

EXPLORING
HUMILITY AND
PRIDE

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Marilyn Leonard for teaching me the importance of tolerance and for those who have been my teachers in so many areas where spiritual rubber meets the road to reality.

ENDORSEMENT

Rene's writing is very wise teaching that is based on the Gospels and his experience of the Christian life. He has so obviously overcome enormous hurdles. The text is well-edited although lengthy. But in combination with his on the ground teaching I am sure that this can be very helpful to those who he involves in teaching. He also has good theological instincts.

Bill Reimer, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Foreword

1	Introduction	1
2	Motivating Humility	5
3	Growing in Humility and Dying in Pride	20
4	Praying the Lord's Prayer	29
5	When is Judging Pompous or Not?	34
6	Some Beatitudes	45
7	Using Non-Violence as a Pathway to Peace	51
8	Hypocrisy and Legalism	59
9	Envy	67
10	Bearing Good Fruit and Bad Fruit?	73
11	How Do You See Yourself	84
12	Grace or Pride?	95
13	God or Money?	100
14	Parable of the Talents	104
15	Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life	122
16	To Be Born From Above or Again?	127
17	The Final Judgment	129
18	The Parable of the Prodigal Son	133

19	Why I Believe God Wanted Jesus to Die For Us	140
20	Mercy, Karma, Positivity and Negativity	150
21	Human Kind	153
22	Do You Want To Be a Good Person?	155
23	Conclusion	162

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FOREWORD

Rene's down to earth straight-forward defining of component parts of humility and pride, while consistently using our capacity to love as the yardstick of our progress keeps us from sinking in a bog of theology, and sets us in the footsteps of Jesus.

Rene has made every mistake in the book when it comes to pride but the amazing thing is that he has learned from each one of them and brings understanding and a depth of perception to each facet that leads us unerringly back to Jesus. Rene challenges us with statements like "It is so easy to love humanity and hate our neighbor" and then reels us in to the kernel of the nutshell:

" All kinds of pride except honest pride are a result of making it a top priority to look good in the eyes of others as well as ourselves, rather than to love. Love comes from humility. No love in an area means no humility in that area. There is nothing wrong with wanting to look good in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others. It is when we make it more important than love, then it is wrong."

This is a book of reassurance also in those problem areas. Rene faces them head-on and shows us a way to deal with them: "If we have a compulsion, and want to overcome it and don't know how, we shouldn't feel guilty about it. Attempting to do more and try harder won't work. Praying to

Jesus and listening to what He asks us to do is the path to take.”

An invaluable book for any reader wanting to grow in their capacity to love.

Anita Patel

Fellow Traveller.

1 INTRODUCTION

My goal in exploring and writing about humility and pride in this book is that I want to love people more deeply, and humility is a key to doing so. I was a very proud person most my life and therefore I was a very poor lover as a result.

Good theology can not by itself change the heart. This book slowly became good theology in my opinion and then began to function sort of like a compass, a North Star, a goal, a hope, together with my book called *Exploring Faith, Hope & Love* in telling me where I wanted to go. But these two books by themselves could not change my many misguided loyalties, bad desires, biases, proud attitudes, meanness, judging, condemning thoughts, and my many other visible sins, and bad energies.

Without confession, repenting in prayer, and renewing the mind the ability to change is minimal at best even with knowledge of what humility looks like. When I say there is “help” in the different contexts in this book I am referring to my book called: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* which explores a path Jesus showed me that leads to personal inner transformation. The books I’ve written fit together.

This book is about adopting truthful-thinking on how to see God, people, and self with healthy humility, care and compassion. The contents found in this book grew as God led me to true repentance in many areas of my relational life; and that meant because vices were being removed, virtues needed to replace them. Virtues are built up in the heart and mind by believing relational truths that are healthy, non-judgmental and caring.

In order to think in a humble way one needs to stay away from many pitfalls. One's pursuit of humility is not aimed at for one's own sake, but for love's sake. The difference is that the former is like a lady who develops all sorts of techniques to beautify herself but her tongue is toxic and untamed. She will get plenty of looks but her potential at living out healthy relationships is poor until she repents from her toxic tongue. The latter is done by caring for, and becoming compassionate towards people that leads to loving them.

Some of the material covered in this book comes from stuff I struggled with when I was a baby Christian. Back then my intuition said one thing, but the Bible "seemed to say another" or actually did say the opposite. So, this book is also about reconciling these three camps.

