HUMILITY

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The content found in this chapter has been struggled with, reworked, deleted, and added to many times over in the years and hours that I have invested in writing it. Let me say from the beginning that I am no expert when it comes to humility. There were times when the energy within in me was not healthy while writing certain sections of this Essay. Over the years, I have edited the Essay and attempted to correct the darkness. I do think that this Essay has something to contribute about humility as it has become sort of like a mirror or thermometer for me. Please don't skip this introduction as it prefaces what is said afterwards.

For those who are interested in what I need to say here, I would like to warn you. There are many dangers to defining 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 supposed 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 is in the know. This is a possible danger of direct communication with God, or 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 what sins looks like and to pour on the guilt to somehow motivate finding God. Rather my Essay called, "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" from this Website attempts to lay down recipes for growing humility in us which always leads to love. I'm not into making one struggle more with guilt, shame, or rigid standards in this Essay. Freedom is what I'm after for myself and everyone else. This Essay does attempt to describe pride though, but I do it more from a desire to help diagnose and eventually be cured of the strongholds of pride through God's truth and grace that come from Jesus. There is a war that needs to be fought against pride. 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.

I was initially ensnared by the devil into somehow coming up with a theory that explained God's judgments…but the Bible says they are unsearchable. I wanted to understand it all, come up with a maxim that pierced the mystery of salvation…like who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell. The danger was that one starts to judge when one embraces such thoughts because one forgets what one looks like. "We should not fall in love with concepts, but with people" and God, as pope Francis teaches.

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 have been guilty). 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 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 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 have been an all or nothing kind of guy for too long a time now. I don't have it all right. I am a work in progress.

In much of my past, I have made my cross way too heavy, and in the process attempted to make other people's crosses way too heavy too (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 others are 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 get messy, unclear, and confusing a lot of the time. Only God knows it all. One can't rest on yesterday's achievements, or limited understanding. Growth calls each of us. We all have a vacuum within our hearts. We all thirst for more. Let's not ignore this and become closed-minded, arrogant, impatient or mean towards those who ask questions.

There are three standards: The Old Testament Law, the Moral Law, and the New Testament Commands. 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 dark meanness, hostility, abrasiveness, and a “fuck-you-attitude” when honor or rights are denied us is not wise. 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.

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”, 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 pleasure seeking.

Jesus promises us that if we abide in Him (humble ourselves) 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 need to be dealt with. For ideas on how to deal with these see the essay called, "The Twelve (Plus Four) Steps" with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/ExpandedTwelveSteps.pdf

and the Essay called, "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/DismantlingTheTree.pdf

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 attitudes. If we seek to love people, then doing so out of our caring for them is good motivation. If we focus on the law too much we can invite temptation and can find ourselves in slimy black pits as consequences. Focusing on good things, pure things, and holy things helps to lessen temptation. The Law makes nothing perfect. Only Jesus makes things perfect. Please keep this in mind while reading this chapter.

Faith in and relationship with God through 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 chapter on "humility" then I know that no Christian can practice it authentically unless they are guided and energized by Jesus. 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 for trust in God, and the need for relationship or walking with God.

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 pressure, guilt, impatience, and judgment directed towards others and ourselves. We were never intended to correct our behaviors purely by ourselves. 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 in an email 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 self-righteously 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 them. Guilt should drive us to God and not directly to 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 confess it to God, and become dependent on Him in faith as He purifies us from the sins we commit (Cf. First John 1:9). 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. Fear and Pride are roots to committing sin.

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.

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 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.

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 live out 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 or slave-mentality-relationship. He wants us to move from a 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 follow 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 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 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 thing.

What I have written in this chapter 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 many of the errors I 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 bad motives to uprooted or deal with 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, energy, health, 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 chapter 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: caring for people.

A little 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. God is Light, and so exposes things for what they are. God loves us, and He desires us to part take in His Love.

Perhaps what you will find below 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. If you see things differently after reading what is here, then got to the contact page from this Website and let me know about your concerns!

<u>The Road To Growing In Humility… and Dying To Pride:</u>

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 and after/or me and 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 doctor (Cf. Mark 2:17) … He gets the credit for bringing health to our souls.

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 humility or a proper foundation. We have all sorts of attitudes that evolve, morph, or grow in many environments. In this context: either the church or the world.

Before I continue, I need to include a chapter from a book I've written that comes from this link:

THE POWER OF THE SIN NATURE VS. THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

In this chapter, I develop a rationale for how "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" develops and is acted on by the "sin nature", fear, and pride. The diagram[1] below shows two-continuums of behavior where we can find ourselves. In the center is the place of humility, where we are aware of our self-preservation and connected to our altruism.

[1] I am immensely grateful to my friend Rafael for a discussion that inspires this diagram.

These two natures are healthy God-given qualities, but within us is a "dark energy", a "force", or a "pull" known as the "sin nature" that tries to pull us away from humility through fear and pride towards pseudo self-preservation (envy/ selfishness) on the right, and pseudo altruism (lust or fake love) on the left. This "pull" is always there in this life and is known as the "flesh". It tries to warp the spiritual healthiness or humility within us and tries to push us to the extreme left or right in the different contexts of our makeups, relationships, and lives through fear and pride. When we grow in humility we move along either continuum towards the center. Even when we are near the center we will feel our self-preservation and altruism being pulled and harassed by the "sin nature". We can get self-preservation confused with selfishness when we don't understand the pull of the "sin nature". If we don't jump the gun and patiently wait we will see the difference. The more we move away from the center the more we act out fear and pride.

Our sense of self-preservation is strong, and we need to acknowledge it as a gift from God. The pull to the right by the "sin nature", fear and pride is strong too, and should not be ignored, stuffed, and pushed down to try and mortify or supposedly annihilate. To annihilate the "sin nature" is an impossibility in this life. Yes, we can kill strongholds of fear and pride, but we can't kill the "sin nature", the "pull", or the "dark energy" within us. God grants us grace, truth, and strategy to say, "I accept you, but I don't need you right now"[2] to the "sin nature" when it rears its ugly head, and to say, "yes" to grace instead. But we will always feel the pull to the extreme right in this life.

We need to say, "I accept you, but I don't need you right now" to the "sin nature" when it calls because in trying to just say, "no" to it, we give it more power and that means we need to expend more energy and time as well to resist it. We need to accept the "sin nature" and not leave it out of our calculations. God calls us to "be still" or to "cease striving" and to "know Him" in Psalm 46 and when we are still and connected to God, and we say, "I accept you, but I don't need you right now" to the "sin nature" we become strong in the Spirit and are able to stay away from the sin that is tempting us provided the Strongholds are gone. We can't do this if we are struggling to "not" sin by just saying repeatedly, "no" to the sin.

[2] Insight from my friend Suda

When we are still and connected to the Lord, He is more than enough to satisfy our needs with “grace upon grace.”

Our sense of altruism is strong too, and we need to acknowledge it as a gift from God, not as a badge of merit or honor that gets us God’s favor. The “sin nature”, “pull”, and “dark energy” tries to draw us to the left, congratulating us on noble acts, trying to motivate us with fears of rejection and losses of honor, trying to move us with pride/ conceit, and seeks to put pressure on us so we will push towards a reputation of goodness that “actually” is full of lust, empty of love, and is self-righteousness. The fear is one of not being accepted, welcomed, loved, and cared for. Our conceit (also known as “the ego” going bad), actual steals genuine honor and real love directed towards us, and we need to say, “I accept you, but I don't need you right now” to this dark energy within when it rears its ugly head so we can say, “yes” to grace. We say this because in saying, “no” to it we give it a firmer place and added power in our lives to tempt that it doesn't deserve.

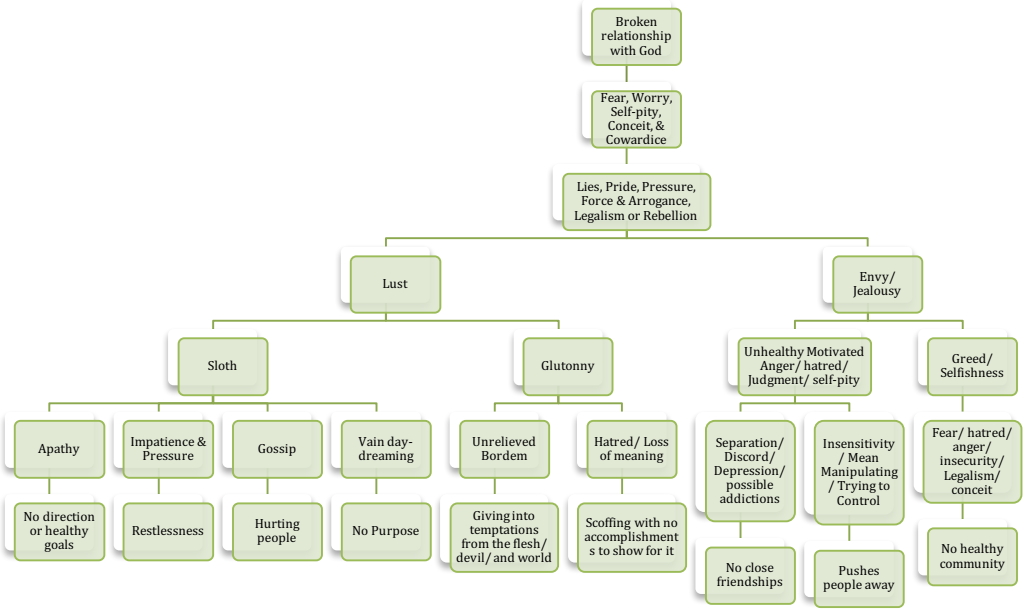
"It is in dying that we are born again" comes from a Prayer inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi’s life, and is often used in conjunction with Saint Paul’s statement: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) to wrongly mean that we can kill the part of ourselves we don’t like, the “sin nature”, so we can love people more deeply. This is done religiously through putting pressure on oneself through self-hatred. This is all a horrible trap. We can't crucify ourselves or our flesh, and we can’t kill the “sin nature”, but we can kill the strongholds mentioned in this book with Jesus’ help. When Paul used the word “die” he was referring to physical death and being united with Jesus in heaven. We can't add to Jesus to get better.

“The tree of knowledge of good and evil” is not the same as the “sin nature”. Why is it that one person has no addictions, while another can’t stop eating or getting drunk? Or, why is it that one person has spiritual pride, whereas another is humble about spiritual things? Or, why is it that one person gets jealous so easily, while another person is altruistic? One person’s “sin nature” is not better than another person’s “sin nature” surely? No, there is a level playing field. But we can allow our “sin natures” together with our choices and folly to grow the seed of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in us into a structure of death, hatred, malice, bad fruit, addictions and negativity that pushes everyone away from us in the worst-case scenario.

When we see that all people have a “sin nature”, a “pull”, or a “dark energy” within that the Bible calls the flesh or sin (Cf. Romans 7:14-20), then we begin to realize that we are all basically the same. There is no need to feel superior, to judge, or to condemn others, and if we do, then we have spiritual pride. No matter how far we walk spiritually in this life the flesh is still with us; any healthy righteousness within us always comes from God. We have nothing to boast about

(not even about God's Spirit within us) because we are not better than anyone else.

So, Pseudo Altruism is basically fake love also known as lust. This is spoken about and developed as the left side of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" below. Pseudo Self-preservation is basically envy/ selfishness and is developed on the right side of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" below. Fear and pride together with the "sin nature" try to push us to these two extremes that are never absolute or complete because they are perversions of healthy humility. The power of the "sin nature" works to establish in our lives the strongholds of fear, pride, envy, judging, lust, gluttony, sloth and the sins that come from them. These strongholds can be dismantled in our lives, but the "sin nature" can't be dismantled. The Strongholds make up the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" found in the Garden of Eden as told in the book of Genesis, and looks like this:



Obviously, this tree does not list all the sins mentioned in the Bible but it will do for our discussions. We will discuss this tree by taking it apart and giving prescriptions on how to dismantle it and how to replace it with a life-giving structure instead. The very bottom row of the tree contains some of the consequences of eating from it.

The good from this devilish tree is not defined in the sense of real tangible right-ness/ spiritual healthiness…but in the popular deceptive-shallow sense of "better-than or more-special-than"- which leads to comparisons and unhealthy pride/ superficiality which are perceived as good but that lead to hurtful comparisons,

evil (in the real-unhealthy-sense) along with hurt because of judgments which are negative in nature; which slowly can lead to the death of the image of God in us (that we were made in). The hurting will often hurt others. A rotten apple in the presence of healthy apples usually infects the good apples. For it to be the other way around something supernatural must happen.

I think that Satan sold the idea to Adam and Eve that the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" would get them to be as "special" as God. He wanted them to think God was holding out on them. The reason I think this is because the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" was the source of a devilish kind of knowledge or dark wisdom where:

Good = (I'm more special because…) or (This is more special because…) or (You are less special because…)

and where:

Evil = (I'm less special because…) or (This is less special because…) or (You are more special because…)

This kind of knowledge or thinking is a hurtful kind of paradigm of thought, rooted in restlessness, fear and pride, and they bear the rest of the vices that all destroy wholesome/ healthy community/ and peaceful relationships. This kind of knowledge slowly defaces the image of God within us (except for the grace of God in our lives). And in so doing this knowledge helps us to hate, kill, and relish revenge, "eye for and eye" and "tooth for a tooth" actions against everyone who crosses our paths and eventually seeks the death of all. It is devoid of love, joy, peace, humility, warmth, kindness, hope, gentleness, valuing people, caring, altruism, and being a living sacrifice.

The "sin nature" is wrongly relied on by us to save us from boundary violations, and things that are uncomfortable, so that we can have supposed peace or instant gratification. We only land up with guilt or meanness and restlessness in the end.

The "tree of knowledge of good and evil's" seed, structure and fruit has infected all 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 are not trustworthy. The devil promised independence, but 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 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 naturally 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 fitting 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 that 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 we at just like Jesus did.

All the above 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.[3] The Old Testament Law was an application of the Moral Law for the times, circumstances, customs, and culture inherited by Abraham's descendants after the exodus from slavery in Egypt. Some of the Jews during Jesus' earthly ministry poured 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.

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

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

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 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 blinded one.

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 speaking 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 would become 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. [4]

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 are important.

Having said this there is another side to this topic. Mother Theresa got into the public eye with her tangible love…but she did not do so from bad motives. Ellen Degeneres does a lot of good on her show for people in need…and asks her viewers to be kind too. Love is kind. I think both women's examples are very good when it comes to caring for people. As for Ellen, she has a lot of enemies in conservative Christian circles because she is a lesbian. This is because some of these people see her sins as worse than their own. Jesus said to not judge or condemn anyone.

Good deeds aren't always the same as love. Good deeds that are done with right motives and energy are considered love in God's eyes. When people have ulterior

[4] Matthew 5:14-16, (emphasis mine)

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 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.

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 become even more proud.

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 bowel 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 everyone whose paths we cross.

Boasting about almsgiving is always wrong. Only the shallow 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 in our hearts too.

There is nothing wrong with public prayer per-se. Even Jesus prayed when He was around others on occasion. 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 are important when one decides whether an act is being done out of humility or pride.

Praying the Lord's Prayer Truthfully:

For those who aren't familiar with the Lord's Prayer, here it is:

> Our Father in heaven,
> hallowed be your name,
> your kingdom come,
> your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
> Give us today our daily bread.
> Forgive us our debts,
> as we also have forgiven our debtors.
> And lead us not into temptation,
> but deliver us from the evil one.[5]

When we are spiritually proud we can resemble the father of lies more than we do God the Father. When we are blind to our pride, we may think that God is just like we are, and so call Him Father. When we do this, it has nothing to do with having been adopted into His family through mercy and grace. If we were adopted, we have possibly temporarily forgotten it.

Living out, "hallowed be your name" to God is more difficult than it may appear. Our actions should bring His name glory. We all suffer from pride in degrees and so in different ways covet the glory belonging to God in our own hearts, and so it may seem that we can't possibly mean these words in their truest sense in prayer. But we pray the prayer not only for others but for ourselves too. We don't have to be perfect to pray the Lord's Prayer. We pray because we know our poverty, our need, and our desire. We also pray because we know our faults, imperfections, and guilt. We pray because we may truly desire to be holy in our thoughts, words, and actions even if they are not so. We pray, "hallowed be your Name" to God

[5] Matthew 6:9-13

because it in part keeps us humble. When we truly praise God, we start knowing our place and are on our way to freedom.

The Bible says that God knows the arrogant and proud of heart from a far (because the proud and arrogant usually push Him away). It is hard to get close to a proud person because they are so full of themselves. But proud people can search out for God. Proud people can be blind to their pride and God knows that. We don't clean ourselves up to get into God's presence…we go to Him and He cleans us up… it is a process to get clean and pride also needs to be cleaned up. When we pray for God's Kingdom to come, we are inviting God's presence into our lives. People who are acting out their pride are too busy competing with others, and so if God were to show up, they would compete with God. Proud people dislike it when others more glorious than themselves show them up. I know that I have been envious of those who I deemed to be more popular or manly than myself.

When we compete to the point of hating our rivals, then we need to learn how to mean and desire the words, "your kingdom come" when directed to God. The proud are more than likely going to pray this to themselves; but even the proud do have consciences and so can recognize their fallen-ness and so pray this to God. Only the truly blind, those with darkened consciences will have difficulty praying this.

At different times, we might all think that we know better than God and what He has to say in the Gospels, so if we do pray, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" to God we may be blind to what God's Kingdom is about. But who knows better that God's will needs to be done and want to pray it than those who struggle with doing God's will? No matter how far we have transgressed God desires for us to pray these words. We don't have to be super-ultra-pure to be able to utter these words to God. And that is the Good News: God welcomes us to walk with Him no matter where we are in this life. We not only pray that we will do God's will, but we pray that everyone will do likewise. In praying this we need to be careful to not demand (i.e. meanly expect) it from anyone else. We are not moral police. We pray God's will be done so that even when others don't do it… we won't get critical, judgmental, angry, mean, condemning, and hard hearted.

Love puts no limits on what I am to do concerning God's spoken will to me. If I want to love, then I can't say I'll only do so much. Praying the Lord's Prayer where it says: "Your will [oh God] be done on earth as it is in Heaven" means that I shouldn't hold anything back from God that God knows I can give. I shouldn't say, "I'll only do so much of God's will" but on the other hand I'm not perfect in love…and God is not anal. The Lord's Prayer is a call to approach over time total commitment to God and His will. Gradual growth in commitment is best. Giving up

beliefs and judgments that are contrary to what God is telling us through the Scriptures, His Church, and His Spirit is key to building up commitment because the process will bear good fruit. Such a process is called Inner Transformation. Holding back from caring for others will mean we are acting out our selfishness. Selfishness comes from our desire to have it all. When we care for others we will carry their burdens in prayer to God. This is known as acts of sympathy and mercy. Such sympathy is not burdensome. We aren't left holding burden after burden without relief. Giving our burdens to Jesus at the cross frees us to move on in life and to retain our joy in the journey.

Proud people are more than likely going to take or demand their daily bread, than humbly ask for and receive it from God. The bread talked about here is God's grace (His empowering presence) which results from His unconditional love.

After Jesus taught His disciples to pray the above words with meaning. He warned them that if they refused to forgive those people who sinned against them, God might not hear their prayers. Proud, arrogant, merciless and heartless people won't forgive when they are aware of un-forgiveness in their hearts. That doesn't mean that people who need to forgive and want to forgive will forgive. Many don't know how to forgive.

I heard one radio evangelist preach what He considered and claimed to be the pure unadulterated Gospel of Christ. But on one of his shows he had to admit that he didn't know how to show others how to forgive when they wanted to but didn't know how. If all you have is theory, then you have never fully practiced what you preach. And, therefore perhaps, the theory is quite possibly wrong or incomplete. No wonder many in the Church are weak and not growing in their faith.

In the Essay: "The Expanded Twelve Steps" from this Website I show one how to forgive. Everyone should know this, especially those who claim to be servants of the Gospel. At the very heart of the Gospel is forgiveness.

Depending on just how proud a person becomes, they might think that they are invincible. Humble people are aware of the wickedness in their own hearts, and tremble knowing what the future might bring as far as temptation is concerned. So, they willingly pray the last two lines from the Lord's Prayer. True, they will have some confidence in God's good will towards them, but they also know that two people walk together only while they are agreed.

<u>When Judging Is Pompous, And When It Is Not:</u>

The context in which I am using the word, "judging" here is as follows. I am "Judging" another person when I use my intellect to reach a decision where I land up despising (unable to love) the person because of his or her behaviors and/or

beliefs based on certain criteria (usually the supposed superiority of my beliefs, or my conduct). The road to love in my life eventually challenged my stubborn self-righteous, blind, judgmental, mean, contemptuous, hypocritical mean attitudes, and ugly misunderstanding of the statement given below by Jesus:

> Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.[6]

In other parts of Scripture Jesus says that we should judge for ourselves, and not by appearances.[7] Is Jesus contradicting Himself here, or does what He is saying go deeper? It goes deeper! There is judging between truth and falsehoods…but judging people is forbidden.

What is judging anyways? What is the best way to define it? If we don't know what it is and how to distinguish it from expressing the truth, then we will never stop doing it. Judging involves measuring and estimating and marking someone up with a label that hits home because we are trying to control or change or put them down. "Judging is not like telling the truth. Judging is telling someone else about what I think about them. Whereas telling the truth is about telling something about myself."[8] The former is all opinion, or speculation, or casts a bad light on somebody else, it brings fear, it brings hurt, it is not gentle and puts people on the defensive. Judging always creates distance. Telling the truth is about how we see ourselves, and so is authoritative when honest.

So, when somebody hurts us, and we don't want to judge, then we won't speculate on his or her motives or intent, or supposed stupidity, or abrasive ness, or his or her lack of kindness, or his or her pride and arrogance, or his or her weaknesses and tell him or her so. If we are hurt by them, then telling them how we feel and how we are struggling to handle what is happening inside of us is telling the truth. Telling the truth uses "I"-statements and does not blame or point the finger. Telling the truth appeals to another person's noble ness, humanness, warmth, kindness, and caring. It doesn't try to convict, shame, blame, or disrespect; and put the person on the defensive, make them want to hurt us back and want to judge us back. Judging robs the person of self-esteem, self-worth, and respect.

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[6] Matthew 7:1-2

[7] Cf. Luke 12:57, & John 7:24

[8] Danny Silk, from a www.mynewday.tv show.

No one rejoices over judging; but because of truth's nature those who seek truth rejoice over it.[9]

In me judging, I harden my heart, and make my tongue toxic. But truth can lead to sympathy, empathy, compassion, kindness, change, and mutual respect; it gives the benefit of the doubt, it believes the best about people[10]. Judging believes and accuses the worst about people.

The reason why we are very sorely tempted into thinking judgmental thoughts and to want to follow through on judging is because we feel injustices have been visited on us. Even when we recognize that Jesus commanded us to not judge, we are pulled this way to try to make things right because we think that if we don't speak up things will get worse. This tension occurs because we don't know how to speak our truth gently. Judging attacks whereas speaking the truth does not. Truth speaking involves using "I"-statements and owning our feelings in conversation with those who hurt us and is more likely to illicit understanding and change (although those who don't care may laugh us off) whereas, when we judge, then we blame and put people on the defensive. This will not bring healing unless there is forgiveness on both sides.

