

## **THE APPLES-TO=ORANGES COMPARISON OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS (Part 2 of 2)**

Have you ever encountered a bully? Don't answer that. If you have been alive on this earth for any length of time, I know what you will say. Unfortunately, bullies are everywhere in every realm of life, whether in one's family, neighborhood, school or workplace. Tragically, they are even to be found within the body of Christ. You would think that would not be the case. But due to their lack of self-awareness, resulting in a lack of spiritual growth and maturity, even people who call themselves Christians can possess a "bully type" of personality, making life difficult for those around them. And it seems to me that this problem of Christian bullies is not going away anytime soon due to the use and abuse of one isolated text in the Old Testament. As far as I can tell, it has become one of the most quoted verses of Scripture in all of Evangelical America, second only to John 3:16. It is none other than Proverbs 27:17, where we read the following –

***"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."***

Christian bullies use this verse as a justification for getting in your face and sticking their nose where it doesn't belong; all because they somehow think that they are a God-given piece of iron who will sharpen your iron. I actually believe they don't think that at all. They just like being bullies and have found Proverbs 27:17 to be a convenient excuse for their rude/disrespectful behavior. And when you dare to tell them to mind their own business, because your life is none of their business, they immediately accuse you of an unwillingness to be "accountable." So, how relevant is their reasoning as it applies to the New Covenant Christian, or are they very simply guilty of another apples-to-oranges comparison?

First, *"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,"* appears only once in the book of Proverbs. It never appears again throughout the entire Old Testament. And you guessed it. NEVER does it appear anywhere in the New Testament as a guiding principle for the New Covenant Christian. On the other hand, there is a verse in the New Testament which actually seems to counteract the way that Christian bullies are using Proverbs 27:17, and it is found in Galatians 5:26, where we read this –

***"Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."***

Isn't this exactly what the Christian bully does? Isn't he or she (Christian bullies aren't only men), guilty of "challenging" you about your Christian life when they don't belong to the God-given authority structure under which you must function? The word "challenging" found in Galatians 5:26 is the Greek "prokaleo." It literally means "to call forth" or "to provoke." It is used here in a clearly negative sense. In its context which warns of pride and envy, this verb can rightly be rendered as an admonition against being self-righteously combative. Isn't this the perfect description of a Christian bully?

Let's consider the matter of accountability and there is plenty of it to legitimately go around. In the vertical realm, all human beings are accountable to God for their behavior. As followers of our Savior, Christians are accountable to Jesus Christ. He is our Lord and Master. He keeps us accountable here and now through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In the future, every believer will stand before Him at the Judgement Seat of Christ and give an account of how they lived for Him. In the horizontal realm, if you are under the authority and care of your parents, you are accountable to them. If you attend a school at any level, you are accountable to your teacher/professor/administrator. If you are an employee, you are accountable to your employer. If you are married, you are accountable to your spouse. In your citizenship, you are accountable to various levels of governing authority. In your church, you are accountable to the leadership that is in place. All of these areas of accountability legitimately apply to you, whether you like it or not. The last thing any of us need is a Christian bully pain-in-the-you-know-what, who thinks he or she is God's Proverbs 27:17 gift for "sharpening" everyone around them.

So, the next time he or she tries to bully you and you actively resist, and they start quoting Proverb 27:17, counteract their behavior by quoting Galatians 5:26. And then? Walk away!