The questions wrestled with in this book are as follows:

What are healthy motivations when it comes to doing good deeds? What is the place in one's life of the Old Testament Law, the Moral Law, and the New Testament teachings when it comes to a healthy spiritual life? How are good and evil defined in the Bible, and how is that useful when it comes to judging people? Is it healthier to be in church or out of it? Is there a difference between sin strongholds and what is called the "sin nature" in the Bible? Is there a danger in aiming to be a good person, if so, what is a better motivation? When is boasting wrong? What does it mean for us to let our light shine on others?

What attitudes ought I have when approaching prayer?

Is Jesus' warning to not judge or condemn people still binding on us? Is there a better way than judging people and to still get our concerns across to them? What is the difference

between correcting people and judging them? What is an “I”-statement? What does it mean to be the salt of the earth?

Are the Beatitudes that Jesus taught still important?

Why choose non-violence as the pathway to peace in the face of conflict? Does non-violence mean doing nothing?

How are legalism and hypocrisy defined and what sorts of dangers can they get us into? Is viewing holiness as spiritual healthiness a key to fending off legalism?

What does it mean to delight in God, so that He will give you the desires of your heart?

What does it mean to abide like a branch in the true Vine: Jesus? What is God’s true attitude towards the branches in the Vine? What are the natural loves, and what are their relationships to supernatural love? Why do the branches on the Vine bear good fruit?

What are fitting ways to see oneself and others? What does dependence and independence have to do with humility? Should we be critical of God for how He made us, for what He withholds from us or for what He gives to us? How do the answers to these questions make us treat our neighbors?

Does becoming a Christian means we reject everything from our former way of life? Is there goodness found in other faith traditions? Is an “us vs. them” mentality helpful when it comes to love? Who has the fullness of the truth?

What is the real story behind the dispute between Martha and Mary found in Luke 10? Is forgiveness a license to sin? Why should we forgive?

What is involved in submission to parents, spouses, bosses,

and governments?

Do we worship money and try to use God; or do we use money and worship God?

How does one interpret the Parable of Talents and not get proud?

What does it mean for Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life?

What does it mean to be born from above or again?

What is Hell about?

What is the true meaning of the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
What is rightly directed repentance?

Why did God want Jesus to die for us?

And finally, are we the descendants of Adam and Eve wholly evil, or do we have some goodness in us?

In exploring these questions with the focus being on humility and pride I eventually knew where I wanted my attitudes and actions to take me.

2 MOTIVATING HUMILITY

Let me say from the beginning, that I am no expert when it comes to humility. The contents found in this book have been struggled with, reworked, deleted from, and added to many times over in the years that I have invested in writing it. Which means that it has been a work in progress. I have not attained perfection in how I see humility, but my understanding is continually evolving, getting re-worked, deleted from, and refined over time.

There have been times when the energy within in me was not healthy while writing different parts of this book. But over the years, with the Holy Spirit's help I have edited the book and corrected the unhealthiness within. I do think that this book has something to contribute on humility as it has become sort of like a mirror, a thermometer, and a diagnostic tool meant to help cure me of my different pockets of pride within.

For those who are interested in what I need to say here, I would like to warn you. There are many dangers in attempting to define humility with maxims, lists of do's and don'ts and the like. Conforming to what is said does not mean that one is practicing humility. Knowing what humility is does not mean we are practicing it; we can get proud attitudes because of our knowledge. When one practices humility, then love, peace, and joy are what result, and it does not come from us apart from God, but is done in cooperation with God's grace: His empowering presence in clean and pure energy. God is the one who is glorified.

When one sees mysteries, and connects with them, especially when these mysteries have never entered one's mind before, and one has not ever seemingly heard anyone else utter such things, then one can take on a sense of superiority or a proud attitude because one thinks one is in the know unlike those "other" people. This is a possible danger of being preoccupied with stuff off the beaten path, being a loner, isolating oneself and getting a high off theology (which can be very unhealthy). Spiritual pride is a danger to all of us; that includes those who want to practice humility. So, I need to watch myself.

I do not wish to make people burdened with new lists of sins and to pour on the guilt to somehow motivate good behavior. Rather there is help¹ for uprooting pride once diagnosed and workable recipes for growing humility in us that do lead to love. I'm not into making one struggle more with guilt, shame, or rigid standards in this book. Freedom to love is what I'm after for myself and everyone else.