Years ago, I was promised an opportunity that was not coming through for me. I was tempted to get bitter, hostile, and I had many judgmental thoughts towards the person I thought was responsible for reneging on his promise. But when it came time to confront the person I did not blame him, I said how I felt, I did not vent, hate, scream injustice, or judge the person. A few days later the opportunity came my way. I now know the person did not feel judged by me, and he was warmed by my response to his cold shoulder. I see this as a powerful example of the difference between judging and telling the truth.

Remembering the many consequences of judging along with what judging is and what truth telling are will help one to stay away from judging. But there is a lot more to it than just this. For an in-depth discussion on judging and how to tackle it and more reasons on why to avoid it check out my essay called, "DISMANTLING THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL" from this website.

Jesus gave a rule or condition under which one Person is allowed to help another Person out of a sin.

> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let

[9] First Corinthians 13:6
[10] First Corinthians 13:7

> me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.[11]

As a Christian, we ought not to think the sin that one's brother or sister commits won't ever be a problem for us. Scripture is clear that we need to watch ourselves lest we fall. There go I but for the grace of God. Speaking from experience, I know that it is very easy to get angry with someone when they attempt to correct me in some area. If we do fulfill the requirement mentioned above (i.e. not being a hypocrite) by Jesus and attempt to help remove a speck from our brother or sister's eye, then we need to "be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves." By brother or sister, I mean someone who professes to follow Jesus Christ.

I think the above condition applies to three situations. (1) That is, the sin committed involves us. It is our personal business. As stated above, using "I"-statements is the healthiest thing to do because it is truth telling and not loaded with blame or judgments. (2) When the situation does not involve us, then we don't have the leverage, right, or ability to speak the truth unless invited by the person who needs correction. (3) The person just, or almost just, or will hurt someone badly.

When an unbeliever does an unholy act, then we need to be careful that we don't judge them in our hearts or with our mouths. If they invite our opinion, then we can give it. If they aren't interested in our opinions the Jesus said:

> Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.[12]

I've felt justified in my sins many times. I know how it can feel when one is blind to a sin, and someone points it out (even) lovingly. One may think, "Who is this stiff-necked hypocrite telling me that this precious gift is wrong? Why did they ever show up? They just want to spoil the fun!"

As a Christian we aren't called to regulate, change, control, force, or manipulate others (Christian or Non-Christian alike) into seeing and doing things our way. The only person I can change is myself if at all. If we have the idea that, "we only need to hit others over the head with enough truth (or with what we rightly or wrongly think is truth (or salt)) to make them see and do things our way," then we need to abandon the idea.

It is true that Jesus had some very sad and upsetting things to say about certain

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[11] Matthew 7:3-5, RSV
[12] Matthew 7:6, RSV

segments of the Jewish population of His time. He had a right to point out their sins because He is God, and the Judge of the world; also, He is neither a hypocrite, self-righteous in a bad way (i.e. proud), nor a slanderer. He said it in love, not meanness, not hatefully, not hostilely, not judgmental ly, not hardening His heart, not to hurt the people, not to slap them in the face, and not to feel superior to them. He also said these things as a warning to us, and not to make those He judged to necessarily look bad; they already did. Just because we claim to be following Jesus doesn't mean that all the things He did we can necessarily do. We can't walk ahead of Jesus and think presumptuously that He would do this or that. Just because Jesus accepts worship doesn't mean we can. Just because Jesus walked on water doesn't mean that we can. Just because He judged others (followers and non-followers alike) doesn't mean that we can pass judgment. Jesus attempted to correct in healthy ways and He had no speck or timber in His eyes. We don't have the same authority.

Humility longs for correction, because love is its objective. Proud people don't like the truth when it counts, because either they are blind to it, or it will cost them something to give it up or they don't want to be humbled or be made to look bad.

Every person can be a lesson in humility for us. That does not mean a lesson in humiliation. I do mean that we can learn stuff from them that has been deposited in their hearts by agents of good. Their consciences may be more clear in certain areas than are ours. Even if they are not a believer in Jesus.

I used to think that if there is a judgment on the last day, then it was a good thing to warn anyone (Christian, or Non-Christian alike) who is committing certain moral wrongs to repent from them. I saw my judging or pointing out their sin as an opportunity to share the Gospel – boy was I ever deluded.[13] But now I'm in touch with the truth that I'm not a moral policeman, and more, I didn't have the moral authority to do so. When I step into a situation that is not my business, and begin to judge, I am going to get anger coming my way. And likely bring the way of Jesus into disrepute. God has written the moral law on each person's heart – can we do any better? If we see that a person is feeling guilty then we can share the Good News of God's forgiveness with them if we are invited to. If someone asks me whether I think that a certain act is right or wrong, then I am allowed to give my opinion. If someone wants to debate a certain issue in a humane way, then there is nothing wrong with putting forth arguments in love to win over an opponent and learn from them. But if we are wrong then the wise and prudent thing is to admit it. And if we aren't making an effort to change our own conduct, then how can anyone take us seriously on moral issues or opinions. Christians are called to

[13] I am grateful to my Therapist Marilyn for showing me the stupidity of this position.

be both salt and light in this world.

I was told a long time ago that salt is used to keep meat from decaying. From this I thought that Christians were called to keep society from decaying morally by plastering others with as many truthful morals or salt as possible so that they would not decay morally. I now realize that plastering others with plenty of morals, and rules may stop them from decaying morally but it won't give them life. They might try to conform to the morality, but what they need is inner-transformation.

When Jesus calls us to be salt He means that we are to get others in touch with their thirst for God and love, and when they get in touch with this thirst they will want to drink the living water (God) and He will give them life. If we can submit to God in such a way as to let Christ shine through us, then others will be drawn to Christ and His way of loving others through us. This is much more effective than hitting people over the head with "so-called truth", "moralizing", or "mounds of salt" or "our judgments" or "preaching" hoping that they will eventually somehow believe out of shame. People feel guilty enough.

When we judge others, it means that we have become faultfinders. "Love covers a multitude of sins." We weren't sent into the world to morally police others by pointing out their faults (they probably know about them already). People respond to holy (healthy) examples better than preaching. When others ask why we are honest instead of cheating, giving instead of greedy, and loving instead of resentful, then we can share our pearls or holy things with them. This is what Jesus meant by: "Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you."[14] If we do share our pearls with those who didn't ask for them then they might trample those truths and maul us. We need to wait for permission to share our wisdom. We can't rush into things. Love is patient.

We should make it a regular practice to humbly pray for those who we disagree with on moral matters. It may change them, but will foster more love in our hearts towards them if we want to love and not so much be right. We all have at least a few hundred things wrong within us so we should choose our battles wisely. We aren't called to be "moral" policemen. The attitude: "there go I but for the grace of God" is what we should aim for.

If you ever get tested in severe trials, you will come to know what is in your heart. It is amazing how quick we might be to judge God's commands as indispensable in certain instances, and not so in others. One moment we might expound on the

[14] Matthew 7:6, NRSV

glory of Jesus, and how wonderful it is to follow in His ways. While the next moment we may feel that His sayings are too hard, idealistic, and uncompromising when we are tested. What used to be sweet may become bitter for a while (or forever). Love requires us to sacrifice the very parts of ourselves that are selfish, pampered, and proud.

Humility hungers for right living, first in our own lives and then in other people's lives. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled".[15]

A Beatitude Explained:

Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth". If we go about meanly demanding our rights from others and they don't come through then we will get judgmental, angry, and resentful. In fact, being meanly demanding is always done with bad energy and we need to confess it and repent in prayer from it in all contexts where it is found in our relationships. If we attempt to grasp what we think we deserve and don't treat others the ways we want to be treated, then we are acting out of pride and selfishness. Those who are meek (slow to anger, gentle and unselfish) will not meanly demand their rights. They will invoke a higher right to give up a lower right when it comes to that. This can't be done in one's own energy, but only through prayer and yielding to God's will in this context. The meek might not get plenty of real estate or respect now, but Jesus has promised that they will get real estate after they die. The proud and arrogant will take what they think they deserve. The humble will give even when it hurts.

The kind of wisdom offered by the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden was Carnal. It was earthly, and demonic. It was the kind of knowledge that has to do with getting one's own way and using others to get it. Such a kind of wisdom goes against meekness. God knew about this kind of knowledge all along, but because of His purity He is never tempted to embrace it. We on the other hand have it living in us: it is a result of our wills and desires not being completely in sync with the life of God. The only remedy is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that embraces the life God offers and to reject our own supposed "godhood".

Another Beatitude Explained:

Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are you who mourn for you will be comforted." Those people who get judgmental, mean and angry towards those

[15] Matthew 5:6

other persons who are living a life of immoral pleasures or sin do so out of pride and don't care for those they call sinners. They have become self-righteous/ judgmental/ and angry and don't see with the eyes of God. Humble people are going to be compassionate towards others no matter how sinful others have become. They know that they stand but for the grace of God. They truly want the best for those who have yet to repent. And so, they will mourn, weep, and pray with tears that God will save those who don't see as they should.

When one sins one might also get angry with one self. If the anger is too intense it comes from pride because we think we are better than what we thought and acted out. Such anger can and does often lead to self-hatred. And when we hate in a context, then we can't love in the same context. Perfectionists are usually hard on and get angry with themselves (and therefore others too). God is not petty or quick to anger. God is slow to anger. We need to see ourselves the way God sees us. When we mourn, and cry out to God with repentant hearts then God will comfort us. God wants us holy and righteous more than we do. If one finds one is angry with oneself… accept it but don't stuff it, don't hurt others and yourself with it. Learn to deal with your anger in healthy ways so that eventually you will mourn for your sins.

Anger is like an alarm that goes off in us when something is wrong interiorly or exteriorly. Anger is meant to get us to act and make things right. The key is to not try to wrestle that anger away. Rather it is a call meant to marshal us to act in kind, caring, and warm ways so the stuff that is wrong gets dealt with in healthy ways. Anger is not a moral fault, if we believe our anger is a moral problem then we will get angry with our anger and that just makes us more twisted, confused, and useless in the face of injustices, or impedes our ability to meekly questioning our expectations of people or ourselves that may have triggered our anger.

<u>Yet Another Beatitude Explained:</u>

For a long time, I only saw "mercy" as something dispensed by a judge towards a lawbreaker ((i.e.) to forgive a debt or a moral wrong). But now I see it as having a much wider range of meaning. I see it as compassionate or kindly forbearance shown not only toward an offender, or an enemy, but towards another person in one's power to help (such as those who are less fortunate or poor, or in need of clothing, healing, food, and love ((i.e.) human warmth)). To be merciful means to be compassionate, have pity, or show benevolence. Mercy sets one free: from prison, burdens, debt, guilt, meanness, hatred, anger, and petty attitudes, but also brings healings to hurts, injuries, and diseases (spiritual or biological).

Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." One can't earn mercy, so the only reason merciful people receive

mercy is because they are the only ones who understand it, and desire it because they do to others what they want others to do to them. In Matthew 25 Jesus describes the Final Judgment: those who were merciful receive mercy; those who were proud and only out for themselves, or cared only about their own image, and treasured money or wealth more than the human in need that crossed their paths, found themselves in such a position where they could not receive God's forgiveness (God cannot force His forgiveness on them) and so they experienced God's presence in such a fearful, untrusting, judgmental, jaded, and disagreeable way even though God is not that way at all.

But receiving mercy is not left only for the final judgment. Those who dispense mercy now, will often receive mercy in this life too. For instance, when we forgive someone who wronged us, God forgives us. Also, I know that there have been times when I have acted mercifully (helping others in need) and in response God has totally granted me mercy with me not deserving any of it which is how mercy is defined.

Just because God in the end will have mercy on those who are merciful does not mean that we ought only be merciful to those who are merciful today. Chances are we may know nothing about the history or character of those who cross our paths. We can't probe or question people to decide whether they are merciful before we are merciful to them. They might never have felt love, gone through very difficult and dark experiences, been rejected, hurt, hated, shamed, or abused. Such people may be very hungry for love and mercy. Should we deny them that? You can't give what you have never received. Those who are callus and hurt others can be viewed as enemies, but we are called to love and be merciful to our enemies just like God is merciful to all of us. The quickest way to kill an enemy is to make them your friend.

To Resist or Not to Resist?

I am slowly getting understanding in an area that has stymied me my whole life… and I am learning to not attack/tackle situations or things blindly. What occurs in red-text below is wisdom I got from a speech Derek Flood gave online. It has shed light on a huge area that required healing in my heart. Thank you, Derek!

It is so true that following blindly a set of instructions gets people hurt. The only acceptable blind-love is romantic-love. Unquestioningly being obedient to anyone especially confusing Scriptures leads to abuse. We cannot be faithful and honest if we don't know how.

Jesus is the Light of the world… His truth sets us free… when we follow Him we walk in the light meaning we see and aren't blind in the area we are following Him in… blindness is looked upon as an illness not a strength in the NT. And even when

we follow Jesus, we are asked to renew our minds… meaning that we have blind spots that He wants to heal and to bring us understanding there instead. Patiently waiting on Him through an interactive relationship is key to uncovering blind spots and gaining freedom to love people more deeply.

Enemy love means to love our enemies no matter what they throw at us.

Rome's cross had to do with coming down on those convicted to death like a hammer in a bloody, hateful, ridiculing, forceful, retributive, crushing, and shameful way; whereas God in Christ on the cross was love in the midst of and in spite of the violence and He intended to expose to the world and us the insanity of crucifixion. Crucifixion is a grave injustice just like the NT says. When we pierced Jesus, in response He released water and blood both of which are symbolic of life not poison/hatred. Jesus came to give life… and that to the full. The New Testament (NT) teaches that in the past (i.e. OT) God was partially and imperfectly revealed, but that in Jesus we have the full revelation of God's character, nature, motives, and desires. God the Father did not come down like a hammer on Jesus during His Passion: indeed the NT says God was in Christ on the cross reconciling the world to Himself. The cross and all Rome poured into it was not a healthy thing… Jesus came to expose it for what it was. Jesus' actions on the cross were pure, passionate, caring, peaceful, wise, and hit the mark on where our malady as the human race is.

Jesus did not come to glorify the cross! He came to undo the works of the devil… He came to love and share His life with us. He joined in solidarity the despised, unwanted and rejected; He sided with us, shared our weaknesses, and therefore the world powers wanted Him to pay for His loyalties, to hurt Him, and to somehow kill His popularity; they wanted to stop Him from reconciling the world to God… but it backfired and Jesus won the world and those who believe in Him. Even though our flesh crucified and rejected Jesus on the cross; Jesus did not reject us on the cross! What love He showed to us in this: the creator despised and hated by His creation; yet the creator forgives creation and without-stretched-arms embraces us and so wins us by becoming weak and taking the hard way.

Love of enemies is not simply a refusal to engage in violence. Rather it is a better and more effective way of resolving conflict and ending hurt. It is not unrealistic or illogical. Nor is it opposed to a healthy desire to protect our loved ones and ourselves.

Retributive justice means being hard on those who are our enemies and to come down like a hammer on them because the thinking is: if we don't punish evildoers, then crime will run rampant. Retributive justice is violent payback to enemies and

criminals. In many Christian circles the crucifixion of Jesus is seen as God's retributive justice through what is called penal substitution (i.e. god's justice meant that he had to punish us. But he wanted to forgive us so Jesus apparently took our punishment on himself and in doing so god vented his wrath on Jesus so supposedly enabling him to forgive us). I held to this view for a long time… but it is skew (riddled with problems) and devoid of enabling us to go to the center of love's source or understand God's love. It miss-represents who God is and casts him in the "molds of some demon gods" who in OT times demanded from certain communities that their infants be sacrificed through fires in order to find peace, prosperity, and a supposed hope. These communities were held in fear of the future by the demon-gods they worshipped.

But…

What if justice is about mending and healing and not coming down hard on transgressors?

When I realized this I got the image in my mind when I was a child in SA when the principal at school hit me because I wanted to make peace on the pay ground and prevent my playmates from getting into trouble. Lord God I forgive the principal for his action and I repent in faith from my reaction towards him which was wanting him to feel the pain he put me through: I wanted revenge.

Restorative justice is the framework for enemy love…

Love of enemies is a general principle applicable to both individuals and society which has many context-specific applications

Turning the other cheek (fighting oppression, exposing injustices of oppressive regimes (Gandhi and Martin Luther King are good examples of this)) is one particular application of the larger principle of enemy love. Turning the other cheek is not always effective or appropriate. It is wise to turn the other cheek when it comes to speech and communicating with people when things don't go our way or situations anger us (responding with kindness instead of insult for insult is turning the other cheek verbally). Our tongues can be weapons. Choosing to bless whomever we talk with will go a long way to stopping verbal and physical violence. Turning the other cheek when it comes to speech ought to be universal because if we can't be peaceful while talking we may become violent in our actions.

The assumption is that force or violence will get things done… fact is this is wrong: Non-violent campaigns are more than twice as effective at resolving conflict than violent campaigns.

The above has to do with bringing healing to those who transgress rules embraced by those cultures where the wrongs are done. But the ideas lend themselves to the theme of not using “might” to get one’s way in ordinary situations in everyday life. I know that the principles apply to me… because there has been a hard/cold/damn-it I got to force things “mentality in me” to get my way for a long time.

So in the past when it came to me loving my step-kids, our dog and all the people at work and in the world I wanted to come down with force (which came from a hard place in my heart) on everyone to get what I saw as reasonable or just plainly my own way. I knew that this was wrong and I tried to suppress it, and stifle it but it worked often enough for me to have some confidence in it…after all something deep in my heart resonated with this darkness, but now I know it’s roots: it was because I believed the lie that “might” was better than weak or “kindness”. Thank you Lord Jesus, Father God, and Holy Spirit for showing me the errors of my ways and giving me liberating truths that transforms my actions into love, light, and kindness in a more compassionate way! Amen and Amen!

Strangely enough when I first got ill with schizophrenia and attended a church service somebody recited out loud the following verse:

> So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.[16]

I remember believing it but not understanding it fully. I knew at the time that it meant I needed the Spirit to get through my trial… and that acting independently would secure my spiritual death certificate. But now I see that there are wider ramifications: Only by God’s Spirit can I love supernaturally… and also come from a gentle kind and loving place when interacting in all my relationships.

Note: When I seek to use violence on my enemy when my enemy seeks it on me, then I become like my enemy. This knowledge seals and puts my heart and mind in the safest place: no longer tempted to use force or violence inappropriately.

[The following three paragraphs came much later but contextually belongs here]:

Through the Spirit I have come full circle. But now I know that I need to seek out and learn what servant leadership is about because I get confused about when to serve and when to lead. I know that as a leader I am to lead by serving the best interests of those I lead. If it is that simple, then I can do it with God’s help… but I would do well to look into this topic more deeply. A good leader is also a servant. A good leader is a humble person. A good leader is a healthy-relational-being.

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[16] Zechariah 4:6, NIV

They respect people, have insights into the human condition. They know the pitfalls of pride. They are people focused for the best sake of the people… they are not money, wealth, and experience focused.

I now realize that when Jesus went to the cross and was raised up… He drew all peoples to himself… and they brought that which was not submitted to God with them; namely their independent wills, broken intellects, and warring emotions. Jesus did this so that we could see that our independence or flesh wanted to crucify Him… and with the Holy Spirit's gentle nudging we are cut to the heart as we see our sins nail Jesus to the cross and so we are healed. Those whose eyes are opened to this daily, carry their own crosses and in so doing don't live solely for earthly pleasures, but for supernatural love through being led by the Spirit through relationship.

Following the way of "enemy love" does not start with a high ideal or my own goodness… rather its motivation and source of strength is the person of Jesus and His example of enduring the cross and His rationale for doing so. A philosophy by itself does not give the power needed to carry it out no matter how good the philosophy is.

Hypocrisy:

Who hasn't had standards, and naively thought that they kept them? When we think, we keep them all then the trouble starts. Who hasn't had high standards one moment, and the next moment broken them without being aware of it? When we are hypocritical and don't know it we are to be pitied above all people. Getting to the point where we know that we have hypocrisy is crucial for real change. Whatever way a person shows hypocrisy, if they never repent from it, then they will do a lot of harm to others and themselves in those contexts. People who have hypocrisy and don't know it have become blind to some or all the light that has been granted to them. Their consciences are not working, as they should. Their hearts have become callused. They have pride because they see themselves as better off than they are.

A hypocrite is one who says to others: "Do such and such…" but would never do it himself or herself. A hypocrite is one who would say: "Don't do such and such…" but does it him or herself in total abandon.

Those who see their sins and hypocrisy for what they are know that they need mercy, and are more likely to dispense that mercy to others. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy".[17]

[17] Matthew 5:7

Jesus the humblest man who ever walked on the earth once said:

> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.[18]

In the past I would always strive to understand these words, but now I think that I do. When Jesus says, we will worship God in spirit, He means that we will worship according to the real meaning and intent of His words. When Jesus says that we will worship in truth, He means that we will worship God with diminishing amounts of hypocrisy as we journey with Him.

There is a vast difference in worshipping according to the letter of Jesus' word, as opposed to the spirit. When we worship according to the letter we are doing as the Pharisees do – we make the outside of the cup clean but the inside of the cup is still filthy. It's our motives that God cares about. "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, [and] foolishness."[19] Who isn't convicted by this list? Humility moves from practicing darkness to practicing what the Light teaches. Jesus is the Light. Light is a metaphor for goodness, love, and tolerance. Christians practice light only because they abide in the Light: Jesus.

The Christian walk is about faith working itself out in love. This involves in some sense keeping the commands of the Son of God.

If we keep all the credit for ourselves by keeping the commandments to love, then we are self-righteous, and that is worse than hypocrisy.

It is important to note here, that if a person is hanging from a cliff with their bare hands, and is in danger of being crushed below if they fall, then all God expects from him or her is to hang on to the cliff for as long as possible and nothing else. The muscles of courage, and being able to appreciate humble circumstances during their time of crisis will get them through life later in a more dignified/ less judgmental manner. Our sufferings, temptations, tests, and trials are meant by God to reveal to us our hidden attitudes and hypocrisy even if we don't reveal them to others (if we can help it). Being humbled is different than being humiliated. God is not into humiliation; the devil is. God means for them to teach us who we are in hope that we will turn to Him for his saving help. If a person is overcome by a devastating illness, then other things should become less

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[18] John 4:23-24 (emphasis mine)
[19] Mark 7:21-22, RSV

important. This doesn't mean that one doesn't have to resist temptations to do wrong brought about by the illness. When healing is on the way, then people need a time of convalescence. God is not a slave driver. Resisting evil, and seeking to do good is the safe path to take.

Legalism (A false Humility):

To be legalistic means that one is not keeping a law for what it was intended. Put another way, legalism occurs when we don't understand the real intent of a command handed down to us from God and invent rules to keep it yet miss the real intent of that command. These rules often fall in line with the letter or wording of the command, but they oppose the spirit (real intent) of the command. Legalism also occurs when we make certain commands too absolute and don't make room for the exceptions. Rules often are intended to remove abuses, but when we forget what those abuses are, then we land up applying the rules where they were never intended to reach.

Legalism is using what is holy in a wrong manner.

Legalism is into conformity, not transformation.

For instance, the law was intended to show us what love is, along with what sin is. But many people wrongly use it to "supposedly" get right with God. No one can get right with God by keeping the law. Getting right with God has to do with accepting His grace and mercy through faith. The Law makes nothing right or perfect.

All legalistic people will focus on minor issues to the exclusion of weightier matters and see it as practicing humility.

