

## **The Last Sin to Die Is the First One that Should**

Jesus placed us in His church because He knew that it is impossible for any of us to achieve the goal of Christ-like righteousness in a social vacuum. Relationship, fellowship, community – these are nothing short of essential to our spiritual development. Oh, we'll eat together, play together, golf together, pray together, worship together, serve together, *etc.* and call it relationship, fellowship, community. But, it is long overdue that we as modern, American, independence-loving people face the reality that Jesus had more in mind. He expects us to be engaged with one another in our struggles against sin. That requires the death of the first sin that should die – pride.

... Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. – James 5:16

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. – Romans 15:14

... Carry each other's burdens ... – Gal 6:2

In Bible School this past Sunday, we viewed the gut-wrenching testimony of Charles Templeton. This successful American evangelist, a friend and co-laborer of Billy Graham, began to question his faith. His questions led him on a pseudo-intellectual journey, at the end of which, he came to doubt his beliefs and believe his doubts. He tells of his studies at a liberal seminary. He read many of the writings of notable skeptics. He wrote a book explaining his abandonment of the Christian faith. In it, he chose to embrace the most secular possible responses to tough Bible questions, but these responses are easily countered by those who trust the Bible. That led me to question, "Did this man ever bounce any of these matters off his good friend, Billy, or off any other believers for that matter? Or, did he simply cloister himself away from the people of faith to figure these things out on his own? Templeton died an agnostic in 2001.

Templeton's story brought to mind that of Ray Boltz, one of the most successful Christian singer/songwriters of the eighties and nineties. In September, Boltz announced that he was gay and concluded that God had created him that way. Now, Boltz categorically states that his struggle was private. He prayed, he studied, but he never overcame the feelings. When he shared with his family his "conclusion," it came as a total bombshell to them. Apparently, he had never let them in on the "struggle" that preceded his conclusion. I was left wondering if there was any brother in Christ that Boltz had trusted enough to let him share the burden.

I will leave it to hyper-Calvinists and hyper-Armenians to settle the issues of who may or may not have lost their salvation, who may or may not have ever had it or who is simply backslidden. What hits me between the eyes are the hyper-tragedies that emerge from hyper-privacy and hyper-distrust.

Obviously, we can understand the terror of sharing such battles with others. Christian communities have been known to react hysterically and judgmentally rather than constructively and compassionately. Also, it is easy to assume that everyone else in the Body of Christ is much more “spiritually together” and beyond us than they really are. But, eventually the excuses for not being a more transparent people have to cease. If believers persist in their refusals to lean on one another, what will be the cost? Some will give up in their battles with sin and conclude that they were wrong for having ever bothered to struggle. The present dysfunction in the homes of believers will simply escalate all the more. Others will never escape their own private hells. And all because we are too proud and too afraid to take God at His word:

... No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out . . . – 1 Corinthians 10:13

More often than not, that “way out” will be found in the community that God has already given us, if we can only risk dropping our guards.

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