There is a war that needs to be fought against pride. But only the battles are winnable. The war goes on and on in this valley of shadow of death (this earthly life). Perhaps it goes on in continual victory in Heaven...but it needs to be addressed here on earth. God alone can sustain the victories as we cooperate with Him.

Pride and humility are not "all or nothing" states. Some people have more pride than other people; the key is to not

¹ Cf. Rene Lafaut, Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive

let pride swallow up the little humility each of us do have.

I heard someone say some time ago that, “he or she who sets themselves up as the sole determiner of or authority on truth only has the gods’ laughter.” Wanting to be absolutely correct, or too holy is not a good thing to be doing (of which I was guilty of much my adult life). I am not an expert, guru, PhD, priest, or want-to-be pope. Needing others to agree with my slant on truth had been very important to me for a very long time... too important. As if I owned the truth or authored it and needed to somehow be a watchdog or policeman over it.

I can neither give life all by myself nor am I interested in taking anyone else’s life. I am no machine, computer, or robot; so, I make mistakes in my thinking about truth and I have moral failures, I take things too seriously at times, I compromise, and I have sinned often. I have also been a perfectionist for a long time; wanting my beliefs to be as clear and truthful as possible as well as lived out. If I can’t live out a supposed or real moral, I rightly or wrongly want to jettison that moral and live without it because I hate guilt. I was an “all or nothing”- kind of guy for a long time, but no longer. I don’t have it all right, and I am a work in progress.

For most of my past, I have made my cross way too heavy, and in the process also attempted to make other people’s crosses way too heavy (please forgive me). I am not perfect, so I can’t expect others to be perfect. We all have our own faults. And I want to be as gracious as possible towards others just like I want others to be with me. I have mathematical

training, and I love to analyze things way too much instead of letting things be, and accepting them. I love simple truths and principles and I like to meditate on them, and live them out. But life is messy. Linear-correlations are easier to understand and explain than non-linear-correlations. Life and sin is often non-linear; things rapidly escalate into getting messy, knotted, unclear, and confusing a lot of the time because we often don't have clarity to see what is in our hearts or subconscious. Only God knows it all. One can't rest on yesterday's achievements, or limited understanding. Growth calls each of us. We all have some sort of vacuum within our hearts, or restlessness. We all thirst for more. Let's not ignore this and become closed-minded, arrogant, impatient or mean towards those who ask questions we used to ask.

For Christians, there are three standards: The Old Testament Law, the Moral Law, and the New Testament Commands that we can or have struggle(d) with. Living within the Moral Law can be very difficult. The OT Law was an application of the Moral Law for a Jewish culture given a long time ago. When I read the OT Law I see it as a way of trying to make things fair. Wanting things to be fair is healthy, but demanding them with anger, dark mean self-pitying, hostility, abrasiveness, and a "f- -k-you-attitude" when honor or rights are denied us is not wise or kind. Focusing on having to have things fair all the time often leads to me measuring and judging and trying to avoid losing my lower rights in the process.

But the Commands Jesus put forward in the Sermon on the Mount aim higher than the OT Law, and are only possible to

live out with His grace. These Commands of Jesus seek to give more than fairness to those we are called to love. They communicate: I care for you whoever you are to the point of where I'm willing to sacrifice myself and die for you. The commands of Jesus call us to exercise our higher rights to give up our lower rights with gentle, kind, caring, peaceful and humble energy.

When Jesus says that the Ten Commandments still stand, (cf. Matthew 5:17) He is not saying we are under LAW (we are under grace), but that these commandments are still to be used to point out sin. We don't trust in the Ten Commandments to somehow keep the commands. No, we aim higher than these Commandments like the teachings of Jesus and Sermon on the Mount outline. In aiming higher, the minimum OT standard will be fulfilled through love prompted through caring and the grace poured out through faith in Jesus.

The OT Law said to not steal or covet; Jesus said to give freely to the poor. The OT Law said don't murder; Jesus said to love our enemies. The OT Law said to sacrifice cattle, bulls and sheep to God; Jesus called us to be living sacrifices. The OT Law said to commit no adultery; Jesus says to love our spouses as ourselves. The OT Law said to not worship lifeless idols, Jesus invited us to true life for free. The OT Law said to honor our parents; Jesus said to take them into our homes, help them, and care for them. The OT Law said to not work on the Sabbath; Jesus said it is healthy to do good on the Sabbath. The OT Law said not to use the Lord's Name in vain;

Jesus says we get to call God our Father. The OT Law said, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”², but Jesus said use non-violence to spread love. The OT Law said bear no false witnesses; Jesus said to speak the truth in love, believe the best about people, and not to judge or condemn people. The OT Law said to give a percentage; whereas Jesus asks us to be generous just like He is.

