Judging and Truth

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For so much of my Christian life I was like a war machine. God told me this many years ago…but change comes slowly. God gave me the image of a small iron, heavily armored war boat in calm waters with guns pointing out of its low roof with no warmth and no perspective in it when He showed me my state of being. This essay ought not be viewed with the tones of hatred, war, judgment, and meanness. It is an attempt to recover my humanity and renounce my intolerant mean perfectionism so that I can love others more deeply and not act out of fears but strength, relationship, and God's love. I pray for a new healthier energy one that doesn't put unnecessary burdens on people or handicaps my relationships out of fears and selfishness when God calls me to love Him, myself and people healthily. I don't want to major on minor stuff, and ignore major stuff like the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. I don't want to use the Bible to hurt, judge, condemn, or push people away, or use my understanding of it in such a way that it prevents me from loving people in healthy ways.

All of what is below was made possible by a medication change that helps me to think more clearly, process stuff that has been congested for decades, and to see things that I glossed over or swallowed too easily by well-meaning people.

This Essay is aimed at me and some of my former spiritual loyalties. I am not trying to judge the Latin rite of the church maliciously, only to point out that there are inconsistencies in its approach that forces me to look elsewhere for a healthier approach on how to search for truth. True, the Latin rite has preserved much truth (that others have unfortunately abandoned) but that I gratefully embrace…but no one has it altogether perfect when it comes to knowledge, theology, faith, morals, and practice. I do not hate the Latin rite but I am grateful for much that has been given to me by it.

I became an Evangelical Christian in 1989 and I swung into fundamentalism shortly thereafter, then with the beginning of my dark night, I then swung into confusion and eventually into the Roman Catholic church, and then into Roman Catholic conservatism, and then into legalistic Roman Catholic conservatism. The pendulum swung back to Evangelicalism when I went through a medication change that put me in touch with where I am emotionally, intellectually, relationally, and spiritually…so in the end I landed up with healthier perspectives because of my spiritual journey along with receiving many spiritual riches and learning many lessons from all these different tribes within Christendom.

So here goes:

We can't get holy, or healthy by being hard on ourselves...

Not being hard on ourselves is healthier than seeking some misguided perfectionism...

We can't get other people healthy by being hard on them or trying to guilt and shame them into obedience…

We can't lock down salvation by arguments we win and QED like mathematical proofs of

theorems giving us somehow absolute knowledge and security...if we try to nail things down too tightly or write them into stone too securely then we will lose focus and sanity...either getting smug because of our intellect or fearful because the challenges brought about by guilt, real or insinuated by the devil. Assurance for salvation comes from faith, knowledge of God's graceful love which is familial in nature. It is not philosophical/ law/ perfection/ guilt/ fear/ intolerant/ and judgmental in nature. Salvation is anchored by faith in Jesus, not in keeping the works of the Law or getting all our theological ducks in a row. Salvation is relational in nature and ought to be less of an academic pursuit than one in search of how to grow in love more and more deeply.

Aiming to be too holy is not wise or healthy...it stifles freedom and reality; and is done in one's own strength or self-righteously usually through meanness and pressure. Jesus saves us, we can't save ourselves especially by being hard on ourselves, worrying, and trying to be anally perfect. Resting in Jesus love, forgiveness, grace, and care is the path to supernatural love.

God is the judge over other people's sins. The Spirit convinces people of the wrongness of their sins (Cf. John 16:10) for I'm not qualified, I have a continual supply of wood in my eyes. If someone is of good will, and seeks after God who am I to judge (according to Pope Francis)? Even if they aren't of good will or don't seek God...I'm to love them non coercively... with care, gentleness, joy, and peace...if I got sin in my life (or wood in my eyes) I can't try to pluck wood out of another person's eye...I'll just fuck it up if I try...

I had horrible sins in my heart for decades, such as: hatred, pride, legalism, greed, envy, jealousy, lust, sloth, gluttony, self-pity, meanness, insensitivity...etc. but I was not resisting the Holy Spirit in any of them...God did not kill me or say I was dead in sin (He said I was not condemned)...He did not say I was lost (He said I was being saved by faith)…and God did not abandon me in any of this (He said I would never be forsaken by Him)...I confessed these sins to priests regularly for many years repeatedly...but none of the priests had the medicines needed to heal me. Only when I turned to the Bible did I find help in cooperation with God along with the gentle truths poured into my life by my sisters and brothers in Christ along with family members...thank you Jesus, Father God, and Holy Spirit for providing ways out of serving these sins. It was slavery because I knew not how to get free and did not have my own power to set myself free.

I'm not against church councils like in the book of Acts. But I am against councils where fear is used to force its voting members and flocks to say yes to stuff they disagree with or where people are condemned for disagreeing. Paul taught that if we believe something to be sin then for us it is so. But if it is not found simply in Scripture then it is disputable and not binding on anyone else but only on those who believe it. When councils can't agree on a doctrine unanimously in clear un-coerced peace of conscience, warmth, fellowship in union with Holy Spirit, then the bigger council factions can force their rules and agendas down everyone else's throats. If the council is not embracing and representative of all of Christendom in having something to contribute, including males and females (especially when it comes to dealing with those issues that involve woman and their spirituality) then the council is void in my opinion on those particular issues.

Peter the first pope was open to correction when he was wrong. Believing yourself to always be right is unhealthy and proud. Saying that the Church hierarchy cares for us, and won't let us down and so should have the last say on all doctrine, supposed truths and practice is not true

and is very unhealthy. The inquisitions, crusades, indulgences, castrations, pedophilia cover ups, putting down of women, and protecting the reputation of certain doctrines instead of protecting abused married women is a sample of stuff that discredits this view in my opinion. The church does have a good side too that I'm grateful for, but it can't be my conscience; otherwise I will become a robot without intuition, freedom, life, joy and love. I need room to move and make mistakes. I no longer want to be motivated by fears of man-made-rules-and-punishments.

The problem with making someone like a pope the supreme interpreter of Scripture is that one hangs on the words of the interpreter not the Scriptures. This is wrong. It says that only the interpreter knows truth, and can hear from God directly. It gives a low view on the flock and refuses to trust the faithful with being able to discern and know truth for themselves when Jesus said His sheep know His voice. The interpreters (popes) from generation to generation aren't fully consistent in how they interpreted and applied Scripture. There are many in the Latin rite who are uneasy, skeptical, and worried about pope Francis and his less judgmental and more liberal approach to scripture and those outside of his flock. Some try to defend him and say he is true to the faith and Traditions, whereas others say he is going too far, and some believe that there is likely going to be a split within the Latin rite because of him. So even in the Latin rite there is not complete unity or agreement on truth (that many within the Latin rite claim there to be).

Truth sets us free, not the fear of hell (not the idea of God's "wrath"). Love sets us free from fears; not threats of going to hell. "WE" have the mind of Christ ("WE" means the "Whole Church"). Truth is not the monopoly of a secluded or isolated "elite," "think-tank," "magisterium," or "pope." Rather it is the Holy Spirit who convinces and leads us into truth...the truth that sets us free from lies (a process that is not immediate; it is a journey for those who take it). The Truth sets us free from bondages to sins, and darkness... in such a way that we continue to grow in love. Truths that heal and set our hearts free are often only known to be needed by the Spirit because they are people specific. Peace comes from the Holy Spirit. Truth and peace do not usually trickle down from a hierarchy (Government or Religious) to its people or flock. Both Governments and Religious organizations often promise us that if we follow them completely then we will have peace and freedom. Too bad they often use fear tactics to control and keep everyone on their courses and agendas. Governments and Religions create rules to conform to, but rules do not transform, they don't make our behaviors genuine, healthy, and free. Man-made rules with their man-made punishments put fear into those who buy into them. Only truth sets us free to love, care, and be at peace. Fear/rule-foundations motivate conformity; whereas, truth/love-foundations motivate transformation.

Too much hurt is hidden, and too many details need to be addressed in each of our hearts for love to grow that a hierarchy won't be able to address them all for all people. The Holy Spirit can work in each person and equip the people to help each other…and this He does. The Church should equip people to do the work assigned them. That means the Church members needs to be able to think for themselves (not tossed back and forth by wind and waves of different teachings) and to be taught how to cooperate with and depend on the Holy Spirit. The idea of leadership in the Church means they need to help people become dependent on God, not anally and fearfully dependent on the clergy. None of us have the fullness of the truth (such a belief leads to the idea of superiority and trying to judgmentally point out other people's sins or

attempt to convert them by the sword) along with not even having the spiritual medicines to cleanse people from their real or imagined wrongful actions and only leaving them with guilt or shame in the end.

Truth is context dependent, and no magisterium has all the experience, knowledge, understanding, and insights needed to set us all free. The Bible says the Holy Spirit (not the pope) will lead us into truth. Yes, some popes do have much wisdom, but they are all fallible like the rest of us (myself included); and most have not been married, nor had children (and so are weak on speaking to issues dealing with marriage and family life), and many have been corrupt or out of touch with God. Any organization (government or religious) that says we will do the thinking for you, don't argue with us, just accept and do what we say…don't trust or respect their people. Such organizations can be judgment driven (in many ways) because they fear they might lose control of the people. Rules and fear do not set people free, only truth does.

I have met many clergy; and some are wise healers, but some are judgmental butchers. The Church will never be perfect in its earthly journey, nor will it have the fullness of intellectual-truth in its earthly journey. Jesus is the fullness of truth…we have access to Him by faith. We have to wait for heaven for full intellectual truth (the most important truths help set people free to love each other). No church is fully united on the truth. There are conservatives, moderates, and liberals in every community. Some see Law or conservative values more important than mercy, non-violence, and human rights. Others see mercy, and non-judgmental ism as more important and that judgment belongs to God. Some see non-violence as the answer to conflict whereas others see war as the answer. We have seen too many clergy (not all) who have not protected the weak and vulnerable. Many claim they know what is best for us…but often they only care about what the Law says is right and wrong. Other members have been humiliated, judged, and condemned by the Church (hierarchy and members too) when Jesus loves those who were humiliated, judged, and condemned. Can we throw the first stone?

There is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in our philosophies. We depend on each other's insights, lessons, experience, wisdom, cares, and encouragements...not on a hierarchy that excludes women, and the rest of Christendom. Both of these latter groups have valid truths, insights, wisdom, maxims, concerns, and strengths (that address needs and weaknesses that ought not be over looked or ignored), that would help to correct, balance and contribute to the understanding of many on sin and truth, whose end can make us more merciful, kind, tolerant, caring and set people free to love more fully, deeply, and genuinely through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Trying to justify one's actions on philosophical grounds alone with deductive reasoning using a few premises to the exclusion of the fuller scope of the human makeup (male and female) is not wise. That means we need to include not just maleness but femaleness and How God's love is revealed to us in relationships and in the Bible when it comes to spiritual realities. The Sadducees (Cf. Mark 12:20) had a closed system of thinking and they were dead wrong about God's love, grace, and power along with what God said about our human destinies. I used to get fed-up with murder mysteries on TV and in books because no one could figure out who did it until the last clue was given. But now I know that they are good because they tell us not to assume, and not to make up one's mind before all the evidence is in when it comes to judging

issues on truth. We all have missing parts to the puzzles of life; and there are many puzzles. We all have massive gaps in our understandings along with a lot of blind spots and hardness of hearts. Love does no harm to one's neighbors. I want to live out my personal faith in such a way that it bears love in simple ways.

Having said all of this, I think it is Jesus who justifies. We can't justify ourselves (by our reasoning/ or keeping the law/ or playing it safe/ or being motivated by fears). It is by grace that we are saved through faith. The more we seek consolation through perfectionism the more it will elude us.

We should not blindly love concepts, creeds, or principles more than people. Little "t"-truths should counsel us on how to love people in healthy ways and not be an end in themselves. When we are too devoted to fallen human authorities, or organizations (religious or secular) we land up justifying their dirty laundries and giving them licenses to sin and hurt people. When rules take the primacy over caring for people then they hurt and kill people. Laws cannot save us or make us love, they usually only point out what is acceptable or what sin is. If we become too loyal to authority structures (religious or secular) then we give them power that is unhealthy, and corruption and pride will set in. Our current times and human History show we are people who have misguided loyalties to ideals, philosophies, communities, organizations, and fallible leaders. We have given them too much power...and this gets everyone into the trouble of hurting each other instead of protecting each other from hurts.

Good principles help us to love people. We need to love good principles because they help us to love people the way God designed us to love them. Good principles and healthy truths have their place, but I need to be careful that I don't use them to judge people. Jesus who is Truth itself was more offensive in the nostrils to the religious than those considered sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and unclean. What was His secret? He did not judge people or harden His heart against people. His first inclination was not to judge and condemn people, but to reconcile, care, restore, give hope and life to people. He came to undo the devil's works. He was humble meaning He did not communicate a sense of see I'm superior to you (the religious people did) so bow to my perfection you scum, and unclean sinners. Because He cared for us, He sought to heal us and save us from the works of the devil. Jesus' attitude was gentle, and meek, not: "If you disobey me I will rain hell fire down on you." Hell is a place of burning thirst caused by pride, with torment, and fear caused by guilt not dealt with. God forgives; but we have to receive it. Pride keeps us from drinking in life and forgiveness and loving others.

When I have a judging problem (and I did have a really BIG one (but not as debilitating as before)), then I'm missing pieces to the puzzle of how to love. My thinking was a real mess for a long time. My understanding was a real mess. I was wounded inside somehow believing lies that chained me up when it came to love. When walls went up inside of me when disagreeable stuff came along, then love couldn't come out of me, and this was because of fear, judging people, demonizing people, a false sense of personal superiority on my part, and wanting to control people. I remember demonizing people early in my Christian walk trying to defend my faith and defend the goodness of God. God is infinitely good and we don't have to demonize people to say God is good.

