

各人自扫门前雪

Sweeping Your Own Snow



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When I bought car insurance, I asked for both liability and comprehensive coverage, covering potential risk for my car as well as those of others. I heard that in some states in the United States, car owners just pay to insure their own cars. That might not be a bad idea if the entire system is designed that way. If we are all careful what we do to our own things, there will be fewer problems in the world.

This reminds me of a Chinese saying: Sweep the snow in front of your own door, and ignore the frost on other's roof. We often think that is meant to accuse a person of being selfish, but that may not be the original intention of this proverb. A Song Dynasty writer, Chen Yuanliang, for instance, quotes this as a "self-disciplinary" proverb. One of my friends also said that the world would be a peaceful place to live in if each country "sweeps our own snow", and stop pointing at other's frost. Unfortunately, we have snow piled up high at our doorsteps, and we enjoy blaming our neighbor for having frost on his roof. The Bible says: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Mathew 7:3).

We often measure others with certain standards, but do not measure ourselves with the same standards. I sometimes hear people say to Christians: "Hey, aren't you a Christian? Why don't you turn the left cheek, when I slap you on the right?" Whoever is thinking this way is using a standard to bind others but not himself. The Bible told the victim to change others with their humility in turning the other cheek, but the Bible does not give the victimizer the license to inflict pain on others. Why don't we all apply moral standards to ourselves first? If we apply the standards to ourselves first, we won't even ask others to turn the other cheek.

Being stricter with ourselves is not just a Christian tradition. Chinese people also say "we reflect upon ourselves three times a day" and we say: "Treat ourselves with discipline, to others, tolerance." Whether we are following such good advice is another issue.

In Taiwan, there is a good TV program that provides advice on marriage. The host said he often heard his guests complain: "What a pity! I wish my wife/husband should be here to hear this." The host the nail on the head by saying: Why focus so much on him or her being here to listen to this? If you think these words are good for you, go use them. If you change, your spouse may also change. If you just expect him or her to change, you both are stuck.

When we try to measure other people with a standard, we should be aware that the standard will also be applicable to us. Therefore, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Mathew 7:1). In the book of Psalms (130:3), we read: "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" When you start to judge others, you are basically getting into a glass house, and you try to throw stones around?

买车保险的时候，我们州的法律规定必须买责任险，亦即假如车撞了别人，或是撞了别人的车，所应承担的责任。如果自己的车况比较好，还得买综合险，也要保自己的车。听说在有一些州，保险只需保自己的。如果每个人的保险都是保自己，系统就是这么设计，那也是个好办法，对所有人都公平。我在想，如果这个世界上每个人都管好自己，那么社会上的问题就会少很多。

由此联想到“各人自扫门前雪，莫管他人瓦上霜”这句话来。我们常以为这是告诫我们不要自私，其实这未必是此谚发明者的原意。宋代陈元靓就在《事林广记》中将其称为“处己警语。”我的一个朋友也讲过：要是大家都自扫门前雪，这个世界也都太平了。现实往往不是这样的，每家门口的雪成堆了不去扫，却对他人的瓦上霜指指点点。马太福音 7:3 上说：“你自己眼中有梁木，怎能对你弟兄说，容我去掉你眼中的刺呢。”

人类的通病，总是拿一个标准去衡量别人，不去衡量自己。比如我们常听人说基督徒：“哎，你不是基督徒吗？圣经上都说了，打左脸的时候要伸出右脸，你怎么不照着做啊？”问这话的人，请问你是不是拿这个教训在约束自己？再说了，这段话是说给被打者听的，要被打者以谦卑感化他人，这话不是说给打人者听，要你打了人家左脸再打右脸的。如果你能用这话约束自己，就根本不会去质问人家。

对自己严谨，对他人宽容，这不但是基督教传统，也是一个普遍的认识。中国也一样这种做法。我们说：“三省吾身。”“严于律己宽以待人。”我们有没有遵循这些传统那就是另一回事了。

台湾有个电视节目，教育夫妻相处之道，主持人说：每次夫妻一方听到的时候就埋怨：哎呀，这么好的节目，我那口子怎么不在，他/她听到就好了。那主持人的话很有道理：你管对方在不在呢！你听到了道理，若是合理，照着行便是，你改变了对方也跟着改变。如果都指望对方变，自己不变，那就成僵局，就不会进步。

每当我们用一个尺度去衡量别人的时候，就陷入了一个圈套，因为他人也会这样来衡量我们。因此，《马太福音》7:1 告诉我们：“你们不要论断人，免得你们被论断。”《诗篇》130:3 也说到：“若究察罪孽，谁能站得住呢？”当我们去论断的时候，就好比钻进了一个玻璃房子里，在玻璃房子里，你怎好去乱扔石头呢？