For example, legalistic Christians may focus on not being involved with tobacco, alcohol, dancing, bowling alleys, movies, glamour magazines, cards or gambling, expensive clothing, certain music, or watching TV. They may also see carrying a Bible to church as an expression of righteousness.

Legalistic people may also view refusing to swear, or stuffing anger as rooted in humility. Showing indignation for blatant violations of certain visible standards alone might appear as righteous behavior by legalistic people.

What do the following words mean: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"[20]? To paraphrase it I think… "it means that keeping the outward appearance of the Ten Commandments can't give life by itself. Jesus is the source of life."

Thinking that theological accuracy implies one is also automatically practicing it, is

[20] 2 Corinthians 3:6

also a form of legalism or loss of reality. When this happens one is not in touch with where one is at practically morally speaking. One has become blind to what the Light says and will have a higher opinion about one self than is warranted.

Inventing rules that agree with our vague and wrong or misguided understanding of what God seems to expect, is also legalism. When we think that God dislikes celebrations, or wants us to continually feel guilty, then we are legalistic. It is a good thing to celebrate the birth of a new year, the birth of a new romance, and, also of all new life coming into the world. Some people have never celebrated the gift of new life because nowhere in the Bible do they see Jesus commanding us to celebrate His own birthday. They forget that Jesus would only command us to celebrate His birthday if He were proud. As His followers, we are free to celebrate every facet of His existence – including His birth. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would bring Him Glory.[21] Jesus never said not to celebrate His birthday.

When we obey rules in a manner that they are not intended for, then we are becoming legalistic. This is why counsels, and governments everywhere are continually rewriting laws because they get dated and no longer protect what they were intended for.

When Jesus said that the Pharisees, "strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."[22] He was saying that they were majoring on minor issues, and minoring on major concerns – and this is what legalistic people do. Legalistic people have abandoned in some ways the path to truth and authentic love. The search for and living out of the Truth is part of what it means to be humble. We all have some legalism in our lives.

A cure to legalism is to view holiness as spiritual healthiness.

There are two extremes: (1) Seeking to obey God's commandments and (2) following the Maxim: "Love does no harm." Those who only focus on the commandments become legalistic; where as those who only focus on; "love does no harm" become humanistic. We need to be somewhere in the middle. Legalism empties God's commands of meaning. But if we ignore God's commands then we will miss much of what God sees in our hearts. We need to hear God speak if we are to truly love. God speaks to everyone. Many tune Him out and listen to the world, the pleasures of the flesh, and the devil instead.

<u>Ultimate Legalism:</u>

The ultimate form of legalism is when we keep the commandments of God

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[21] Cf. John 16:14
[22] Matthew 23:24

outwardly but independently of God which means it is done self-righteously. Such devotion is devoid of the real intent and source of God's commandments.

The Importance of Humility:

The first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"[23] is a promise. Whether you are a newly baptized Christian, or been one most of your life, it doesn't matter – being "poor in spirit" is what keeps you saved. Even if you go through blistering trials like I did, it is still necessary during the trial, and afterwards. So, what does it mean to be "poor in spirit"? I offer the following definition: To be "poor in spirit" means to see ourselves in need of the Spirit. It means to have a degree of humility and to be growing in it. It means to be aware of our riches but not proud because of them. It means to be aware of our poverty but not envious of others because of their riches. We are proud or puffed-up if we look down on others.

Envy:

Envy can be hard to detect or even disagree with when it springs up out of the soil of our hearts. I've found myself saying many times when I beheld my poverty, and another's riches, "It's not fair – God gave it to them so why not me?" We hear everyone say this from time to time, but it goes against humility. What God has done for others, He won't always do for you, or me. And it seems so unfair to us. If we set our hearts on what others have, we covet, and break one of the Ten Commandments. Coveting hardens our hearts towards those who have what we want because we say to ourselves that we must have what they have – it's only fair.

It is not necessarily wrong to want something that our neighbor has, if it is available. But if we want the actual thing our neighbor has and set our hearts on it, if they can't or won't give it to us, then we will become unloving towards them. This un-loving attitude may show itself in hostility, aggressiveness, rage, hatred, impatience, jealousy, and actions or movement meant to attain what we covet. And God ultimately gets blamed if He doesn't come through for us. For those who already don't believe in God, it becomes another reason to hate the possibility of His existence. If the good we desire can't be gotten (such as intelligence, understanding, power, musicality…) we might murder those who have what we want because of our hatred. If the goods (land, gadgets, money, authority…) can be gotten through murder, then murder and intrigue might be pursued if we think we can get away with it.

[23] Matthew 5:3

If we believe in the existence of God, our prayers may become demands for Him to show His fairness, and His loyalty to our causes. We may dress up our envy by trying to entice God with the idea that we could do a lot of good with His gifts. But ultimately we want it for ourselves. And so, we lose our thankfulness when God gives us the cold shoulder. Or, we persevere in prayer thinking that God might still reward us. If we do persevere in prayer, and envy is motivating our prayer, then our hearts will get colder and colder. But still we might persist with our cleverly concealed demands. After all, we quote the Bible when it says:

> Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.[24]

We can't delight in God when we are envious of others. God knows our hearts. Delighting oneself in the Lord is more than having enthusiasm for Him, or more to the point – having enthusiasm for what He can do for one. The Bible says that humanity doesn't live on bread alone, but on every single word that comes from the mouth of God.[25] This is a difficult statement, that Bible believers complacently quote at one time or another. But we can forget that there is much teaching in the Bible that is hard to chew on and digest, let alone make a part of our lives. Re-read the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew some time.[26]

If we delight in the LORD (not our understanding of Him, or what He can do for us), then He will give us Himself in whom we delight. Can He give us anything greater?

The whole practice of delighting in the LORD has to do with taking up one's cross and following Jesus. The Gospel cannot be compared to a comfortable couch that we sit in while being entertained by the miracle worker Jesus for the rest of our earthly lives. For Jesus, it was a rugged wooden beam that weighed Him down and that He needed help carrying. Psalm 1 begins with:

> Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Notice the progression above: Walking, standing, and finally sitting, i.e.) moving from motion to inactivity and eventually poisoning other people's minds with one's speech.

Some people claim that there is no such thing as constructive criticism. They believe that all criticism is destructive. I must disagree. In certain situations, it is both prudent and loving to give constructive criticism. For example, music

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[24] Psalm 37:4
[25] Cf. Matthew 4:4
[26] Cf. Matthew 5:1-7:29, or Luke 6:20-6:49

teachers need to correct their students' techniques if the students are going to progress. Coaches do the same with athletes. And followers need to be open to their spiritual directors' correction or advice, if they want to progress in their spiritual walk. In these areas, if we are going to give constructive criticism, there must be an environment where there is receptivity. If all we ever do is criticize others (find fault with them) then we are not in the process of loving anyone. I know that when people compliment me in certain areas, I'm much more open to correction or constructive criticism because I feel loved and affirmed by them. We know we are destructively critical when all we do is criticize and never compliment. If all we ever do is look for the dirty laundry belonging to other people, then we will find it. Constructive criticism has nothing to do with gossip.

It is so easy to criticize others (find fault with others). Who isn't flawed in some ways? If we are naturally critical about others, then likely we won't feel comfortable around others because the measure we use we will assume others will use on us. Hence, criticism destroys community.

We ought to look upon others as being more important than ourselves. The Church on earth is made from humans prone to sin. We are not going to change anyone, or any group when bitterness (and anger) is springing up out of our hearts into our words no matter how right we might think that we are, even when in fact we are right!

The same finger that points to everyone else can also point to us. None of us are perfect. If God were to point out all our faults who could stand?

We must start with ourselves. "We must become the change that we want to see".[27] Like Jesus said, we must take out the beam in our own eye before we attempt to take out the splinter in our brother or sister's eyes. Beams usually leave splinters when we try to take them out. Splinters are harder to take out than beams. A splinter in the eye easily goes unnoticed, and they cause a lot of pain when being removed. The "eyes" Jesus was talking about are our consciences.

I have thought that my insights were noble and constructive when in fact I only wanted our own way. Love does not seek its own way (it isn't selfish or demanding or meanly expectant). Here is my interpretation regarding the dispute between Mary and Martha (Cf. Luke 10:38-42):

Martha indulging in self-pity, complaining, and in anger asked for judgment and a 'supposed' justice from Jesus trying to make her sister Mary help her...that was the worst part...Mary choose the better part... Mary chose joy and that in the

[27] Mahatma Gandhi

presence of Jesus! Mary chose joy; Martha chose self-pity/complaining/judging/anger. That is why Jesus said Mary choose the better part. Everyone knows that good works are important, and, also that learning is important. It wasn't about work vs. visiting/learning...both are important. It was about self- pity/ judging/ anger vs. joy.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount for us to not judge or condemn people. One judges and condemns when one doesn't look in the mirror and makes sober observations with the light given. Self-pity/ complaining/ judging/ anger all go together. When they are together often they are an unhealthy mix, and in such cases, they spring from pride. Mary chose the better part; Jesus said it would not be taken from her. Martha chose the worst part...and Jesus wanted to take it from her if she would allow it. He eventually did!

Look at God's attitude. He doesn't have a critical spirit towards his children. By critical spirit I mean one where He is constantly looking for flaws and mistakes to rub into our faces. We should have the attitude that says, "There go I but for the grace of God." Also, if an unbeliever is not asking for our correction then likely we should not give it to him or her, unless of course, the person is in real danger of gravely hurting or harming someone else. But it needs to be done as gently as possible, without making a big scene out about it, non-judgmentally, and without preaching. Also, spare the other person's pride or dignity by not pointing out his or her fault in front of a crowd. Do it privately.

I was corrected many years ago by a friend after I road my bike in a non-responsible and reckless fashion almost hurting a lady. I could have badly injured her because of my lack of care and disrespect. Right after the incident, my friend who witnessed the incident assertively pointed out to me that I needed to ride my bike with more care and respect so that those around me would not get hurt. I felt hurt by what he said at first, but humble enough to listen to what he said and act accordingly. I felt hurt for years by his rebuke because my pride was wounded. Then years later I attempted to correct a different person in a gentle fashion only to hurt him or her by ending the correction with a preachy and judgmental tone. By being preachy and judgmental I hurt my second friend's pride. As these memories met within my mind I realized I needed to heal the past and make further amends to the person I was preachy and judgmental towards.

I have no power to change anyone else except myself, and even that can be a formidable challenge. The opening line in the serenity prayer says:

> God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

In the past I used to think that it was okay to be constructively critical towards

one's spouse/ fiancée/ girlfriend/ or boyfriend until I read the book called, "Becoming A Family That Heals".[28] But now I know that when one is judged one will be made to feel guilt or inferiority and one will likely get angry and defensive as a result and start to argue and point out the dirty laundry of the one doing the criticizing. So, I have been taught that instead of being critical I need to say, "I feel such and such when you do this or that…." That way they don't feel judged by me; get defensive, and feel angry and therefore judge me back. I also, in this way make my needs known and that helps my partner meet my needs instead of participating in arguments with me. Being critical or judgmental might feel powerful, righteous or noble at first but a power struggle usually results from such attempts to change one another.

Bearing Fruit?

Many Christians are deceived into thinking that they don't have any good fruit. When it comes to righteousness they see themselves in a pictorial way as wearing dung-covered clothing. By wholesome fruit the Bible means: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."[29] I agree that wearing dung-covered clothing is the way we all start out, but in First John 1:9 it says:

> If we confess our sins, [God]… is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

This purification is a process that we cooperate with God in bringing about. Some people think that we must change our behavior and then confess our sins for God to forgive us. This is wrong. When we confess our sins, we are acknowledging them as wrong, and we wouldn't do it unless we wanted to change. We may want to change and not have a clue as how to go about it. First John 1:9 says that after confession God starts the process of cleansing. The cleansing process involves renewing the mind, and destroying strongholds and this is done in co-operation with God. I go in depth into how this process can work in the Essays: "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" and, "The Expanded Twelve Steps", from this Website.

When we have a compulsion towards something, then we are not free to defy the attraction or act, and so we are slaves to the compulsive sin. 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.

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[28] Drs. Beverly and Tom Rodgers, Becoming A Family That Heals, Tyndale House Publishers, copyright 2009, Chapter 13.
[29] Galatians 5:22

We don't abide in Jesus by impressing God with our piety, good works, loyalty, holiness, or wisdom.

We don't stay in the True Vine [or Jesus] by self-righteously earning God's favor through good works.

We love by staying in the vine. We abide in the Vine when we embrace humble attitudes. By abiding in the Vine, we are connecting with the Vine: Jesus, and that means we are seeking His face; we are God-centered, not pleasure centered. This means to nurture communication with Jesus, and trust in Jesus, to give oneself freely to God, and to pursue Him so that one can follow Him. When we get to know Him through the rough times we will learn to celebrate Him, and not to be caught up in ourselves. We are not fully abiding in the Vine when we put pressure on ourselves. If we still can't say no to sin by abiding in Jesus, then we have a compulsion.

God is not deliberately looking out for reasons to cut us out of the tree of life. He is looking for ways to get us closer to Himself. And when we are close to Him we will naturally do His will. His will for us is to love, and love springs from thankfulness. Jesus is a Christian's Thankfulness. This can be difficult to nurture when we go through periods that make us question where God is, why He lets things happen like evil triumphing over good.

No one can supernaturally love apart from God because God is love. Wherever God is, so is supernatural love. Wherever supernatural love is, so is God. When one loves supernaturally one will automatically give God His due. God is worthy of all our worship or devotion because He is love. As far as the natural loves are concerned (i.e. those loves we are conceived with in our mothers' wombs); they are good as far as they go but they fall short of supernatural love or perfection. The natural loves are a preparation for the supernatural loves. God has given the natural loves to us, but some people have yet to figure out that the loves they have naturally come from God[30]. The supernatural loves complete, extend or lift the natural loves to where they ought to be.

Some sins are symptoms from seemingly unrelated past sins that I call virus sins. We may be able to control the symptoms for a while if we are lucky. But we should take the right medication to get rid of the virus if we don't want the symptoms to keep flaring up repeatedly.

Put another way, some sins are bad fruit that come from trees whose seeds were planted in our hearts. These seeds come from bad fruit that we tasted thanks to

[30] I am in debt to my wife Sophie for this insight.

those who sinned against us. We may be able to pull the bad fruit off the tree for a while, but they will keep growing back if we don't uproot the whole tree. If we pull the roots out, then we will also get rid of the bad fruit attached to those roots. If we pull the trees out, then we will also pull the branches out of our eyes. The eyes I am talking about are our consciences.

I have learned that sins such as addictions or compulsions are usually symptoms or fruits; whereas the virus sins or bitter root sins have to do with resentments, vows, grudges, or un-forgiveness that come from wounds real or imagined that we perceive others to have committed against us. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you".[31] With forgiveness comes healing.

Good Fruit from the Vine:

Many Christians say after bearing some good fruit that all the credit ought to go to God. This is only partially true. In John 15 for instance, Jesus views Himself as the true vine, and us as the branches attached to Him:

I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes
to make it bear even more.
You are clean already,
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.
Remain in me, as I in you.
As a branch, cannot bear fruit all by itself,
unless it remains part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the Vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.[32]

The branches that do bear good fruit do so for many reasons. The main reason is that they abide in the true vine (i.e. aim to stay humble). We don't do good deeds to please God so that He will let us stay in the vine. We bear good fruit by staying

[31] Matthew 6:14, RSV
[32] John 15:1-5, Jerusalem Bible

in relationship with God through grace by faith in the Love of God. Having said this, the branches that do bear good fruit can because of the following reasons.

First the branches are pruned so that they will bear even more fruit. Being pruned means that the sucker branches are cut off. Sucker branches waste the precious sap that comes from the vine. Either pruning these branches from us means we are disciplined by God so that He can form character in our hearts through suffering. Or it means that when we repent in response to Jesus' words we feel pain and withdrawal symptoms from those sins that we give up through His grace.

This is the meaning of the often-misunderstood words by Jesus that say:

> If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.[33]

The "hands" and "feet" that Jesus wants us to cut off are not our physical hands, or feet! They have to do with those dark desires, feelings or attitudes of superiority, or harmful attitudes that we agree with and that are so much a part of our lives and that we are committed to despite possibly our consciences' disapproval. We may get to the point where our consciences get too callused or seared and no longer tells us right from wrong when it comes to our commitments to pride, evil attitudes, and dark desires. Those dark desires, attitudes, and pride that can be so dear to us. Those dark desires, attitudes that serve to fuel our proud, and independent schemes to achieve supposedly useful purposes.

The reason He calls these dark desires and attitudes "hands" and "feet" are that to us they seem to be a natural part of the way we function. It's almost like we can't live without those parts in our day-to-day lives since we seemingly have had them from when we were young. Thus, they cloud our perceptions of right and wrong and help us to embrace life-styles or habits that have developed over time that are immoral. Therefore, the "eyes" Jesus wants us to gouge out have to do with renewing our consciences or minds or the way we see things. Either we will be ashamed of the fruit (and try to hide it), or we may embrace it thinking it is natural and become proud of it. Judging (hardening our hearts and getting angry with) people who embrace and become proud of such dark-desired-lifestyles won't help (if we do this then we become like the ones who hate). We are to love, tolerate, and respect everyone. We are to hate sin (not in the emotional sense of the word) but in the sense of "not giving" ourselves to that sin: to not glorifying the sin.

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[33] Matthew 18:8-9

And it is amazing how we can justify these dark desires and attitudes, along with the dark schemes, and the dark fruit that they produce. Jesus knew just how glued to our lives they can be. For me, being a man, for the longest time I unnaturally, as far as God's design is concerned, thought that inappropriate sexual lust was okay and healthy. If we have the freedom to give up such desires, imaginations and sins as these we should. If not, then Christian Twelve-Step based groups would be a good place to start our journey into the light. Don't expect overnight success. Real change comes gradually, gradually, gradually, and then suddenly. Don't give up!

We ought not feel guilty if we have bad desires or bad feelings yet resist them and where they can or do lead us to. Compulsions are dark desires that form addictions. Compulsions can have roots in un-forgiveness or hatred in our hearts or lies that we have swallowed, wounds inflicted by others, or resentments made in the past.

Either way, whether it is God disciplining us, or us feeling withdrawal symptoms through repentance, being pruned requires that we cooperate with the Vinedresser.

Second, the living branches have precious sap flowing through them. This sap is the grace or power granted to us by the True Vine or Jesus. God wants to provide us with this grace, but we can block it through our pride, and judgments of others. When we block the grace, we start to atrophy or die spiritually. We also need to continually ask for this grace or sap from God through prayer. This requires poverty of spirit on our part: the attitude that says, "Here go I but for the grace of God." Other Bible translations say vine-grower instead of vinedresser. God wants us to grow in the fruit of His Spirit, but pride (hardness of heart, meanness, or judgmental-ism) blocks this growth.

The fruit bearing branches are small compared to the Vine. We the branches should not compare our sizes to each other because it leads to pride and envy. I hesitate to use the idea of "exercising muscles of love" because if there were such a thing then we would get proud quickly when we observe our hugeness compared to the littleness of others. God told me that He was digging tunnels of love in me a long time ago. That means that the supernatural love that flows out of me comes out of tunnels not muscles…and those tunnels carry the Holy Spirit and grace (God's empowering presence). So, the Bigger the branches the hollower we are…and that means the more dependent we are on the Spirit (which means we have nothing to boast about). This dependence is an important reason we do abide in the true Vine: Jesus!

And fourth, the branches need to remain in the true vine to bear good fruit otherwise they die. God wants to lead us, but we need to follow Him if that's to be

a reality. He wouldn't warn us to remain in the Vine if He didn't give us a choice in the matter. God cuts dead or unproductive branches out of the vine because they take up unnecessary room, or they waste precious sap.

Now it is true that if one wants to get to know and love somebody one must spend time with that person. Those whom we see spending very little Quiet Time with God in our opinion may be spending all the time God ask them to. We are not allowed to judge or condemn. We are all at different stages in our spiritual lives. Some Christians might have some very black maladies within their hearts that keep them from prospering, growing, bearing much good fruit, and enjoying their walk with Jesus. Such healing may take years and years to deal with. Patience is needed: not a whip, not judgmental-ism, and not loading them with burdens of guilt such as… "if you'd only do what I do!" Also, it is really easy to get angry with someone who crosses our boundaries, to get all heated, and justified in our anger… and for resentments to take root… it may take time to work out what are the roots (commitments, beliefs or lies) to such defiance's or reactions, and may take time for us to realize that we need to forgive and move on in love.

People are only responsible for the truth that they have heard or are aware of. God judges every single person by his or her own conscience, not by yours or mine. A Christian can only supernaturally love by abiding in the true Vine. Non-Christians can love supernaturally too… and God gives them special graces to do it if they do it, even if they know nothing about abiding in the true vine: Jesus. We should not fall into condemning or judging those who are not Christians as unable to love (do good) or to have dignity. We need the attitude that says, "There go I but for the grace of God" when see people out of control. This takes a humble attitude.

As we watch our branches supposed poverty or riches, and look at the neighboring branches' prosperity or poverty, one of the more difficult things to do is to fight off the envy and pride that so easily entangles us. This is because we often get heavenly riches confused with earthly riches. Our pride and envy can grow faster than the fruits of the Spirit. That's why we should do everything that the Vine, Sap, and Vinedresser require from us.

<u>A Way to Fight Off Envy:</u>

One of the surest ways to fight off envy is to find your place in the Church, as well as in society, in a way that brings contentment.[34] It can also be a way to letting pride grow if we aren't careful and start to compare and judge insensitively those who are struggling to find their niche. To find our place in Church and society

[34] I'm in debt to my sister Desirée for this insight.

requires open-mindedness, self-knowledge, discernment, listening-prayer, trying out new things, and taking risks. It requires that we might fail some of the time, but the rewards are well worth it. Life is a journey, and these things will take time to figure out, so we must be patient. It might also be difficult to figure out, and in such a case will be part of our crosses to carry.

There will be times when things seem hopeless. Those are the times when we should tenaciously hang on to the promises of God, and disregard our shortsighted views of things. If we view God as not looking after the whole person, we will be adding burdens that God never intended us to carry. True, we do have a responsibility to do our part, and if we do our part then God can bless those efforts. If we don't do our part, then God can't bless those efforts. Doing our part means that we are keeping Jesus' commands, maybe not perfectly, but getting up each time we fall. Jesus' commands extend to every realm of our lives and are not burdensome when we have humble attitudes.

Most of us can only rise so high in position, status, and wealth before we feel our weak foundations giving out on us. In the media, we hear about the messy lives of the rich and famous. This is often mirrored elsewhere in society. Stubbornness and rebellion are the roots of stagnation, plateauing, and stunted ness.

In the Church, we also have immaturity. Some who rise within the hierarchy, such as priests or pastors have molested little boys and girls just as savage wolves tear apart helpless lambs. These people may have wanted to appear righteous, loving, wise, and generous initially, but they lacked character. They deceived many into respecting them. And this comes from a poor understanding of what good mature fruit is. Jesus said we would know people by their fruits.

Perhaps one of the reasons this sort of thing happens in the church here in the West is that it is too socially acceptable to join it. If there were persecutions directed at the church here in the West like there is in other parts of the world, then the wolves' cover would be blown. Wolves don't care anything for the flock. Wolves in sheep's clothing don't stay around when lions are on the hunt. Wolves would not want to pay the price of persecution only to live out their perverted fantasies. They want easy targets. People who attend churches are usually very trusting of the communities they are a part of. People with bad motives will take advantage of settings like these.