So, Jesus’ view of the OT Law was to give an even higher standard that when aimed for fulfills the OT Law in the doing without focusing on the OT Law. Jesus raised the standard to an even higher level where God’s grace guides, strengthens, blesses, and frees us to love others unconditionally in this new way. Jesus took the “thou shall nots” which are negative and passive in nature, and gave us positive commands that far exceed the OT commands. These commands of Jesus inspire us to positive action, they appeal to our nobleness, they aren't passive in nature, they don't focus on what we are entitled to personally, they don't just limit us to harm reduction but bring health, growth, and help kill selfishness, judging, hostility, pride, and living for pleasure seeking alone.

Jesus promises us that if we abide in Him (humble ourselves in faith) we will bear the good fruit He talked about in the Gospels. But He does not guarantee that we won't sin in this life. He who is without sin may throw the first stone. If we attempt to abide in Him yet still struggle with compulsive sins, then there may be strongholds in our minds or hearts that

² Exodus 21:24

need to be dealt with. There is help³ for such problem areas.

I am not better than anyone else; I'd die of embarrassment if all my sins were shown on a BIG screen in front of the whole world. Who am I to judge anyone else? We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; especially me. I do have faith in Jesus, but that does not make me more righteous, humbler, or worthier than other people. All the good I do was and is given to me by God through His blood and sweat and the good I do have I did not earn it. My sins aren't better than anyone else's.

Speaking about right and wrong can often become abstract or self-defeating. Keeping the Sermon on the Mount by foremost rolling up one's sleeves and digging into it with one's own energy isn't wise. We can attempt to keep the Sermon and still miss Jesus along with the people it is intended to protect. It will point to stuff that we don't understand. We need a Shepherd to guide us and intuitively lead us to obey the Sermon when it applies in the many complex and simple situations that arise in life. Love is more than keeping certain rules or laws outwardly; love involves pure motives, energy, and caring attitudes. If we seek to love people, then doing so out of our caring for them is a good motivation. If we focus on the law too much we can invite temptation and can find ourselves in slimy black pits of guilt feeling powerless and weak. Focusing on good things, pure things, and holy things helps to lessen temptation. The Law

³ Cf. Rene Lafaut, Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive

makes nothing perfect. Only Jesus makes things perfect. Please keep this in mind while reading this book.

Faith in and relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the only way to love “supernaturally” for those who have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ and understood it. There is no principle, code, system, technique, or motive that can produce love all by itself. Jesus is the true Vine, and no matter what others say, you may be able to do “natural” good without being in relationship with Him, but you can’t love supernaturally without being in relationship with Him if you have heard the Good News and understood it. I want authentic love and no cheap imitation. In me learning how to love I have been broken repeatedly.

If there is any truth in this book on “humility” then I know that no Christian can practice it authentically unless they are guided and energized by Jesus with healthy beliefs. This is made possible through faith in, trust in, prayer to, and relationship with God. There are many dangers in describing what humility looks like. Only God can see directly into the hearts of people, and we often don’t know our own hearts or motives in the first place, hence the need to hear what God has to say personally to each of us about it.

Practicing humility by focusing on ourselves and exclusively on lists of do’s and don’ts is doomed to failure and leads to trying to conform instead of being transformed. The more we focus on ourselves the more we will be tempted to get proud because of our success, or deflated, guilty, and downcast because of our failures. Love isn't about me, myself, my

reputation, how I look, and what I get out of it. The more we try to correct our bad behavior by ourselves (through pressure or pushing stuff down within) to conform to LAW, the more we will lose sight of Jesus. When we lose sight of Jesus the more we will feel angry pressure, self-pity, guilt, impatience, and judgment directed towards others and ourselves. We were never intended to correct our behaviors by lonesome selves. That is God's job because He is the one who made us from the inside out.

