

## **Introduction**

In 1945, George Orwell published his celebrated allegory titled *Animal Farm*. In it, a group of animals oust the humans from a farm and begin running it themselves. But the society they form degenerates into a brutal tyranny of its own. That tyranny is expressed in a change in one of the seven commandments that were set up to govern the society – the seventh. At first, it said, **"All animals are equal."** But the animals that eventually grabbed power soon changed it to say, **"All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."** They of course were the **"some"** that were more equal than the others.

The animals in Orwell's allegory represent human beings, many of whom do actually think and act according to the changed seventh commandment. But you and I as followers of Jesus shouldn't. We should think and act according to the original seventh commandment instead, **"All animals (human beings) are equal."** We should because of our common bonds and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **Our Differences**

Each of the texts we read mentions a contrasting category of people.

In Proverbs 22:2, it's **"the rich and the poor."** These are people on the opposite ends of the economic ladder: Oprah Winfrey with her 11 homes costing \$100 million and a homeless person I knew in Barberton named Esther.

In Proverbs 29:13, it's **"the poor man (the oppressed) and the oppressor."** These are people on the opposite ends of the political ladder: Momar Ghadafi and the Libyans he's imprisoned or killed.

In Ecclesiastes 2:14, it's **"the wise and the fool."** These are people on the opposite ends of the intellectual ladder: Stephen Hawking with an IQ of 160 and a man I knew, John Hutchens, with an IQ of 50.

Finally, in Matthew 5:45, it's **"the evil and the good."** These are people on the opposite ends of the moral ladder: hedonist Hugh Hefner

and evangelist Billy Graham.

The contrasting categories in these texts, taken together, imply an observable fact of our existence. The seven billion people that inhabit earth are different in countless ways - talents, intelligence, resources, looks, genders, races, character, cultures, personalities, languages, and beliefs. We're different when it comes to those things and many more.

### **Our Common Bonds**

That's true. But it's also true that we're more the same than we are different. Notice the instructive term that Solomon uses in Proverbs 22:2, "**common bond.**" No matter what our differences are, there are things about us that are the same. Those things about us that are the same are our common bonds. These texts identify three of those.

The first is found in Proverbs 22:2. We have a common origin. As Solomon states it here, God is the Maker of us all. Referring to Psalm 139:13-16, God generated and formed Oprah in her mother's womb just as He did Esther, the homeless woman. We have a common origin.

The second common bond is found in Proverbs 29:13 and Matthew 5:45. We have a common blessing or as theologians say it, a common grace. God gives light, sun, and rain to us all. The sun shines every day for Hugh Hefner as much as it does for Billy Graham. We have a common blessing or grace.

The third common bond is found in Ecclesiastes 2:14. We have a common fate. I said it last week. All of us are going to die. Stephen Hawking and John Hutchens will one day quit breathing, die, be buried, and decay. We have a common fate.

A fourth common bond is found in a text we didn't read, Genesis 1:27, "**God created man in His own image.**" We have a common image. Momar Ghadafi and his victims are like God in certain and the same ways. We have a common image.

Those then are the common bonds of human beings - origin, blessing, fate, and image - and they're decisive. Those four things that

are the same about us supersede the sum total of all the things that are different about us. We're far more the same than we are different.

Take white people and black people for instance. I have two questions. First, what is different about them? It's primarily that black people have more of the pigment melanin in their skin than white people do – 1/30<sup>th</sup> of an ounce more. Second, what is the same about them? It's their origin, blessing, fate, and image. It's clear. The common bonds that white and black people share supercede their differences.

But it isn't just white people and black people. It's every one. Our common bonds supercede our differences. They make us far more the same than we are diverse.

### Our Equality

Do you realize the life-altering implication of that? The original seventh commandment in *Animal Farm* defines it, "**All animals (human beings) are equal.**" Probably the most recognized line in the Declaration of Independence is this one, "**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.**" That is literally true. All seven billion of us on earth are objectively equal.

Don't misunderstand me. That doesn't mean that we're the same in talents, intelligence, looks, resources, and so on because we obviously aren't. Most of us are better off than some and worse off than some when it comes to those things. But because of our common bonds, our worth is the same. God is the reference point of objectivity. And because of our common bonds, He considers all of us equally valuable. Each of us is infinitely important to Him and by definition "**infinitely**" levels the playing field. When it comes to value or worth, we're equals.

Let's particularize that so that we understand it. Oprah and Esther are equals. Momar Ghadafi and his victims are equals. Stephen Hawking and John Hutchens are equals. And Hugh Hefner and Billy Graham are equals. God values each one as much as He does the others.