Fighting fears, superiority, pride, and the sins that spring out of them like judging, trying to

control, meanness, selfishness, and intolerance is an ongoing war whose battles can be overcome one at a time. But one needs tools in the context of relationship with Jesus to win these. Strongholds can be routed and replaced with peace and the fruits of the Spirit…patient endurance and strategic warfare are necessary to get there. One reaps what one sows. Understanding what battles are going on in us are crucial and for that we need the Holy Spirit and the wider community of believers.

Moral policemen are not into love; but they are into social engineering, order, law, and cookie cutter people supposedly endowed with a certain "right kind" of respectability. I know I have seen some people as respectable, but does that mean I don't respect the rest of the people who don't fit that right kind of mold of respectability? Who are also made in the image of God and loved by God? It seems I have been an undercover moral policeman for a long time. Luckily I'm one with a conscience that did damage control whenever I lashed out in fear and superiority, and suppressed the rest of the spiritual disease within me the rest of the time. How does one care for people one disagrees with or with people who have a different morality or spirituality than I do? One person at a time, one thing at a time, and one situation at a time through prayer, wisdom from God, and seeking humility and understanding on how to love.

Denying justice to those who need it only to protect supposed truth claims or doctrines is from the devil. The "Roman Catholic" church did this when they tried to defend marriage by covering up the fact that certain women were being assaulted by their husbands. They preach never sin to the flock, but turn around and try to choose the lesser of two supposed evils in their eyes. It is hypocrisy and denies the truth of love to the very core. Any truth that does not help us to love is not being respected and handled in healthy ways.

I know that I had many problems loving those people who were not agreeable or respectable in my eyes, and I have repeatedly despised those people who seemingly have some kind of immoral defect(s). Who doesn't have defects? Who am I to judge? Why did I have so little love for people? My image of God did not fully follow who Jesus presented Himself to be.

Jesus deliberately lost an argument with a gentile woman (Cf. Matthew 15:36), even though He was and is the Truth. We need His humility. We need to be foremost loyal to love, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Father; and not fallen human authorities. We can't give people God like authority or devotion. People with religious authority often fall for the temptation to make more and more rules instead of focusing on getting people closer to God who does will and desire us to depend on and be led by Him into love. We ought not impose our consciences on others. No organization, or institution should take the role of becoming the conscience of the people. No fallen human being deserves absolute power of obedience like Jesus warned us to stay away from (Cf. Matthew 23:9). I don't want to throw my intellect, will, reasoning, and intuition out the window and act like a weak pliable manipulated fear-driven cult member.

Saint Paul said that the church is the pillar of truth (Cf. First Timothy 3:15). Some sects take this to mean only their denomination is...such as Roman Catholics do. But it says "the church", not the "Roman Catholic" church. The church refers to all of Christendom here, not just one sect. The promises about the church are for all Christendom. There are no second-class citizens in Jesus' church. Each congregation is special to Him. We all have errors, false beliefs, and worse we all break some of the commands we all agree on. Right theology does not guarantee a

healthy practice of love. We all have pet-morals that we don't want to compromise and that we say determines whether we are orthodox or not. Grace says: "I love you whether you do right or wrong", we can learn from Jesus who offered this kind of grace. We can reject it in small and BIG ways. The more we abide in Jesus the more of a "pillar of truth" we become…by that I mean we are more able to stand up for the truth (like a pillar) in the face of hostility, and to become more of a useful building block to God as He sees fit to use us in His Kingdom here on earth.

Jesus called Peter the rock that He would build His church on. In the Latin church Rite, this has wrongly been taken to mean that Peter and his supposed successors have an extra "special" "infallible" God-like-roll over the whole church. But Peter wrote that we are all living stones being built into a holy dwelling for God. We all have a purpose and are all truth bearers...some more so, some less so. Peter was correctable by his peers...not all popes have been like him.

When the Eastern and Latin rites of the church split, it was because the pope at the time added a phrase to the Nicene Creed without consulting the Eastern rite. The church is the pillar of truth not a select few in a hierarchy or the pope alone. We are all allowed to have our opinions, but we can't impose them on others even when they are true. God's love is non-coercive, and ours should be the same, especially spiritual leaders.

What does it mean for the church to be the pillar of truth? It means to stand up for the truth even in the face of hostility.

It isn't a dead structure of calcified truths that nobody lives up to (the law does that), but built for a purpose directed by God. Throughout history all church members (both clergy and laity) have always had blocks to love...those blocks are what I call lies, and untruths. All pillars are used for something by their builders: God is the builder in the case of the church. The church is supposed to stand up for truth (to be a pillar), to be a vehicle and an instrument of meaningful liberating truth that point to Jesus (the truth) that sets people free to love. It is supposed to reach for the sky...or heavens or rather to God in non-hypocritical prayer and intercession bringing down grace to all in need; hence it is called a pillar of truth. It prays up to God in truth through Jesus. Lived out truth and hypocrisy are opposites. The healthier church members will have diminishing amounts of hypocrisy as time goes by. The whole church is the pillar of truth, not a secluded magisterium, an unbalanced poorly represented church council, or even the pope alone. If the scriptures meant the pope or bishops or apostles to be the pillar of truth alone, it would have said so. The church is the whole church…every single member of the church is a part of the pillar of truth.

God's grace is His unconditional love: He loves us whether or not we do good, bad, have apathy, or are ugly. But we can block this grace (His empowering presence and unconditional love) in any area of our lives by inviting sin in (but God still loves us even when we do sin). Even so, we aren't perfect...and God grants us grace (His unmerited favor) even when we do sin when we truly seek humility and want to love people and stay away from sin even though we fall often or hard morally speaking and are often blind to much truth. God is not anally perfectionistic and He understands our frailties. Note that I used the word "grace" here with more than one meaning.

Grace isn't a reward for good behavior, rather it gets us out of our guilt, out of our sins gradually, and gives us aptitudes that make us gracious towards others. Hence the saying found in John's

gospel: "grace upon grace" ...grace saves us, and keeps us saved through genuine faith in Jesus lived out in love and hope.

No church denomination has a monopoly on or the fullness of the truth. The lines don't fall that way. There are some Roman Catholics who are much more loving than many of those in the Greek Orthodox and Protestant Traditions. But there are some in the Greek Orthodox and Protestant Traditions that are more loving than many Roman Catholics. It goes both ways. Those who love more deeply believe fewer lies, so have more truth than those who don't. So it doesn't make sense to say one Tradition has the fullness of the Truth and others don't. Jesus is the fullness of the truth, if you have Him you have truth. This discussion is problematic in that it is like comparing apples and oranges. We all have different love languages, experiences, wisdom, knowledge and connections with Jesus, but we all know Jesus. The pope does not care for or love me more than my mother. My mother speaks more truth and encouragement into my life than any pope ever did. The Bishops don't love me more than the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is far more capable of speaking truth into my life than are the Bishops and I know this from personal experience.

No one has a monopoly on the truth. I can't go about thinking I got the fullness of the truth, or my sect does, and others don't have as much truth, or as many healthy motivations as my sect does. Thinking one has the fullness of the truth kills one’s search for truth and God (often leaving questions involving truth over to the clergy and not seriously wrestling with them by oneself); and this is altogether unhealthy. Only in wrestling with truth can we truly make it our own, and become strong in living it out. When there is no understanding on truth, and we only believe truth claims because of some ordination line or tradition, then that is a cop out in my opinion. We are called to believe in the truth, not necessarily in a hierarchy no matter how old.

We all have gaps in our thinking, lack of connections in our logic, have stuff we assume true and try to use to justify our beliefs but can't prove or justify. We all miss the big picture in many ways. We all have some truth and a lot of falsehoods. Even when we have some truth, it does not mean we live it out perfectly. None of us have arrived. We can't judge the motives of others. Jesus said to not judge or condemn people. Let's not pretend we have it together and that our houses are in perfect order. None of us have arrived. Let's accept that it is through the forgiveness of our sins that we are saved. And when we pray, let's not assume we don't need what we think others need. Using "we" and "us" instead of "me" versus "them" is healthier, humbler, less full of hypocrisy, more caring, and devoid of self-righteousness when making requests in prayer.

Faith, hope and love are humble in nature. They are not muscles because if they were then we would compare ours with others, put others down in pride or slouch down in self-pity when jealousy sets in. We can grow strong in commitments, attitudes, desires, and habits. Faith is just opening doors, supernatural love is the Holy Spirit that flows through the well of our hearts springing up into our interior lives and relationships, and hope is our expectation that God will make a way and provide for others and ourselves.

Love is people motivated, not LAW motivated. Yes, truths, maxims, and principles are our counsellors when it comes to loving people. Love is God motivated. But to love does not mean we give ourselves first to our darkness within, that colors our theologies, and makes our grids,

measuring rods, our misguided loyalties, our fears, our pride, and our meanness into walls of judgment (circumventing truth that ought to set us free) ...because then we have problems seeing people for who they are through our judgments or wood in our eyes or distorted lenses. Supernatural love starts out with God first loving us. It continues through faith, gentleness, truth, commitment, humility, and perseverance in a way that we see people more and more for who they are. Not squished into our judgment boxes and distorted, devalued, not connected with…but instead meeting them where they are at.

Principles, maxims, and theology have been too easily used as weapons and judgments in my heart because my heart was wounded by certain fears that sought relief in sinful ways. They can make us defensive in mean ways that make us offensive (both in lack of flavor and kindness). We need to believe the best about people, accept the truth they speak and believe and use all truths as bridges to connect and build trust and respect while realistically accepting that "WE" are all flawed. Without this humility there is no love and no real evangelism. When others have immoral beliefs or actions (as if we don't) we can dislike those actions, but we need to be respectful of their rights to their beliefs, care for them, and accepting of their freedoms to live life as they see fit (do to others as you want done to you). We can't bully people into becoming like we are. We are not perfect. God is not into coerciveness in His relating styles. God's kindness leads to reconciliation, not threats inducing obedience by fears and dark force. God treats us with love as sheep or children (lost or saved), not harshly like mean people treat slaves.

It is not meant for us to expect people to have their theological ducks in a row in order for us to love them. We are not to judge them or condemn them especially on things we can't see, measure, or understand...as well as the things we can see. We are not to set ourselves up as pious judges (or moral policemen) who are cold, distant, un-loving, uncaring, and anal towards those we are called to love. Let's agree on common ground, and love people even when we disagree.

Jesus interacted, cared for, made His presence felt among what the religious respectable citizens called sinners, unclean, impure, dogs, evil doers, law-breakers, and worthy of punishment. The religious thought God did not care for sinners, that He wouldn't enter their lives so long as every single sin was not repented from. Jesus enters the lives of whomever will have Him through faith. He meets us where we are at, and walks with us never abandoning us. Our love for each other can be so imperfect, fleshly, and dark compared to Jesus' glory, but that does not mean Jesus doesn't help us love to the degree we do, however imperfectly because we did not follow a method prescribed by a certain sect or denomination.

The critical spirit is what the Pharisees majored on. Such people had so little humility, warmth, and love; and public image was so important to them that they sought their own honor more than caring for others. They wanted everyone to be just like them in how they though, behaved, acted, coveted, and related. They wanted everyone to be cookie cutter Pharisees with no deviation or diversity in dress, beliefs, and actions. They did not see their own fallen ness, how spiritually sick they were. They majored on self-preservation: following the law not to love but only to not go to hell and only to get blessed. People who are lovers love those who are different, who are hard to love, and those who are their enemies. Loving only those who love us back is not love, instead it is a parasitical dependence based on selfishness. Unity comes from

love and acceptance of each other's weakness, flaws, and hurts not on agreeing on a rigid list of truths or rules however beneficial that might be.

Not going to hell and being blessed are good things. But putting man's rules as prerequisites for heaven and getting them obeyed by fear and coercion above caring for other peoples' healthy needs is dark, manipulating and appealing to self-preservation rather than love. This can be very selfish in nature. Jesus said anyone who tries to save their life will lose it because all they care about is themselves too much. Love ought to be the fulfillment of the law. The law is not the fulfillment of love. Fear and pride are the roots to the Pharisaical mind set. They fear dishonor, they fear punishment, they fear hell, and they have to have more and more money, better positions, and higher status over time...and when anything gets into their way it becomes an enemy or something to be hated, mocked, scoffed at, censored, and removed. No wonder they hated Jesus and landed up killing Him. Unfortunately, I have done likewise. They use the law to judge, not love. They use the law to put pressure on others and themselves, not to release them into the freedom to love.

Love is people motivated not principle motivated. When love becomes only about obeying rules especially when our only motivation is what we will or won't get out of it then it is selfishness and self-righteous law keeping. When principles become the focus or more important than loving people, and we land up dehumanizing people because of our principles, then we become blind to people, have lost our understanding, and lost our ways in those areas.

Having said all of this I think if I want to cherish my freedoms I need to grant everyone the same freedoms. I have moral failures but that does not always disqualify me from being a vehicle of truth and meaning. The same is true for all peoples including governments, organizations, and religious institutions. We are all entitled to our opinions. Just because I disagree with some of the views belonging to others (people or institutions) does not mean I ought to vilify them, hate them, persecute them, and try to shut them up. I need to tolerate people because I want to be tolerated.

I'm allowed to stand against injustices and untruths, and try to prevent them from harming others…but arguing so often leads to misunderstandings, hurts, walls, persecutions, hatred, intolerance, discriminations, and wars. I will not be free if I don't give others their freedoms. In trying to hush people up, suppress their opinions, black list them, imprison them, torture them, mock them, and censor them I walk on a slippery slope that marginalizes people (takes away their rights) and can bring about persecutions such as with fascism in politics, and so called moral-policing or holy wars in religions just to expand controlling people. We should not operate under the illusion of control or try to socially engineer our cultures through coercion, because people-control is a myth. It often lies about the genuineness of intentions, motivations of the heart, and may be intolerant about how others do things. Better people be real than carbon copies of each other.

