

The Sharpening of the Christian

Doug Hamilton

Prov 27:17 “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (NAS)”

- [As] iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens the wits of another. (God’s Word)
- Iron makes iron sharp; so a man makes sharp his friend. (Bible in Basic English)
- Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (KJV)
- Iron by iron is sharpened, And a man sharpens the face of his friend. (Youngs)

Though there are many apparent differences in the varying versions of the Bible, they in essence saying the same thing. Let us examine the verse more closely and make application to our lives.

History of Iron

To understand the sharpening process of the Christian, we must understand the sharpening process of the iron. How does iron sharpen iron? Let us cover a little “Iron History”.

Bronze, the material primarily used for weapons prior to 1300 BC, was running short because of all the wars going on in the world at the time. The Aegean people, perhaps the Philistines, developed a skill for making weapons out of the much-stronger iron.

Iron weapons were so revolutionary that the Philistines kept the technology to themselves similar to our approach on nuclear technology today. Their “Iron” advantage helped them hang onto the early monopoly on iron weapons as indicated in *1 Sam 13:19-21*, *Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." 20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. 21 And the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes.*

Over the next couple decades, the technology leaked out and Israel came into possession of this newly found skill. Sometime near the age of King David, Israel began making iron weapons for themselves. By the time of Solomon and the writing of Proverbs 27:17, the making and sharpening of iron swords was a huge national endeavor which allowed for military independence of the nation.

The Sharpening Process

The “Iron Sharpening Iron” process was carried out in a few steps. They are as follows.

- First was the pounding out of the sword with the iron hammer. They would flatten it around the edges like sheet metal.
- Second, they would use an iron file or and iron-ore stone to take create a razor-edge.
- Thirdly, they would use another piece of iron to rub and lift that edge. This would have to be done whenever the edge would become dull. You have heard the saying that “He’s lost his edge.” That is referring to a knife that needed to have the edge raised.

When Solomon stated “As iron sharpens iron”, this was the cutting edge of technology (Pun intended). Anyone that heard this at the time would have had great and timely images in their heads. When iron was around other iron, great things happened.



The Sharpening of the Christian

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Application

When Christians are spending time with each other, there is incredible sharpening that occurs. It is not in the form of a weapon of this world and not in a razor edge on a sword, but something that gives all Christians the EDGE when it comes to going to heaven. The people of God are a culture defined by the blood of Jesus and an accompanying lifestyle of morality which follows. It is when we are around one another as the *“Holy Nation, a Royal Priesthood, a People of God’s Own Possession”* (1 Pet 2:9), that we gain the Spiritual Advantage the Razor Edge. It causes us to be victorious in this world and leads to the heavenly realm.

Taking On Your Environment

I like what a scholar named Matthew Henry wrote concerning this verse. In paraphrasing him, he states that a child that is born in Brooklyn or in the South are taught the English language from a young age. On the other hand, the respective “Nasal Tone” or the “Southern Twang” is not something they are born with or taught, but picked up unconsciously from the culture that they were surrounded by. You can literally identify most people from their region in the US by their language of the culture. Different sounds, words and phrases like the following made it obvious.

- In the Midwest we call soda “pop”. In the Northeast it is called “soda pop”. In the Midwest we have youths, but in Brooklyn you have “Yutes”.
- In Texas they call all soda “Coke”. If you want a Sprite, you ask for a “Sprite Coke”. If you want a Dr. Pepper, you ask for a “Dr. Pepper Coke”. They call gas stations “fill’in stations”, “you all” is “Y’all”, hello is “howdy” and preparing to do something is “fix’in”.
- In Southern California, objection is pronounced “Gag Me”, extreme objection is “What-Ever?”, very and really translate to “totally” and “way” and you have to use the word “like” in every sentence.
- Valley Girls from California end their sentences with a “question mark?” at every sentence, Southern folk “draw it out”, Louisiana grunts and smashes the words, Bostonians talk tough and Iowans speak normal (LOL).

They are all speaking English, and yet uniquely different from each other. The point of this is to emphasize that we take on our environment. We typically take on the actions and language of our environment.

- Prov 13:20, He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
- 1 Cor 15:33, Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

When one surrounds themselves with other people who love Christ, there is the likelihood of becoming a better and stronger Christian. If that environment is not good, let’s say “Iron and Paper”, the sharpening process cannot take place and you lose your EDGE for Jesus. If you want to be SHARP for Jesus and His kingdom, then you must put

The Sharpening of the Christian

Doug Hamilton

yourself in position of being sharpened by Jesus. If you want your Christian countenance lifted up, then you must be active and involved with the other PIECES of IRON.

Here are some of the sharpening techniques we have.

Showing Love for one another

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Confession to and prayer for one another.

- James 5:16, Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Singing and Studying with one another

- Col 3:16, Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms {and} hymns {and} spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Showing Humility to one another

- Phil 2:3-4, Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Words and Deeds of encouragement for one another

- 1Thes 4:18, Therefore comfort one another with these words.
- 1Thes 5:11, Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.
- Heb 3:13, But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is {still} called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Simply Spending Quality Time Together

- Col 3:12-13 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Application

You are pieces of IRON. We are here together for the sharpening of one another. This should also be a primary function of the church as a whole. Next to salvation, our fellowship is the greatest thing we have to offer each other and those who have yet to come to the Lord.