It is important to search for truth, but it is just as important to ask why one is searching for truth. Put another way: pursuing truth (or right behavior) is important, but the reasons for why I am pursuing truth (or right behavior) are just as important. Seekers of truth won't necessarily find love; whereas seekers of love will find truth. A friend of mine with whom I have corresponded with on this topic explains some of these dangers regarding this subject, and that I happen to agree with:

The term I should have used was "moralism" - a religious first cousin of legalism - which I understand to be the pursuit of righteousness through the doing of "good works". And here Paul and Jesus make it clear that our righteousness is not derived directly from good works, but only as an outworking of God's work through Jesus and in transforming us by His Spirit. Moralism also involves succumbing to the temptation (often unconscious) of believing that if I do this good thing, and that good thing like it says in the Bible (and

of course Paul provides many such lists of “goods”) then all will be well. The danger here is that a person places their faith in their own power to do good, and then also the danger of becoming self-righteous and judging oneself to be superior to others who do not do all or as many of the same acts. I understand the Jesus way to involve the transformation/ purification of the heart, which then leads the person to do those good works, not because of what you “get” for them (salvation or otherwise), but simply because they are good. You don't “think/analyze” whether it fits God’s law - you just do it because that is who you are [in Christ]. Only God is truly “good” - but as we become more in love with Him, our being is changed and we act more like he would act.

There is so much to chew on here. Going to the Torah (OT Law) or Moral Law every time we fail in keeping it and holding onto the Torah more tightly inside our hearts trying to keep the Torah (OT Law) or Moral Law is not wise. The Torah (OT Law) and Moral Law are intended to point out sin. They have no power by themselves to make us obey God. Guilt should drive us to God and not directly to doing good deeds. Being transformed by God’s Love (the Holy Spirit) through faith, and relationship with Him is the wisest path to take to grow in supernatural Love. It is the only path to supernatural Love. Doing good deeds (prescribed by the Law (Torah, or Moral) or some other systems of principles) with the hope of getting Salvation, points of merit, badges of righteousness, favor from God, or the favor of our peers goes against the Spirit of

Love. When we love for love's sake then we truly love God. Whenever we aim to get something out of the good works we are doing other than just loving people with those good works, then we are off course.

If we sin, then we don't do more or try harder to stay away from that sin. We learn to rest in God's promises concerning our salvation from sin when we learn to confess our sins to God, and become consciously dependent on Him in faith so He can purify us from the sins we commit⁴. Often, we commit sins because we have believed, and think lies or half-truths. Often, we commit sins because we aren't dependent on God's grace. Often, we commit sin because we aren't teachable. Us having resentments, fears, and pride in our lives are pathways to committing compulsive sins too.

Fear is a root to sin because it leads to holding onto whatever is close by to achieve a goal so that we become independent from God (i.e. proud) and so become self-made men and women instead of becoming God's workmanship.

When we love God or any other person, then we don't want to harm, hurt, or offend them; we want to bless them. When we love, we become sensitive towards those we love. When we love, it is because we care for those we love.

When we break the least commandment, we are guilty of breaking the whole Law: which is to love; because the whole law can be summarized in: love God, neighbor, and self.

When we hold onto God's Love we will want to, and will

⁴ Cf. 1 John 1:9

move towards loving others. When we hold onto serious sin then we can't embrace God's love until we come to Him and throw ourselves at His mercy, grace, wisdom, and power to pry us loose from our serious sins. "We can't serve two masters: We will either hate one or love the other".⁵

As Christians, we are called to no longer lead a sinful life. Not sinning means the Moral Law is binding on us. But aiming to not sin using the Moral Law as the means to not sin won't get us anywhere. A simple stone keeps all the Ten Commandments perfectly. But that stone by itself can't dispense mercy. We are called to a higher goal: active love, the way Jesus taught and showed. If we focus on following and loving Jesus wherever we meet Him, then we will immediately fulfill the requirements from the Moral Law. But if we focus on "not sinning" then we will be Law focused and get nowhere fast.

God calls us to a love-relationship, not a fear-driven-slavery-mentality-relationship. He wants us to move from "fear of making him angry when we do wrong" to "caring for Him and what he wants". He doesn't want us to be insecure, and not aware that we are loved by Him. God's love eventually results in peace, joy, and love for those who commit to following His only Eternally begotten Son: Jesus.