People without their own children often forget, or get disconnected to, or weakly experience God's love. If they don't marry or forbid marriage, then they lose yet more components of human and Devine love…these are huge blind spots…how can they more fully learn to love with these handicaps? Books of philosophies by themselves do not have the same power to change us and open our eyes like relationships with people, traveling, going through hardships, and

experiencing relationships with God. Some books can help but aren't sufficient, we need healthy families and communities to grow in humility and love because they point to love and truths and needs in ways concepts and philosophies don't.

My focus ought not be: "I'll be obedient out of fear and play it safe because If I'm not obedient to such and such fallible human authority, then I will go to hell" This is coercive in motivational nature. We are saved by faith in Jesus not by dark fears. My focus and desire is that I want the Holy Spirit close to me, to commune with, to talk with me in prayer, and out of that get healthy spiritual input and change so that the supernatural love within me will grow.

My relationship with God is both a child-parent one and a sibling-brother one, we are a family. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Sin is rooted out because it hurts people and goes against LOVE who is God. God does not harass us with threats of condemnation, He is gentle, kind, and shows us the wrongness of sin but not in an anal, demanding, fear-driven, law, slave, perfectionistic, rule focused and dehumanizing way. A lot of this kind negative fear driven thinking has been so ingrained within me and it has made me unloving, and unkind from a dark energy place only caring about "me versus them" - judgment types of thinking when Jesus said for me to not judge or condemn others. He said the same to the Church. Prayer, confession, understanding the roots, and repenting in faith have been the medicines that are getting me healthy spiritually.

The healthy thinking I'm talking about here is not meant to be carved into stones, and then forgotten about and then to collect dust and never deepened. I want to deepen it in my relationships, and caring for people with Jesus being the way!

Swords

One can't love another person while holding a sword or weapon in one's hand in the context of what is supposed to be a love relationship. One can't love another person, or help them see pointed truth while one has wood or darkness in one's own eye. Truth should not be used as a weapon in our relationships with people. Moral precepts rightly handled should be either withheld if it could hurt a person disrespectfully, or it should be given only when requested and given in gentleness, caring, and respect so to build people up and not tear them down. I talk more about this later in the Essay.

Truth Police?

It is easy to call people who believe truths exists and are always knowable: "truth police" or should I say, "thought police" when they argue, and use all means (both good, not so good, and often bad) to convince others about what they believe, because they may lack humility to know they very well could be wrong or blind on many details or nuances and deny that others could have something to contribute or correct them on. Any person or organization that can't take correction is not humble enough. None of us have the fullness of the truth…we are lucky to have a few jewels and not just straw, wood, hay or stubble. Humble people are correctable not rigid, not cold, not self-pitying, and don't act like parasites only giving as much as they get.

Believing something to be true because you want it to be true is not healthy. Believing something to be true because it fits into one's system of thoughts, or is accepted by one's

community, or because one is too loyal to a fallible human authority is not always wise...one needs a more well-rounded foundation.

It is wrong to accept things as truth only because you want truth and want to be right or want to be justified or want to have the answers for yourself or others. If this is one's disposition then being right can be more important than the truth...and hurting others in the way one relates one's so-called "truth" may result because what one thinks is truth is most important, unfortunately more important than the way it is communicated to the people one should care about. I'm not proud about this.

Accepting truth claims because one wants to have a sense of belonging, or to have a home is not wise. This approach never gave me a sense of home like I had hoped it would, it never felt completely right.

Going for the first thing that looks like truth, because there appears to be no other options is not wise. Slow, thoughtful, meditative, and prayerful two-way dialogue with God, along with opening one's eyes to the human condition: both male and femaleness and how they work and their perspectives (not just from books, but from experiencing them in marriage), the power of family and children, the power of community, the power of history, knowing the power of being indoctrinated, being self-aware, seeking humility, and admitting one's limitations and weaknesses, understanding self-deception, and realizing that none of our moral compasses are exact, all need to be in the mix for truth to have a chance to be discovered, to grow, and be nurtured.

Not all truth is knowable in this life. We walk by faith not sight. We look into our mirrors darkly... not fully illuminated.

When one claims to be the ultimate authority on faith and morals a very high track record needs to be established...nowhere is that to be found in history but only in Jesus and the Holy Spirit and God the Father. And their truth is intended to clear misconceptions about the image of God, and to set us free to love, and to not be motivated by fears. God cares more about people than reputations of infallibility. If those fallen humans who claim infallible teachings practiced them perfectly, then I'd consider their claims more closely. Infallibility ought to mean willing to do anything right to protect all people (no matter how few) from harm. Infallibility means nothing in the face of injustices not made right for hundreds of years (think the castrations in the Latin rite).

Where is God?

I asked God if He is in the Roman Catholic Church. He said yes! I asked Him if He was in the Protestant Church. He said yes. Both sides have factions that accuse each other of grave sins, purporting untruths or lies, and the likelihood if not certainty of hell. I see a humble God that goes where He is welcome. Where people resist Him interiorly or exteriorly He does not trespass: individually and corporately too. Where people welcome Him in faith He comes. He withholds His full self when we put up walls but He is persistent and relentless in pursuing us and loving us where we are at. He loves us even when we say no to Him. I see a God that is in both communities loving us unconditionally, even though we are both guilty. If we have all sinned on one account or another, then we have all broken the whole law (James 2:10) ...so are all guilty of what we accuse each other of doing wrong.

I have told myself repeatedly that I don't want to sin (I don't want to go to hell but heaven). But this is not the whole truth. Yes, a part of me does not want to sin. But there is another part of me that does want to sin when convenient and another part that actually is committed to certain sins. And truth be told, when I have bad energy within me because I carelessly believed a lie or made a judgment on a person, then that attitude or energy manifests in the way I treat other people too. Also, when a situation springs on me too quickly and whatever comes to my mind to say seems the lesser of two evils, then telling white lies, or untruths just happens because of pride or not wanting to hurt somebody else's feelings. It is a lie that we can conquer all sin and sinful attitudes in this life because even Saint Paul didn't count himself as attaining this. But we can make tremendous progress with God's help (Cf. the Essay: KILLING PRIDE from this Website on how to do just that). God does not want us to sin, but He knows our fallen humanity. He is slow to anger. He is not hostile. He is not ashamed to be friends with tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, dogs, and the unclean. He does not threaten us with hell if we don't somehow repent of every single sin in our lives immediately. God is reasonable not anal.

My foremost focus ought to be am I growing in love; not putting pressure on myself to stop sinning. Sin is relational in nature. Love is relational in nature. The flesh is always involved in our love acts…does that mean we should not try to love? I'm not perfect...and I don't want to live with the illusion I can be...that is too much of a burden. Ideally I rather sin caring for someone else than for selfish reasons but that is not where I'm at because I'm very selfish at times and still want to go to heaven. Life is messy. I'm not Jesus. I'm not perfect. Humility starts with the truth about where we are at. We can't expect others to live up to what we don't do ourselves…even when we do, then things get dicey because we are all at different stages in our journeys. Believing the lie that we can be perfect now, and that we should absolutely never sin, and fall into a sense of superiority (like we have arrived) is a sure recipe for judgmental ism, and being hard on oneself and others.

Admitting all of this does not mean we ought to aim for sinless-perfection anally, tooth and nail, by being hard on ourselves…it means we focus on what God puts on our plates alone. Let the Holy Spirit do the convincing, leading, and healing. He wants us healthy more than we do. If someone asks us our opinion on a moral issue then we can give our opinion, but to use shame, guilt, judging, blame, and meanness to get the person to agree with us is not healthy and should be abandoned. Trust the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Father with your sanctification.

Judging is bad for many reasons. One often overlooked reason is that when we judge we want to condemn people to a punishment that is often retributive in nature, and when we do so we are blind to our own sins (so are hypocritical) and this is all wrong. Another is that we don't fully love the person or people we are judging, so how can we be merciful to them if we don't love them? If we love them, then we won't want to judge them. Another one is that we don't have the grace to judge them...it is not in Jesus' protocol for us according to the Sermon on the Mount. Another is that we don't have full knowledge of what happened, what led up to the incident, the minds and hearts and motives of those involved, and what God thinks about it. If we don't know what God thinks about it then how can we judge? When we judge it is because we feel threatened, violated or want some sort of justice; usually not restorative in nature, we may want payment, punishment, death, or we may want revenge. We often judge because we did not get what we coveted. Judging can stem from selfishness cloaked in supposed injustices.

Love Does No Harm to One's Neighbor:

Love is relational because God is relational in nature: God is wholly Trinitarian.

Logic by itself when applied to morality when lacking a full perspective of knowledge (and pertinent details) may not encompass (as is done in some circles) both femaleness and maleness, and so is cold, judgmental, biased, and leads to coveting and esteeming concepts and misguided loyalties rather than loving people in their fullness. It leads to either chauvinism (or worse, being a massageinist) or ultra-feminism (or worse, being a man-hater) in attitudes which leads to the lack of respect between the sexes and the attempts to control, manipulate, discount, count as second-class citizen, domesticate, rule, lord over, devalue, enforce inequality in wages and opportunities, rapes, takes away rights, neglects, makes guilty, makes inferior, uses the other for selfish reasons, and dehumanizes each other. It defaces the image we have of God in our understandings. It is done in pride (a sense that I know better or are superior), and fear; and should I say with hatred? I know that I saw men as more important and stronger than woman as a teenager out of pride, selfishness, misguided-loyalties, and immaturity and started to accrue some very chauvinistic tendencies that later got corrected by pertinent women-realism.

Relationship with God does not involve arguing with or preaching to people in one's head on truth, expounding on right and wrong, or trying to pierce mysteries in academic or intellectual ways all day long. Relationship with God involves friendship, spending time together (often in silence but awareness), celebrating each other. Arguing and preaching to oneself all day long leaves no peace...the Spirit gives a peace that attracts understanding...that fosters genuine love and caring. Getting there can be very painful. Yes, seeking understanding, deconstructing, sorting through stuff in prayer and meditation where the focus is; seeking self-growth- and dependence on God, seeking what truth is, and not demonizing or blaming others in self-pity can be very fruitful…and can be painful when the stakes are high.

I ought not judge people because I lack love and won't be merciful in my attempts at justice because of my lack of love for people. However, if I love, then I won't judge them, because for one: I know that too much is hidden and I really don't know the whole mind of God; Two: I don't have the go ahead to judge or the grace to judge others; Three: hypocrisy is often not far behind; Four: a sense of superiority and pride are also behind judging; Five: fears are often behind judging; Six: skepticism, cynicism, and negativity breed judging.

Fear is often a result of being blind to God's love. We get blind by turning our eyes from God and tuning into and believing the devil's messages; or forsaking our intuitions for other people's truths that are not compatible with what works for us. When people see certain things as sinful, then for them it is sinful. That doesn't mean I am bound by their consciences. Fears of not being honored, respected, not getting justice, and not the getting the loyalty or security one desires in relationships lead to judging too. Fears can lead to vows, that lead to wanting to control that lead to demands, that lead to judgments. We need to deal with these fears in prayer until the roots are yanked out and replaced with the Holy Spirit's presence through faith, communion, fellowship, and trusting the promises from God. This brings healing, sanity, gentleness, peace, love, joy, wisdom, caring, patience, and compassion.

I had obsessive compulsive judging going on in my head for a long time: confession…

repentance… judging… confession… repentance… judging …etc. And I suspected it was from a wound or my schizophrenia or poor life choices and habits I'd formed in my journey…but such angst means there is at least one stronghold [there were more as we will later read]. I was told that fear was a BIG foundation for judging. So I began to see, because of conversations with two people, that there were more roots of fear and stuff left un dealt with in me until recently, like when as a child my peers rejected me. I realized that when that wounding happened I determined to never be hurt again. In fact, I vowed it and demanded it from others and so judged people for the slightest hint of betrayal or rejection in my attempts to set boundaries and control people so I'd ensure my happiness and determine my own self-worth. This construct/ stronghold, built on the wound of rejection, poisoned my mind and heart. I prayed it through, confessing it, and understanding it, and repenting of much of it, forgiving myself, and putting my trust in God to get me through this learning curve. But more was needed that would come piece by piece…

Another incident took place. I was on the playground as a child happily playing with a toy I dearly coveted when two boys approached me. I was told by one boy that the other boy claimed my toy was his, but that the boy speaking with me was willing to judge fairly between us if I handed over the toy because I could trust him. I did. A very short hearing or trial was held and the judge gave my toy to his friend and they walked away without a word. I couldn't believe how deceived I'd been. My cynicism grew.

I have more memories of betrayals that I never processed in healthy ways but am now being led to do deal with.

Praying for healing and confessing to God the exact nature of our sins our fears along with our independent (from God) vows and structures we built to protect from hurts and to alleviate our fears (and asking for prayer from others), understanding and acknowledging our troubled evolutions and confessing and repenting in faith with Jesus' help from our fears and the related sins is key to finding freedom (and inviting God into our emptiness), along with renewing our minds with truth, that helps us to understand God's love and image as found in Jesus, and seeking humility will form healthy pathways to dying to judging. Also renouncing one's allegiance to the devil in this matter and submitting to God's will are keys to healing.

When we are in relationships, and people we are deeply attached to do stuff that seems to threaten their relationships with God then sometimes it can be more about us. When it is, inside of us we can be more engaged with our fears of possible personal rejection, possible personal disrespect, have real insecurities, and personal neediness (low-self-esteem). These can lead us to try to control, manipulate, be mean, judgmental, resentful, pouty, angry, cold, distant, weak, have "it's all about me" attitudes, hateful pride, envy, hostility, erecting walls, self-pity, demands, violence, commands, ultimatums, senses of superiority, senses of inferiority, and fears of abandonment. All this needs to be dealt with before genuine love has a chance to flourish. Confession, understanding, repenting in faith, forgiving, renouncing, realigning one's loyalties to actually loving the persons we are supposed to love not as trophies, but as real persons, and learning to care and be gentle and non-judgmental are keys to a new life of hope, joy, and celebrations.