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His followers by noticing our love for one another. Yet every sin that takes place in society also takes place in the Church. The line dividing good and evil does not go between cultures, religions, political parties, countries, social-economic groups but through each of our hearts.

How Do You See Yourself?

What God has done for others, He won't always do for you, or me. That's one lesson. The opposite is also true. What God will sometimes do for you and me, He may not do for anyone else. If we lack the attitude of humility, this becomes an opportunity for our pride to grow. Humility can't be faked in the heart. Following a bunch of rules outwardly will never produce humility. Pride causes distance from God because we think He favors us over others or others over us. This thinking is rooted in the idea that we are better than anyone else or deserving of what good anyone else has. Humility knows that we aren't better or worse than anyone else when it comes to sin. We are all sinners.

Some people might be more spiritually healthy than us, others worse so. But we should not allow this to give rise to pride in our hearts. Others may start out in very unhealthy circumstances. But have made significant progress spiritually compared to us. While we may have started out in very healthy circumstances, but have squandered much. We shouldn't be measuring ourselves with others to feel superior. That is the kind of judging that Jesus forbids.

> Pride makes us hate our equals because they are our equals; our inferiors from fear that they may equal us; our superiors because they are above us. Envy, my children, follows pride; whoever is envious is proud.[35]

We all have some riches and some poverty. As far as our poverty is concerned, we need to see ourselves as sinners in constant need of a Worthy Savior. Even when we see ourselves as sinners, we don't have to feel guilty about it, because one of our riches is the grace and forgiveness of our loving God.

Some people believe if one views oneself as a sinner one will have low self-esteem. This is not necessarily true if one knows the love of the Creator, and believes that He values us despite our shortcomings and is rebuilding us.[36] Our self-esteem is not based on the shifting standards of a decaying society, but on the goodness of God. So, I say this, I became even more aware of how I need to nurture a "poor in spirit" attitude within me, even after so many years in the Refiner's fire!

The "rich" or "proud" don't hunger and thirst for righteousness. They are more concerned with what the world has to offer. They may be thankful for what they have, but have no one to thank except quite likely themselves or random chance. At the center of being "poor in spirit" or humble is "thanksgiving" to God. God

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[35] John Vianney in Jill Haak Adels, The Wisdom Of The Saints, Oxford University Press (1987), p. 159

[36] Cf. Philippians 1:6

can't command thankfulness from us, only through love is it possible for God to bring it about in us. If we are thankful to God for providing our needs and some of our wants, then we will pursue a relationship with Him. The more "light" we have, the more potential we have for realizing the companionship God offers.

God Is Good:

I initially said that God will sometimes not do for us as He has done for others, and that sometimes He will do for us what He won't do for others. Because of this, I don't want to leave the impression that God is capricious, or fickle as some non-Christian voices assert. God is better than we can ever imagine. And so, I believe that He wisely desires to give or withhold things from us for our own good. When God gives a gift, He always does so with the purpose of blessing others through us. He gives so that we can give.

Because God gives to some and withholds from others, we are prone to jealousy. Sometimes when we see others wasting the gifts given them that we wrongly covet, we may be tempted to judge God as unwise in the giving and withholding of His gifts.

Having said this, I must say that God has His reasons for doing the things that He does. It may be to test us so He knows what we want. Even so, that doesn't mean that we will be consoled by His reasons, or that He is answerable to us when He acts. How can the clay say to potter, "Why have you made me this way?"[37] It is a statement of faith that God is Sovereign, Loving, Merciful, Gracious, and Just. When we are proud, we will judge God as being "empty-headed", thinking that we would do better than what He has done. When we are humble we will work through the process of accepting our station in life one day at a time! We can have both attitudes at war within us when we have hardships and others have it easier than we seemingly do. It isn't all or nothing thinking!

Learning to accept our lot in life is not always easy. When things are going according to plan, then being happy with whom we are is easy. However, if we feel our limitations when hardships occur (to us or others), then it is not easy to be content. Whether the hardships are of our own making or someone else's, acceptance of our situations is a sign of our maturity. Honest and healthy acceptance requires eyes that are guided by faith. A faith that is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ.

Acceptance of our shortcomings is the first of the Twelve Steps. Accepting our shortcomings doesn't mean that we don't want to make further progress in

[37] Cf. Romans 9:21

practicing the virtues. Rather when we admit that we are sinners, we do so because we don't want to continue in our evil ways. We are basically admitting or accepting that we are made for better things. God accepts us for whom we are, but loves us so much that He doesn't want to leave us as we are.

We are all somewhat spiritually blind. True, we only need a small glimpse of our falseness in the light of the truth to start the journey to wholeness. But if we don't want to be led into error we need to put our faith in the Truth: who is Jesus, because He won't lead us astray when it comes to growing in the freedom of love when we are open to it. Most religions hold to many truths, and all of them do contain varying degrees of error (none of us have it all together; and this includes Christians). But I choose Christianity even though it manages to agree on 99% of revealed truth, but is divided on the remaining 1%. Christianity has Jesus and He is the anchor of my soul. Anyone who denies Jesus is not God's friend. However, God is the author of all the good and truth no matter where it is found; in any Religion. Yet, God is not the author of all that non-Christian Religions teach and that goes against solid Christian teaching. If He was, then He created contradictions, because most Religions have sharp disagreements on doctrines with each other.

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean we should reject absolutely everything from the paths we have followed up until this point. There is genuine goodness and truth found in most world Religions.

Black and white (all or nothing) thinking or putting people, or Religions into boxes comes from or leads to judging, pride, intolerance, and hatred: not love. I used to think that everything other than Christianity was counterfeit but now I know that there is genuine goodness and truth found in other Religions (and those people that adhere to those Religions) and that I need to respect this. The Roman Catholic Church teaches and views, "all goodness and truth found in these [other] religions as 'a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.'"[38] We need to respect people of different faiths and pray that we don't get proud and arrogant and dismiss them as vehicles of meaning and truth. They are human, and we ought not to demonize them.

If one looks at Religions as either real or fake currency, and believes that one's own faith is the real thing and every other Religion is fake currency… one will likely not be as loving, tolerant, and gentle towards those of other faith traditions. I know that was the case with me for a long time. One will be combative instead of being a warm reconciler by building bridges on common ground. Love will

[38] Cf. CCC 843

evaporate when one has a combative stance. One will minimize the wrongs one's fellow believers have committed (past to present), and only look for and point out the dirty laundry belonging to everyone else as the supposed "evidence" of the fake-ness of the faiths they hold in question. Very few people are argued into embracing a different faith tradition. Gentleness, respect, patience, non-judgmental-ism, refusing to condemn, and loving others with their love language will always go further than an angry and intolerant approach to evangelism. We can't demand that others put their trust in Jesus. Jesus always invites those He calls in a gentle fashion. So, should we. If people have objections to the Gospel we ought not to become abrasive. We should meet people where they are at and patiently explain the truths handed down to us in gentleness and respect.

There are many humble people in religions other than Christianity. There are many proud people who claim to be Christians. But what I do believe is that many of those who are humble, and do belong to other faith groups, have been taught wrongly about who Jesus is and what He came to do; and have seen too much hypocrisy in some of His followers. It is hard to overcome such barriers. On the other hand, all Christians, myself included have inconsistencies in our doctrines, and the way that we see Jesus. We are also not perfect in love, compassion, and kindness towards others (who is?). If we were in these things, then we would have removed the all lies that keep us from being perfect in love, compassion, and kindness. No sect, no denomination, and no following has the fullness of the truth. We all don't love like we ought to, and that means we are all believing lies of some sort that keeps us loving deeply and genuinely without hypocrisy, or we are ignorant of truths yet to be revealed. Truth sets free; the fullness of the truth would set us completely free in love. The book of Romans chapter twelve calls us to renew our minds. This is a continual process, and we are never done. Jesus is the fullness of the truth, not anyone church denomination, not the Catechism, and not the Bible; and when Jesus sets us free will be free indeed. None of us know Jesus fully in this life, besides he is infinite.

We Christians often impose our beliefs onto what is written in the Bible and the Gospels, while some non-Christians read into their religious writings goodness and mercy. People who teach and consistently act out what it means to be merciful are living out the Gospel, whether or not they have heard the Good News proclaimed by Christians. Many others live in darkness. Mercy does not mean that we grant people a license to hurt people.

People who are merciful are that way because they see their own need for mercy. When they are offered God's mercy they eventually accept it.

God has no favorites. He loves each one of us more than we can possibly love ourselves or even imagine. He loves us because He made us.[39] And He made us so that He could love us. Before we did anything good or bad ourselves He loved us. Humble people will search and eventually find the God as seen in Jesus Christ. They will come to believe that all the good that they have experienced or will experience is God's gift to them. They also realize that good gifts can and often do come wrapped up in pain. People who open these gifts start the process of learning to practice more humility.

Proud people don't want anything to do with gifts that are wrapped up in pain. They may want God's material benefits or blessings, but want nothing to do with the responsibility attached to these gifts. The humble will inherit what God offers (see the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5).

Just Having a Fun Time Sinning; or Hungering and Thirsting for More?

When we who make up the Church look and see the behaviors of those outside the visible church, we can either be sympathetic, judgmental, or compassionate. The sympathetic will see them as having fun. The judgmental will see them as only sinners, and the compassionate will see them as thirsty people who don't know the counterfeit from the genuine life giving water. Both proud and humble people may see outsiders as sinning (but one condescendingly and the other with grief). Only the humble will see outsiders as thirsty for life.

Grace, Humility and Love:

Consider the empty open hand, and the clenched fist. Together they form a contrasting picture between humility and pride. Humility is the willingness to receive grace from God – hence the empty open hand. Pride is the refusal to receive that same grace from God – hence the clenched fist. An empty open hand is a sign of its poverty, and therefore the humble don't think they are better than the proud. We don't earn God's grace through having humility. Humility recognizes that God is free to give or withhold from us His gifts. Humility believes that God is good even when He withholds things from us. Only those who have empty open hands can receive the grace offered to them by God. To be humble means that one looks after things without possessing them.

Either way we need to exercise the muscles in our hands if they are to remain clenched, or open. Naturally, the question arises: What are the muscles in our spiritual hands? I believe that those muscles represent the vacuums inside each of us. But we also leak. It is up to us to exercise our hands so that others will benefit

[39] I'm in debt to my Dad for this insight.

from what God gives us. We can either put our faith in God or in something else. Faith is not a muscle. Active faith is like opening a door or a tap that lets God's empowering presence in. Either we are reaching for God, or we are grasping for something else. When we reach out for God, we are putting our faith in Him, and He fills our hands with grace. When we hold onto the gift for ourselves only, we are putting our faith in the gift as opposed to the giver, and so we lose our humility. We therefore need to always have faith working itself out in love if we want to practice humility. If we lose our humility, then we lose our salvation or God's grace.

The humblest man who ever walked on earth: Jesus, came to serve and not to be served. His humility meant giving of Himself through acts of love, instilling hope, and granting us a future.

It ultimately cost Him His life. He did not set earthly security as His top priority, but He trusted His Father. He even had no place to lay His head.[40] Out of love He took on our hardships, our suffering, and our presence to show His solidarity with us. Jesus who, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God [as] something to be grasped,"[41] but showed His active humility and love for us by sharing in our hardships and poverty.

Some people have the idea that humility is going up the social and economic ladders because they think that they deserve those things. That is how they view themselves.

Jesus' idea of humility meant going down those ladders. He didn't necessarily seek out the crowds to bring glory to Himself; He sought out people so He could serve their best interest. This is seen in the Gospels, when He would command those that He healed not to spread the word about Him in certain regions of Judea.[42] He did this because He didn't necessarily want all the attention on Himself. His focus was to seek out the lost, those who felt guilty, the unloved, and those suffering from diseases. Large crowds made that sort of work difficult.

Jesus wanted to work one-to-one and in small groups as opposed to larger groups. Jesus would often walk many miles to do one good deed for just one person. He left the well fed to be near the hungry, the ill, and the downtrodden. He came to bring the Good News of God's mercy and grace to us who are far away. He came to bring mercy to those who had gone astray. But many reject Him.

Some so-called Christian evangelists would not be caught alive investing a lot of

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[40] Cf. Matthew 8:20
[41] Philippians 2:6
[42] Cf. Matthew 8:4, Mark 1:44, and Luke 5:14

time, effort or money in a few people where, if their hearts were cleaner, their efforts would be better spent. This is because they have unholy ambition in their hearts. They want us to send them money regularly and use all kinds of manipulative techniques to do this. Their hearts seek fame, fortune, and ease, instead of God's will.

This does not mean that all evangelists are like that, or that it is necessarily wrong to seek large crowds to minister to. Humble people aren't pompous; they aren't full of self-importance. Humble people don't view themselves as the most important people around, and so don't have to be number one when it comes to being served or treated with respect. They consider others as better than themselves out of humility and not deception.[43] They therefore become servants, not self-promoters.

Jesus was a keen observer of humanity. He could have been very critical of us and deservingly so. He managed to walk a fine line in-between continuously pointing out our wrongs and not seemingly showing approval of our sins. He is always gentle and meek.

Pride or Grace?

When I was a child, I was expected to do chores around the house like most children my age. But because of my immaturity, I got so angry with my brother who seemed to get away with doing almost nothing. As I watched my productivity, and his meager efforts I used to have fits of rage, sulked, shed tears, felt a lot of self-pity, and was envious with how he got away with it. I would cry out loud to Dad to try to end what I saw as the unfair distribution of work. I'm sure that had someone told me the story about Martha and Mary in Luke 10, I would have completely sympathized with Martha. I wanted life to be fair, and just. I saw life as unfair. So, I had a lot of self-pity/ anger/ and judgment and hence no joy. Martha had no joy, but Mary did. That is why Jesus said Mary chose the best part not Martha. It was not about good works vs. visiting and learning from Jesus. Both are important. It was about self-pity vs. joy. It was about pride vs. humility. Pride led to depression/ self-pity/ anger/ judgment. Humility led to joy. Jesus said He would not take Mary's joy from her. He wanted to give Martha the same joy in exchange for her anger/ self-pity/ judging/ and pride.

Self-pity stems from a sense of unfairness. When we feel unfairness, we will compare. Jaded comparisons fuel contempt, and contempt comes from pride. Contempt is a compassion killer. I had a lot of contempt in me and I was blind to it for decades. I wanted to show compassion…but I did not know why I could not for

[43] Cf. Philippians 2:3

the longest time. Even though I embraced pride and contempt blindly, compulsively, decisively, subconsciously, without having to think about it, basically by default…I also wanted restorative justice, I wanted grace, and I wanted fairness. Just because we have pride does not mean that we don't want grace and don't want to become humble.

Pointing at Others?

I know that there are many people who decline the invitation to follow Jesus because in their eyes Christians are just hypocrites. Some of these may have been deeply wounded sexually by Priests or Pastors or supposed Pillars in local churches. What a barrier to overcome! On the other-hand on Judgment Day, when Jesus asks those who sought pleasure "alone" why they did not do His will (or accept His invitations), some of these people will have the lame excuse that they didn't do God's will because they only saw imperfections in those who claimed to be committed to God. These people were only willing to do God's will if others would do it without hypocrisy. They wanted fairness, and knew nothing about grace. When Jesus asks us, "Why didn't you follow the light and do what is right?" Can we respond with, "'Joe Blow' didn't do it, so why should I have attempted to have lived mercifully, compassionately, and humbly?" This seems more like an excuse made up to justify one's laziness than anything else.

Is Forgiveness a License to Repeat?

We can rationalize un-forgiveness by saying that if we forgive the persons what they did to us, then we give them a license to do it again. But nothing can be farther from the truth.

When we forgive a fault of another person, we are agreeing not to take revenge on them. We are admitting that under the right conditions we could do the same or even worse. If we are honest with ourselves, we will see that we also hurt others as well. No one is perfect. When we forgive someone, we are not saying that they should go undisciplined at all by the proper authorities. Forgiveness sets us free from the hardness in our hearts. It sets us free from being victims the rest of our lives. Forgiveness helps us live with what others have wrongly done to us. Either way we will live with what people do to us. Forgiveness helps it to be a pleasant arrangement.

Since we ourselves want mercy from God because we too aren't completely innocent, forgiveness asks God to remove eternal consequences from those who injured us, if it is at all possible.

When we forgive, we are saying that we will continue to love our neighbors despite what they have done to us, or continue to do to us. We are leaving the discipline or punishment to the right authorities.

If we are a parent and our child has done something wrong, after we forgive them, we need to discipline them. Even King David after being forgiven by God was disciplined. By discipline I mean to correct the person gently, renewing-ly, patiently, and respectfully with truth and mercy. Discipline does not mean taking out the whip. Change that is fear driven creates a slave mentality. When owners are around, then usually their slave obeys. When they are not the slave will likely relax. Moving from fear to love happens slowly. It happens when we begin to realize that we love the person we want to please, and not because we fear their wrath.

If we think that we don't need to forgive someone who has wronged us because they haven't changed, we are wrong. If one doesn't forgive them one will forever be a victim. When we forgive, we set ourselves free through the grace of God to love our enemies from our hearts. We forgive for our own health. The bridge that we burn we need to cross as well. Jesus forgave sinful people who had yet to mend their ways while He still hung from the cross during His passion. For further evidence that forgiving is what we are supposed to do even when the agents of our hurts don't change their ways, consider the following text of New Testament Scripture:

> [Love]... is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things.[44]

We are to love our neighbors, especially when they wrong us. And these verses are directed to us when someone wrongs us. We can't brood over an injury, if we are to love those who hurt us. If we do, then we need to confess this genuinely to God who offers to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Love is gentle.

<u>God and Money?</u>

For a long time, I pondered the following saying from Jesus:

> Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.[45]

The key to interpreting and keeping this statement is in recognizing the difference in the words "investing" and "storing." This isn't a command meant to make us

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[44] 1 Corinthians 13:5-7, New American Bible, (emphasis mine)
[45] Matthew 6:19-21

aim at being dirt poor as far as earthly wealth is concerned. It is however a command meant to direct us to actively invest the wealth we have been given for the good of others. If we have the gift of being entrepreneurs, then this command is not meant to give us a bad conscience. The minimum investment one can make with one's monetary wealth is to invest it with a bank. If we can do better, then we ought to try. Jesus is asking us in this command to be bold, courageous, and wise in how we invest our wealth and not to just play it safe.

Almsgiving is one way where we can invest our money to help those suffering from disabilities, disease, hunger, thirst, or hardships encountered from plagues, famines, war, catastrophes, or poor economies. This kind of giving is always necessary because there will always be those who can't provide for themselves no matter what one does for them in the long term. If one has the gift of being an entrepreneur, then a second way to help the poor is to invest and create employment for those who can work and wouldn't have jobs otherwise. If we ourselves aren't entrepreneurs, then perhaps we should search for people who are, and give them chances of investing (through our help) in the lives of others.

Jesus is not against us multiplying our wealth. He is against us selfishly storing wealth for ourselves alone. He took a chance with investing in us (for our good), and He wants us to take the chance with investing in others (for their good). Jesus is asking us to wisely share what we have been given, and not to store in places where it can easily be lost. We are called to either share our wealth through almsgiving, or through creating jobs by investment. If a person can earn a wage to support her or his family, the person's self-esteem will skyrocket. To be dependent on others in a way that encourages laziness is just poor stewardship on the part of those who have wealth.

Now, "Jesus did tell the rich young man to give his money to the poor. But he didn't tell this to everybody. The young man loved and maybe worshiped money. It would have been good for his soul to give it away. But if someone has a spiritually healthier attitude, if someone sees money as a tool for helping others, then Jesus might not call him or her to give all his money away."[46] Another thing, Jesus often uses the literary device of hyperbole to shock and awaken us to what He expects from us. My guess is that He wants us to err on the side of generosity as opposed to stinginess when it comes to how we treat others with our money.

Fruits of The Spirit Versus Fruits from Our Carnal Nature:

The idea of describing human acts, which might be either right or wrong as good or bad fruit, is very fitting. All natural fruits contain within them seeds whether

[46] From my friend Dr. Alex Pruss

they are bad or good tasting. We have all tasted both good fruit and bad fruit.

When we taste good fruit we usually want more of it. Some eat the fruit and throw away the seed without planting it in their hearts. These people are like suckers on a vine that waste the precious sap. They will never grow any good fruit themselves so long as they keep doing this. Those who allow the seed from the good fruit to be planted and watered regularly in their hearts eventually become born of God.

> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves [supernaturally] has been born of God and knows God.[47]

When we eat bad fruits, we also have decisions to make. We can either throw the fruit along with its seed away through forgiveness, or we can receive the seed into our hearts in the forms of resentments – or un-forgiveness. When we do the former we grow in spiritual health. When we do the latter, judgmental ism and addictions are the evil fruits that spring forth because un-forgive-ness hurts us with the negative emotions it establishes; and negative emotions cry out for relief. Therefore, addictions or abnormal pleasure seeking result to nurse the negativity don't want to feel.

Either way the fruits seeds (good or bad) will multiply or grow and seek to take over the whole of our hearts. People who are shallow usually have a lot of bad fruit growing in their hearts. When they have a conversion experience with Jesus, which can be a real high, they will eventually come down to realize that they don't have much spiritual freedom or lasting joy. Real spiritual freedom is the ability to do what is right.

Love without truth is not love, but hypocrisy. Truth without love kills.

<u>The Parable of The Talents:</u>

In this section, I'd like to share an interpretation of a parable by Jesus recorded below. I came across the interpretation through my sufferings in life, and meditations:

> "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his

[47] 1 John 4:7

master's money.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'[48]

The parable always used to confuse me – what were the talents given in accordance with each servant's abilities? How did they invest these talents? And how did they get a return? Yes, what are the talents?

For me, the parable eventually came to speak about what humble, and proud people do with the opportunities God provides each of us with. The parable of the talents speaks of the economy of salvation.

Once read, it becomes clear that the man going on a long journey is Jesus. And that Jesus entrusts His servants with talents. Servants are aware that they are

[48] Matthew 25:14-30

commanded to accomplish certain tasks.

What then are the talents and ability mentioned in this parable? Clearly, the talents are given in accordance with our abilities.[49] So our talents and abilities can't be the same things. This is evidence that the talents spoken of here aren't aptitudes. If they were then the parable would be saying that we each receive aptitudes in accordance with our ability. And what would that mean? It doesn't make sense!

If we want to interpret the parable, then we need to understand the relationship between the talents given and our ability to receive them. They have a relationship that is only appreciated once understood.

The talents talked about in the parable are the "opportunities" that God gives each servant. Money provides some sort of opportunities. God provides us with many opportunities proportionate to our abilities to love, many of which don't have a monetary value.

For some time, I thought that the wealth or talents were the mercy and grace that God wants to give each of us. But this led me into blindly acting like the Pharisee in God's Temple judging all sinners a stone's throw away because I thought I was more spiritual.

Some people believe that they receive plenty of opportunities while others think they receive less. Some are very grateful, while others are ungrateful. It is not that God loves some more than others – there is no partiality with God.[50] The reason for the discrepancy in the amount of talents given each servant is because every person has different abilities. The way we view our abilities and our opportunities can lead to judgment/ pride/ anger/ hatred/ jealousy/ smugness/ envy/ contempt/ and insensitivity when we choose darkness, or to practicing humility with God's help when we become noble.

The way we view what God has given us determines whether we react or act with pride or humility.