Concerning one's motivation to live out goodness, the following questions can be asked:

(1) Does me saying and believing: "I must keep God's

⁵ Luke 16:13

commandments because of what I think I'll get (Heaven) and not get (Hell)" lead to pressure and that pressure lead to either failure (i.e. guilt) or pride (i.e. self-righteousness), or does it get the job done?

(2) Does me saying and believing, "I want to keep God's commandments because God first loves me (as shown on the cross)" lead to me bearing good fruit and that more abundantly or is it just wishful thinking?

I think that the answer to question (1) from my own experience has been: "failure (i.e. guilt) or pride (i.e. self-righteousness).

And I think the answer to question (2) is that it leads to bearing good fruit.

If we leave God out of our equations in doing good works, then we get in danger of becoming self-righteous. Self-righteousness says: "I can keep the commandments because I am the source of my own goodness." Self-righteousness can also wrongly say: "I keep certain rules and in doing so I have peace and so gain acceptance with God". In doing so one will be saying that God's love is not good enough, or the work of Jesus on the cross is not good enough. Ultimately one is dependent on God for all things especially the grace or power and leading in loving others. But we can also claim to be dependent on God and do many good works, but fall because we judge others to be not as good or as holy or as pure as we see ourselves. Preaching, teaching, and living out morality are very tricky things.

What I have written in this book is the result of valuable dialogue that I have had over the years with a variety of people from many different backgrounds. I am thankful to those who stood up to me, and so helped correct so many (not all) of the errors I had and have concerning my understanding of humility. It is also the result of my search for love, because without humility there can be no wholesome love. I guess that humility at its foundation or roots is partially about motives. Like a Priest said to me, “each fallen human heart is like a gigantic mine field.” There will always be battles with bad motives before we enter Heaven and the beatific vision.

Much of what I have written may seem moralistic, or too absolute. I have written about how I view humility from the perspectives I have been exposed to (South African, Canadian, European, American; Protestant and Catholic for the most part), in a certain time or era. Years from now what I have written may seem like nonsense by those who read it. This points to the truth that humility looks different on the outside (from culture to culture and from time to time), but on the inside, it does not change or contradict itself because it has to do with motives, health, energy, mechanics, and peace.

I have many times misunderstood the Sermon on the Mount, and will continue to do this until death. Like I said, I started out writing this book because I thought I had something to contribute to interpreting the Moral Law as given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. We all do, yet life isn't about

pushing the envelope on moral systems of behavior, it is about living out love because we are caring for people.

A long while ago, I was flipping channels on my TV when I tuned into two Rabbis discussing the OT Law or Jewish Torah. One of them made the comment that if all we are doing is trying to love others because God commands us then we can't have too high an opinion about those we are attempting to love. This confused me. But then gradually I began to see that God commands us to love each other because He made each of us in His image. And God's image is nothing but goodness. So, when we agree with God and decide to love our neighbor, it is because our neighbor is worth it. If we don't care for our neighbor we can't or won't love them. God is Light, and so exposes things for what they are. God loves us, and He desires us to partake in His kind of Love.

Most people want to love in a way that suits themselves, but God wants us to love according to His nature, will, and desires because His ways are always healthy, unlike our ways. God's thoughts are as high as the heavens are above the earth compared to our ways.

Perhaps what you will find here is nonsense. Perhaps it is enlightened in some areas. I have made a lot of mistakes in my Christian life. I still have struggles. There is still tension in my thinking. Perhaps that is the power of paradox. Perhaps it is because of my blindness.

3 GROWING IN HUMILITY AND DYING TO PRIDE

The Old Testament uses the words “good” and “evil” in this sense: “good” is “functional”: doing what it was designed to do by God; whereas “evil” is “dysfunctional”: being used for an inappropriate end in God’s eyes. So, in some sense evil is a spiritual disease infecting something good, whereas good is spiritual health.

Christians use the word evil to mean a shortage or lacking or eating away from the good present. Therefore, evil can’t exist on its own. It needs to warp or blemish or infect or make sick something good for it to exist. Just like rust does to cars or rotten-ness does to apples.

Therefore, the thinking that most promotes humility, is thinking of spiritual growth as getting healthy; and sin as being unhealthy. The problem with seeing growth as getting “better or improving” is that it opens the door to comparisons (“before vs. after” or “me vs. others”) too easily. We are all sick or unhealthy spiritually in different ways... so comparisons are fruitless: Comparisons can easily lead to envy or pride. You can’t compare oranges with apples or pears. Moreover, when health comes to a patient the doctor should get the credit. Likewise: Jesus is our spiritual doctor⁶. He should get the credit for bringing health to our souls.