The devil does quote the Bible, in fact he can and does quote God in ways that are slimy, fear-

inducing, painful, judgmental, and tries to stop us from being able to focus on God's grace to bring condemnation and rob us of hope. He will use other seemingly trustworthy sources to negate BIG portions of Scripture. Just Because God uses signs to communicate with us, doesn't mean the devil can't do the same. The difference is that the devil's attempts to communicate brings dark condemnation, not warmth, not hope, and not love. God does not use a whip and fear tactics to get us to comply with His best wishes. Perfect love casts out all fear. The devil can time his signs, invitations so nicely that we might think it is God doing it. Therefore, knowing God's voice in two-way-prayer is crucial to stay away from the wiles of the devil. To have victory I needed to put my faith in the whole word of God. I could not go forward with only a few verses that dimmed, darkened, and negated the rest of Scripture. Using the tools in the Essay:

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

helps a lot with sorting out much of my confusion. Staying away from wanting to use people, and loving them instead has been helpful too.

Saint Paul says that no one will be justified by the works of the Law (Cf. Galatians 2:16). But James says that we are not saved by faith alone buy by works too (Cf. James 2:24). Is this a contradiction? No! James is talking about "works of love" which are far different than "works of the Law." Works of love spring from faith in God, whereas works of the Law spring from a hard, convicting, mean spirited (abrasive), unkind, "I have to do it or else hell comes my way" attitudes that relies on the Law in such a way that it sees rules kept, not people loved as important. The Law does not give warmth, or say good job at the end of each day, neither is it soft or cuddly because it brings no solace. It always asks for more and more. It only points out sin. It can inform the conscience but can't save us from sin. Faith in Jesus is the path to love and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The Law gives no grace, it does not encourage us, it can't give life. Only God can give life.

Besides, when we commit one sin it counts as though we broke all of the commandments (my sins are not better than any of your sins). Because all sin breaks love for God, self, and neighbors. We are saved by faith, not by only trying to not sin. Yes, staying away from sin is good. We aren't perfect. But we abide in the Vine to bear fruit; we don't bear fruit to abide in the Vine. Jesus is the true Vine. We are people of grace, not LAW.

More on LOVE and SIN and Salvation:

Jesus told parable found in Luke 18, where He warned us to not judge our sins to be better than anyone else's, and to not think because we are free from certain unclean sins that we are better than others who do commit those unclean sins.

John taught that we all have sin in our lives (Cf. 1 John 1:8). He also taught that if we walk in the darkness and claim to have fellowship with God, we lie and do not live out the truth (Cf. 1 John 1:6). Jesus spoke about certain sins being more serious than others. There are sins everyone commits whether they are in the church or out of it. There are some sins that are more serious that God warns us to stay away from. If we don't stay away from them, then we walk in darkness like the world does. Most of us walked in darkness before we came to Christ. Some of us go there at times but come back to God each time in sorrow, confession, and repentance. This tells me that it is rebellion that embraces a sinful life style that pushes God away and if the rebellious

person never decides to turn back to God for help through faith in Jesus Christ he or she will land up or stay in hell.

Paul taught that we stand by faith (Romans 11:20) and that unbelief causes us to lose our footing. If a believer is caught in a sin and does not know how to get free from it, then God is not going to hold it against her or him. If a believer does a sin listed in the Bible that is easily repented from, then they would very likely repent from it because they want to please God. Sometimes what are considered small sins are very hard to shake. Sometimes what are considered more severe sins are easily shaken. Let's not judge by standards we ourselves don't keep. We have all sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. Pride that is determined to push God away at all costs is what leads to hell. We all have different lists of what are serious sins and what are minor sins…let's not judge each other or condemn each other by these because Jesus warned us to not judge or condemn people.

We are called to grow in love and not be experts in what is sin, and what is not sin and the supposed appropriate punishments for those sins. The former leads to tolerance and love, the latter can lead to judgmental ism, walls, isolationism, and "holier-than-thou" attitudes.

In the book of Acts 10:25-48, Peter says that God has shown him that he "ought not call anyone impure or unclean", and further that, "God shows no favoritism but accepts from every nation the ones who fear him and do what is right." This acceptance is not based on us not sinning…we all sin…but it is based on our faith in God and our caring for what God cares about with a commitment to a clean conscience (no one is perfect). We are not perfect (1 John 1:8). When God says that He accepts these people, it means He accepts them as friends. The religious, those who are knowingly self-righteous are far from God because they are into rules and not loving people. Rules can become an end in themselves. God still loves them, Jesus goes to seek them out and invites them into friendship…but if they reject that invitation forever, God can't force himself on them.

When we embrace a sin we push God away in that area, we need to let go of the sin and instead embrace God and His grace. God is not a tit-for-tat God. He doesn't expect perfection overnight. I have prayed for years to be free from many really BIG sins in my life, but God did not come through overnight. God is not in a rush to purify me. He can and does take us from the shelf and works on us, but often He puts us back on the shelf to rest us. Love and sin are relational. Love is healthy, sin is unhealthy.

God's love for us is not dependent on our output or actions. God loves us unconditionally. When we respect God and care for people then it is because we have opened our lives to His presence. If we don't respect God and don't care for others, then God is pushed away from us. Which scenario makes us friends with God? Which scenario allows God to accept us as His friends? Love is not that we have first loved but that God has first loved us. God does not push Himself on People. He never hung out with the religious Pharisees, and Sadducees of His day because they pushed Him away and wanted to kill Him, but He hung out with those who were called sinners, and unclean because they were real. They were imperfect, broken, but hungry enough to invite Jesus for a beer or glass of wine.

Grace:

The word grace has commonly been defined as: (1). Unmerited favor, and (2). An empowering presence. These serve well when applied to our relationships with God, but the first one does not work well when we ourselves try to give grace to others. By that I mean when we dispense grace to someone will we say to them: “I am glad to be gracious”, or “I'm glad to give you unmerited favor.” The second one is judgmental in nature; and the first one only sounds judgmental depending on what meaning we pour into it. We are commanded to be gracious and it is not for us to judge people. Trying to motivate giving grace to others with the definition of “unmerited favor” does not work for me. There is a measuring, judging, questioning, and labeling involved that Jesus forbids us to do that this definition pushes. Grace and love both give benefit of the doubt to people, it believes the best about people, it isn't judgmental in nature. It appeals to the nobleness and worth of people… the image of God that they were created in, not the guilt or shame Satan puts on people. So what is a better working definition for grace?

Grace is loving someone unconditionally. By that I mean we love them whether or not they did good or bad or have apathy. Unconditional love is not influenced or cheapened by people trying to earning it through their goodness. And we don't stop loving people because they failed someone else, us, or did something bad. Grace cares for everyone no matter what, not only those who are supposedly respectful. God grants us grace because it changes us, flows through the humble into others, and doesn't lie stagnant. We don't do good to warrant grace or earn it. Motives and mechanisms are important in the matters of the heart and mind. We can reject grace or unconditional love…but it takes believing lies, expending hateful effort, and walking in blindness to do so. These can only be sustained by pride and fear…but God’s grace is more powerful so only those who really are deceived into thinking they don't want it or need it and persevere in doing so close the door of their lives to it. They are delusional. We are all made for a God, not Hell.

God is gentle. He wins people through His gentle touches, not splitting rocks, gale-force winds, or extreme explosive fires (Cf. First Kings 19). He doesn't approach people roughly, torturing them, locking them down forcefully, threaten ly, angrily, meanly, disrespectfully, uncaring ly, dominantly, with an, “I’ll show you” attitude to directly change us on the inside. Actions that do change people are in line with the way Jesus lived on earth. When there is violence on God’s part in the Bible, it was not meant to change the people, but to put endings to injustices. When God invites change on the inside it is done by His Spirit inwardly, gently, humbly, and mercifully like Jesus promised in the beatitudes found in Matthew chapter 5. Such attitudes spring from grace, not fear; love and not lies.

God does not waste anything. When people are hostile, hateful, and hurtful; when they choose to persecute, torture, and violate us, God chooses to use it to first show us what is in our hearts and then to invite us to change our energies and attitudes within with His help and grace so we will learn to love people even in the most horrendous times and circumstances…which becomes a witness to those whose energies are as unhealthy as ours.

My Faulty Approach:

I know my approach has been all wrong. My default settings have been to analyze things...everything. Some stuff can use analyzing but most stuff not. The need for deep analysis hardly ever happens. One ought only to analyze when one has all the information needed to do a

proper job. Analysis is good for science, engineering, and mechanics, IT professionals, and repair persons. As for people...I have tried to analyze them continually...and it doesn't work...I can't love people by trying to analyze...I can't love people by trying to analyze them first...you can't analyze love... I can't grow in love by analyzing my stuff…only prayer in the context of people who love you like family grows love.

Philosophy is an art form that no one can win. People always tweet and squeeze their premises to get pre-determined results often to miss guided loyalties. Philosophers are always arguing by each other and not connecting...no one believes everyone else's premises even if they agree on the logic...or it has to do with different interpretations of the same premises. No one wins. Many philosophers are in their ivory towers babbling away while letting meaningful relationships go by the way-side, atrophy, and leaving them to die. Over analyzing stuff is very unhealthy, one loses perspective, loses reality, loses sanity, and loses intuition because of it. Analyzing often has to do with measuring, or how to fix stuff, or control stuff, or get the right results. These lend very easily to judging people.

Jesus made mud on the Sabbath and this angered the Scribes and Pharisees because they saw it as work which was forbidden on the Sabbath. They wanted Jesus dead because of it. I read an Orthodox Jewish book that said it was wrong to comb one's hair (if one has hair) on the Sabbath because it was equivalent to plowing a field on the Sabbath. This is legalism and going beyond the scope of the commands given by Moses. Satan is into skewing our judgments and circumventing our attempts to love by introducing philosophical constructs and concepts as more binding or more important than whether we are actually loving people on the Sabbath or otherwise. It is a sure sign of disconnect and unreality when a rule is introduced (along with the threatened punishment of death if not kept) in a community, yet most of the people who devotedly attend the meetings of the faithful don't keep the rule. The rule is not working.

That doesn't mean one throws out one's mind, just that it needs to become a servant not the fleshly ruler of miss guided loyalties, not the overseer of supposed respectability and morality, not to the foremost security seeker, not the tool of one's fears and hurts, not the analyzer of all things, not the LAW determiner, but to be put in its rightful place...seeking to love in gentle, simple, caring, healthy, non-selfish ways. Connecting to reality in a non-judgmental way in all relationships, those close by and those far away, and those one just sees or meets during one's days is more important.

When one can't make up one's mind on a moral matter quickly and conscientiously and those inside the church community are divided on it (not just the laity but, clergy, and respected theologians too), then perhaps the best thing to do is to leave it in the hands of each person's own conscience like Saint Paul instructed. If it takes a very long period to realize it is wrong by a pope, and then for him to make it a mortal sin on top of that seems absurd to me. Things that are grave or mortal in nature should be obvious to those supposedly endowed with infallibility. If one needs books, years of study, sophisticated and involved arguments to supposedly prove it, then it denies the Holy Spirit's role in simply informing our consciences on the matter.

When we encounter every truth situation in a fight or flight mode: lacking gentleness, being suspicious, untrusting, judgmental, and unable to love people then our minds have gotten in the way of our hearts (that has been me). When our systems, theologies, grids, and need for security

are rooted in fears they become more important than love, and then motivational changes are deeply needed. One does not need philosophy to love, a new born baby loves, a child loves, a teenager may start to get rebellious, the young adult may start to get jaded, the middle aged may get angry and disillusioned, the supposedly matured may get crabby and stubborn, the old may get self-pitying, demanding, unreasonable and cold. No wonder Jesus noted the importance of remaining childlike in attitudes, mind, and heart. To capture the ability to be playful and celebrate the simplicity of love, people, and relationships.

The lawyers of Jesus day knew the Law, but tied up heavy burdens on those who had difficulty carrying them. They could justify their take on the law with reasoning's and logic, but they did not allow for simple love. Their mantra was: "do, obey, and don't question my expertise". We can't force anyone to go against their own conscience. A heavy handed approach never works.

The only way to deal with the mind of mindless gears, and not using it as a frustrating and harmful tool is to address all such harmful attitudes, sins, independent mechanism, and judgmental ism in prayer to Jesus through confession, understanding, repentance in faith, renewing the mind, and submitting it to God in love in the contexts of one's relationships... dealing with the roots, histories, and the ways we navigate our current relationships. Philosophy is concept motivated...not love motivated. Love is people motivated. Love cares for people in healthy simple and joyful ways.

Organizations or movements that rely too heavily on certain brands of philosophy or loyalty to certain concepts (think universities, colleges, governments, political parties, businesses, certain causes or movements, and yes some prominent religious organizations) that marginalize others who can contribute and bring much needed realities; need to invite those they have rejected like children, women, prostitutes, homeless people, the poor, the hurting, sinners, the disabled, and the unclean to their tables (not so much to teach or judge them but to learn how to love each of them more deeply (giving them the right to their voices)) to better understand the fuller scope of humankind, reality, and relational love so one can live it out in respecting people in this "fucked up" world in a more holistically, healthier, and kinder way. We would not only see others differently but learn to see ourselves differently too. We are not all that different from each other because we all have and will sin. Salvation is through the forgiveness of our sins, not rule or law keeping.

A humble man will let truth speak for itself. He does not say, "I speak truth because of my God-ordained-position, heritage, or study and therefore you must listen to me." Deciding to believe someone because of their title, position, ancestors, or spiritual heritage is not wise. Saying one needs to obey "so and so" because "so and so" is an authorized dealer of certain commodities (i.e. truth, justice, peace, order, rule, and authority) ...is not always healthy. Fallible people who are given too much respect, power, and honor will be sorely tempted to abuse it. Even those who aren't respected, and don't have too much power, and aren't favored land up doing unwise things. Jesus said those on the side of truth listen to Him. So truth was very important to Jesus and He trusted that it could change lives, courses, direction, and destinies. He knew truth could influence people for good.