Most of you know that we are Friends or Quakers. I mention that

because Quakers have grasped the equality of human beings from the very beginning of their movement. In his book *Friends for 300 Years*, Howard Brinton identifies four principles that have guided Quakers in their relationships with others. Those four principles are community, simplicity, harmony, and equality. Concerning equality, Brinton writes, **"Equality was the earliest Quaker social testimony."** He's right. The equality of human beings was the first social conviction they formed.

So there we have it, the message of our texts and its implication. The message is that we human beings share four common bonds that supercede our differences. Its implication is that all of us are equals in value or worth because they do.

### **Think Like We're Equals**

So let's live like it. Let's live as if all human beings are equals in value or worth. We live that way by doing two things.

First, think straight.

Many don't. They think crooked instead. They focus on the people's differences, about which they then make value judgments. A is rich. He's superior. B is poor. He's inferior. Or A is educated. She's superior. B is uneducated. She's inferior. Or A is white. He's superior. B is black. He's inferior. That is crooked thinking. It's out of touch with reality. It doesn't take into account what supercedes the differences on which it is focusing, people's common bonds.

A teammate on my college baseball team routinely referred to unattractive girls as **"dogs."** **"Dog's"** implies that they are lesser human beings. So I asked him one day, **"Why do you call them that?"** To which he replied, **"I call it as I see it."** **"See it"** conveys **"think it."** He thought crooked, that unattractive girls were inferior. He was out of touch with reality, ignoring the common bonds that made them equals.

Sometimes we think crooked about others in relation to us. We direct the value judgments we make not just to others in relation to others, but to others in relation to us. He's popular. I'm a nerd. I'm

inferior. Or I'm popular. He's a nerd. I'm superior. He has an above average IQ. I have an average IQ. I'm inferior. Or I have an above average IQ. He has an average IQ. I'm superior. He's white collar. I'm blue collar. I'm inferior. Or I'm white collar. He's blue collar. I'm superior. That is crooked thinking. It's out of touch with reality. It doesn't into account what supercedes the differences on which it's focusing, people's common bonds. You and I are not inferior to anyone. And you and I are not superior to anyone.

So, whether it's others in relation to others or others in relation to us, we need to think straight. First, no one is inferior. There is not one person on earth who is less important than any other person. Second, no one is superior. There is not one person on earth who is more important than any other person. Be a realist. Understand our common bonds and think accordingly, that all human beings are equals.

### **Act Like We're Equals**

We live as if all human beings are equals by doing a second thing. The first is think straight. The second is act right.

The first Quakers are our models for this. 17<sup>th</sup> century England, when and where Quakerism was born, was a clear cut class-conscious society. Depending on their bloodlines, positions, wealth, or power, people considered themselves either inferiors or superiors and acted like it. Two practices illustrate what I mean. One was called "**hat honor.**" It was the custom for men to wear their hats everywhere, even indoors. But inferiors always took their hats off in the presence of superiors. The other practice was called "**plain language.**" Inferiors addressed superiors using "**you**" and superiors addressed inferiors using "**thee**" or "**thou.**"

Everyone bought into these class-distinguishing practices, except Quakers. For one thing, they refused to take their hats off in anyone's presence, including the king or nobles. For another thing, they addressed everyone as "**thee**" and "**thou**" including, once again, the king

and nobles. It was scandalous of course and they were whipped, fined, and imprisoned because of it, but they wouldn't stop. They not only thought that all human beings are equals. They acted like it as well.

And so should we.

Sally James Farnum was a distinguished sculptress. One day, someone asked her little daughter which of her mother's children her mother loved the best. To which she replied: **"She loves Jimmy the best because he's the oldest. She loves Johnny the best because he's the youngest. And she loves me the best because I'm her only girl."** As Art Linkletter used to say, kids say the darndest things, and in this case the profoundest things.

Her comment teaches us how to act right, as if all human beings are equals. We treat each and every one in the very same way – the best. We give each one the patience, kindness, and goodness we would give to the most important person on earth, because in reality, that's what each one is, the most important person on earth.

Take looks, for instance. Gordon Patzer is considered an expert on what is called "lookism", which he defines this way. It's **"treating people in ways biased by their level of physical attractiveness; with benefits to individuals higher in physical attractiveness and detriments to individuals lower in physical attractiveness."** Noted psychologist James Dobson gives us an example of that. He observes that most adults give attractive children more attention than they do unattractive children. But we, as followers of Jesus, don't. We treat every child - and adult - in the very same way, the best.

## **Conclusion**

I'd close by quoting that great philosopher W.C. Fields who said: **"I'm free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally."** That, by way of contrast, is our call. Our common bonds supersede our differences and make all human beings equals. So, let's act like they are. Let's be free of all prejudices and love every person equally, the best.