This ability can both increase and decrease depending on the softness and hardness of one's heart. Soft hearts belong to those who practice humility. Hard hearts belong to those who are proud. We all have soft spots and hard spots in our hearts.

The ability to receive or reject these opportunities can and do fluctuate with the different seasons in our lives. We may start out with small opportunities and

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[49] Cf. Matthew 25:15

[50] Cf. Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, and Ephesians 6:9

eventually have a rich harvest; we may start out with many opportunities but squander many of them. Both prosperous and difficult times can stunt our capitalizing on our opportunities. But can also provide great opportunities for gain. The ability to value the riches or opportunities that God wants to give us, and that the Gospel speaks about, is different with each person.

The parable generally states that those with more talents or "opportunities" will love more than those with fewer talents or "opportunities." But not always! Put another way, those who think they are shown plenty of mercy and grace will more likely share out of that goodness with others. Also, those who view themselves as having been shown less mercy and grace are less likely to shower that mercy and grace on others. The reason for this is that when humans love with supernatural love, they are doing so out of thankfulness for what God has done for them. They aren't trying to earn God's love by doing good deeds.

The parable of the Talents has not been a stagnant pool for me. I have gradually garnished fresh insights from it over the years. I have wondered: what constitutes many talents or huge opportunities, and what constitutes fewer talents or smaller opportunities? I have concluded that huge opportunities involve big risks, lots of pain and suffering, and that over many years. While small opportunities involve less pain, less struggle, less suffering over smaller time periods. The whole thing is upside down compared to the way the world sees things. And if we don't understand this we will very easily fall into envy, self-pity, anger, bitterness, meanness, and judgmental ism.

This parable is not about earning God's love. Instead it is about doing things in thankfulness for what God has already done for us. The abilities that we have to make the most of the opportunities that come our way are a response to the love, grace and mercy that God lavishes on us if we have received them from God. If we have yet to know God's mercy and grace, yet live by the Golden Rule: "Do to others what we want them to do to us…" then we will also make the most of every opportunity that comes our way. Any other interpretation would lead to the wrong conclusion that God's salvation can be earned. We are not doing things to take from God; we are doing things because we know the meanings of love, mercy, and grace and dispense it and desire it for ourselves.

Those who invest in others the love, mercy, and grace they are granted by God show that they are taking hold of the salvation that God offers them. It means that they don't just handle this gift of God for a while and later bury it, but instead they continually handle the gift through meditation, prayer, and action. The people who persevere at doing this show that they value God's gifts. Those who start out with God's grace but don't persevere with investing it show that they don't value it enough to hold on to its source.

And of course, Jesus warns us of the just consequences of not taking hold of and investing our ability to dispense mercy and grace (shown us by God) in our neighbors' lives when the opportunities show themselves. We get what we choose.

Another reason I think that this parable is about humility and pride is as follows. Consider the words that were spoken by the servant who, when asked by his master (God) why he had done nothing with the gift he was given, said:

> I knew that you are a hard man [God], harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So, I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.[51]

The servant thought that his master didn't favor him because he had only received a few talents or "opportunities". In the servant's eyes, the other servants had seemingly received more than himself. He was envious of the other servants, and angry with God for not seemingly granting him more goodies. Humble people are thankful for their gifts, and thank those who give to them.

Pride is not only found in those that seemingly have everything, but also in those who seemingly have nothing.

Note, the servant who did nothing with the opportunities a God gave Him said he knew God was hard hearted. The Scriptures say that those who come to God must believe that He is good and a rewarder of those who seek Him. So, it was a lack of faith in this lazy servant that kept him from living out God's meaningful opportunity for him.

When people receive riches, they need to invest them. Investing our abilities in the opportunities or "talents" involves following the Lord Jesus' example and showing care, compassion, love, mercy, and grace to those the Lord leads us to. This will create room in our hearts for the Spirit of God, and we will grow in the certainty of God's goodness. We will come to see that God is for us and not against us. And God's investment will have yielded a faith that imitates God's faithfulness.

<u>A Warning:</u>

It is so easy to fall into the error of judging others when one thinks one understands the Parable of the Talents as discussed above. One might begin to think that others deserve judgment when compared to us, and that we have earned our favor from God by doing the good works that have come because of our opportunities. Jesus warned us to not be like the Pharisee in the Temple who

[51] Matthew 25:24-25

listed his virtues in prayer to God and in the process judged a tax collector a stone's throw away to be worse than he was.[52] Also, we are all on different learning curves. When we see people asking questions that we have already asked and found answers to it should not become an opportunity for us to become impatient, proud, and judgmental towards them. People who have questions want to learn and show their humility by asking questions. People who have no questions may be proud.

Practicing Humility in Community:

Practicing humility in our interior lives allows us to practice it in community. Since humility is not only about how we see ourselves, but how we see others, people who grow in humility will forever be pulling specks or logs out of their own eyes. When this happens there will be an increase in the quality or healthy of their love towards others gradually, gradually, gradually, and then suddenly.

People who see themselves as being independent to the degree that they don't see their dependence on God and society are proud. They are also the ones who will turn a cold shoulder to those who are having difficult times making ends-meat. They are slow to see that there are those who will always be financially dependent on the good will of others. Living in community means that we give and receive.

People who see themselves as being more independent than inter-dependent do so because they see themselves as being strong. They don't realize that many other people are much weaker, or less privileged than they were or are. They have never suffered enough to know their own need of mercy. And if they have suffered they may have become hard and bitter because of it.

They don't practice mercy because they don't see themselves in need of mercy. When difficult things happen to them they will not humble themselves. They will steal, take, demand, or commit suicide because they can't bear the shame of being a beggar. They have never given out of love, so they don't know what it is to thankfully receive. And if they do get something good given to them, they often believe they deserve it.

The Golden Rule given by Jesus: "Do to others what you would want others to do to you," is not practiced by proud people. No fallen human being fully practices this rule; we are all proud in some ways. Lord please have mercy on me a sinner. If you see yourself as being better than certain groups of people whether because of spiritual, behavioral, physical, know how, understanding, monitory, moral, sexual, ethnic, or racial lines you have plenty of pride. And Jesus said that the measure we

[52] Luke 18:10

use is the measure that will be measured out to us (Lord Jesus please have mercy on me a sinner). Humble people see others as being more important to love than themselves. Humble people are merciful. They are willing to die if necessary for others.

If we give only to those who resemble us, and withhold from those who are different, then we are proud. Jesus said, "But many that are first will be last, and the last first."[53] If we consider ourselves last, but are envious of others who we consider first, then we really consider ourselves first.

Thinking that we know better than God does when it comes to some or all of the issues pertaining to our lives is another form of pride. Every fallen human being will encounter this kind of pride in his or her heart regularly. Who are we to think that our plans are more important than God's plans? If we do think that our plans are more important than God's plans, then we have either forgotten who God is, or are blind to whom He is. Humility remembers how God has revealed Himself and hungers more of Him.

People of faith throughout human history have believed that God knows what is best for us. This is because they see God as having unfathomable power, intelligence, understanding and knowledge; as well as being infinitely good, utterly merciful, unsurpassed in compassion, and infinitely wise.

Humble people are growing dependent on God. They value what God has to say, and use His commands to build the fabric of their lives through His grace.

What Kind of Humility Do We Have?

For me humility is attitude showing itself in actions. It moves from darkness to light, and from light to the Light. It moves from confusion to meaning, and from meaning to understanding. It moves from lies to truth, and from truth to the Truth. It moves from hypocrisy to truth. It moves from evil to love. It moves from idea to action. It searches for lost treasure, treasure that lasts. It cares for the weak, the despised, and the unwanted (Lord please have mercy on me a sinner).

Perhaps the most startling difference between humility and pride is in what they seek. Humility seeks love, relationship, and respect. Pride seeks power, control, and glory. Humility seeks substance; pride seeks outward appearance. There is no greater peace when humility builds relationship and respect through love. There is no greater discord than when a person mixes pride with power. Humble people can submit to authority, while proud people conceal their rebellion until the opportune moment.

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[53] Matthew 19:30, RSV

If you are uncertain as to whether you are seeking love or power out of humility or pride, ask yourself the following questions:

- ☐ Am I always seeking to be higher on the totem pole than everyone else? Am I competing with others even when they are not competing with me? Am I always trying to win? Do I hate losing? Do I covet titles such as apostle, pastor, intelligent, elder, wise, father, mother, doctor, president, or the like more because it looks good than because I enjoy serving in those capacities?
- ☐ Am I trying to convince God to make me smarter, faster, stronger, or more creative? Am I envious and unloving towards those who do have these more in abundance than I do? Or in other words, am I looking or searching for power? Do I look down on those who don't seem as intelligent as I am?
- ☐ Do I seek Biblical knowledge more than wanting to be close to God?
- ☐ Do I seek knowledge more than knowing people? In doing so, am I impatient with people?
- ☐ Am I so preoccupied with my own agenda, that I'm impatient with, uncaring, and blind to the humanity belonging to others? Am I mean when my expectations are not met? Am I demanding my rights over other people's rights…do I have a well-fixed sense of entitlement?
- ☐ Do I love things, experiences, or concepts more than loving people?
- ☐ Do I have problems allowing those closest to me to be themselves? Or, is my life a mess, but still I put all my effort in to judging and attempting to change others while totally neglecting myself? Am I impatient with others?
- ☐ Am I envious of other people's success?
- ☐ Do I not trust God enough to generously give to those in need?
- ☐ Do I treat money as God, and God like Money? Do I worship money, and attempt to use God?
- ☐ Do I constantly complain about other people's behaviors? Do I break easily – do I hold resentments, and let the sun go down on my anger regularly and with ease?
- ☐ Am I blind to my pride?
- ☐ Do I think that I am humble enough?
- ☐ Do I have a hard time listening to other peoples' advice?

- [ ] Am I quick to judge other people's ideas as inferior to my own? Do I laugh at, think I see through their agendas, do I ridicule, or scoff at those who try to contribute or care enough to give?
- [ ] When it comes to Jesus' teaching as described in the Bible do I think that I know better?
- [ ] Do I respect people in God-ordained positions of authority, or do I continually fight, complain, protest, and argue with them or against them in an un-respectful manner?
- [ ] Do I always have an "us vs. them" mentality? Do I criticize, blackball, or try to harden the hearts of my listeners towards those belonging to other denominations, or spiritual traditions?
- [ ] Am I more drawn to being served than serving others?
- [ ] Am I more drawn to worldly success than helping my neighbors? Am I impatient with them?
- [ ] Do I only have superficial relationships?
- [ ] Am I always getting into personality conflicts?
- [ ] Do I try to change others with force (think blackmailing, or using heavy handed approaches) and threats?
- [ ] Do I have bitterness in my heart and difficulty forgiving others? Do I refuse to forgive others or even just one person?
- [ ] Do I take things from others instead of graciously receiving them when they are properly offered and God says it is okay?
- [ ] Do I feel like I always get less than my share of the goodies being handed out? Am I nursing self-pity as a result?
- [ ] Am I having difficulty accepting God's will for my life?
- [ ] Am I unthankful to God for some of the things that have been given to me?
- [ ] Do I tackle tasks that are too big for me regularly, and never learn from my mistakes? Do I despise small beginnings?
- [ ] Do I refuse to take responsibility for the bad things I have done?
- [ ] Do I feel a "coldness", a motion towards distancing myself, or a pouting attitude towards those who don't receive or applaud my opinions or workmanship the way I desire them to be received?
- [ ] Do I always have to be right? Do I feel wounded when my opinions are not well received?

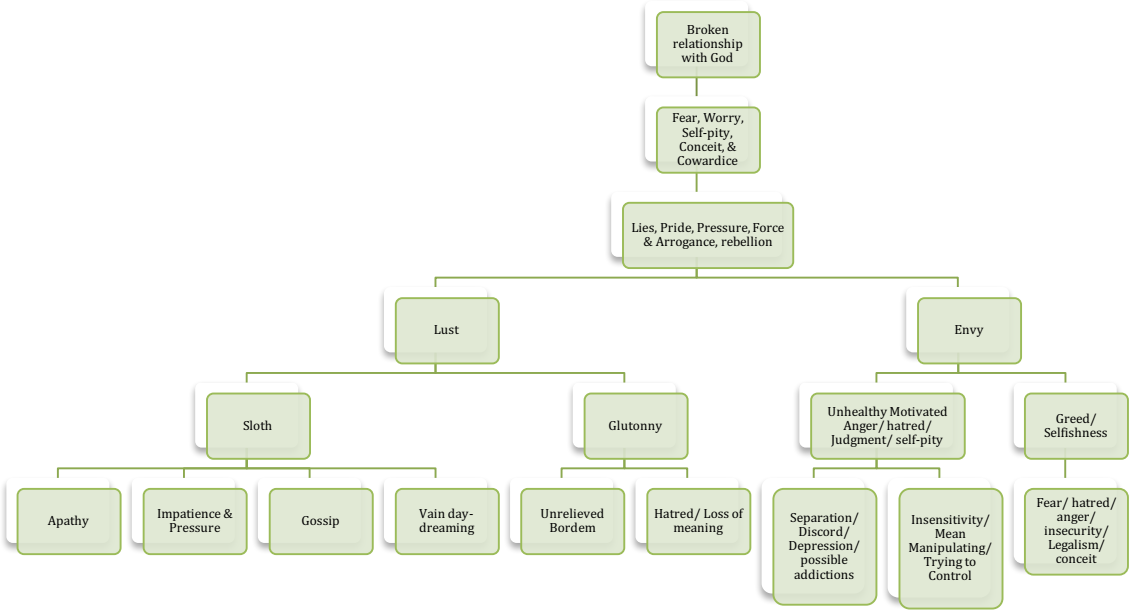
- ☐ Do I see getting my opinions across as being more important than loving others?
- ☐ Do I look down on others? Do I criticize other people, thinking that I would not do what they do? Do I think I am wise and wouldn't do the 'foolish' things other people have done?
- ☐ Do I flatter others in order to look good in their eyes more than to love them?
- ☐ Am I contemptuous?
- ☐ Do I covet my reputation more than doing the will of God?
- ☐ Do I see voicing intense hatred for immorality as a virtue and a sign of my own righteousness?
- ☐ Do I think about myself too much, and not about what others want (as well as God)? We don't love God whom we have not seen, if we don't love those we can see.
- ☐ Do I speak too much about myself when in conversations with others? Or am I too preoccupied with self and refuse to focus on the needs or humanity of others?
- ☐ Do I try to impress others with my spirituality?
- ☐ Am I always thinking about what others might be thinking about me, and are moved or motivated out of the fear or pride thereof?
- ☐ Do I handle rejection poorly? Am I very insecure?
- ☐ Do I look more leniently towards my sins than on the sins of others? Do I jump to conclusions quickly…only to realize that I had no perspective in my disputes and land up hurting those involved?
- ☐ Do I care more about how my actions look on the outside than my motives? Am I more caring about whether others are friendly to me than whether I do the right things?
- ☐ Am I no longer teachable? Do I see myself more as a teacher and leader than a follower?
- ☐ Do I see myself as not having to ask God for the things I need because I view myself as independent, self-sufficient, and rich? Or do I see myself as poor and in need of gifts, power, and opportunities that will supposedly help others as well as my self-image?

We will all say, "Yes" to at least some of these questions and so seek power more than humility and love in some area in each of our lives. If you answer, "Yes" to

many of these questions then you definitely seek power more than love as a goal in your life. If while reading the above you were thinking mostly how it applied to someone else you know, then you might be either very observant or in denial about your own flaws. I don't mean for anyone to be condemned by this list or to become focused on this list. It is meant more as a diagnostic tool. See the Essays called, "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" and "The Twelve [Plus Four] Steps" from this Essay for recipes on now to kill our strongholds of pride and lack of love. The more we focus on sin the more we will get drawn into it. Only by abiding in Jesus (become humble) will we have victory. Abiding in Jesus means we have humble attitudes that lead to gentleness, love, and respect.

The tree diagram below exposes more deeply what pride does interiorly & exteriorly to us.

If we have Pride, we have Lust and Envy. If we have Lust, we have Gluttony and Sloth. If we have Envy, we have Unhealthy Anger/ judgment and Greed…etc. For a fuller explanation of this diagram and more besides see the Essay called, "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil"



with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/DismantlingTheTree.pdf

from this Website.

Four Categories of People:

Here they are:

(1) Those people who with the good found in them see themselves not in need of God.

(2) Those people who are drawn to the good within them and pursue God for more believing what they had is not enough.

(3) Those people because of the bad found within them don't want anything to do with God because they are happy with the pleasures and evil to be found in the world.

(4) Those people who because of the bad within themselves hunger for purity and so pursue God.

Admittedly there is a bit of each of these in each fallen human being. One tendency might be stronger than any other depending on the person. But there is hope for each of us.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life:

Ultimately each of our attitudes will fall somewhere on the continuum between pride and humility. The critical mass of humility that is required for salvation is when that humility bears supernatural love. And by supernatural love, I mean the kind that is talked about in the Bible. Love doesn't try to earn God's favor. It does things out of thankfulness to God.

People who have never heard the Good News about Jesus' love can still have this critical mass of humility. In John's Gospel it talks about Jesus being the Light of the world. It further says about Him that He is:

> The true light that gives light to every man.[54]

Light is a metaphor for goodness. So, Jesus not only puts goodness in each person's heart, but is of good will towards each person. Some people's natural loves are greater than some people's supernatural loves. If one believes in the light even though one doesn't know its true name, then one believes in the same God as practicing Christians do. Believing in the light means that one respects God and does what is right to the best of one's ability. The story of Cornelius in the book of Acts in chapter 10 bears this out.

People like Cornelius consistently choose to have mercy on others, because they know that they themselves need mercy. And Jesus said that because they do this they would be shown mercy. When the Gospel is presented to them they eventually come to believe.

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[54] John 1:9

This does not mean that everyone is going to go to Heaven. It also doesn't mean that because we supposedly live a good life the way some people see it that we are automatically going to go to Heaven. Those who eventually do enter Heaven do so because Jesus forgave their sins by dying on a wooden cross. Even those on earth that love, do sin every now and then. God forgives us freely, but the forgiveness needs to be received by us for it to do its work in us and restore friendship with God. Jesus showed His love for all of us by dying on a cross because of what is in all of us. All we need to do is welcome Him into our lives, accept His forgiveness regularly and commit our lives to Him and His ways daily out of gratitude.

Out of humility we can have a relationship with Jesus and therefore be saved. Those who follow the Light (Jesus, or God) will be spared the darkness of hell or the lake of fire. This is true even if they have never heard someone speak the name "Jesus" to them. If this is so, then they know God by some other name. They may have many errors in their doctrines and beliefs. Who doesn't? But they practice humility to the best of their knowledge. Psalm 149:4 says that God crowns the humble with salvation. Practicing Christians are not the only humble ones on earth.

Spiritually thirsty people search for life giving drink. We are all thirsty, but some of us just don't know that we are thirsty for God. Some drink poison (or lies) from idols to quench their thirst thinking that it will give them life (many Christians have done or still do this). Proud/ blind people mistake what gives life and what gives death, and won't change even when the real thing is offered to them.

One of the most controversial and misunderstood sayings from Jesus is:

> I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.[55]

When Jesus says that He is the way, it means that we must follow Him if we want to see the Father. It also means that we must imitate Him in His humility if we are to follow Him, because He is humble! We can't walk together unless we are agreed.

When Jesus says that He is the truth it means that He won't deceive us. It also means that He will help us die to our hypocrisy if we are willing. Hypocrisy is rooted in pride. Truth also sets free: Jesus sets free. Unfortunately, we can get tangled up so easily because of fear and pride.

When Jesus said that He is the life, He means that we will find true non-

[55] John 14:6

hypocritical life in Him by us abiding in Him so that He will do through us what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount.[56] We won't be disappointed with what he offers because He made us for Himself. It also means that through His passion and sacrifice on the cross and subsequent Resurrection, He has opened the door to fellowship with the Father for us. We take hold of this life when we have a change of mind and believe in the Light (Jesus).

If we think that we can practice humility without the Light, then we deceive ourselves. If we could practice humility without the Light, then we would have something to boast about. But that would reduce our attitudes to puffed-up pride, and where is the humility in that?

A lot of people have problems with Jesus being the only way. But how many of these people would quarrel with God's way as being the only way? If Jesus weren't God, then He couldn't be the only way. His way means to humble yourself and follow the light that He has given you. Jesus can save anonymously. But He still saves.

In dying on the cross and resurrecting from the dead Jesus became mankind's Judge and Savior for all time as well as on the Last Day. When Jesus judges on the Last Day He will dispense mercy to multitudes of people who never heard the Good News. Those whom He has mercy on will have peace with God through Him as Judge and Savior. Hence, "No-one comes to the Father except through Jesus."

For those who have heard about Jesus and His deeds, He invites all who would want to practice humility to learn from Him, when He says:

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.[57]

Come to Him. Take on His yoke – the relationship that comes from believing the Good News as described in the Gospels! You won't be disappointed if what you are seeking is to love and be loved.

Rest in His Love and forgiveness. Confession is a great way to foster humility.[58]

<u>To Be Born from Above or Again:</u>

What I would like to do here is to describe what it means to be born again or to be

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[56] Cf. Matthew 5:1-7:29, or Luke 6:20-6:49
[57] Matthew 11:28-30
[58] I am in debt to my friend Alex Pruss for this insight.

born from above.

It is not a one-time event. Rather it is a process that normally extends from a beginning point and ends in Heaven. The beginning point occurs when one comes out of spiritual darkness and starts to walk in a marvelous light. Just like a baby in a womb is in darkness and isolated from others, when it comes out of the darkness into the light it starts to form relationships. In the spiritual, living relationships are based on love, mercy, and grace. So, when one starts to be born from above, one starts a relationship with God based on what Jesus Christ did 2000-years ago whether one realizes it or not.

There are two steps to being born from above. And they are summarized in the Old Testament saying, "In repentance and rest is your salvation."[59] The invitation to rest is an invitation to rest one's faith in God, the Light, or Jesus. The command to commit oneself to repentance the way Jesus commands is a lifetime requirement. It is a lifetime requirement because it is part of the human condition to sin or do evil at least now. And each time we find ourselves doing sin, we need to repent.

Both a commitment to repentance, and resting one's faith in Jesus Christ are vows that one makes at one's Baptism. And that is why the New Testament says that our Baptisms save us, provided we continue in living out our baptismal vows with faith in Jesus.

True repentance means that one eventually turns away (with Jesus' help) from whatever Jesus calls sin, and instead one begins to humbly love God, one's enemies, and oneself just like Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel.[60] One can't repent without the help of God. Repentance requires that we cooperate with God so that He can clean us from guilt and sinful actions. It requires faith, patience and perseverance.

To rest one's faith in Jesus means that one begins to trust in His sacrificial love shown on the cross 2000-years ago, His Resurrection from death, and His continual leadership/ shepherding/ Kingship over us.

<u>The Final Judgment:</u>

Truth is not always pleasant to the ears. I wish no one would die. Alas, people do die. I wish no one lied. Alas people do lie. I wish there were no experiences known as Hell or the Lake of Fire. Whether these names refer to real places or are metaphors for certain types of suffering people undergo in the afterlife I don't

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[59] Isaiah 30:15

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

know…but I do believe at a minimum that they are states of existence.

Hell is not the only place of torment. There is also the Lake of Fire. In the end those who find themselves in Hell will enter the Lake of Fire.