To those who were humbly discipled by Jesus, He said they were trustworthy enough to impart His wisdom. Judas was discipled by Jesus, but Judas never humbly took root and was eventually

willing to sell Jesus for a profit. Jesus said we will know each other by our fruits not by who ordained us.

Even though Jesus said for the disciples to obey the Jewish leaders, in the end they knew they had to obey God in their consciences! Even though Jesus said for us to obey our leaders we must first obey God in our consciences. Church leaders, no matter which line of origin/ordination are not our consciences, and we are not to be their slaves or toys obeying their every request, rule, whim or fancy especially when they threaten us with dire consequences. They are coercive in their rule…something Jesus forbade His disciples to do (Cf. Matthew 20:25).

When we have a good, wholesome, and acceptable goal in mind, then we don't have to be legalistic about how we fulfill the goal. We don't have to follow a certain form, method, or man-made-rule to achieve the goal in an acceptable manner. In the book of Daniel, the king's rule was that everyone in his household had to eat fully from his table. But the young Jewish exiles in his service could only eat kosher food and so were caught in a dilemma. They realized that the goal of eating from the king's table was to be healthy and managed to convince the steward to accept that if the goal (to be healthy) could be met in another manner then the method would still be acceptable. Rules don't necessarily make things acceptable. Often people ask: What would Jesus do? Jesus was not predictable; we can't put Him in a box. He did not want to follow a form for form's sake. He does not want us to put Him in a box! He is with us and will guide us into the truth. He will surprise us in so many ways yet remain consistent with His teachings.

The fear of those who appeal to central human authority to establish truth is that people will just believe what they want to if there is not centralization. We may dispute what people choose to believe but we can't take away their choice to believe what they do. If the only reason we believe certain doctrines is because we are supposed to respect those in authority (usually out of fear), then we are not following truth but men who point to their position for their authority, not to truth. Jesus trusted truth enough for it to stand as a witness. Whatever Jesus expected from people 2000-years ago, He expects basically from everyone who heard/hears His voice since then. Jesus did not want to use miracles, signs and wonders to win people over. He won people over by His love and truth that set people joyously free to embrace the same. Jesus won people over by touching them in their hearts, minds, and Godly thirsts. Jesus pointed to His love and profound simplicity of His truthful teachings as the evidence for deciding whether or not to believe Him. We should do the same. If our truths don't bear love through grace, then maybe we are mistaken about what truth is.

Don't Buy Off More Than You Can Chew:

A common mistake for some, myself included (for a large part of my journey) is to too eagerly embrace man-made-lists-of-doctrines. When those lists have certain man-made-punishments (passed on as though God approves) for infractions, then they might be coercive in nature. Don't buy into it if it is coercive. Even if it is not coercive in nature, then don't buy into it unless it is simply a consequence of Jesus' teachings. If it takes books, and long and intricate philosophical arguments to somehow prove, then I'd be weary of it. Anything that condemns or judges' others so as to make us hard hearted, unkind, fearful, and mean towards them, needs to be re-examined or jettisoned. We need to use wisdom.

The wise thing to do is to munch on the spiritual food that God puts on our plates each day and where the rubber meets the road. Let's not rush into anything. Let's not give into fears and skepticisms too easily either, in such a way that we don't embrace Jesus (and His teachings) more fully each day. No understanding means empty beliefs. Focusing on how to hear God's voice better, on how to pray more effectively all with the thrust being towards loving people more deeply is what the goal ought to be.

I know that I need to watch my motives for why I want to believe things. I need to watch my energy when I gravitate toward a belief about God, people, myself, and our human destinies. Only embracing the box or package because I can live with it now, or because I want to belong and don't have a home is not wise. We have to ask less selfish questions like: How does it affect others? Would the Apostles approve of or embrace it? Is it from the Father's heart? Can a child understand it? Is it merciful? Could you share it with others without embarrassment or feeling like it is anal and absurd? Will it make me more loving? Am I willing to condemn others just to get a package or a ticket to Heaven? Would I share it even though I'm not sure about how it would apply to me under the right circumstances? Am I deferring hard questions onto others by throwing my mind out and letting others do the thinking for me? Am I abdicating my responsibility and accountability to Jesus onto somebody else?

Yes, many things need to be taken by faith, but when it comes to how to treat others, what is reasonable, what is merciful, and what is fair, then we all have our own intuitions and consciences that speak louder than philosophies or louder than many people in positions of authority (whether from church or state or sports clubs). We are all made in the image of God, we are all wired to see things with certain perspectives on reality. We ought not be forced, scared, or threatened into a belief and path of action.

Life isn't about getting the "whole package deal". Life is about relationships. Relationships are messy, complex, and painful a lot of the time. Boxes cave in because they are often rigid with no foundations and are not flexible enough. Jesus is the only foundation that can last. Jesus kept it simple; everyday life is about practicing the small things Jesus asked us to do. Yes, BIG things do present themselves at times.

Every day there are many temptations to judge and get offended by others. These situations are not in short supply. Praying for wisdom, and getting wisdom on how to deal with it all is healthy. As you read further I will give tools on how to deal with taking offense and judging others. Knowing how to stay away from people-judgments is important, but also knowing how to clean up our people-judging when we fall into it (and we do so sometimes often others times less so) is also just as important. Jesus is the way. Jesus is not a philosophy.

Boxes & Concepts

We love concepts but many times hate them. When people are affiliated with a concept we are loyal to; some scenarios can happen.

We can love them if they are in the right box. And maybe we are loving the "right" box too much. Or...

If the people are not in the right box "think respectable community" in our eyes, then we can get suspicious about them and distrust them even though they are loyal to some concept(s) we value. Judging each of their motives may become really BIG factors in how we choose to relate to them positively or negatively.

If we are wholly loyal to our boxes, then their boxes can be seen as very distasteful and hateful, and we can land up judging and hating the person's belonging to those boxes by association even though they value some of the same concepts that we do. Even if they don't have the same values we are called to love them anyhow.

I'm learning that people are not the boxes or concepts they are sometimes loyal to. They are people, who rightly and sometimes wrongly see some good in their respective boxes. I have been the same...still am in many ways. We can be very loyal, or less so to our boxes and concepts. We more often than not have no concept of each other's histories, formations, goals, fears, callings, cares, humanities, dignity, guilt, frustrations, anger, hopes, despair, emptiness, hurts, blindness, frailty, and longings. We don't understand each other's thoughts, thinking patterns, aims, searches, how hard we are on ourselves, what we want to escape...and the freedom we long for. We don't know who or what was promised to others, how they were indoctrinated, if they had loving parents, or if they were abused. We don't know the mind of God regarding each person. Often we are in the dark about the mind of God regarding our very selves. We are all in need of love. We are called to love our enemies.

It is very easy to love and hate people based on the concepts they embrace and the boxes they affiliate with. Boxes such as political parties, social issues, movements, values, causes, governments, sects, job titles, and religious affiliations. Respecting people means letting go of the boxes that we may hate, are hostile to and seeing the persons not as boxes or concepts we disagree with, but as people made in the image of God. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Let's not judge people and condemn them because we don't like their boxes and definitely don't know the mind of God on much if anything, and if we did we would love each person more deeply.

Knowing Self

Judging can be rooted in negative, skeptical, and cynical, expectations. What are called forebodings. Changing what we expect can lead to peace in other areas of our lives. A physician can't operate on herself or himself too successfully. We often need help from others and God to straighten out our crooked thinking, approaches to life, and how we treat ourselves and others. Lots of work is needed, sometimes it is really painful, as we approach life with flaws that don't seem to go away and cause a lot of frustration, heartache, angst, self-pity, and even more forebodings.

This is where the way of peace and gentleness is so important. Believing that God will help us navigate these learning curves of change (most of the time dealing with the internal) and listening to and obeying the Holy Spirit will bring more and more peace (and tolerance) eventually although pain, and brokenness might very well make the pathway to the new creation God planned for us to be in fullness a long, long ways off..

Often it is not so much our take on an issue that is the issue but how we come to our take on the issue that matters. When our thinking, approach, energy, expectations, and dispositions are screwed up we land up having a bumpy judgmental tit-for-tat life that stops us from loving with perseverance and continuity.

How Human Conflicts Can Evolve and Possibly Be Resolved:

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 them. "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."[1] 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.

So when somebody hurts us, and we don't want to judge, then we won't speculate on his motives or intent, or supposed stupidity, or abrasive ness, or his lack of kindness, or his pride and arrogance, or his weaknesses and tell him 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.

Not speaking judgmental thoughts is very wise, but it is even healthier to not have judgmental thoughts. If we find we are entertaining judgmental thoughts, then exploring how we feel and using honest "I"-statements helps to gain perspective and push away the judging. Then by aiming higher than wanting to not judge people. I have found that aiming for and practicing "do to others what you want them to do to you" clears the mind, quiets the mind, and generates kinder thoughts towards others. Yes, we will be torn between the high road and dark thoughts at times...but it is not a cake walk that Jesus calls us to. Even with useful tools to manage my emotions, when people hurt me it can burn something fierce. Pain is a part of navigating relationships.

No one rejoices over judging; but because of truth's nature those who seek truth rejoice over truth.[2]

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[3]. Judging believes and accuses the worst about people.

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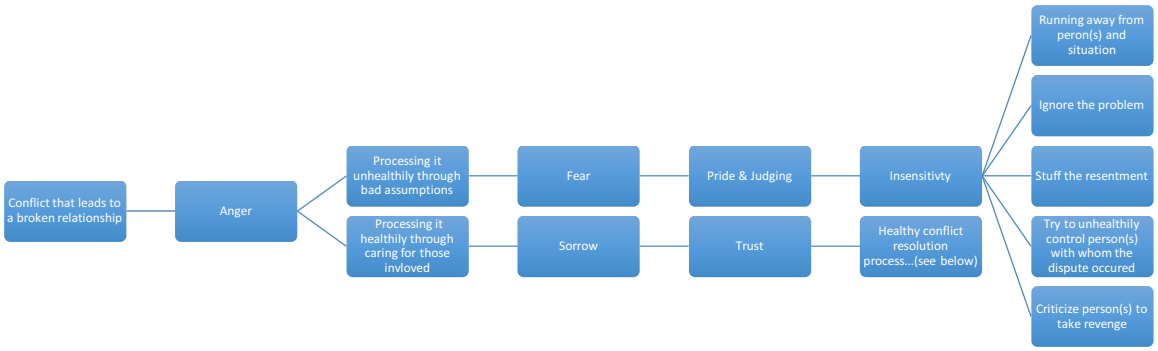
[1] Danny Silk, from a www.mynewday.tv show.
[2] First Corinthians 13:6
[3] First Corinthians 13:7

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.

"I"-statements follow the formula: "I feel such…when you…because…and I therefore I would like…", and they are to be simple, none-threatening, none accusing, non-judgmental, without putdowns, and without name calling.

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. The rest of this section talks about some dynamics involved in our conflicts. It goes into some of the roots or judging-strongholds so that our judging-histories can be seen and washed clean and our minds can be renewed from our bad energies or habits that cause us to judge. It has many extra reasons as to why judging is wrong, hurtful, and unhealthy. Coming to these truths was a bloody hell.



This diagram shows both paths on dealing with conflicts. The upper one is unhealthy, and the lower one is healthy. When a relationship is broken because of conflict (with a history or not), it will cause anger because anger alerts us to the fact that something is wrong. Anger is neither right nor wrong. It is what it is. It is what we do with anger that can be harmful. If we take the fleshly route, anger is used in an unhealthy way and causes a lot of hurt (human anger does not achieve the righteousness of God). When we healthily process our anger, then we stay away from sin (hurting people) in the process, and if we do sin in the process (because we aren't perfect) then we will be motivated to deal with it healthily ASAP if we know how.

The Unhealthily Processed Anger:

When we are humanly angry because of a violation, injustice, hurt, or supposed disloyalty, then we can make bad assumptions, and this can lead to fear that the violation will reoccur, and the injustice will be perpetually visited on us. This causes dark fear and an urgency to do something about it ASAP. But because we see the injustice and feel hurt, we can judge them as worthy of our resentment (and see them as an enemy and harden our hearts towards them). This is all done out of hurt, fear and pride because it says "I need to protect myself at all costs" and "I'm better than them." This leads to insensitivity and a lack of respect for the person. From this, five scenarios will arise:

Scenario (I): Running away. This is often the cowardly thing to do which is also a result of being fear driven. Hagar in Genesis 16:1-15 after getting into a dispute with her mistress felt powerless and a lot of self-pity and tried to solve her problem by running away.

Scenario (II): Ignoring the problem. This was Abraham's solution to the mess with Hagar he and his wife had created (Cf. Genesis 16:1-15). It says: it is not my responsibility; you deal with it the way you see fit.

Scenario (III): Stuffing the resentment. This is what I have been in the habit of doing in so many of my conflicts. It has the power to kill happiness, love, life, and joy. It has the power to get us seeking after idols to bring illegitimate happy moments (because the moments are fleeting). One will seek such idols out if this is not dealt with healthily. The resentment need not always be against the person(s) you have had the conflict with, it can be with yourself for having gotten into the situation in the first place and for the things you did in the situation that you are not proud of.

Scenario (IV): Attempting to control the person(s) to get our happiness back (but we can't change anyone). This attempt tries to control people with force and threats possibly using fears (of punishments), meanness, impatience, inappropriate boundary violations, abuse, hatred, superiority, lording authority over people, using guilt or shame to control people, or using blackmail to control people. But our fears can also motivate us, fears such as: insecurity, disloyalty, pride, loss of wealth, loss of power, loss of privileges, loss of relationship, loss of purpose, loss of satisfaction, loss of self-image, loss of happiness, loss of benefits, loss of love, and loss of self-esteem.

Scenario (V): Attempt to criticize the person(s). This is meant to hurt the person(s) or take revenge on them for the injustice(s). Slander, gossip, meanness, hostility, character assassinations, malice, hatred, and possibly rape, or murder, along with "I will pay them back and more…I'll teach them" attitude being a part of this package.

