

Faith and Works LI

The Contemporary and Biblical Contexts

Col. 2:8

When Man Measures Man

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Introduction

Men often speak of seeing things in a new light. Certainly, when it is properly understood, the Gospel becomes a powerful source of illumination.

We are told to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Daniel was told that in the last days, knowledge shall increase. There is perhaps a great many thoughts today that are yet to be taken captive by their being revealed by the illumination that the Gospel brings.

There are two ways Biblically to address racism. One is to demonstrate God's model for the body of Christ, whose members are unified by their identification in Christ, who are clothed with Him, leaving all identity derived from the fallen nature and temporal tent inherited from the first Adam, and who are now identified by faith in the revelation and confirmation of the truth of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit both individually and corporately in Christ.

The other is to examine the nature of fallen man and discover the innate tendencies now in operation because of his fallen condition. Since the fall of the first Adam, man has attempted to regain a connection to eternal life, the tree of life from which man is now prevented by his fallen condition from partaking, by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in an attempt to become as the God from which man divorced himself at the fall.

In the following discussion, the most controversial issue will be that rather than pretending to interpret what the Bible has to teach, and only as is the usual custom, by quoting only a few verses here and there, instead where possible, complete passages of scripture will be cited, allowing the scriptures to speak for themselves.

Nothing new will be said here than is plainly in view in the Bible. We wish to let the scriptures speak for themselves, rather than speak for them. Some scriptures will be cited more than once, without fear that their relevance will be depleted.

While there are many today who insist they must repackage and redefine what they feel is the inner message, or messages of the Bible, it is here to be understood that the God who knows the end from the beginning is surly to be trusted to inspire the authors He has worked through in history to ensure that what we read today has the relevance of eternity, rather than merely being fashionable within the contemporary intellectual trends of our modern society.

The true value in what will be explored in the following study is in whether we are actually bringing illumination to various issues with the light of the Gospel, or if we are instead merely engaged in an exercise to voice theological religious opinions and speculation.

It is often the case that once our own ideas and terminology have been defined according to a certain viewpoint, that they then tend to take on a life of their own, and begin to string themselves together following their own logical connections into new and endless combinations of thoughts and ideas.

But an idea that makes sense to our temporal intellectualism is not necessarily eternal truth. This is why we should follow Paul's admonition not to go beyond what is written. We often know what we need to know, and we need to act on it instead of looking for ever more knowledge.

The Need and the Answer

Finding where things fit in-between the Alpha and Omega of Christ can be a matter of seeing what is revealed when it is illuminated by the light of the Gospel. The Gospel is indeed good news, but only to those who know their own need to heed the news that it proclaims, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them (2 Corinthians 5:18). Those who are in darkness see a great light when they come to the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But not all will come to that light for it is there we must first face the exposure of our deeds and the foundation of sand we have attempted to build on.

John 3:18-21 *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

John 12:44-48 *Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*

Acts 26:17-18 *"I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."*

Paul wrote that he was not ashamed of the Gospel, for in it was the power of God for the salvation of man. Who is ashamed of the Gospel? Those ashamed of the Bible's insistence that all men are in need of a savior. All positions and conventions within religion or secular philosophy come down to the issue the Bible describes as walking in the flesh, or in the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Roots of Enmity and Strife

All prejudice, and man's inhumanity to man, can be seen at its base to be the outworking of man's need to compensate for his fallen state by advancing himself at the expense of those around him. It is the fruit of the mind set on the flesh (Romans 8:6).

Seen from a Biblical context, racism and prejudice is an interesting subject. There are many different kinds of prejudice, and many different reasons that prejudice takes place. We will be primarily concerned here with people who are both slaves to themselves and sin, and who therefore in turn seek to enslave others.

John 8:34-36 *Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."*

All too often man can be seen working out his frustration of failing in his efforts to become as God, and to grasp eternity by improving his finite condition, by turning instead to seek to lord authority over his fellow man. In psychology this is referred to as projection, where someone will recognize and condemn their own failings in others.

It is both man's pride, and his fear of losing the ability to control his own fate, which will keep men willingly hiding in darkness, avoiding the revealing light of God which would show all men to be equally in need of the salvation God offers in Christ Jesus. The Bible says that the devil is able to lead and manipulate man by man's fear of death.

The first experiential death the Bible says we must come to before we can receive the command of Jesus to pick up our cross and follow Him is when we come to the end of ourselves, when we realize

that it is not a matter of what we have done, but why we have done what we have done, as a result of our having been born as a descendant of the first Adam.

We all must reach that point of self revelation, and no longer seek to base our right standing before God on the foundation of our old fallen nature. It is then we can begin to walk in Christ, and as a child, start over, building with gold on the new foundation, Christ Jesus.

For without the new life offered in Christ, we remain debtors to the flesh, a slave to sin, and in that condition we will always be dependent on what we are able to provide for ourselves by our own means.

“I freed thousands of slaves, and could have freed thousands more, if they had known they were slaves.”

Harriet Tubman

Our slavery to sin, due to our inherited fallen nature, is not something we become experientially aware of until we have been confronted and exposed by God's law. When we hide through hypocrisy and self denial both the effects and the state of our nakedness before God and seek to cover ourselves with the fig leaves of our works, we become the whitened sepulchers of which Jesus spoke.