Many don't want to believe in Hell or the lake of fire. As far as I can see, if there is pain in this life then there are no guarantees to all that there won't be pain in the next life. There is grace for those who are open to it. But God can't force His grace onto unwilling people. That doesn't mean that God condemns people to Hell or the Lake of Fire…people condemn themselves to be there. God has come to save us in the person of Jesus Christ. Only Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy. Jesus hates sin, death, and decay. He came to save us from them. Jesus did not come to save us from God the Father's wrath. He came to save us from our sins, and sin's intrinsic consequences especially death. Sin kills us; not God. Sin mutilates/decays/and infects the image of God in us. Sin causes guilt…and guilt if not forgiven or relieved rightly causes the worst kind of suffering, insecurity, and paranoia; and that might be in my opinion what Hell and the Lake of Fire are all about. Sin pushes God away from us, but His presences is Heaven, so in pushing Him away we push life and peace away from us too because He is life and His presence is peace.

For those who hear the Spirit speak to them and change their minds and believe in Jesus, grace is given that enables them to be saved from sin and sin's consequences, the worst being death.

> In being forgiven sin we have guilt removed.
> In renewing our minds and hearts we are born again.
> These bring health (or holiness) and love for God, self, and others.
> This is a consequence of life, mercy and grace.
> This is Heaven.
>
> In not being forgiven we struggle with guilt, and insecurity,
> and have identity issues.
> Our minds and hearts feel stagnant, lifeless, and at a dead end.
> These bring the feelings of despair, shame, hopelessness, apathy and hatred.
> This is a consequence of sin.
> This is death or Hell.

Is there a place named Hell? Yes, I do believe so… but my views have radically changed over the years. Just because other cultures had or have ideas of retributive justice including a place of torment does not mean Christianity must have borrowed it. It may very well have been a very imperfect bridge that helped

to bring converts to Christianity. No one has a monopoly on the truth.

Retributive Justice used to be very important to me...but now I think God is into restorative justice. I'm reminded of the last book in the Narnia Chronicles where certain dwarves just could not believe because they were lied to once. They lost faith...and could not believe in the goodness of Aslan (the Christ figure) no matter how much anyone tried to help them see the truth. So, the news in the New Testament about Hell is about how certain people will experience God in the afterlife. Every good thing God attempts to do for them is seen with skepticism and ill intent. We all to a very large degree create our own reality and somehow manage to live with it.

Hell, in my opinion is a dark place in the minds of those who experience it. Not because God wills it, but because the people there push God away who is Light and warmth. The dark and cold are what they feel when they push God away. The darkness is representative of void, lack of footing, or more to the point: fear, insecurity, and the trepidation of not having received forgiveness of one's sins because of what Jesus did on the Cross.

The Lake of Fire is a metaphor for the burning thirst we all have for God that is not met for those in hell because of pride, and believing it to be only satisfied by idols (that are no longer available). In the New Testament, it says that an axe is set to every tree that does not bear good fruit. Have you ever been cut by a piece of paper, or a knife; or scrapped your knee on concrete? It burns horribly, this is the effect that the axe has on those trees (or people) who reject friendship with God. God says out of justice (not retributive justice), "I need to put an end to the waste of resources because this plant bears me no good fruit" and this cutting off away of resources burns something fierce…this suffering is a torment for those who experience it.

Pride causes the boundary that keeps people in hell or the Lake of Fire. God does not will it. God would embrace them if they could only humble themselves and open themselves up to God. But they push God away. The NT makes it clear that for some this is Eternal, not because God wills it but because they will it.

There that is my take on Hell.

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote the following that is part of a dialogue in Part I of his masterpiece called The Lord of the Rings, between two characters named Frodo and Gandalf while discussing a third character named Gollum:

> He deserves death. [Said Frodo]
> Deserves it I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then don't be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. [Said

Gandalf].[61]

I hope that people don't think that I am, "too eager to deal out death in judgment" in writing this chapter. I am very aware that I have stayed away from some very difficult questions in this chapter. I am not that wise, and I certainly don't see all ends.

So why choose Jesus? I personally have felt the love, compassion, mercy, discipline, and grace of the historical Jesus as describe in the Christian Bible. Nothing else offers the hope that He does in my opinion.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son:

The time came when God finally wanted me to re-examine some of the teaching that I heard at the Overflowing Grace Conference by Ken Blue way back in 1992. He wanted me to understand the true meaning of the parable about the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32. Here is the parable:

> "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.
>
> "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything.
>
> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.
>
> "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.
>
> "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

[61] J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of The Rings, Part I; Fellowship of The Ring, Ballantine Publishers (1991), p. 93

> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.
>
> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’
>
> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’
>
> “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”[62]

The paraphrase I heard at the Overflowing Grace Conference of this wonderful real story is something like this:

> There were two brothers who were both cranking out the good behavior until the younger one asks the father for his inheritance and a day later packs his bags and heads for a distant country. He squanders his money, and lands up being hired to feed pigs. He finally comes to his senses because of his hunger, and prepares a little speech for his father: “Father I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I’ll crank out the good behavior in exchange for you taking me back and feeding me.” He then proceeds to return home, and when he is still far off in the distance His father sees him and runs off to meet him. The younger son is embraced by the father, and starts to recite his speech. But the father doesn’t listen to the speech. He gives him a ring, new threads, and holds a banquet in His child’s honor.
>
> The older brother finds out that his dad is holding a party for his younger brother and won’t go in to join in the festivities. His father comes out to plead with him. But the older son says, “I have been cranking out the good

[62] NIV

> behavior all this time, and not once did you hold a party for me and my friends. Don't you think that I deserve even that? Yet your younger son goes and squanders your wealth with prostitutes and look at how you reward him."

The moral of the story is this. If you want God's grace, then go to Him, don't do more, try harder, or crank out the good behavior to win God over to your side. God loves you whether you sin heavily or lightly. Your sin doesn't determine whether God loves you or not. God loves you because He is love. You can't earn God's favor in one area by doing right in another area.

However, there is one kind of sin that can block God's grace in so many areas of our lives. If we become or stay or grow in pride, and recklessly judge others behind their backs, then we will open the doors to doing worse than those we judge. Because when we judge we are saying that we are better than those we judge which is pride. Gossip is a manifestation of pride. The attitude that we ought to aim for is: "There go I but for the grace of God."

I used to judge those people who landed up homeless and addicted to street drugs or alcohol as being very unwise. I thought it would never happen to me because of my "great" wisdom. I now know that this was a very pompous and proud attitude. I now know that it doesn't matter how much moral resolve I have; I can land up living on the streets addicted to drugs or alcohol if the right circumstances are to come along. Yes, there go I but for the grace of God.

The Bible teaches us that we need to trust God for our salvation. He desires it more than we do our selves.

The prodigal son went back to his father not because he thought his father would be impressed, but because he was hungry for love, joy, and right living. He went hesitantly, knowing how he had treated his father in the past. He did not say boy my father will be impressed... if anything he felt ashamed for how he had treated his father... and he felt that it was possible that his father might reject him because of his previous bad behavior. But the father welcomes him. The Father had greater love than the prodigal expected. No sin can keep the Father from welcoming back His son. The prodigal son did not say to himself boy I am doing a great thing by going back to the father... just look at me... he will have to accept me based on my efforts... no, he knew that the father had a right to reject him just like he had rejected the father... but the father always loved the prodigal... and was willing to wait until his son figured it out that his father still loved him. It was the hope of his father's mercy that prompted the prodigal to find his way home… and it was the love from the Father that brought about repentance for the Prodigal: to leave everything behind and embrace the life that the father had for

him. It was the Father's love that motivated and restored the relationship with His son. When the son realized that he was loved unconditionally the relationship was healed.

Rightly directed repentance means that I let God clean me up. Notice, that the father in the above parable gives his younger son new threads, and these new threads are symbolic of repentance that bears good fruit. I don't repent and bear fruit all by myself (i.e. I don't clean myself up all by myself), and then go into the Father's presence. It is our Father who cleans us up, and that is the result of true repentance. The result of repentance is that I will bear good fruit to the Father's glory.

Notice that there are two parts to rightly directed repentance: (1) I accept God's lavish mercy and grace for me because I have a change of mind about where I'm at spiritually (i.e. I admit I have sinned, and I have sorrow or sadness for the sins I have committed, and then I approach God in faith because of His promises, by humbly confessing my sins to God), and (2) God's response to my plea for mercy (forgiveness) and grace (cleansing) by making me clean and holy (healthy) in conscience and action over time by forgiving and healing me. Notice that the prodigal son is so poor that he can't even change his own rags for good clothing, but he humbles himself and goes in faith and out of hope for his Father's mercy and grace anyways. And the Father lavishes that grace on His child.

Another important point is that the prodigal son was a child of the father because the father had fathered him: not because the son was ever worthy. So, the statement by the prodigal that he no longer was worthy to be a son is "literally" incorrect. But it does point to the son's admission that he does not deserve the privileges of being a son. Before the prodigal asked for his inheritance he was not worthy to be a son of the father. However, he had worth in the father's eyes. Conception and birth come before behavior. God's love comes before our behaviors. Our good behaviors ought to flow from God's life, love, and presence. They do flow from Him when we aren't using them to impress Him or others, or are attempting to get stuff from Him or others and not really caring for Him or them (Note: many people feel they only want God's blessings because they don't like their quiet times with God. This is sad because the devil has lied to them about who God is and what they can expect from Him in their quiet times. Yes, our quiet times can feel boring, useless, dry, empty, and a waist of time but not always. Yet the devil will try to use this uncomfortableness to get us to quit. Spending time in the presence of God no matter how it feels tells God that He matters, and is key to getting to know Him better instead of just about Him.)

Why I Believe God Wanted Jesus To Die for Us:

I do not believe in the Penal Substitution Theory of the Atonement. Our ugly sinful malice and hatred put Jesus on the cross. The god that breathes fire at one's least infraction and needs to punish his son on a tree just to vent his wrath so he could accept us is the way a lot of people see God. I would call this cosmic child abuse if it were true. Reading much from those who studied the early Church Fathers and reading about the history of Penal Substitution Theory I am forced to reject it as the way I personally explain the cross and redemption. I know that the way we see god/God determines the kind of people we are going to be.

J.R.R. Tolkien says in his trilogy, "The Lord of the Rings" that the history of the Ruling Ring was long and not fully known by any. I think the same is true about Salvation History. As far as the beginning in the Garden of Eden, all the motives, loyalties, longings, thoughts, and desires that went through Adam and Eve's minds and hearts, and where God stood at the time has not been clearly or fully revealed. With that said finding motivation for Jesus Passion can be tricky. I'm grateful to my current Bible Study for challenging me, correcting, and giving me focus on this important topic: The Atonement. They accept the Penal Substitution Theory in this area, whereas I don't…but they made some very good and healthy points that I now accept and which have brought stability to my mind and peace to my heart.

I see Jesus' Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection as a rescue mission orchestrated by the Trinity. With the Father in love (not anger) giving the Son to the world. The Son, Jesus who knew no sin entered "death" so He could absorb those people (who died in friendship with God) into Himself, so that when He rose from the dead (because death could not hold Him) those in Him would be made alive to newness of life. This solves the sin-problem for those who died in friendship with God. Jesus came to solve the sin problem. Also, for those who are still alive, when they are baptized into Jesus death through faith they are raised up into newness of life through Jesus' Resurrection (Cf. First Peter 3:21). So are fulfilled the words directed to Jesus in some church liturgies: "dying you destroyed our death, and rising you restored our life."

The new life (the Holy Spirit and grace) that we receive from Jesus through faith in His Passion/ and Resurrection are meant to fortify us against sin. Jesus came to save us from our sins and the consequences of sin, not His Father' wrath (Matthew 1:21). Nowhere in the Gospels does it say that God punished Jesus for our sins with (infinite) wrath. Many people wrongly read Penal Substitution into the many Bible Scriptures (OT and NT) that talk about Jesus dying for us and our sins. I think these verses are talking about Jesus rescuing us from our sins and their consequences. I whole heartedly believe that Jesus came to save us from our sins. He came to save us from further losing the image of God we were created in. The

worst thing that can happen to us is to lose the image of God that we were created with. There are many different theories on how the Atonement could possibly work. Penal substitution was not a view held by the early Church Fathers, and the way it is presented in Evangelical Churches started with the Reformation with people like Calvin.

Here are some of those verses that people who accept the Penal Substitution Theory of the Atonement use to try support their view:

Isaiah 53:4-6, 10, 11—"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all ... It was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin ... By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities." (RSV)

Romans 3:23-26—"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus." (NRSV)

2 Corinthians 5:21—"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (RSV)

Galatians 3:10, 13—"All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.' ... Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us - for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.'" (RSV)

1 Peter 2:24—"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."(RSV)

1 Peter 3:18—"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." (RSV)

I think these verses can be interpreted with the view that Jesus came to win our sanctification and was willing to pay for it with the pain we inflicted on Him.

The NT (Revelations 13:8) says that Jesus was crucified from the foundation of the

world. If that is true, and one believes in the Penal Substitution View of the Atonement, does that mean God was punishing Jesus for our sins from the foundation of the world? I don't think so. So, I reject the PST of the Atonement.

Can anyone buy your love? If yes, is it still love? Can anyone buy God the Father's love? If yes, then it isn't love. Jesus did not buy out God, so that God could love us. I therefore reject the PST of the atonement.

Penal Substitution motivates itself by saying that God is both Love and Holy. The holiness part is defined by some-kind-of "vague" unknowable "separated-ness". And it is this separated-ness that supposedly demands payment for sins by punishment. This payment was supposedly received from Jesus and inflicted by God the Father (God did not join us in our hostility towards Jesus on the cross). I ask, aren't we all commanded to live holy lives ourselves (Cf. 1 Peter 1:16)? Isn't our holiness supposed to reflect God's holiness? If so, then we are supposed to punish people when they sin against us because our holiness means we must reflect God's holiness in the Penal Substitution Theory of the Atonement if it were true. But we are not allowed to hurt others for hurting us instead we are to forgive. I rather like to think holiness means to be spiritual healthy, staying away from sin, and devoted to healthy love. God has this kind of holiness, and we are commanded to pursue it in the Bible. This kind of holiness does not demand punishment immediately when sin happens (Cf. Matthew 5:5,7). It longs for reconciliation, willingly forgives, heals, and is into restorative Justice from the get go (Jesus came to undo the works of the devil not finish the devil's work (Cf. First John 3:8)).

There are usually two forms of justice that are spoken about: restorative and retributive. I think there is a third: putting an end to injustices. We all deserve the consequences of our sins, but that doesn't mean we should relish it when people reap the horrible consequences that they sow. Sin is bad, and sin along with sin's consequences are the punishments for sin. Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit don't delight in the death of the wicked. God is not mean, and does not meanly punish anyone.

The places where Jesus gets angry in the Gospels are not where He is hateful of the people He is angry with. When Jesus tells parables where the bad guy gets his due He is not saying He hates the bad guy, He is saying He hates what the bad guy did. Jesus is slow to anger...but when the sin has run its course in rebellion hurting people and rejecting God's pleas all the way, God wants to put an end to it for justice sake. Often people think there are only two kinds of justice: restorative and retributive. God however, is gentle. Justice also means putting an end to an injustice. Those who dislike the "end" see it as retributive because the party has come to an end for them. Whatever happens after the injustice is stopped, will

depend on the attitudes of those involved in the situation. God can give people over to their sins, or He can restore them. No amount of punishment is going to undo the injustice. Only God is able to save.

The main reason Jesus died a cruel slow death was to show His love for us (not to appease the anger of a supposedly blood thirsty wrathful God). He died for you and me, for your sins and mine (Thank you Bible Study Group). He showed that He was willing to suffer excruciating pain (that led to death) for us while at the same time resisting any way out even though He could have ended it at any moment before or during His suffering took place. He wanted to show that He is willing to die for each of us so He could show just how great His love for us was and is. If we aren't willing to die for another person we can't possibly love them that much. Jesus did die for us and therefore showed His love for us to the fullest possible extent.

For a long time, I had a poorly informed understanding of why Jesus died through His Passion. In those days, I believed that Jesus became totally separated from and experienced the wrath of God the Father so that He could pay the penalty for our sins. But I'd later come to see that this was downright misguided in many ways even contradicting sacred Scripture.

I used to think that there was something "just" about Jesus being crucified because I got the word "flesh" confused with the word "body". I saw His "flesh" crucified on the cross as symbolic of our "body", "flesh" or "sin nature", that needed (past and present (continuous tense)) to be killed so that we could somehow be done with the dark side of our humanity. So, I saw our bodies as evil. But the human body is good not evil. It is not responsible for our "flesh" or "sin nature" that seeks to corrupt us. Even though Jesus' body was crucified, it did not kill our "sin nature". Jesus did not and has not a "sin nature" and His body was completely healthy. This bad theology leads to giving the "sin nature" more power and influence than it needs.

Now it is true that Christ died for our sins, so that we would not have to be separated from God forever in the Lake of Fire. But it is not true that God the Father vented His wrath on Jesus for our sake. The Son was, is, and will forever be precious to God the Father, and that means that He was also precious to Him during the Passion. God the Father has always loved the Son, and the Son has always loved the Father. Christ's Sacrifice on the cross was a sweet aroma to the Father, and pleased the Father because the act was done in utter and complete selflessness, that is, was done in absolute love. Jesus did what Adam failed to do. But that does not mean that Jesus was obligated to correct Adam's mistake. Isaiah 53 says Jesus' Passion was a travesty of justice meaning He owed us nothing. Yet it is true that Jesus suffered so we would not have to, but not by what some call

penal substitution or retributive justice.

A benefit that comes from Jesus dying comes from the old proverb: “You can’t judge a person until you have walked in her or his shoes.” The only fitting judge is Jesus because He died a cruel death without sinning that gives Him insight into our conditions, compassion for our situations, and solidarity with us in all our sufferings and trials.

Jesus became savior and judge through his sinless passion and death.

Jesus died for us as we humanity vented our poison on Him through His Passion, and He absorbed the poison of hatred, evil, pride, judging, contempt, hostility, cynicism, and anger in us as we directed it at Him, and He in the process can and does heal us. We are truly healed by Jesus’ stripes.

In a very mysterious way Jesus paid that price for us through His passion. But it must be emphasized that God is not like demon spirits that in the past demanded child-sacrifices through fires in order to appease the demon’s anger and grant safety or prosperity or acceptance to those sacrificing the children.

God can and does forgive freely, lovingly, compassionately, and mercifully; and has tied forgiveness to the cross for many reasons many of which are still hidden to us. The cross is a mystery that draws us in wonder to behold God’s love for us. God is not the “accountant type of god” who somehow needs to balance the books when it comes to the weight of our sins and Jesus’ suffering. With the thinking that He can’t give us freedom unless somebody proportionally loses it.

God wanted to show how strong His love is for us: He was willing to hang on a cross and die to express that love. An added benefit from this is that we have a perfect example to imitate when it comes to sacrificial love.

Jesus' cross (along with all our own crosses) represents our call to love. Jesus calls us to pick up our own crosses (accept our circumstances) and to follow Him each day. Love is sacrificial in nature... it can be a hard thing to do some of the time (making it so sought after and celebrated), so Jesus leads the way in showing us what love looks like by being our example even though He is not inclined towards sin. Jesus helps us to focus on love; not self. We are called to be love-centered; not self-centered.

When we believe in Jesus as Savior and Leader we become a part of the Bride of Christ through Baptism. And if we persevere in loyalty and holiness until death, we will inherit the fruits of Jesus’ Passion – the beatific vision.

However, that does not mean that as we sojourn here on earth and anticipate Heaven that God has left us on our own without cure or remedy to prevent us from committing serious sins endlessly. Indeed, by “Jesus’ stripes we are healed”

not so much from physical ailments (although that is a reality), but from the spiritual maladies in our hearts, souls and minds, and relationships. These spiritual maladies (such as deception, fear, pride, insensitivity, or addictions) can be removed. They can be removed when (1) we as members of Christ's body share in His suffering and are purified slowly over time through faith and humility by confession and repenting in prayer. And, (2) by believing the truth as taught from the Bible for two thousand years now, and renewing (or repenting) with the aid of God's grace with visibly transformed behavior as the good fruit. Jesus came to set us free from bondage to darkness. Those who persevere eventually win freedom to do much good and love. For a practical way to become free from addictions and character flaws see the essays called: "The Expanded Twelve Steps", and "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" from this Website.

The Path that Jesus calls us to walk is difficult. But He has promised to help us persevere through all our trials and promises that these trials are full of opportunities to grow in personal holiness (healthy), knowledge of God's goodness, and in the skill of love. Jesus by His Passion has shown us the way to reality, to meaningful giving, and to love.

Fact: I have sinned again and again, and so in some sense am separated from God because of it. Fact: Jesus came and was mutilated in the flesh so I could be healed in the spirit/ soul/ and mind and not have to be separated from God forever. Fact: God the Father did not punish His Son Jesus Christ through His Passion… indeed God was in Christ on the Cross reconciling the world to Himself. Fact: God loves unconditionally… but He does not owe us love.

Human Kind:

We are all made in the image of God. And since God is wholly good, we are also good. The only problem is that we all have emptiness, and darkness inside of us that can be described as death. This we inherited from our ancestors Adam and Eve. Since we are made in God's image, it means that each one of us is made for God and not for Hell or the Lake of Fire. We are given gifts at our conception: the natural loves that are a preparation for supernatural love that comes from God's Spirit. The emptiness, the darkness, and the death inside of us can only be cured by Jesus who seeks to give His Spirit of life whenever possible. The emptiness inside of us attracts us to sin, but also to God. Those vacuums within us are destined to be filled with God's supernatural life… but often we fill it with lesser things: idols. Many don't know their spiritual condition. God offers us all supernatural life. But the devil blinds whomever he can deceive. All goodness, beauty, and truth are preparations for the Good News of Jesus Christ. Each person has some goodness, beauty, and truth in them. If they didn't they would cease to exist.

I personally am learning that I can't judge or condemn anyone because I am not God. My judgments when it comes to judging people is fleshly, I don't have the authority or the grace to judge anyone. When I judge people I always discount them, rob them of their voice, humanity, and dignity in my meanness, and I am drawn to refuse mercy, and box people in…in doing so I judge like the devil does. When we have no wood in our eyes, then we can help people to see better…but this does not involve judging them. The energies are different: judging is black, whereas being invited to give an opinion in a non-mean way is God's way. God is judge (and He does not judge like the devil, God judges in love) … and has left the final judgment for the Last Day. Should I not let Him do the judging? He can have mercy on whomever He chooses. But we can condemn ourselves. May He continue to have mercy on us now and forever more. Amen!

Humility, Faith, And Works:

It is very easy to misunderstand others if one doesn't use the same lingo or terminology. I feel like I am swimming in waters way too deep for me most of the time when thinking about works and faith and how they relate to each other. So, I try to keep it simple: One can't earn one's salvation, and if anyone will go to heaven it is because that person's sins are forgiven through the Passion of the Christ whether they know it or not. For a long time, I could not read the books of Romans, James and Galatians without getting confused (and so tempted to think that the Bible was contradictory) about what Paul and James meant by faith, works, works of the law, and so forth and how they relate to each other.

I don't think that I know much about Salvation (the Bible says God's judgments are unsearchable), what I do have is faith, and I do hold onto the Promises of God regarding His salvation concerning me. I know that when I lived in Alberta I had compartmentalized my faith (which was also very legalistic at the time) and so I did not see that I had some (or many) contradictions concerning it.