All these scenarios lead to insanity, mental illness, depression, unhappiness, despair, and not wanting to live, and if we want to live we will seek to survive independently from God but we will become dependent on idols such as food, drink, sex, power, money, experiences…etc. which are all unhealthy for our souls.

I personally have found myself tempted by these scenarios compulsively, and have often given into some of them (even though I wanted to suppress my lashing out at people). They became such strongholds that they happened so quickly when supposed or real infractions happened, that I immediately found myself in the "insensitivity" stage in the blink of an eye not knowing how I got there each time. I did not feel the bump in the road because it felt so smooth and normal.

I have gone through much of my life not anticipating how my words and actions make others feel only wanting to not get into trouble and ultimately only caring about and being conscious of my own feelings. Jesus said a person who finds his or her life will lose it, but whoever loses his or her life for Jesus' sake will find it (Cf. Matthew 10:39). Do I continue in selfishness or do I pursue altruism in the little intrigues of each day? I want forgiveness, but that means knowing the full extent of how I harmed others (because if I don't then I don't know the gravity of my sins and how much I am forgiven) and that means to know how people felt when I hurt them in my sordid past, and to feel people's feelings now even anticipating how to make them feel happy and to not hurt them. I choose to be open to and pursue that reality from now on with Jesus' grace. This will also help to kill judging.

Healthily Processed Anger:

For me I had to learn how to slow the process down so I could see how my “anger” went to “bad assumptions”, how “bad assumptions” went to “fear”; how “fear” went to “pride and judging”; how “pride and judging” went to “insensitivity”; and how “insensitivity” went to “trying to control” people, so that my prayers could be more pointed to deal with this mess (or way of thinking and way of life) that I created with the devil’s help, and so be able to renew and change my mind and attitudes to become healthy with Jesus’ help. But even when one recognizes these dynamics at work one needs a better way than the above unhealthy scenarios. This requires undoing these sins committed out of our human anger (that is not sinful) each time we find ourselves here, and then to deal with our broken relationships in healthy ways instead. This will take time and will take a learning curve that will see many victories that bring releases and moments of joy, but also many “seeming defeats” that are just part of the learning curve and should not be seen as failures. The defeats are part of the learning curve and not meant to shame us. God will never leave us nor forsake us.

This is summarized in these steps:

A. In prayer and gentle meditation ask the Holy Spirit to heal our attitudes and unhealthy relationship
B. In gentleness ask the Holy Spirit where and when we judged or hardened out hearts
C. Wait patiently and search gently for the wrong(s), then…
D. Forgive ourselves from the heart and in prayer ask God for forgiveness for us judging people and moving to insensitivity; being motivated by our fears, and for the above sour scenarios we may have acted out
E. Repent in prayer from the sins, attitudes, and scenarios we acted out
F. Seek healing to our relating styles so that the dark energies continue to diminish and are fought off and we are renewed with gentleness, healthy attitudes and God’s empowering presence
G. Move towards healthy conflict resolution

This process needs to be done in trust, gentleness, patience, and not by being hard on ourselves or others. It ought not be rushed, and shallowly prayed through. Holding onto the promises of God patiently with confident expectations is key too. Negativity just trips us up with more judging.

Healing Our Relationships

Judgments and condemnations never heal relationships. We need to get to a place of clean, non-toxic, gentle-caring for people, and kind energy which is done through heartfelt honest prayer. Kindness and gentleness in listening and communicating with those in the conflict and speaking our thoughts and about our hurts (in non-threatening, non-blaming and non-shaming ways) are very important to building trust. Accepting our wrongful parts in the conflict is key. Asking forgiveness, and forgiving those who hurt us are what will make our relationships go forward. Then setting boundaries non-threateningly (when the Holy Spirit says it is OK (not out of fear or meanness)). Setting boundaries with clean energy and peace is crucial while being open to compromise where it is wise and full of commonsense.

Some people won't be open to this. You will sense their energy, along with walls going up from them that warn you to not push or pursue for reconciliation. When you sense this you are reading the person's energy, so respect the person's energy, along with the person. It is telling you that no matter what you say it will be taken as a threat, an accusation, or an attack. You are not bound to pursue the relationship with them in this case, but be kind to them and pray for them and watch yourself. Understanding that relationships are two-way-streets and that we ought not try to manipulate or control others is key to health and happiness. If need be, we may need to cut off ties with the person or party that does not want to play fair.

(An aside: Sometimes people can be so jaded that they expect the worst from almost everyone. Their judgments are so skew that they take the good things people do and twist them into something awful and choose to get offended without giving people a chance. When this operates, then fears, and feeling threatened, or being insecure can be at the root of it all. Or, it can be done out of wanting to dominate, out of pride, or out of arrogance by trying to put up a strong front; either way they land up selling people short, not trusting them, and if they voice or act out their wrongful judgments/offense they land up hurting people. Again hardening one's heart towards people is unhealthy, and bad so no wonder Jesus forbade it.)

Taking Offense:

Taking offense often can be very much like the above discussion on trying to resolve conflicts in unhealthy ways. But it is slightly different. Here is the dynamic at work when offense is taken against people, their choices, beliefs, and actions:

This scenario happened so often in my life that it drove me crazy. I felt so judgmental most of the time and did not know what was happening inside of me until the Holy Spirit led me to deconstructed it with my Mom pointing me in the right direction. This sequence of thoughts and actions, and reactions became the mechanism or structure at work within me that drove love out of me so often. When I realized this, I was able to break free from the judgmental and condemning thoughts I had towards others, their choices, beliefs, and actions. For a long time, I thought it was because of my poor understanding of the relationship between law and grace as is taught in the New Testament.

If we have good expectations the above offense-dynamic can still happen. We can expect good from people but it is our bad assumptions that can get us into this trouble. It can also happen more often if we have jaded outlooks or forebodings, are very skeptical, cynical, and negative and are in the habit of assuming the worst about other people. This dynamic gets triggered if we are in the habit of making bad assumptions all the time. We need wisdom.

So how does one break this regression? By forgiving oneself when aware, confessing each part of this dynamic at work within oneself to God when aware, asking God for forgiveness and healing,

receiving them from God in faith, and then committing to change all these beliefs, attitudes and actions in the dynamic with Jesus' help realizing that we make bad assumptions that lead to unhealthy attitudes and instead choosing with God's grace to not assume the worst about people in the heat of the moment. But doing all this with gentleness (self-respect), and praying with heartfelt accuracy through all of this baggage as suggested until the strongholds are gone. Do not own guilt unless the Holy Spirit says it is OK to own it; if He says own it, then deal with it otherwise it is false guilt. Also we need to admit that our insensitivity will lead to some of the unhealthy scenarios discussed in the previous section. This needs to be confessed and repented from in faith and dealt with healthily too.

Also, it is easy to overlook a person (as a target of our offense) in a situation where you and two or more people are involved. We can think it is only one of the persons but it can involve more people, especially when we really love one of them or blindly don't suspect we would take offense at them in the situation because it seems so obvious that it is the other person is at fault.

Situations that annoy us, aggravate us, piss us off, or have us seeing people as idiots because of their supposed incompetency can all point to saying this dynamic is at work in us. But not all the time; we can feel unsettled for many reasons…just don't jump the gun…ask Holy Spirit if issues need to be worked on in this dynamic…otherwise just wait it out trusting Jesus to lead you out of the turbulence.

The reason I use the word: "assumptions" is because I know I need to own my thoughts and not blame others for them. The assumptions we make become ours because we see them as valid truths, but they often don't believe the best about people. The assumptions are usually caricatures, overly simplistic, or negative in nature. Assumptions are about believing lies, whereas judgments are measurements that lead to hard hearts. That is why a distinction needs to be made between assumptions and judgments. They need to be dealt with one at a time.

In all of this don't think you need to battle the devil, outsmart him, or figure him or his strategies out. Be gentle with yourself, try to be in the moment and watch for apathy, unrest, irritability, and lack of peace as these are signs that "may (not always)" point to us having chosen to "assume", chosen to "be offended", chosen to "judge", and to have reached the dead end of "insensitivity". If we have insensitivity, then that is good sign that something is amiss. Pray for wisdom…for knowing the voice of God is indispensable here.

These principles I have found need to be practiced and perfected in all areas of my life. The Holy Spirit can be trusted to heal us as we pray in faith for healing and trusting Him to bring it about.

After having found some success in dealing with "taking offense" at people, we may go days with peace thinking everything has been solved, but so many situations can arise that trigger this regression or dynamic within us. Don't give up…just apply what you have learned in gentleness, love, perseverance, and trust. God will complete the work He began in you. Don't give up. God loves us. We are His children.

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 it along with its consequences are the punishments for it. 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. What happens after the injustice is stopped, will depend on the attitudes of those involved in the situation at hand. 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.

For many Christians the word "meek" is wrestled with uncomfortably because it is found in the Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Cf. Matthew 5:5), and because it in some sense conveys weakness. A standard lexicon defines meekness strongly as: "enduring injury with patience and without resentment… [but also weakly as] deficient in spirit and courage: [and submissive as in] not violent or strong."

Other Bible translations use the word "gentle" instead of the word "meek" in the above verse, but many reject it for conveying even more weakness, cowardice, and low self-esteem. But I beg to differ that it is the weak to genuinely gentle. Being genuinely gentle is anything but easy to be when we have anger within that threatens to explode into meanness, hostility, judgment, or resentment because of injustices, hurts, or violations visited on us. The ability to be gentle is a gift that can steer us away from much heated conflict mixed with verbal or even physical violence. No wonder Jesus prized it so much.

Gentleness as a cloak???

Genuine gentleness is not a cloak over sinful attitudes. Genuine gentleness has dealt with sinful attitudes in the heart and mind, and so the gentleness is real, not forced, not acted, not faked, and not manipulative. James 3:11 says: "Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening?" How do we get rid of the bitterness?

To do this one needs to catch things before they morph into bad fruit. We do this by healthily dealing with our anger (among the other vices (Cf. the Essay: "Killing Pride" from this Website for an in depth answer). If we have only started to generally see and deal with our anger in practical ways then we will have a backlog of mindsets, habits, and thought patterns that ignore, or harbor, or suppress our anger in situations in order to be nice, supposedly gentle, or to look like a saint. Whitewashing walls never lets love through.

Knowing that gentleness is the path to take but ignoring, and stuffing our anger in every situation is unwise. We can express that we feel anger and still be gentle because we are not blaming or meanly taking it out on the one who hurt us or challenged us.

When we don't listen to our anger, then it turns our hearts hard and makes us insensitive towards people. This destroys genuine humility, gentleness, and care.

It is so very easy to say, "I ought not be angry". Yet, this is bullshit and a lie from the evil one! Anger is neither right nor wrong, but it is a healthy-alarm-response that says deal with your

situation in a genuinely caring fashion. This anger or alarm should not be ignored...and usually is when there are "pros and cons" or there is more than one side to a situation or dispute at hand. This is where the confusion can set in. The confusion keeps us from dealing with the issues healthily and that is exactly what the devil wants to happen to us because the anger won't get resolved! We need wisdom, we need to unclog our confusion and blockages to seeing things clearly, caring, and being genuinely gentle. Anger helps us to see things that need to be dealt with, it should always be owned, and then it should lead us to gently, non-judgmental ly, and caring ly deal with each situation in truth, respect, and warmth even when at times in pain, darkness, hurt, devastation, and rejection.

We can project our anger on people thinking they are not warm towards us, when the real problem can be that we are suppressing or not owning our present or past anger. When we do own our anger we see people differently and our bad impressions can fall away rather quickly.

I think the truest test of character is not: "Can I conquer my addiction?" however important that is, but: "Can I be human enough to forgive people for the hurts they inflict(ed) on me?" Often (not always) addictions are tied to un-forgiveness. When we fight the greater battles the lesser ones can fall by the wayside without a fight. When we are hurt, judged, humiliated, devalued, violated, or insulted, then to process it all and move to forgiveness can seem as difficult as getting a Camel to go through an eye of a needle. Being gentle in the midst of being hurt, judged, humiliated, devalued, violated, or being insulted and not being mean, hostile, and hateful in return is the example Jesus showed us. This takes real strength and love for one's enemies. It takes not sweeping our anger under the carpet, but to own it and deal with things healthily.

When I was a kid I got challenged to a fight at school. I won the fight, but right afterwards a young girl decided to pay me back by fighting me and trying to humiliate me. I could have easily beat her...but I cried tears of self-pity because I wasn't allowed to fight girls. I never resented her for it afterwards for many years, but much later I boastfully and meanly began to retorted to myself whenever I thought about the incident that I could have beaten her to a pulp. I then began to realize this attitude of mine was proud, uncaring, unkind, not gentle, but resentful, abrasive, and unhealthy; and it needed to be replaced with gentleness, compassion, sorrow, forgiveness, and caring. So what if I was stronger physically than her, the real test of any person is to be able to respect people and to be gentle in the face of wickedness. Nonviolence as a pathway to peace takes more strength and courage than acting out of our fears, insecurities, and hurts with hostility or rage or violence.

God loves each of us unconditionally, forever. Our pride keeps us from enjoying His presence. When we wrongly think Jesus relishes our punishments, then we become judgmental and easily offended in our natures. If we want to be like Jesus, then we will jettison the meanness of wishing torment on others, if it has been active in our souls. If we want to be merciful, then we got to see Jesus as merciful and loving towards everyone including His enemies. Embracing Jesus' true nature will set us free to love and not be judgmental or to choose to not be offended as often as possible.

If we want confidence that God is wholly love without meanness, not hating people, not anal, not vindictive, not unmerciful, and not uncaring, not wanting to and not relishing to punish us for eternity if we walk in unbelief, then we have to see the real Jesus. We do this by reading and

believing the Gospels in the Bible. If we do see Jesus as mean and vindictive then it is because we have laminated our own dark energy onto what we read in the gospels. Jesus is the true image of God, the exact representation of the Father. Also, don't get retributive justice confused with Jesus just wanting to put an end to injustices. Jesus does not judge the way we are tempted to, Jesus does not harden His heart towards anyone; Jesus is non-coercive in His love. Jesus came to undo the works of the devil.

