for the sin, it is also a hatred for the sinner, who is saved, just like them.

I must say I dislike both attitudes and find them unbiblical and evil. I say this as a fellow believer AND as a fellow sinner! The more I see sin in myself the less I am comfortable condemning others for THEIR sins. Yet, there ARE ways to deal with the problem of sin amongst believers, with a genuine care for the one who falls.

Deuteronomy 9

Deuteronomy gives many clues for us to follow. For example, He advises Israel that there are MANY who are greater and more powerful than they were. They could NOT boast in their strength or superiority (v1&2). It is GOD Who destroys the enemy, NOT the people of Israel, who are only vessels used by God to bring about His actions. In themselves, they are fickle and, at times, good for nothing.

God reminds the people they were accepted because He had promised their patriarchs that their descendants would occupy the land of Canaan, hence He said *"the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people."* (v6). We are exactly like them! We sin and yet we want to claim we are righteous! The people were so wicked at times, God wanted to get rid of them altogether (v8). Do you really think your idea of your own righteousness would stop God ending your lives today, as He did with so many Hebrews when they disobeyed?

The book of Deuteronomy continues to show how sinful the chosen people were, how God saw

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them sinning and had a hot anger against them, and yet how He treated them with compassion because He knew their human frame. Do you think individual Christians today have freedom to condemn their fellow believers?

I know my own condition. DO YOU know yours? Because I know my own frame, and see it as God sees it, I cannot, as a pastor, condemn fellow believers who sin. Indeed, it is not my role anyway. Only God can condemn believers, not me. There is a very big danger that if I condemned other believers for their sin, it could turn back upon myself, because I am just as guilty! (We may only judge sin in others if we are NOT guilty of the same sin – otherwise it is prudent to just shut up).

Sin and Its Penalty

Sin of ANY size/type is hated by our holy Lord, whether it is murder, or the theft of a paper clip from an employer. Both these examples are useful for illustration, because BOTH are equally as hated by God. This is because God hates ALL sin, no matter how we view it. But, only God can prescribe the remedy or penalty.

So, a fellow believer sins and it is known publicly. What do we do? The first thing is NOT to show unfettered 'love' for the sinner, but to condemn the sin. NOT with anger, scorn or personal vehemence. We are ALL guilty of sin, though in every one of us the actual sin might be different in every case. Thus, we must condemn sin in ourselves as well as in others. Then, we swiftly move on to counsel the sinner in the ways of the Lord. Only God can apply a penalty.

YET, if the sin is obvious and 'big' in terms of its effect on others or against God (e.g. adultery, theft, violence, heresy, etc.), we must go through with the process of discipline quickly. If there is no repentance after two attempts to counsel and seeking the person's repentance, then the third step is to cast out of fellowship and shunning. If, however, the sin is 'lesser' (though not in God's eyes), and is as yet unknown publicly, we may take action in the form of counsel, if the person will accept it. If not, it might have to end in casting out anyway.

Mostly though, our sins tend to be hidden from others. Even if made public we have no right to personally condemn the person publicly, but must seek to urge him to repent and change. At NO time may we hate him, or show anger, because that would be judgmental, not true judgment. And that would be pride and personal hatred, not true care for the brethren. See how God treated His chosen people, though they committed every sin under the sun! That is how WE ought to be towards fellow believers who fall (or even jump) into sin. God knows we are frail

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and will sin – DO YOU know this and respond accordingly?

Though very brief, I hope readers have the message and look upon sinning believers with empathy, whilst hating their sins. (Also see [O-182](#)). Meanwhile hate sin because God does. Help the sinner to see sense and by repenting. But – do not sin yourself by hating him, even if he refuses counsel and is cast out for a season.

(Note: Sin by unbelievers requires a different kind of response).

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