I am certain that Jesus intended us to carry out His interpretation of the Ten Commandments as stated in Matthew 5:17-20. Some commandments in the Old Testaments were carried over to the NT as this passage indicates. In the OT, the commandments were viewed as the minimum requirements one needed to do to get by. But we NT Christians are under grace, not the OT Law; but strangely grace helps us aim higher than the OT Law. The devil attempts to push the OT Law to get us to measure, compare, and judge each other, and the more we depend on the Law to save us from sin and hell the more it becomes a burden, and actually frustrates our efforts leading us further into sin. Only Jesus can save us from sin. The Law only points out sin, it can't save us from sin.

The Law said to not steal or covet; Jesus said to give freely to the poor. The Law

said don't murder; Jesus said to love our enemies. The Law said to sacrifice cattle, bulls and sheep; Jesus called us to be living sacrifices. The Law said to commit no adultery; the NT says to love our spouses as ourselves. The Law said to not worship lifeless idols, Jesus offered true life for free. The Law said to honor our parents; Jesus said to take them into our homes, help them, and care for them. The Law said keep the Sabbath; Jesus said it is healthy to do good on the Sabbath. The Law said not to use the Lord's Name in vain; Jesus says we get to call God our Father. The Law said, "an eye for and eye", but Jesus said use non-violence to spread love. The Law said bear no false witnesses; Jesus said to speak the truth in love and not to judge or condemn people.

So Jesus' view of the OT Law was to raise it 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 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 just limit us to harm reduction but bring health, growth, and help kill selfishness, hostility, pride, and pleasure seeking.

Our understanding of little "t"-truths is not the source of our love, but we love with understanding. When truth breaks the lies in our lives, then we are free to love out of God's grace whose source in Jesus Christ. We access that grace by faith and becoming humble.

The OT Law is usually seen as a way to make things fair. It is seen as a way to get what is coming to us. It is seen as a justification for what we all deserve. Jesus' teachings and example remove this focus from His hears and gives a higher calling: love does not seek its own; do to others as you want done to yourself; give up everything that comes between you and love, and follow Jesus; for God is LOVE.

The purpose of the law was to lead us to Jesus. It was meant to prepare us for love. It only points out sin…it has no power to save us from sin.

Love does not ask for wages. So, love does not earn one's salvation. Salvation however needs to be worked out through fear and trembling as the Bible clearly states. If instead I say that I can earn my salvation by self-righteously keeping the moral law or the Ten Commandments, then I am way out of line. But I know that when I cooperate with God (which in part is my decision repeatedly whether I do or don't) in doing good works, then doing those good works prevent me from sinning, and so keep me in God's will so to speak. So, that James is right in saying that "we are not saved by faith alone".

Salvation is not just God forgiving one's sins, but God helping one to stay away from sin, and one stays away from sin by abiding in Jesus (Cf. First John and John

15) through faith in Him. The good works I complete are a result of God's grace (if I cooperate with Him at all), and that my faith is completed in love. I think that the book of Ephesians talks about being saved "unto" the good works that God prepared in advance for us to do. Faith if it is humble will cooperate with God in bringing about supernatural love. I know that Saint Paul said that the law was given to reveal sin. We aren't supposed to sin. So not sinning is in some way upholding the spirit (real intent) of the law not self-righteously, but with God's grace. By law here I mean the moral law, and not the entire Old Covenant, which as a whole cannot save but only points out sin. Again, focusing on the wholesome positivity, worth, meaning, and care found in Jesus raising the OT commands to new heights in His NT teachings and commands helps us stay away from sin, and often the temptation of sin with the grace offered by God. The OT Law is not highest; God's ways are higher still as taught by and lived out by His only begotten Son: Jesus Christ.

The law says what sin is, but it also says what love is indirectly. I want to love, and so I can't redefine or make up love as I go. The Moral law or Ten Commandments as re-interpreted by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (or Plain) is what Christ intends me to live out through Him by His grace. Without God's grace this is a futile business. I can't keep the spirit of the Law (love) by focusing foremost of the law or the Sermon on the Mount. I need to abide in Jesus by faith if I want to love supernaturally and unconditionally. Jesus needs to be my focus and joy. We are not under Law, but under grace.

How do we know if we have a Law-mentality or a grace-mentality?

We know we have a Law-focus when we have an agreement with somebody, that they violate in some small way, but then we have a major meltdown of self-pity, judging, and meanness within us that we don't necessarily outwardly express at the time although we can, but stuff it knowing it is ugly and wrong and ungracious.

A grace-mentality means we have a lot of wiggle room when it comes to letdowns by others, and we treat them not based on the Law (with "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" mentality) or by the letter of the supposed legal agreement, but with warmth, flexibility, kindness, gentleness, freedom, and compassion. Meanness is a sure sign of expectations gone wrong.

When we don't understand why our thoughts are unloving and ungracious, and our desires, commitments, and attitudes are in the wrong place, but deep down inside in our consciences we know they are wrong. Then going to God and reasoning with Him as we tell Him our emotions, worries, fears, commitments, thoughts, and bad-attitudes, and cold thoughts through our stories, asking for His wisdom, will allow and enable His light, insight, and wisdom to penetrate our

darkened thoughts and melt our cold attitudes into loving ones as He speaks new thoughts into our minds through our thoughts in the here and now. And this means transformation from the inside out as God's grace and truth set us free.

This is best done by holding onto to the promises of God: if we seek Him with all our hearts we will find Him; Ask and you will receive; Those people who come to God must believe He is good and a rewarded of those who seek Him.

Having a vocabulary for inner emotions/ attitudes/ and energy that are unwholesome is very important. It allows us to pray more strategically and to destroy the sin-strongholds within us. I have developed this vocabulary in the Essay: "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" found in this Website. I know that I have had "really" bad energy within me and the vocabulary in the mentioned Essay has helped to deal with it. Also, there have been times when my energy has been so bad, with me not knowing where it came from, that to deal with it I felt the energy and put the emotions/ attitudes into words as I connected with them, and this revealed to me the exact diagnosis and applicable vocabulary which enabled me to pray through it until it was killed and replaced with positive, clean, holy, healthy energy/ and attitudes.

Pastor Jim Richards made some comments on the TV program called, "My New Day" that have cleared a lot of confusion in my life where the tension between Grace and Law has been.

> First he says that: Jesus' teaching in the Gospels ought to be viewed as wisdom and not rules. They ought to be viewed as prescriptions intended to bring about healthy relationships between me and everyone else. We are called to love; and the New Testament teaches us that love is the fulfillment of the Law. So our love will look like that Law when acted out [but goes deeper and higher through grace].

I wish to build my house on the rock: Jesus who grants His grace (strength and presence) and love to enable me to with His wisdom love others. If I don't build my life on Jesus, then I will lose my faith. Talk about paradox: Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy." Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus said, "Anyone who attempts to save his life will lose it."

<u>Human Nature, Sinful Nature, & New Nature:</u>

Some people think that each human's human nature is completely evil. They say that not only is the knowledge of evil granted to us from the tree in the garden of Eden bad but also the knowledge of good. They further say that the knowledge of good granted by the tree is unable to please God in any way. I think this to be true (Cf. the Essay called, "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" from

this Website and how I describe the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil there). But we do have consciences. God has put some good in us. We are made in His image after all. His light does shine into our minds/ hearts/ and consciences too even before we have a peaceful relationship with Him.

Me being a Christian I want to listen to the Bible, and the Holy Spirit speaking through the church. And so, I hear one source say that "all goodness, truth, light, and beauty are a preparation for the Gospel". So, I believe it. In the book of Acts (Chapter 10) Cornelius (who was a gentile) was said to fear God and do right (and so was acceptable to God) before he heard about Jesus Christ and accepted Him as Savior. Point is... he had not received the new nature before conversion and yet could please God before accepting Jesus anyhow. Somehow Cornelius received special graces or power to love in a way that pleased God before he received the Good News and the new nature. To me this means that his human nature was not totally corrupt. "If someone were wholly evil, then he or she would drop out of existence."[63] Both the Old and the New Testaments say that God gives His grace to the Humble, but that He opposes the proud. So, God's grace in varying degrees was available to people before Jesus was born because there were humble people before Jesus walked the earth, and is now still available to whoever humbles her or himself also afterwards.

This means that human nature is not equal to what some call "the sinful nature" before conversion or after it. Moreover, we are made in the image of God and God never creates totally (absolutely) corrupt evil creatures. Whatever God creates has some virtue, has some goodness, has some beauty, has some hope, has some dignity, and was made for God Himself: such is the case as far as all humans are concerned. That goodness, beauty, and truth are not meant to say that we don't need God, and neither are they meant to be put into the service of earning God's approval. They are a preparation for supernatural love. Related to this, is the following question:

Is there such a thing as a sinful nature?[64] Yes, I think there is such a dysfunction operating in all our lives. To discount it is unwise. If there were not a sin nature called the flesh operating in our lives, then we could become sinless in this life, and that is not possible as far as my experience tells me, and Scripture points it out too.

To kill the stronghold of Pride and the related attitudes completely in this life is

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[63] I am in debt to friend Alex Pruss for this insight.

[64] I am in debt to Jeff Van Vonderen, "Tired of Trying To Measure Up", Bethany House Publishers © 1989, for showing me the power of this idea.

not possible. We can destroy the strongholds though, but we will always have the flesh to deal with. It's natural to feel, experience, and agree with it to some degree when confronted with stuff we do not expect or when others make requests we have not counted on. Trying to kill it all is not wise, is very unhealthy, and comes from a perfectionistic mindset. Perfectionism should not be worshipped. It is unhealthy to want to be too righteous. When we expect too much from ourselves we will expect it too much from others and make their lives as miserable as ours. Perfectionism leads to judging, and perfectionism tries to do it all by oneself because God is not in it.

Christians carry a cross; that cross is our labor of love knitted to our circumstance and our sinful natures. We aren't better than non-Christians. We have much to learn from people of other faiths. If we can't learn from others, then we have become proud and closed-minded.

A Final Word on Humility:

A truly righteous or humble person is one who means it when they say, "I have sinned" despite what others might say when in fact they have sinned. It doesn't matter how rarely one sins, or what one's record is of how many days, weeks, months, or years one goes without doing a sin. A holy person not only knows how far they have come without doing particular sins, but they can see just how far they still must go. Even if they have freedom from doing certain sins, they will still experience concupiscence this side of Heaven, and they may "actually" give in during weak moments.

Humility is very hard to see in others because we as humans can't see into the hearts of others and perceive their motives. We even have difficulty in seeing our own motives. Therefore, we need faith in Jesus the light. We need to trust Him that He will guide us, and lead the way into the beatific vision – the glory of God.

I also know that I haven't scratched the surface of what it means to practice humility. As the days, and weeks pass I am learning more and more about how to walk in the Freedom to love that God promised me so many years ago. I am learning that I cannot focus on only one single principle to do this. The more we rush to and focus on one principle to the exclusion of other worthy truths, the more distorted our practice of love, humility, faith, and prayer will become. We need to be open to recalling when appropriate any of the truths that the Lord has revealed to us in the past up to the present. The Holy Spirit will reveal to us what we need at each moment to ensure a path to freedom and love! He will reveal new truths, and insights into older ones that we did not see before too as is needed.

When one lives according to rules of good and evil alone and measures oneself by

them, then the focus is on the rules and oneself (not God and people who we are called to love) and pride will be the natural outcome if one is successful. But when we abide in the true Vine – Jesus through humility, 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 naturally love and find joy in Jesus because He is the true joy for those who discover His beauty. We will, if we patiently await it, be transformed by God into clay vessels of His love.

God does not need our worship. We need to worship Him. Why? Because when we don't worship God, then we get proud and arrogant. And that pride leads away from authentic natural and supernatural loves and leads to envy, judging, contempt, hatred, hurt, and death. I need to and want to worship God more and more because I still have lots of pride. I quoted Jesus somewhere else in this Website when He said the following:

> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.[65]

I had wondered for some time what the salve represented spiritually. I knew it was medicine that healed the eye so that it could let light into the eye. So why do the eyes not let all the light in? Three words: pride or shame or lies. Pride and shame and lies destroy our ability to see: either distorting or blocking it out completely. What is it in the salve that heals our pride or shame? God's touch: love is not that we first loved, but that God first loves us. Sometimes salve is the gentle touch (beauty, mercy, compassion, truth, or fullness of joy) from God that warms our hearts and helps us to see more clearly. Otherwise it is the circumstances of life: illnesses, hardships, injuries, poverty, limitations, emptiness, pain, or suffering that come our way that lead our hearts closer to God and reality. I have been touched in both ways.

An approach that leads to humility is to not to seek to be a good person. Instead seek to love and do no harm to others. The former is "I" focused. The latter is "other" focus. The former leads to pride. The latter leads to healthy spiritual growth.

<u>Humility:</u>

[65] Revelation 3:17-19, (emphasis mine)

Many people see actions, or postures as evidence of humility. They will see carrying a Bible to church as evidence of their piety (but Hitler carried his Bible to church); they may see saying an eloquent prayer as being righteous but not realize they are proud and can be verbally abusive comments; they might see saying forty-decades of the Rosary as a sign of piety but hold a grudge against the person who took the seat in the pew in the morning Mass. Humility is managing our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and relationships in a healthy manner. Holiness is about wholeness, and it is about spiritual health. It doesn't see its contribution to relationship with God or others as something to boast about. It is impressed with God, not one's own conduct, morals, values, or attributes.

I know that I am flawed in many ways. I still see my pride at work in my life every day even after much suffering. I have room to grow in becoming humbler. I know that, "there but for the grace of God go I." Lord God please show mercy to me a sinner. Thanks!!!

Jesus said: "You cannot serve two masters at once: you will either hate one or despise the other: you cannot serve both God and money at once!"

Pride believes that we have something to boast about before God; to fight this I have been told a healthy tactic is to admit how ridiculous this actually is! In that vein:

A few weeks before Sunday, January 25, 2015 I realized again that we all give accounts to God of ourselves when we die. At the time, I told myself that I did not fear this because I had tried so hard to overcome my sins with pain and failure being my wages. I thought at the time that I had done my best and that God could not find fault with that. Problem is: God rewards faith not pride. God wants us to care…to care for others…! Fact is I am making progress but only when God grants it. Yes, there have been a lot of failures…but also a lot of battles won through faith in Jesus. He gets the praise, the glory, and the booty.

Pride tries to control or manipulate things and people. Therefore, it looks for signs in one's circumstances for optimism or confidence that it's manipulating is going well. Only problem is circumstances change all the time…and people often don't give us what we want. Circumstances can have a lot of "cons" besides "pros". So, circumstances aren't a good place to find hope or security…so we feel insecure because we don't see the sure thing in our circumstances. To counter this, we need to look for hope in God not our circumstances…this requires faith and trust. Negative thoughts can enter the mind and make us feel down and insecure which re-enforce the negative thoughts that in turn re-enforces the negative feelings…etc. We got to renew our minds with correct thinking and right believing. Not all thoughts are to be trusted. Truth sets free in thoughts and beliefs to love. I

think this paragraph ties together pride, insecurity, hope, thoughts, and belief. From it a strategy can be used to fight the devil and his lies. Oh, yes where there is pride there is judging…do a Google search on "how to kill pride." I did, and found some good pointers on how to fight pride too.

Realizing that God does not share His glory with anyone else is key too! Setting up God as number one in one's day-to-day life also curbs pride; and everyone else like myself. Finally giving God glory kills unhealthy pride when we achieve, or are complimented, or see our left hand wanting to pat our right hand. Making it a top priority each day to worship God is another pride killer when done in humility. Pride is slimy…it won't be mastered easily because it finds its way into our lives like a snake in the grass…it easily gets to us. So, the war is never over…each battle is key…and battles will continually present themselves. Remembering the cross is pivotal too…and remembering that it was our sins that crucified Jesus…and any sin alive still tries to crucify Jesus. In remembering the cross as a means to killing the strongholds of pride…the penal substitution view is the wrong path or paradigm to take. A restorative-justice path is the healthy one, and very helpful.

The first beatitude found in the Sermon on the Mount is: "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit." In today's language, this means, "Blessed are the humble." That is what the Sermon on the Mount hinges on. That is what this Essay hinges on. Not a false humility… but one that is nurtured through relationship with God through Jesus Christ through faith. Faith is not a force that we muster and exert, or a technique that gets God's attention and makes Him love us more. No! Faith is like opening a door that lets Jesus into our lives, so we can talk with him and He with us, so that we can have community, and touch one another in love and grow in fellowship. This allows Him to grow us in love…and so be a blessing to others we know now and have still to meet.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT?

It is that I remember the God who looks like Jesus: who came to undo the works of the devil…who approaches us who are sinners yet with care, compassion, kindness, good intent, and peace. He is warmly affectionate…not rigid, not draconian, not coldly stern and not anally demanding. He smiles at me and draws me close…I am not an orphan spiritually. The maxims and principles above have their place but God is love and heals all things in His time.

So many lessons had to be learned by me for all the above connections to be made; this will only go on. I am in debt to so many who contributed in anyway over the years. Like I have said before… all principles have limitations. The above principles don't cover everything including the topic where the wounds we get

make us hurt others in return. See the Essay called "The Expanded Twelve Steps" from this Website for that topic and many more.

HEALING: PRIDE, RELATED VICES AND THEIR BAD FRUITS:

Saying no to pride is a day-to-day affair. But we can't get stuck only trying to say no pride the rest of our lives, we got to grow humility too. Killing Pride's strongholds can be done. But there will always be battles. On how to kill Pride's strongholds and their related vices and fruits, and to replace them with humility and love, checkout the link from this Website below:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/DismantlingTheTree.pdf

When one sees progress in practicing the virtues of love, respect, humility, and kindness one should not hang one's hat on them and say: "See I'm good with God". Growth is good! Yay! But it is safer to see them as fruits from one's faith in Jesus. Faith saves us, not works, but faith without works is dead. Let's keep this tension in mind. It only takes one hole for a ship to sink. Thank God for the grace pump that keeps us from sinking from our holes of sin, lack of understanding, blindness, and sour attitudes. God is a God of grace: unconditional love, patience, tolerance, compassion, reality, and peace.

CONCLUSION:

I find it interesting how easy it is to expound on truths, ideals, humility, morality, love, and spiritual maxims when not exposed to raw reality where the stakes are high and life and choices and consequences draw us to compromise. The film series called, "Criminal Justice" made me more aware of this than ever…Under the right circumstance I bend, squirm, I get tempted, want to fold, want to give up (even if I don't give up), and I'm willing to compromise. Life is so tricky; sin is so sticky. I needed this film…it shows me that even though I have convictions, that when they get tested, doubts, fears, self-preservation, anger, weakness, temptation and the will to escape are not far from my will longings, and thrust…or energy. So, I conclude that understanding humility is not the same as practicing it, or willing to pay the price to live it out, and to remain committed to it through thick and thin.

Another point that the movie raises, that I wrongly complained about in so many murder mysteries I watched on TV, in the cinemas, or read about in books over the years, is that we often don't know who did it until the very end…and often the culprit isn't even a character in the story until very near the end. I am struck by how this scenario not only plays out in the murder mysteries all the time, but also situations in my life that have nothing to do with murder. I have found that I have assumed or jumped to the conclusion that I had all the evidence in front of me so many times only to realize later that I did not have the full picture…and would

have made some pretty bad decisions if God had not convinced me to do otherwise despite the pull on me to judge, passing sentence, and doing self-righteous things. Thank God for a conscience!

Different Kinds of Pride:

Here I am going to attempt to categorize different kinds of unhealthy pride and how they function. The medicines to be heal them are found in the Essay called: "Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/DismantlingTheTree.pdf.

Here are some different characteristics of Pride:

All unhealthy pride is tolerated by God because He is gracious loving and compassionate towards us (He does not hate us for it), and He loves us more than we do ourselves and is closer to us than we are to ourselves. God does not share His glory with anyone. As far as Salvation to Heaven is concerned: there will be no boasting on our part because Salvation is a gift from God. Even the good works we do in cooperation with God are achieved through faith…and faith is a gift from God. So ultimately all praise goes to God.

There are many kinds of pride. Pride in general says I am more important or better than others. In general pride is an exaggeration or distortion of how we see ourselves to look better than what we are or when compared with others. Here are some of pride's manifestations:

Pitfall Pride occurs when we think no one has it as good as us and so we are better than or more special than others. Problem is that we will be tempted to sabotage other people's efforts to improve beyond us…this may have to do with keeping our reputations, achievements, material goods, opinions, reputations, and experiences from fading so that we will continue to be number one in our communities.

Pity Pride occurs when we think no one has it as bad as us and so somehow everyone owes us. It keeps us from loving and meeting others where they are at. It confuses us and keeps us from loving others more deeply. It aids us in being parasites instead of a givers and nurturers.

Idol Pride masquerades as humility. This kind of pride occurs when people give thanks and glory for their good fortunes to the supposed powers of crystals, good luck charms, stars, planets, demons or any other thing instead of to God. People who practice this kind of pride know that giving them selves all the glory isn't being humble. Instead, they give glory to impersonal forces that have no idea about moral judgments, but whose power they believe they can harness. And so they attribute sole responsibility for the growth in their physical wealth,

knowledge, intelligence, or goodness to these idols. They refuse to give thanks to Him who knit them together in their mothers' womb.

The problem with idol pride is that it fails to give credit where credit is due.

Moroni Pride occurs when we give more credit or honor to others than what they deserve. In other words, we land up giving them more glory/ honor than they deserve only so that they will accept us. The problem with this kind of pride is that we are living a lie. When we give a compliment more to lift us up than to encourage others. This kind of pride is full blown when we start to deify others and ourselves thinking that we will one day be gods equal in glory to the one who created us. There is only one God – the trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There will always only be one God.

Conceited Pride is sort of like Moroni pride but different. I got this definition from a sermon at church: "A person who is conceited is empty of honor. Such a person believes they deserve more recognition than they are receiving. Such a person draws attention to themselves. They are honor hungry. They are always competing, and always comparing. Conceited persons provoke and disrupt. Conceited persons are both envious and proud. When envious they feel inferior; when they are proud they feel they are superior."

Friendship Pride occurs when we put out a false image of ourselves up in order to win friends that have things we want (such as reputations, money, influence, work, holiness, pleasures…etc.). Once we get what we want we will jettison those that are no longer needed, and focus more on other goals. We land up caring more for what we can get from certain people than caring for those actual people: We have set up an idol as opposed to loving people; and setting up idols is always done out of pride.

I Am Right Pride occurs when somebody does a wrong to us and we don't work towards forgiving the person. We instead feel justified in our coldness and harden our hearts, orientate our attitudes towards tit-for-tat, or let our desires for revenge against the persons who piss us off grow. This kind of prides goes against grace: caring for people no matter where they come from, are at, and where they are going.

Pride of Rejection occurs when a person wants to be accepted too much by others (and refuses to take "No" for an answer), and eventually gets rejected. Out of the rejection the person may decide to aim at some sort of perfection hoping that she or he will be liked as a result… but in the process he or she becomes a judgmental person. The "to be liked" motive translates into becoming a people pleaser; and the "judgmental-ism" translates into insensitivity: I'm better than you. Hence they become insensitive people pleasers. Such people land up doing everything to be

liked… so their love becomes jaded… and their ability to love becomes more limited. Because they want their own way too much they become very selfish, and land up seeing everything out of their brokenness. The judgmental-ism can turn into meanness or hatred. Those who travel down this road may land up joining groups or clubs that persecute others to create a sense of belonging or community. But the community is shallow, empty, dead, and imperfect.