I have fallen into judging others so often, and immediately experienced the devil judging me in unrelated stuff (because of my schizophrenia) thereafter each time with me only finding relief when my judging was healthily repented from with God's help. The devil's judging made me feel like I was not listened to (had no voice), like I had no worth, like what was important to me was discounted, like it had no substance, like what was important to me was meaningless, like I had nothing to stand on; I felt my points were mercilessly ignored, not valid, empty, and held no water...and I felt guilty, desperate, exposed, and fearful; unable to love people, or advance in confidence in this state of mind.

Only when we know how others feel when judged will we find real strength and resolve to stay away from judging others. The way the devil made me feel when he judged me I now know that is how my judging (when) or if ever voiced (did) would make others feel. It is not a healthy place to be. That worm of guilt is not a pleasant burden to carry.

Praying to be able to care for others, aiming to dislike hurting them in unhealthy ways because we know how they will feel when we hurt them is key to staying away from hurting others. Love does no harm to others is where it is at. If we only try to stay away from hurting others because it is morally wrong, then that can be a very shallow foundation. When we grow in love, then we know how our actions can hurt others and that is a bigger deterrent to judging others than blindly following some rule(s) motivated by fear; not love. Getting to this place can be most uncomfortable, painful, frustrating, and hurtful. Now I know more fully why Jesus said for me to not judge or condemn others, but I got to deepen this work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit and somehow make Jesus' example my reality. This is a long learning curve.

Because we all come to the Holy Scriptures with personal baggage, we will often pour dirty stuff in the words, concepts, and morality (using them as unkind labels on people), that were really meant to heal, convince us of truth, and help us to love more deeply. With some people they see the world with an: "us vs. them" mentality through distorted Scriptures… where others are the enemy; are vile, evil, sinister, full of malice, dirty, and unclean, and they are the virtuous, clean, holy, pure, and blameless people. The others are those who are not just supposedly misled, but have chosen beliefs with malice and so they are in these persons' eyes rightly, zealously and wishfully worthy of God's wrath, punishment, personal hostility, meanness, anger, and to be seen as the enemy. Not worthy of warmth until they get their acts/beliefs together. When we pour our dirty laundry/ energy into these ideas expressed in Scripture, then we will always be judgmental until we confess and repent in faith from doing so on every single word, idea, and concept. If we pour meanness into our starting points, then we will get meanness at our ending points. We reap what we sow.

I found that I needed to examine and pray through with the Holy Spirit's help the making of many foolish decisions a long time ago that questioned in my mind the motives, energies, and

humanity of people belonging to certain communities, such as: Moslems, Buddhists, Mormons, Jehovah witnesses, Hindus, Sikhs, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, Gays, bullies, those who listen to questionable music, those with questionable morals, Democrats, Republicans, Liberals, Conservatives, Cool looking people, people with different cultures or different colored skins, Poor people, Rich people, Intelligent people, Dumb people, Athletic people, and generally those people I put into boxes. Who didn't I put into a box? Oh yes, I needed to pray through my attitudes towards those I profess to love, family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. In praying through this list, confessing the history and my current malice, ill intent, slander, judging, and intolerance; replacing them with truth, receiving God's forgiveness and my own; and inviting the Holy Spirit into the emptiness within, I found new depths spring up within me of caring, compassion, sympathy, empathy, and love for the persons I chose/choose to care for. I also found long solidified biases melt away.

"Whatever we believe we will look for proof to support it.

"We can believe negative things about people and find proof for it, just like we do with positive things. The sword cuts both ways.

"There is nothing, nothing wrong in talking about bad times, but to draw negative, bad, cynical, skeptical, slanderous, unhealthy conclusions about the people involved is not wise. Let's think the best about people and not judge or condemn them.

"My doctrine might be academic, intellectual, wise, profound and OK, but are my beliefs about God, myself, and others seeing the best about them in caring and healthy ways too: are they OK? These can be wholly different worlds.[4]

In situations that can be very explosive...like where money is the issue, or possessions are the issue we will handle such situations in judgmental ways so long as the money or possessions are most important to us. However, in deciding that the person is more important than the wealth, we will invite peace. When we decide the person is more important, then we care for them more than for wealth, and so are on the pathway to love. This will help kill the judging.

Putting on the attitude of deliberately being gentle to self and others is the armor that keeps us from falling into a place of playing with judgment and condemnation of others. When we choose to be gentle we are going to care for people and so find ways to love them. But even with this armor on we can at times fall into judging, but that needs to be dealt with, with the other useful advice in this Essay/Website along with other balm from the rest of the body of Christ as well as the Bible.

God answers genuine prayer in His time. Sometimes things need to be in place for the fullness to come. Yes, little 't' truths need to be administered, but supernatural love comes from God, so praying regularly for the ability to care so one won't judge is wise. We have not because we ask not. It is wise not to put all our focus on the content of our prayers as if they are good enough then God will listen to them. It is our faith in God that saves us. When we approach God with faith in His goodness with strategic prayer realizing that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him and those who believe that He is good, then we stand by faith, and will become strong in

[4] Cf. www.mynewday.tv program: with guests Steve and Wendy Backlund

God, and confident that God hears and answers our prayers (not always instantly or how we want). Jesus heals those with faith. When we forget the importance of exercising faith, and don't exercise it then we will wobble about and have unsure footing and life will get difficult and frustrating.

When I pray, I pray with faith, and expectation...but the results don't depend solely on my goodness/wisdom/and charm but on the faith given to me by God...yes I leave the desired prayer request results that I want God make happen up to Him...I don't have to be a control freak. If I have no doubt that things will happen like I requested, then maybe I'm delusional, psychotic, and acting in fleshly energy. Doubt is the constant companion of faith. Doubt says we don't see it all, and don't have God in our pockets. Doubt keeps us humble. Doubt is not unbelief. God is worthy of our trust...I don't have to be into instant gratification! I want to be in the present...actually present...I don't need to be perfect in my theology, aim, or thrust...just real, and really knowing what I want...but content enough to give God, whatever He wants!

When I forgive I ought not expect an immediate change in my emotions…these things can take time to process and run their course. My forgiveness is activated in faith, trust, and commitment through deciding to do it…emotions will follow my thoughts and thinking in their own time. Trying to cohort or force one's emotions one way or another is unhealthy and will lead to a fleshly energy that those closest to us can sense.

First impressions

First impressions often become the long term boxes we put people into. We make them one dimensional in either good, bad, or ugly ways. People have depth, they have many facets, they have many characteristics and these can baffle us, challenge us, and confuse us when we see inside the boxes.

People who break easily put people into ugly boxes usually straight away. They might think, "this stinks...so there has got to be more...so I got to reject them because I'd never be as stinky as them". This is a very judgmental approach and needs to be looked out for and dealt with wisely: confession, and repentance in faith…!

Lovers see the best in people...and believe the best about people...this helps them to be respectful, gentle and kind and forgiving.

People willing to fight for others will forgive much more easily than those not willing to fight for others. Our relationships are navigated often more because of us and our compasses than because of what's happening in those we meet and get to know.

First impressions can suck us into despising people, not trusting them, hating them, selling them short, and disrespecting them.

A first impression can also set a relationship in the right direction. But these can be challenged by what comes out of the box at later dates...it all depends on what comes out of the boxes and the good or bad will or energy we have within us. Boxes can be like Christmas presents every day, or like the packaged-handouts we despise. But we have to remind ourselves that what are in the boxes can change because of good and bad opportunities and our choices of attitudes.

Disputes

Even after a dispute has come to an end and been resolved we can still have energy, and attitudes and emotions within that are geared in the flight and fight response. We need to drop them, let them go, and look at the blue sky and shining sun. Holding onto the expectation of worse stuff happening again makes us miserable.

Being Hard and Judgmental to Oneself:

Being hard on oneself happens because one believes everything is up to oneself. It happens when we wrongly think we have to earn God's favor by keeping rules and quotas on "to-do-lists". The Book of Galatians explicitly states that we receive grace because of faith, not by doing the works of the law. We don't do rule keeping in order to get God's blessing, or favor or grace. We do things after we receive God's grace out of thankfulness. When we have grace we love God, and so want to keep His commandments found in the NT. When we sin we are forgiven through grace and healed through grace by faith. When we do serious sins we push God and His grace away...but God wants us to have His grace because it liberates us...only problem is our serious sins push that helping presence away if not repented from when we can with His grace. Examples of serious sins are: murder (no murderer has spiritual life within (Cf. 1 John 3:15) unless forgiven), or refusing to forgive another person (Cf. Matthew 6:15). There are other serious sins. But when we refuse to dispense grace we block our ability to receive that same grace.

Some Personal "I"-statements

"I"-statements follow the formula: "I feel such…when you…because…and I therefore I would like…", and they are to be simple, non-threatening, non-accusing, non-judgmental, without putdowns, and without name calling.

- I feel God, the church, and I are silenced when the Roman Catholic church says it is the final authority on interpreting Scripture because it takes away the voice of God speaking through all His people myself included, I would like the Roman Catholic church to recognize each person as a possible vehicle of meaning, and that the whole church has the mind of Christ not a select few.
- I felt threatened and forced to go to church on Sundays when Roman Catholic church said I will go to Hell if I did not go one Sunday without repenting (church is supposed to be a celebration not a life and death battle), I would like the Roman Catholic church to stop using fear to keep the pews full.
- I felt plenty of guilt while holding onto my past sins while waiting to confess them, as the Roman Catholic church prescribes confession to a priest, in order to be forgiven, because my sins would always accrue between each confession eating up my joy so I'd not feel the joy of God's salvation and the joy of being forgiven. I want the Roman Catholic church to not be so controlling, and to trust its flock more to God's care and love by encouraging and helping them to grow their faith in, connection to, and ability to hear God personally; so, that they will be love- focused and feel joy instead of being guilt-, sin- and rule-focused all the time.

Some Really Twisted Kak (Analyzing, Offense, & Being Stuck):

For such a long time I had been compulsively driven to push people away from me who I felt did not love [me, others and God in the official way]. I assumed that they had to have their theological ducks in a row and loyalties in the correct places for me to call their love or kindness acceptable. I would try to analyze everything about them, look for signs, quote Scriptures to myself: in their favor and then out of favor in the name of truth, all trying to find grounds to trust them, and to lower my walls [that I later found out were judgments and the offense dynamic mentioned earlier] and so love. But I was stuck in such a bad, unhealthy, and unkind place… and did not see the way out.

I knew vast portions of Scripture and I used them to try to love but only landed up judging people as acceptable or not acceptable because I took offense too easily because of my bad assumptions. Worse, if the direction I went to within my mind was not favorable towards these people, then I would have negative emotions and attitudes towards these people that tormented me because I knew they went against love (I did not want this kak).

I knew Jesus said that tax collectors and sinners loved each other, and that I wanted to love people because caring people love. But I was perpetually caught in analyzing and judging and choosing to be offended. But I came to my senses after much agonizing, failed analyzing, pain, brokenness, and desperation because no matter how I tried I was paralyzed when it came to sustaining my love. When I saw my warped attempts and broken strategies to form loving attitudes in me as worth jettisoning. I felt liberated by rejecting them with Jesus' help...and had a pretty decent day of stability because of it (which was unheard of for such a really long time). Then my wife Sophie sent me this devotional text right after this victory had materialized:

> Those that least deserve your love are the ones that need it the most. Lord, may I have the humbleness of spirit to reach out even when my feelings may be hurt.
>
> If you feel the need to get even, try getting even with those that have helped you. Lord, free me from any thoughts of revenge because this only shuts the door to my own happiness.

It confirmed the change that took place within me earlier in the day, and gave this newness more focus, substance and punch. It gave me new direction...the new change had catapulted me out of my offensive rut. And is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise the Holy Spirit gave me (that I hold onto): to love people genuinely. Like I see happening in those close to me. I still want to grow more deeply in love. Thank God for keeping His promises. I choose to persevere through the grace of God.

One does not accept or love only those with the right respectability, credentials, and those in the right boxes. Love happens appropriately or inappropriately when we care for people. When we are more committed to other things (however useful, proper, supposedly holier) than caring and loving those who are prickly, then we are stunted in love, and stuck in a bad way. My stuck ness was a result of thinking all I needed was to analyze my way to love. This is wrong. Caring is the way to love. No system of thought will bring about love. Love is personal, it is about people, it is about God, it is about caring in healthy ways.

Analyzing and diagnosing people are very unhealthy pursuits, because we scrutinize, measure, weigh, and judge people. In doing this we think we have a measure of control, and so exert

fleshly energy in our attempts to manipulate and change the people we have judged. I think being diagnosed is ok when done by a trained physician. The physician can't do her or his job without our consent and cooperation. But analyzing keeps us from connecting with people...and analyzing often means categorizing, putting into boxes, and focusing on small details instead of the whole picture. Those who analyze people are always trying to fit them into their own paradigms of thought instead of accepting them for who they are. There are no good reasons to focus on analyzing and diagnosing the people in our lives...but we are called to love them, care for them, and bless them. We pray for them, not giving God prescriptions on how to fix them. We pray that we will become the person who doesn't stand in the way of God's plans, and loves with clean energy so no one feels berated, lectured, or manipulated.

It is not the model or concept of love that bears love, it is the source of love that bears supernatural love...to access supernatural love we need expectation, caring for people in truth, and trust in Jesus to conquer our vices and wrongful attitudes and thinking. This is a process.

Love is not attained by admiring it as an idea, concept, or virtue and striving for it that way. If you want to love you will find a way because you care for people in healthy ways.