Some people think that by withdrawing affection, warmth,

⁶ Cf. Mark 2:17

and kindness from a “sinner”, that they can show disapproval of the sinner’s life choices or behaviors, and somehow shame the “sinner” to correct the behavior. This does not work. The “sinner” this is aimed at often thinks there is something wrong with the person who acts like this towards them. This strategy neglects the truth that we all sin, and that we all have flaws in our natures. In pointing a finger at the one we want to “repent”; three fingers are pointing back to us. We can’t change anyone; focusing on ourselves is wiser, and is non judgmental. When we love we inspire people; when we try to fix them they feel judged, and get defensive. It is God’s kindness that leads to us changing our ways; not threats, pressure, shame, demands, or karma.

In the World, or in the Church?

If one thinks one can escape the temptations from the world by entering the church one is blindsided. The church will offer its own set of temptations. Sometimes we are healthier in our beliefs just before we enter the church, and get spiritually more ill by entering the church. Put more precisely, we take our baggage with us wherever we go. There are all sorts of spiritual viruses in the world and in the church. Holiness is not a result of any virus. It is the fruit of a humble faith or properly building on a healthy foundation. We have all sorts of attitudes that evolve, morph, or grow in many environments. In this context: either the church or the world. There is a difference between a “sin stronghold” and what is called our “sin nature”. The former can be dismantled whereas the latter can't be crucified, killed, or destroyed by

us. Knowing this simplifies the battles we ought to fight.

The strongholds of sin are what I call “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” within us, whose seed, structure and fruit has infected all fallen humanity: Adam and Eve and us their fallen descendants. The tree’s infecting power is in the lies spoken to us that we too quickly and easily embrace because they promise us instant peace, alleviation of fears, and the lie that God’s promises to provide ways through difficulties are not trustworthy. The devil promised independence, and made us slaves to sin, but only Jesus can free us from this tangled mess through the Good News found in the New Testament (NT).

When one lives according to the Torah or OT LAW, and measures oneself by it, trying to use it to be righteous, then the focus is on oneself and rules; and pride will be the natural outcome if one is successful. But when we abide in the true Vine – Jesus, then the focus won’t be on us, and we won’t attempt to conform to what humility looks like by our own efforts. Instead we will begin to supernaturally love and find joy in Jesus because He is the true joy for those who discover His beauty. We will when we patiently await it, be transformed by God into vessels of His love.

When we have an ideal that we aim for like being a certain type of woman or man, we must be careful, that our focus is not to fit a certain mold, instead of caring for or being concerned for those people we meet on our path each day. It is so easy to love humanity, and hate our neighbor. Humble people care for those who cross their paths, whereas proud

people are more concerned about fitting a certain mold they deem as perfection and are less concerned about others than the way they themselves look. People who attempt to conform to an ideal such as only being a good person in the eyes of others will usually only do good when in the presence of or when seen by others. When I read the Gospels, I find Jesus loving whomever crossed His path: sinners, people of bad reputations, those seen as burdens such as disabled people, those in need, those who were hungry for food, peace, acceptance, love, meaning and joy. Jesus did not make it His top priority to look good, respectable, and acceptable. He refused to be boxed in... and that was hard to accept by those who did not understand Him. He did not aim at perfection; He was perfection. I know that my spiritual journey picked up steam when I concluded that I needed to meet others where they are at in my own small way just like Jesus did.

All kinds of pride except honest pride are a result of making it our top priority to look good in the eyes of others as well as ourselves, rather than to love. Love comes from humility. No love in an area means no humility in that area.

When we make our main goal to love others like the Sermon on the Mount outlines, then it doesn't mean that we necessarily have humility.⁷ The Old Testament Law was an application of the Moral Law for the times, circumstances, customs, and culture inherited by Abraham's descendants after an exodus from slavery in Egypt. Some of the Jews

⁷ Cf. Matthew 5:1-7:29, or Luke 6:20-6:49

during Jesus' earthly ministry pored over that same Law thinking that in them they would have life, but they persecuted Jesus the author of life and the Law. They had the outward appearance of righteousness but denied the power and way to keep the spirit of the law. We can do the same thing with the Sermon on the Mount.

Humility is not an all or nothing thing. All people have different degrees of humility. We can squander it in one area, or grow it in another, depending on our choices.

