



"Live so that your friends can defend you but never have to."
—Arnold H. Glasow

04-Jan-19

Iron Sharpens Iron (Part Two)

In Part One, we began to study into the wording of [Proverbs 27:17](#): "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." Most of it is simple and self-explanatory, but how does one sharpen the countenance of a friend? Perhaps a more fundamental question is, "How is a countenance—another's face or expression—sharpened?"

The Bible speaks several times of a person's countenance, particularly that countenances change. We need to take a look at some specific examples of this change in countenance because it will help us to understand what this proverb teaches. [Genesis 4:3-7](#) is an early and well-known instance of a person's countenance falling:

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LOORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LOORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LOORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, [sin](#) lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Cain, even though he probably knew that he was disobeying God's instruction

concerning offerings, was somehow disappointed that his incorrect offering was not acceptable, and his face—and most likely, his whole body—revealed his disappointment and anger that [God](#) did not respect his offering. Evidently, Cain wore his emotions on his sleeve.

What should have happened is that Abel's example to his brother—and probably his words of encouragement and gentle correction ([Genesis 4:8](#))—should have honed or sharpened Cain's countenance so that he would have returned to a proper attitude and realized that he was not listening to God. Instead of heeding the example of righteous Abel ([Hebrews 11:4](#)), he murdered his brother.

Another example of a falling countenance is found in [Proverbs 25:23](#). In its illustration, it provides more detail and understanding on the countenance and how it is changed: "The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance."

We can easily understand how backbiting—attacking a person's character or reputation by speaking slanderously or unfavorably against him while he is not present—can bring on an angry countenance. If an individual finds out that someone is saying bad things about him behind his back, his mood immediately changes, his feelings become hurt, his fists clench into balls, and his face—his countenance—alters. It likely turns red and forms itself into some type of "well, who do they think they are?" expression, or it darkens to fit the expression, "If looks could kill. . . ." The face quickly represents the attitudes and emotions inside a person, and such a change in countenance can have a direct impact on his relationship with others.

A more positive example appears in [Proverbs 15:13](#): "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." The margins of most Bibles express that "countenance" once again refers to the face. When we are happy and have a merry heart, we grin from cheek to cheek. The whole body is happy. A similar thing happens when we are saddened by a negative experience. For instance, when a loved one dies, the face displays our inward emotions by frowning, weeping, and downcast eyes. Again, the face represents what and how a person is feeling inside, in his very being.

In our connections with each other, we can either have a positive impact or a negative one. For good or ill, we can change a person's mood, mind, or countenance concerning a thing, a person, an idea, an experience, etc. When we discuss God's Word with a friend or acquaintance, we can help each other refine or even change an incorrect perspective—or we can feed them falsehood and perhaps hinder their relationship with God. Just as we can do it to another person, he or she can do it to us.

How do we "sharpen" another's countenance, as [Proverbs 27:17](#) puts it? Most importantly, the imagery implies proximity, closeness. Nothing can be sharpened unless there is some sort of contact. Without contact, nothing will change, nothing can be sharpened. Recall the examples of the file, the whetstone, and the steel honing rod. No one has ever waved a blade or tool in the air and somehow changed the shape or alignment of the edge. The chef does not brandish the knife and the honing rod separately above a roast and expect the knife to be sharpened. No, he brings them into contact with each other. He scrapes the honing rod along the knife all the way up and down the edge to push the edge back to a uniform and straight edge. Contact is key.

Along with contact itself, there must be contact with the right tool. It might be a bit obvious, but if we are not making the right contacts—friends—our relationships will likely not yield the desired results. The Bible contains several admonitions to come out of [the world](#). For instance, [James 4:4](#) cautions us that "friendship with the world is enmity with God." Paul warns in [1 Corinthians 15:33](#), "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Friends tend to be close to each other; they are in proximity to either sharpen or dull themselves against each other. Perhaps we should ask ourselves some questions: Have we assessed our friends? Have we evaluated the conversations we have with them? Are we using the right tool to sharpen our own countenances, that is, ourselves? On the other hand, how good are we at being a sharpening stone or honing steel for others? We should take these questions seriously and perhaps meditate on them.

- Ryan McClure

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A new prayer request update has been posted for [Dolores Reid](#).

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Friendship Within the Church](#)

by Mark Schindler

Mark Schindler, focusing on the concept of friends and friendship, reflects on William Jennings Bryant's (and Senator McCain's) use of the term "my friends" and biblical allusions to evoke a bond of intimacy and unity for the sake of political expediency. The effusiveness in Bryant's "Cross of Gold," depicting a friend of the entirety of the world, is not a substitute for real sincere friendship, one that has a greater bond than a natural brother. This kind of friendship ought to be practiced throughout the body of Christ, emulating Christ as in John 15:12. The bond formed by Helen Keller and her teacher Anne Sullivan exemplifies this kind of love, as Sullivan wrote letters into her hand, awakening her to the miracle of language and a world of feelings, enabling her to feel remorse, repentance, and joy. We need to be as responsive to God as He communicates to us. We will be judged on this responsiveness and our subsequent friendship with our brethren, a friendship that goes through the grave for all eternity.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Learning to Love One Another](#)

by Geoff Preston (1947-2013)

We may look around the church of God and wonder why so many are not being healed. Geoff Preston, suffering a chronic illness himself, uses his experiences to assure us that God is working out even these matters for our good.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study will be **The Commandments (Part 19)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh** on **Friday 04-Jan-19**. The Bible Study will be continuously available from **6:00 pm Friday** until **12:00 pm Saturday (EST)**.

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Sunday 06-Jan-19	Don't Be a Cretan
Monday 07-Jan-19	Developing Spiritual Wanderlust
Tuesday 08-Jan-19	Testing the Spirits (Part 1)
Wednesday 09-Jan-19	A Conflict of Interest
Thursday 10-Jan-19	God's Will in the End Time
Friday 11-Jan-19	God's Epistle

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