Those who are rejected by others, and really want their own way might demand that others love them or accept them. If this is the case, then they might turn to self-pity each time they are rejected or ignored. When they do this over and over again they will get a negative mentality, see things in a jaded fashion, and judge others to be proud without evidence. They judge others to be proud because they see the rejection by others as rooted in some sort of pride: after all the rejected person might say: "I'm not good enough for them… so they must be proud… after all I am a good person!" When one demands friendship, or desires it too much friendship is often not granted.

Pride of Love occurs like this. Suppose that one has done a virtuous act. When one starts broadcasting to others the fact that one has performed the act then the act spoils… and it spoils because one couldn't keep silent (one has gotten one's reward already). One spoke about it because one had the pride of love.

Praying Pride occurs when while praying we are focused on how "rich", "insightful", "biblical", and "holy" our prayers are instead of being impressed with the God of all glory. The point being that while in God's presence He ought to be our focus because He is greater than our prayers, motivations, and spirituality. He is the point of existence not us. The world revolves around Him not us.

*Self-Important Pride (*also called pompous pride) occurs when one becomes the most important person in one's life because one thinks one is better than at least one other person. One knows one has this kind of pride when one gives a picture of one self as a gift to a person whose birthday it is. All joking aside we all have self-important pride from one degree to another. When we try to control others so that we will feel peace (by having our way), then our peace (and desires) are more important than those we are trying to control. We therefore have self-important pride because we care less for others than our selves. We can own; we can seek to own; or we can be owned. We can control; we can seek to control; or we can be controlled. Either way one will be dealing with either giving into or dying to pompous pride.

The counter part to pompous pride is meekness. Meekness is when we exercise our higher rights to give up lower rights. It means to healthily handle our anger; for Jesus it means He is slow to anger. Meekness means to give up our pettiness

and to choose our battles wisely. Meekness means to give to others rather than to demand from others. Meekness opposes meanness. Meekness means being kind, and not abrasive to people.

One can seek to make the world over to suit one. This causes chaos, arguments, and conflicts because pompousness tramples over other people's values, desires, or boundaries. No one can always have his or her own way: not even God does. One can seek to own property so that one will be at peace or secure. But any peace that depends on owning something can be taken away. This doesn't mean owning things is always wrong. But it does mean that motives often control or determine the outcomes: good fruit or bad fruit.

Losing Pride means having to win each game and not being able to enjoy a game unless one is winning. This is a sign of childish immaturity. It is based in selfishness and jealousy. Many children have such attitudes and many don't outgrow them. People who are more interested in the scoreboard than the beauty of the game in their opponents' skills and strategies have losing pride. People who have this kind of pride might fall into hating those they compete against. We ought to respect those we compete against because they make us better when we embrace a humble, respecting, and learning attitude.

Pompous Pride also means that one hates any weakness, ugliness, stupidity, or incompetence in others, and so one can't love others. One also lands up hating oneself. Hating becomes one's motivation/strength.

Closed-Minded Prides: There are two such prides:

Closed-Minded Pride (I) occurs when one closes one's mind fully to the truth and no longer allows others to teach us because of pride. This is so easily fallen into; I had this sort of pride shortly before I became ill with schizophrenia. One knows that one has this kind of pride when one judges any speaker to be proud before they have said anything one way or another. Closed-minded pride (I) occurs when one is no longer open to honest advice from friends, co-workers, supervisors, bosses, teachers, preachers, or parents who have more wisdom or have traveled further in this life than we have and so speak with authority. This kind of pride says, "I'm going to do things my way." The problem with this kind of pride is that it judges itself to be self-sufficient and despises those who try to help as idiots.

Closed-Minded Pride (II) has more to do with an inability to learn new concepts out of pride independent of who puts forth the concepts to our hearing. Accepting or seeing things the way they are is very important when it comes to learning and being open to new ideas. It is also an important ingredient to becoming humble or teachable.

A closed-minded person can't accept or access things for what they are without

great effort (whether the ideas are controversial or not). A closed-minded person has a fixed way of looking at things. A closed-minded person has difficulty embracing new ideas. A closed-minded person is closed minded because of pride (thinking they know something) and judging (others as not knowing as well as they do). A closed-minded person has the mentality of, "I am right you are wrong." Such a mentality is rooted in pride and will bear a judgmental attitude. Closed-minded people are loyal to what they think they know. Closed-minded people think they know things… when in fact their intuition is more warped in general than others because of pride and judging. Closed-minded people go by what they think they know… whatever doesn't relate or tie in with what they think they know they can't absorb or build upon except with great effort. Closed-minded people are out to impress or out do others when it comes to opinions on contested or controversial topics. Closed-minded people have difficulty listening to others and absorbing what others say, because they are more interested in their own opinions or impressing others.

Open-minded people are able to take in a lot more information generally speaking than closed-minded people. Open-minded people are more able to see and acknowledge the truth if any in what others have to say than closed-minded people do. Open-minded people aren't into conspiracy theories or sniffing out the dirty laundry in the lives of people who don't fit in the "right" or "acceptable" boxes closed-minded people construct. Open-minded people don't look down on others nearly as often as closed-minded people do. Open-minded people are generally humbler than closed-minded people are.

Hateful-Prides: There are four kinds of such pride:

The first kind I'll call *Hateful-Pride* (I) and it occurs when one might want to change one's behavior, learn new things, or achieve certain goals in accordance with one's own desires through self-hatred. One problem with this is that self-hatred requires relief. We weren't designed to continually feel discord within our souls. If one builds one's life with this kind of pride it will ultimately collapse. Pride always goes before a fall. A humble person will accept Jesus' invitation to learn from Him how to live life.

Hateful-Pride (II) occurs when one starts to hate oneself out of pride because one has hurt someone else in a way that seems unforgivable in one's own eyes. One reason for the hatred and pride is a misplaced shame for getting oneself into a situation (in the first place) where one (actually or seemingly) has hurt another (usually in minuscule ways). The thinking goes like this: "I'm better than this, how could I have done this? I hate myself...if only I had of done the opposite. I am sure that so and so won't forgive me now, or look at me in the same way as before. I am sure they will think less of me. I therefore hate myself. I can't possibly forgive

myself. Is there anyway I can get out of this without the bad deed being revealed? Gee…I hate myself. Boy I feel guilty." Hateful-pride (II) is rooted in what one thinks others will think about one self once the bad deed has been brought out into the open. I did this often until God pointed it out to me. I am still tempted to fall into hateful-pride (II), and the only way out of it for me has been to confess the situations when they arise to God, and to repent where appropriate. There is a difference between sorrow for and hatred of oneself after one has done something wrong. If one grovels one may be in the habit of practicing hateful-pride (II).

A humble person knows she or he is not perfect; and realizes that no one else in their right mind sees them as perfect. And they are able to confess their sins to others in a contrite (sorrowful fashion) and with hope that healing and forgiveness will result so that each relationship can grow and mature.

Hateful-Pride (III) occurs when somebody gets angry with another person (God or human) because that somebody became disappointed with the person for not coming through for her or him in a way they had their hearts set on. This kind of anger is powerful because we see ourselves as victims and that some law or fairness was violated. We might have been promised BIG things and were willing to give so long as we got what we wanted. When the BIG thing doesn't materialize then we get angry and full of self-pity. When it comes to our relationship with God we have to realize that He will let things happen to us that our parents would never dream of letting happen to us. God owes us nothing. He does love us though. Yet part of becoming mature means that we tolerate those people that are difficult to handle or don't do what we desire. It also means that we are able to accept that we won't always get what we want. So what is wrong with Hateful pride (III)? It is based in selfishness: "Give me what I want or screw you." Those who have hateful pride (III) seek to use others, and not treat them in the way God commands us to. Not obeying God is always done out of pride when we know what God commands because we think we know better. Such is a state of insanity.

Hateful-Pride (IV) is perhaps the worst kind of hateful pride. Its genesis occurs when others reject one… and one says in reaction to the hurt: "Well yeah… I hate you too" out of one's anger; instead of turning the other cheek. Insensitivity results from such pride because anger births hatred that in turn births insensitivity. This shows itself by being unable to feel another's sorrow or hurt. Or it shows itself by bitter criticism, judging, talking behind another's back, and hurting others. Often those with this kind of pride don't realize what they are doing as evil. Hateful pride might also turn hatred into hurting others through physical abuse. Almost everyone sees this as wrong, but people caught up in it have great difficulty in saying no to it. Why is hateful pride (IV) called a pride?

Because we ignore God's will by failing to: "turn the other cheek" like Jesus commanded.

Not Forgiving Myself Pride occurs when we try to motivate right behavior by threatening un-grace on ourselves. This usually involves making the vow to not forgive ourselves if our shameful actions were to become known to others. The belief is that we think that we need to be hard on ourselves to perform. When we vow to not forgive we cut ourselves off from God's grace… and that grace is what we most need. Because it enables us to turn away from shameful actions.

Reactionary Pride occurs when our bad behaviors make us compensate or alter our theologies in bad ways. Have you ever noticed that there are those that are definitely very hard on them selves, but when they speak theology they are very liberal. Then there are those who let sin reign within their mortal bodies and yet who are extremely conservative or fundamentalist in their theology. Both of these groups of people are reacting in a bad way to their behaviors by altering their theology. We need to be somewhere in the middle: not hard on ourselves, and at peace with our theology and opinions not trying to compensate or change our opinions because of problematic or immoral life styles. Having said this, I must say that our behaviors will have an effect on our theology to some degree even if we are not hard on ourselves and don't let sin reign in our bodies. We know that we have some sanity if we aren't extreme: having too much distance between our behaviors and opinions. True understanding shows itself in good deeds.

We might also have some deeds in our lives that our inherited or embraced faith traditions teach us are wrong, but because we can't seem to give them up we alter our world-views to be accepting of those behaviors. We do this because we don't want to live with the guilt. We might also develop theologies that justify our actions. I know because I did this very thing. It wasn't until I had a change of mind based on truth that God miraculously changed my heart and therefore my actions. Having said this it does not mean that inherited or embraced faith traditions are always right. We can rightly reject teachings that our clean conscience informs us to reject. One needs wisdom…it is so easy to be deceived.

Pride of Manipulation occurs when one tries to manipulate another into liking or forgiving oneself for a bad deed done in the past. I have done this in the past and I am still tempted to do it after I do a wrong. The problem with this kind of pride is that one thinks that one can make up for bad deeds by doing supposedly good deeds. One is trying to earn the forgiveness and friendship of the person that was wronged. Jesus made forgiveness legal. We need to respect those whom we offended to make up their own minds freely on whether to forgive us or not. Groveling is a type of manipulation and goes against humility. Closely related to this is:

Hollow Pride (I) (also known as conceitedness) is when you are worried about what others think about you while at the same time you can't let it go, and so you also plot and under take ways to manipulate others to see you in a better light.

Hollow Pride (II) (also known as the heard instinct) is when you care more about what strangers think than what your family or close ones' care about. Many teenagers have this kind of pride. Many teenagers don't out grow this kind of pride.

Rebellious Pride is when we set aside what God has to say in order to listen to and do something sinful that is inspired by either ourselves or someone else. Its flaw is that it gives credence to less trustworthy creatures' falsehoods instead of to a God who is infinitely wise, truthful and loving. All fallen creatures have this kind of pride. Having said this, I must say that all humans have the capacity to be vehicles of God's wisdom in particular areas. Rebellious pride goes against that wisdom.

Snobbish Pride (also known as contempt) occurs when we look down on others with a sense of superiority either because of knowledge (real or imagined), intellect, physical ability or appearance, spirituality, culture, race, or economic positions in society. As for snobbish intellectual pride… we know we have it when we look down on others who come to certain revelations that we had in the past and that we no longer celebrate. Snobbish pride can also mean that we point our fingers towards others in critical or judgmental fashions that don't live up to our ideas of perfection and not realize that we do the same. We can be all focused on correcting others while neglecting ourselves and if we do, then we have snobbish pride. We have snobbish pride if we can't listen to others or can't learn from others. Snobbish pride also occurs when we put down others in our mind wrongfully accusing them of being pompous, because they have something special that we'd like.

Merciless Pride: A proud person is one who thinks his or her sins aren't as bad as anyone else's, i.e.) they judge someone's or even everyone else's sins to be far worse than their own. When this operates in a person's life judging others comes naturally to them even if they don't want to judge. Fundamentalist Christians do this when they judge homosexuals harshly but turn around and judge their own sins as acceptable or not as bad. People who do this handicap themselves when it comes to loving those they see as different from themselves.

Denominational Pride: Is much like spiritual pride in that this occurs when one criticizes or bad-mouths another denomination or faith tradition. This can be done in private, or community settings, sermons, and even at Bible Studies. We all have flaws so we ought not judge others to be worse than we are. One can't compare apples with oranges…no one knows the full histories, dynamics, blind-spots,

loyalties, and motives for why people do what they do. No one has a monopoly on the truth.

Slaughtering Pride occurs when we criticize other people's efforts whether in sports, art, philosophy, engineering, design, hobbies, work, acting, cooking, baking, or whatever else others do to preoccupy their time with. When we do this we slaughter our own creativity too. We do so because everything that comes our way we look down upon. So we slaughter every attempt to improve, create, or achieve in our lives or those belonging to others.

Spiritual Pride: There are many kinds of such pride. When we split the activities in our lives into categories of "spiritual" and "un-spiritual", then we can be tempted into giving spiritual pride a foothold. This occurs when we judge other people's activities to be inferior to ours because we think our actions are more spiritual in nature. We know this is happening when we say to ourselves, "at least we're not as bad as others", or when we get happy while comparing our deeds with those of others. Spiritual pride may also take a foothold when we lose interest in so-called worldly pursuits such as listening to secular music, watching movies that aren't totally clean; and shunning the reading of books by authors that aren't Christian. Spiritual pride also takes hold when we think we know something (like spiritual truths) and think we have understanding of those truths and yet don't practice those truths. We only have understanding if we practice what we believe.

Pride in Possessions is alive and well. It doesn't stop to amaze me how advertisers continually feature newer and cooler idols to worship. They promise "dependability", "enlightenment", and "fullness of life" in order to entice willing buyers. But these are all lies. Only Jesus can come through on these promises. All material goods will eventually break down. It is also amazing how full of self-importance people become when they own something that others don't have.

Pride of Vanity occurs when we speak for our own glory sake instead of to love, or instead of wanting to glorify the God from whom all wisdom, intelligence, and insight comes from.[66] It is the Light that first exposes things for what they are, not the eye.

Pride in Giving occurs when we give time, words, material wealth, or affection to others more to impress than to bless them.

Competitive Pride occurs when we compete with others in an unfriendly manner. The problem with it is that when we compete in an unfriendly manner we aren't open to love. It also keeps us from being open to other people's advice. Unfriendly

[66] Cf. John 7:18

competition happens not just in Sports or the market place, but also in the hearts of proud people everywhere. For instance, if one has undergone hardship of some kind, one might brag about it, instead of feeling the pains of those who are mourning. The heart that stays on the road of love will come to this fork in the road: she or he will have to ask herself or himself, "Do I affirm and comfort those who are suffering, or do I judge them as whiners because they are not going through what I went through?" Unfriendly competitors see strength as a virtue, and ridicule out of pride the weak, the slow, the learning, the hurting, and the weeping. They have no patience for incompetent people.

Successful Pride is when one can't keep things in proper perspective after accomplishing a goal and one gets a BIG head as a result.

Idle Pride occurs when we have abandoned our purposes and have nothing better to do in our own eyes than to criticize others. Those who are busy with some useful business don't have time to criticize others. Why? Because they don't have the time or energy to do so. Those with all the time in the world (because they are idle) are usually more critical than normal and land up criticizing those doing something useful. Why? Because they have the time and energy to do so. "The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it."[67]

Invincible Pride occurs when one thinks that one is… well invincible, that nothing can take away from our destiny… that we won't ever fall into certain sins like other people. The problem with this kind of pride is that it has lost touch with how we are made: from dust; and that we are and always will be dependent on God for ALL our needs, wants, strength, and direction or light.

Age-Pride occurs when one views age as the criteria for who is right and true, what and whom to respect. The young often think old fashioned stuff is rubbish, whereas the old can have a feeling of entitlement or demands to be obeyed because of their age. Both of these neglect navigating by truth; and respecting the dignity of people.

Small-Eyed Pride occurs when one gets shameful or embarrassed and envious when one considers the incompleteness of ones accomplishments when compared with that of others.

Shallow Pride is when one makes hurtful superficial judgments that have no bearing in reality. For example, shallow pride can occur when one wrongly judges other people as having grave sins in their lives because one sees them with some illnesses that they wouldn't otherwise have unless in one's opinion these people

[67] Chinese Proverb

repent from these grave sins. Jesus said, "Judge not unless you be judged." Judging stuff one has no business judging is rooted in pride. Even the very wise do not see all ends. Illnesses come and go for a wide variety of reasons and one ought not put people and God into boxes and jump to shallow conclusions immediately. It is true that some illnesses may be sin related, but it is also true that many illnesses are not sin related. One needs to mind one's own business and think the best about each person one meets if one is to overcome shallow pride.

Jealous Pride occurs when we become jealous or envious of those who have what we want. One is jealous when one covets something that another person has. One covets when one desires something from another person so much that one cares less for the person than what they have. "Envy or jealousy follows pride. Envy hates those above us because they are above us; those who are our equals because they are our equals, and those below us because they might someday over take us."[68] The desire to be first is what drives jealous pride. One wants to be first to have certain (or most of the) possessions or money; first in rank in certain clubs; first to be admired; or first in having certain kinds of power.

Theological Pride occurs when we judge people to have grave sins in their lives because they disagree with our beliefs when it comes to a particular faith's (Christian, Jewish, Moslem…etc.) doctrine. All fallen human beings have some sin in their lives, but theological pride will occur when we think that theological correctness births right actions. People can believe in the Trinity yet deny the love belonging to that same Trinity. People can believe that God is one and merciful, yet be unmerciful to one's enemies.

Infant Pride is when you give all the credit of your good achievements to God. You say, "God did them, not me." I was most familiar with this kind of pride early on in my walk because this is the kind of pride I had the most of. And that doesn't mean I recognized it as pride. I easily justified it then because it felt so natural and right to me. Because it felt so right, no one could help me see it for what it was. My infant pride felt like humility to me.

The good thing about infant pride is that those who have it really want to give glory to God. The problem is that they think that they can only do bad things, even when they see themselves doing good things with God's help. The problem with infant pride is that it doesn't give credit where credit is due. If anything humility is based in truth. People with infant pride shortchange themselves.

Puffed-Up Pride is when you steal another's glory. When we steal God's glory we take all the credit after having accomplished a seemingly good deed. Its flaw is

[68] Not sure of which Saint said it.

that it doesn't give credit to God for having given the talent, power, and opportunity that gave rise to the deed in the first place. People who have this attitude say, "I did it all by myself" when they accomplish something supposedly good. Those without faith in God are the most likely to say this. Or more cunningly others may say, "God did it, and not me" in response to an accomplishment, more to look humble than because they really believe that God did the deed. People who believe in God and who have a shallow faith are most likely to express their pride in this way. One starts to get puffed-up pride when gratitude and thanksgiving to God begin to evaporate. God can't command thankfulness, but He can cause it by loving us. Thankfulness is a genuine response to gifts given.

It is important to note that puffed-up pride is not just claiming all the credit for good deeds, but it is also refusing to take credit for any bad deeds that one does. When one lies about a reality in one's life because of embarrassment one also has puffed-up pride.

When my willingness to be honest and love began to evaporate, I then became filled with puffed-up pride. It also felt like humility at the time.

Critical Pride occurs when we criticize others, not to be helpful, but to tear down, or to get what we want. What is the fullness of this kind of pride? When we point fingers at God in un-respectful ways in an attempt to get what each of us wants. We can't get holiness by practicing un-holiness.

Judging Pride occurs when we go out of our way to humble others. The Bible says I need to humble myself, not my neighbor, the pope, the preacher, the wife, the husband, the supervisor, or the person in my way.[69]

Crises can be good because they can bring resolution, clarity, growth, humility, learning, self-knowledge, and eventually peace despite the initial pain. King Solomon's dealing with the two women who were fighting over a newly born baby bears this out. We ought not dread all trials, or challenges. Temptations are a part of each crisis and they push us on to the moment of truth. Challenges are a part of each crisis too and reveal what is in one's heart and mind. They reveal what we covet, desire, or are willing to give up. This does not mean that I ought to always be confrontational when somebody has wronged me. Feeling righteous just because of my position in a dispute can make me preachy, judgmental, and blind to my own faults. I know this from experience.

Honest Pride is when you give credit where it is due. It says, "I did this through the grace of God" when it is a good deed that we have done. "People who have

[69] Rick Joyner

honest pride are dependent on God and know it, celebrate it and pursue it."[70] If it feels natural to give God His due, and not to leave yourself out of the picture completely when you do something good, then chances are you may have some humility. Just saying, "I did this through the grace of God" when you have done something doesn't mean you automatically become humble. You have to really believe it because it is true and not because you want to sound humble for it to be genuine humility. If one has honest pride, one will also say, "I am completely responsible" when one does a bad deed without compulsion. It can be a struggle to admit to others when we have failed. If we do a bad deed and don't take full credit for it either by minimizing it or not taking any credit for it at all, then we have the opposite of honest pride. Honest pride is an attitude of the heart, and is most difficult to come by.

We may think that we have honest pride because we always apologize when we do something wrong. But this isn't always true. It is false when we only apologize to appear good or humble in the eyes of those we hurt, and don't really feel sorry for the evil deeds that we previously did. Honest pride hates evil, but loves all people no matter what their relationships are to us.

Honest pride also easily rejoices in the progress and accomplishments of others.[71] If we have honest pride then we are teachable and not closed-minded. If we are teachable when it comes to true spirituality, then we are humble or have honest pride. This is what it means to have hearts like fresh wineskins: We are stretchable, learn, and grow to embody the life that God intends for us to exhibit when He pours the new wine into our hearts.[72]

We must all be vigilant and guard our hearts against counterfeit forms of honest pride (or humility) otherwise we will lose our dignity. Benjamin Franklin said:

> There is perhaps no one of the natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it. Struggle with it. Stifle it. Mortify it as much as one pleases. It is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself... Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.[73]

Such is the battle without wisdom from above. The Essay: "DISMANTLING THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL" from this Website with the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/DismantlingTheTree.pdf

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[70] Larry Kreider from It's A New Day TV program.
[71] Cf. Daily Meditations For October 2004: Amazing Grace, The Word Among Us, p. 49
[72] Cf. Mark 2:22
[73] Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?, Zondervan Publishers (1997), p. 35

gives practical advice on how to be more than a conqueror through Jesus when it comes to pride.

Having categorized many kinds of pride (that is not exhaustive). A very important point needs to be made: God will not share His glory/deity with another (Yes, I understand we are made in His image so reflect His glory somewhat, but worship is due Him alone). When it comes to salvation (going to Heaven): None will, or can boast before God. When it comes to our beliefs no one can boast; we are all dependent on others for corrections. None of us have the full mind of Christ all by ourselves; collectively (female and male) we do. As far as works done in cooperation with God's grace are concerned… they are rooted in our faiths; and our faiths are gifts from God too. So, all glory/ worship goes to God. Yes, the Bible does say God will reward us for the works we accomplish.[74]

[74] 1 Corinthians 3:8, 2 John 1:8, and Hebrews 10:35.