The final stronghold to destroy compulsive judging is to renounce the spirits of judging. I prayed the following prayer to be rid of the oppressive, repetitious, morbid, anal, petty, compulsive drive to fall into judging over and over again:

> I cast you demons of judging out of my mind…out of my heart…out of my attitudes…out of my life…and I command you spirits of deception, judging, hatred, hostility, poison, bitterness, dissension, division, hatred, self-righteousness, coldness, distance, evil, malady, unhealthiness, deception, fear, crippling, hurting, discounting, disrespecting, despair, lies, condemnation, and darkness to leave me forever and ever and to go to the pit. Now, go there in the name of Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of the Living God. Praise you Lord Jesus for loving me and giving me life, and that more abundantly. I claim all the land that was taken by the devils in heart and mind and I give it to you Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus Christ, and Father God now and forever. Amen, and Amen. I claim my freedom which is what Jesus set me apart for. Amen and Amen.

Why? Because the demons insert, and pass off their thoughts and emotions into our minds to confuse us, rob us of our confidence, give us false guilt, slim us, lie to us about our state of being and where we are on our journeys. When one has a mental illness of schizophrenia like I do, then this can be overwhelming if not dealt with and fought off with prayer, wisdom, and out-loud-confession of biblical-truth. Even if one does not have schizophrenia, then the devil does still put thoughts and lies into our heads that he attempts to use to confuse us, defeat us, and lead us astray with. We need to be aware of his tactics. We can have victory in Jesus.

In writing this Essay, I was plagued by many fears, and I offer this next section as a way of understanding what I went through to get to the conclusions found in this Website:

On Our Fears & Consciences

Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his only son Isaac on a mountain in the book of Genesis (found in chapter 22). Abraham's fears said don't do it. But God said do it. Abraham decided to do it because of his relationship with God.

My experience says he had many fears, agonizing pain, torment, confusion, and false guilt about what he was deciding to do (since only good guilt comes from God). God had promised Abraham that it was through Isaac that His promises would be fulfilled so Abraham had some hope that he would have his son back after the ordeal and this motivated him. But to offer his son up as a sacrifice must have thrown him for a loop of gloom and a "did I get this right?" questioning. I'm sure Abraham looked back at His relationship with God and all the times he was up shit-creek or in danger and that God rescued him each time, as assurance for him to trust God to get him through this fear inducing trial. In the end the command of God, and Abraham's faith and obedience (despite his fears) led him having a deeper relationship with God. Sometimes we can find ourselves in the same place as Abraham was, and God can bless us like Abraham when we overcome our fears with faith and trust in God that He can bring good out of what looks like a horribly dark and impossible journey.

For devoted Jews who observed the Law during the time of the early church (Cf. the book of Acts), it seemed like God was asking them to go against the Law (God's written commands) in order to embrace the grace offered by Jesus. Some must have felt really guilty and torn between the two. I know this because Peter struggled with this in Acts 10, and again when Paul confronted Peter about his fears about what certain Jewish Christians might think about unclean foods and his fellowship with Gentiles.

Even today many of us have an uneasy relationship between law and grace. It can feel very uncomfortable when we don't see the whole picture. How many of us do?

Not everyone is indoctrinated with fear; some people buy truth claims for the wrong reasons (through psychosis or wanting to belong, or to have a perfect theology, or to belong to the perfect church, or to have heaven on earth, or because of plain lying, or faulty reasoning by well-meaning people who are off balanced in places). Yet all these hurting people can find themselves trapped and threatened by damnation (according to those who did the indoctrination or won them over or convicted them of supposed sins through philosophical arguments) if certain man made rules are not kept.

These hurting people will have plenty of fears, confusion, frustrations, darkness, agonizing pain, and suffering entering into their lives, minds, and hearts when they sense that certain things don't line up (don't feel right, seem harsh, and make God look out to be anal and a bully), and when they feel the draw to leave the community for a better hope they believe others have despite the fears of damnation coming from those in authority. They fear because it was taught by those in authority that God is behind the rules and threats, so these hurting people have an opportunity in common with Abraham: "Do we follow our fears or our consciences?" Fears can confuse, disrupt, disable, darken, and paralyze us and rob us of the light in our consciences and keep the promises from God from being realized in our lives when we choose to give them power by not confronting them.

If all we have is fear when we are tempted to do something supposedly wrong, then our consciences are very likely being drowned out by untruth. A good conscience will not want to do the wrong because it is wrong, not just because of the threat or fear of hell.

Abraham followed His conscience not his fears in the test he went through (Cf. Genesis 22). We need to do the same. Abraham followed his hope, and trusted that God could bring about something good out of the chaos he walked into through the invitations, promises, and requests made by God.

When our consciences are healthy we are not motivated by fears. Perfect love casts out fear. When our consciences are healthy we don't cave into false guilt...false guilt is what the devil pushes onto us. God is not into false guilt, but He can call us to confront it and walk through it into freedom. God is not into Coerciveness. God loves non-coercively without force or threats, He merely warns us of the consequences of our choices; sin can kill us, but God desires us to stay away from sin. God does not love what sin can do to us: kill us. God does not delight in the death of any human.

Abraham did not want to sin in Genesis 22, but I'm sure he felt like he was choosing the lesser of two evils at the time. I felt this way when I was navigating internal/external relational matters in my life while writing this Essay. But when the dust cleared, I was certain that it was not the lesser of two evils I was choosing between, but choosing between love and being comfortable for a time out of fear. When I realized this I no longer wanted to sin, and this fortified me even more from the devil's attacks.

The wisdom found in the Bible when it comes to living, can be grouped into three categories: commands to love, boundaries of safety, and prescriptions for healthy living. Sin starts with lies that put fear in us when believed and this leads to violating the three categories. Thinking in terms of: Are things “healthy” instead of are they “religiously” holy? is the path to take. True spiritual health is true holiness. “Religious” holiness often has to do with form, not substance.

Scripture tells us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Some take this to mean the fear of hell, or the wrath of God. But I think that we are not called to play it safe...we are asked to confront our fears, to be aware of our fears...to conquer our fears which are only done when we are out of our comfort zones...but not to be motivated by our fears and not to be driven by them. God's perfect love casts out all fears.

When we fear things that others in their right minds don't when it comes to relationships (that don’t go against Scripture), then we have chosen to give into the fear of those things and given the fears power. We need to take back the power by not cowering in it, and asking the Holy Spirit to drive it out with love, and to seek to renew our minds with wisdom from above.

Jesus’ Image

In going through a harsh, shaky, bumpy, hostile journey we need to reassert God’s true Image during it and again after it through a process of dealing with our baggage (lies wrongly bought, bad assumptions, sins of omission and commission, judgments, resentments, guilt, false guilt, bad self-images, and hurts) and this can only be done with God’s leading and help in the contexts of relationships and prayer!

It is believing in and receiving God’s love that enables us to love others. A distorted view of God’s image means a distorted love.

As a young Christian and even before that I had a mean and hateful energy within me. I remember reading the wows Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and experts in the law in Luke 11 and laminating my own mean, judgmental, self-righteous, abrasive, unkind, non-gentle, condemning and accusingly law/rule, hell fire focused slant onto His words and message. But Jesus did not come to put us down, load us with guilt, and distort our self-images with shame. Jesus did not seek to mock us, laugh at us, sneer at us, be mean to us, blame us, hate us, judge us, or condemn us. He came to restore us kindly and gently, make us healthy spiritually, heal us, equip us, and empower us to love like He did and does.

I remember as a Roman Catholic being asked to make a vow to be loyal to the pope, to be under his authority, and to be under his teaching...and I felt uncomfortable in doing so, in fact my conscience, and my theology said don't do it but I sort of consented. There is no other name under heaven and earth by which we can be saved but by the name of Jesus. Jesus deserves my full loyalty, devotion, respect, and obedience not a fallible human pope. I feel relieved and free from this thorn in my conscience by confessing my poor follow through and conflicted double mindedness to God and repenting from it. Jesus told us not to swear by anything or to make oaths of absolute-obedience to anyone but Him...and He won't hold us to such oaths if we did not make them wholeheartedly, fully committed, in complete agreement, with a clear conscience, and in full knowledge of what we were doing at the time we made those commitments especially when the oaths can go against love and obedience to Jesus. When we pledge to a way of conduct or agree to do something that is contrary to love and our faith (anything not done in faith is sin), then we are free to break it through repentance because that is what the Gospel of Jesus calls us to do in His strength. Jesus is Lord, Emperor, King, Ruler, Savior, Great Shepherd, Master, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace not the pope or a church magisterium.

In the final analysis I will answer to Jesus, and He will ask me did I do what He asked me to do. Putting a fallible human authority over Scripture in my opinion makes us less respectful of Scripture. It takes scripture away from the people, and ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Jesus. That is the condition of the Latin rite because of it. Jesus words in Scripture is more authoritative than any of the popes. We need to introduce people to Jesus to be saved, not to the church. The church cannot save people, only Jesus can.

On a camping long weekend with the wife and dog on a bike ride we saw a house that had an addition being built onto it. It reminded me of a movie we saw a while ago about an old man who knew his craft and harvested his own wood, cut it to size and expertly began to build an addition to his house for his sick wife only for the permit people to show up and say he had to have official architects make blueprints, use certified lumber, and do things according to the local county inspectors wishes. Problem was that he knew his stuff and his work was better than what the codes called for...it was all red tape, legalism, injustice, anal, and wrong thinking on the county's side. He put up a fight. This parallels my spiritual journey, I want to do things according to Jesus' specifications, not a hierarchy that is out of touch with Jesus and its flock, and has so

many barnacles on its vessel with not enough life saving equipment or people who know how to use it on board.

One might think that after dealing with all the arguments in one's mind that triggered the fear and false guilt, that the crowning moment of victory comes from confronting those who led one into the wrong thinking. This is not true. There are always smarter people out there. People that can poke holes into any moral-theory-rationalization, no matter who comes up with the theory. It always comes down to faith. What one believes about the nature of God. Only God can grant the peace that transcends all understanding. My faith is not dependent on the smarts or philosophy of another person. A child can love, and that is what Jesus calls me to be like. I'm not saying to throw your mind out, I'm saying to trust God, Scriptures, family, and those who really love you healthily. Not all people have deep stores of truths and wisdom within themselves, but those who love deeply have fewer blocks to love...blocks such as lies believed, hardness of hearts cultivated, resentments held on tightly, pride esteemed...etc. which means they show us what is important, practical, essential...and these are always rooted in simplicity, faith, truth, hope, honesty, commitment, respect, humility, and are love related. When we grow in love, caring, and gentleness then that is always a good thing.

Logically and honestly quieting the thoughts in one's head that gave one much unreasonable fear and unrest is important. But ultimately philosophy can't give enduring rest and peace like relationship with Jesus can and does. Yes, philosophical arguments can get the adrenaline pumping, give the feeling of being noble, and it can be exciting, but it does not constitute a relationship with God. Relationship is not just a cerebral thing. Being committed to Jesus in trust, trusting what He did on the cross, and embracing the Holy Trinity in one's quiet times in such a way that it touches each moment throughout each day, and drawing from God's provisions so we are equipped to love more and more deeply are where things are at.

Yes, one can try to justify and try to give valid reasons for what one believes. But let's not confuse this for why we believe what we believed in the first place. We all believe things for many different reasons whether we could justify them to begin with or not. We usually remain committed to a doctrine because we trust the people who gave it to us. If the doctrine doesn't work for us, then we might let it go. Let's not kid ourselves that it is because we can justify our beliefs with philosophical arguments which did come later, that therefore the arguments are why we know our beliefs to be true. Just because we are systematic, and everything seems consistent and understandable does not make us right. It comes down to who we trust. I trust those who love me healthily: God (who gave Himself and Scripture to me), family (who love me, know my heart, and care for me), and those who really care in wise ways. These lead to love; whereas philosophy can surely lead to pride.

One of the things that can give rest and peace and a clear conscience is repenting from or killing the surge within us to judge others repetitively or compulsively, by prayerfully examining all of our relationships from the past to the present, and changing one's attitudes towards each person through prayer in faith with Jesus' help. This is wise and doable.

We do not bear good fruit in order to stay in the vine (Jesus). We abide or remain in the vine (Jesus) in order to bear good fruit. So often questions can be loaded in ways that they prevent us from getting to the truth, or insinuate stuff as bad or contradictory. There are questions that are

asked about Scripture that act that way, and they lead to confusion, and prevent us from accessing the freedom that we would get if the real truth came into focus. One such question is: is the Christian life about law or grace? A superficial understanding pits these ideas against each other bringing confusion. Rule keeping does not bring grace because we can't earn grace. Because grace is unmerited favor and God's empowering presence. What God's grace does is get us to want to love Jesus and so want to keep His commands whose aim is love. When we fall or fail to keep a command, then it is grace that gets us up again if we so choose to embrace it. We don't get grace by earning it… by pulling up ourselves by our bootstraps trying harder, and self-righteously keeping the rules again.

We stand by faith; we fall by unbelief. Yes, good works are important, but no one will be saved by the works of the law (Cf. Romans 3:20). Yes, faith without caring enough to love is worthless. But ultimately it is faith that gets us grace, and when we get grace (forgiveness, warmth, life, love, care, gentleness, and peace...poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit), then we want to spread it and share it with everyone...and Jesus is the only way to do it as He is God. So if someone asks why is God loving me? I say it is because He is unconditional love. I access that love by faith. Faith isn't a muscle...but it can be the opening or closing of spiritual doors. I can seriously block that grace by serious sins...and not because God hates me for sinning, but because I closed my door to those areas in my life or whole life. When we don't depend on our own works for justification we depend on God's love. It is God's love that sets us free from fear, pride, and sin. God's love gives us grace. Not us trying to impress Him with our efforts, successes, rule-keeping, or accomplishments, or understanding, or wisdom. If we have tried to impress God in these ways, then we eventually realize these are empty of life, meaning, peace and purpose when sought self-righteously or independently of God.

This journey, if it does not lead to love, then it is not worthy of us.