When someone practices humility they are willing to look bad when they are doing good. They are willing to listen to and follow other people who are practicing humility. Humble people are aware of their pride. They are aware of their pride because they allow the true light that is coming into the world to expose their pride for what it is. Humble people hate their pride. By hate I mean these people have the tendency to not want to give themselves over to it.

Proud people want to look good at all costs. And so, they will be tempted to try to make others look bad in an attempt to look good themselves. When one thinks one looks good when in fact one looks anything but good, one must be blind. The darkness has made one blind.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to look good in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others. It is when we make it more important than love, then it is wrong.

When Is Boasting Wrong?

It is always important to attempt to speak what we believe to

be the truth because that is part of what it means to be humble. But sometimes we should refrain from speaking the truth about what we do, because otherwise we are becoming proud.

Sometimes when I watch TV, I see certain businesses advertise the supposed good their companies are doing for certain charities. And I think that they do so from mixed motives. The heads of these companies either never read the words of Jesus (below) or misunderstand them, or aren't wise enough to follow them. Jesus said:

A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, *let your light shine before men*, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.⁸

Do the italicized words in this quotation mean that we are to broadcast to everyone: "Hey look at the good I did or am doing for this person or those persons" when we do an act of kindness? I don't think so. Motives and focus are important.

Having said this there is another side to this topic. Mother Theresa got into the public eye with her tangible love, but her motives had nothing to do with making a name for herself. Her example was very good when it came to caring for people despite the fact that she was not perfect.

Good deeds aren't always the same as love. Good deeds that

⁸ Matthew 5:14-16, (emphasis mine)

are done with right motives, energy, and mechanics are considered love in God's eyes. When people have ulterior motives in doing good deeds then those deeds no matter how good, are not fully love. The only thing that counts is faith working itself out into love.

Those businesses that give to good causes because it is merely good business may be both proud and greedy. They may want to look good in the public eye only to earn greater profits. Their bottom line is helping others out only because it is profitable and they look good doing so. When humility acts, the result is love.

Having said this, I think that the heads of certain companies aren't the only ones at fault. We may all at different times be guilty of something very similar. We do this when we give money away because we don't want to look bad, or because we want to look good, even when there is no monetary profit in it for us. People who give alms because they want to look humble are proud. They are more interested in appearances than loving people. The path to love is caring for people and not attempting to conform to a concept or ideal.

There are times when it is prudent to let others know that we give, because when we do, we are not trying to boast. This may occur when someone asks us to defend our integrity when it comes to doing stuff for the poor. Or, when we are trying to teach our children to give. But we must watch the motives and energies in our hearts, lest we give way to more pride in our hearts.

So, how do we interpret the above words by Jesus? I think

that they ought to be interpreted this way. Light is a metaphor for love. When we let our light shine on a group of people, it is because we are loving each member from the group individually. And the reason each person may know about it is because we have loved her or him in a caring way. They in turn might tell others what we did, but that is different than seeking to glorify ourselves. When we dislike someone, who crosses our path we ought not cover our light (our love) with a bowl and make that person walk in our darkness: Love calls us to love everyone who we meet no matter how difficult it may be or get. Our light ought to shine on those people whose paths we cross.

Boasting about almsgiving is always wrong. Only the shallow will do it.

Almsgiving is not the only event where we should watch out for wrong motives. When we pray or fast Jesus warned us that we should watch the motives and focus in our hearts too.

There is nothing wrong with public prayer per-se. Even Jesus prayed when He was around others on occasions. It is when we are praying only to look good in other people's eyes, and not because we are concerned for those we are praying for, that our motives are wrong. God doesn't hear prayers that are motivated by vanity. The only people we impress are those with a poor understanding of humility, and those who would most likely do the same.

There are other times when people might find out we are praying. This may occur when we wish to encourage and

hearten a person going through a difficult time by telling them we are praying for them ourselves. If this is done correctly then we are not doing so to boast, but to give hope and life. Our motives are important.

When we boast about our fasting then we have spiritual pride. Jesus said that we have our reward already if we make an effort to reveal the fact that we are fasting. When we are fasting for the right reasons, it is because we want to be close to God, want to make room for Him, seek direction from Him, or want to show our solidarity with those who are less fortunate. Motives and mechanics are important when one decides whether an act is being done out of humility or pride.