1 John 1:5 *This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

The Law Exposes the Problem

Only those who experientially know and acknowledge they are sick will seek the physician, and when the diagnosis is pronounced and accepted that the whole tree is bad, and that the axe needs to be taken not just to its branches, but to the very root, it is then we accept our death on the cross of Christ and by faith step out of the boat to walk in Christ. It is then we cease to continue to build on the old foundation of sand with wood, hay and stubble, but instead we gladly acknowledge our own weakness and build all with true gold tested by fire on the foundation of the rock of Christ Jesus Himself.

The clearest and best example we have for religious purposes of God's law would be that which He revealed through the people He chose in history to work with to fully disclose and reveal what man needed to know of God's character and Holiness.

And we note that in the law that was given, there was the required daily, continual sacrifices at the temple, for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. While a man could order his daily actions and deeds in compliance to the requirements of the law and remain in fellowship with God, yet, following that law in no way offered man any opportunity to change or heal man's inherited fallen condition.

The law and the prophets testify that all have come short of the Glory of God. Indeed, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament points out that even the High Priest needed blood to be shed in order to be able to approach the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The combination of both law, and sacrifice, was to condition man to understand that there was yet a final sacrifice for sin that had to be made, there was yet a missing bridge between man's fallen state and re-union with God that only God Himself would one day once and for

all provide in the Messiah fulfilling all that God had promised and revealed through the law and the prophets.

God's Answer to Man's Condition

Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the World for all who would turn from trust in themselves and instead come before God through faith in Christ, clothed in the likeness of God's Son, born again into God's family, a joint heir with the risen Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

Galatians 4:29 *But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.*

John 7:7 *The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.*

Both Jesus and Israel are hated by those continuing to live by the world system. God shows undeserved favor to the descendants of Abraham before ever it could have been earned (Genesis 15:12). God's promise to Abraham was not according to Abraham's ability to meet the dual side of a covenant, God already knew the heart of man. God chose Abraham, and simply asked Abraham to follow without Abraham knowing the ultimate destination, only that it would be different from that that known by his forefathers.

Israel is blessed by God at God's discretion. In like manner, the believer in Christ receives a pardon, a pardon that is unmerited. Often those seemingly the least likely to earn God's favor according to man's estimation of greatness do so (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). God offers this, and at the same time, God does not regard the offerings of Cain. Cain offered the fruits of the sweat of his brow. Abel offered blood, for without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. One seeks to complete a transaction, one seeks atonement. And so Cain was jealous, shamed in his own works.

The flesh persecutes the spirit. The world's hatred toward Israel is rooted in rebellion against a God who intends to have left on the cross of His Son all in which men would trust apart from Him.

We need to keep in mind God's final assessment of man's assumed greatness as man measures himself by himself. In the end, at the last judgment, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first (Mark 9:35). And unless we become as children and start completely again, in Christ, with Him as our foundation, building up our character in humility, love and forgiveness, the fruits of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, we cannot see the kingdom of God, and all our works done on the foundation inherited from the first Adam will be burned.

There is no way for man to redeem himself by himself, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. This perishable must put on imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:50-53). The Gospel is not concerned with helping man to better himself. It is not another religious attempt to restore fallen man, rather, it is an opportunity for man to be translated into another kingdom, that of Christ, and to begin to build on a new foundation, leaving the old behind, not looking back.

And so we come to the fundamental difference between Christianity and the other religions of the world. Christianity is based on and in the person of Jesus Christ, whereas all the other religions of man are based on man himself becoming greater through spiritual religious practices and techniques, seeking to become as God or to obligate and control God through meeting the requirements of a contractual relationship. If we do A, God must do B.

Romans 6: 1-14 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 8:12-17 *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

Healing the Body

When the body of Christ comes together there should be less of an awareness of a particular ethnicity, race, culture or gender, and instead people should be aware of Jesus, for when two or three are gathered in His name, in His identity, He is there in their midst.

To reflect Christ, the attention of all the members should be on Christ, not directed to a charismatic leader, themselves or each other. There is unity in the true body of Christ based on a commonly shared divine life, and the humility of those who understand that life is no longer about the pride and self centered focus of the mind set on the flesh, measuring ourselves by ourselves, but on the inherited riches of glory in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-29 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

In England, John Newton, who after a life lived working in the slave trade and who had finally come to a true faith in Christ, wrote a hymn, "Amazing Grace" where he spoke of the great gift given by God, for those who, as Newton came to realize for himself, "such a wretch as I". That is a place of self knowledge that brings one to the complete rest in Christ. It is the place Paul wrote about himself experientially coming to.

Romans 7:21-25 *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Modern Reactions to the Diagnosis

It is telling of the spirit of our modern age that those who consider themselves the leaders of a reformed and updated belief system, those who profess to know how to "save Christianity" from itself by making it relevant to modern man who supposedly is in need of a refined up-to-date religion, and not the primitive religion of the first century church, these leaders of the modern faith find those words of Newton offensive.

Indeed, at one large mega-church where the song was scheduled to be sung, it was removed from the program by a directive from the senior pastor who said man's self esteem would be hurt by the words "such a wretch as I", and yet in true Biblical Christianity, it is only those who have come to know their need who seek and find a true relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus.

While the official and government controlled secular education systems are increasingly becoming vehemently opposed to any mention of the Bible or the information contained in it, yet it was the Gospel that so transformed John Newton's heart, that he in turn, standing on Christian principles, became a powerful moral force that was one of the primary influences that finally brought an end to the practice and trade of slavery in England.

And yet we see the opposite when we consider the effect that materialistically based humanism has on society and culture, particularly in the area of racial inequality. For without certain rights endowed by the Creator on His creation, man quickly succumbs to being included in the materialistic deterministic machine of nature whose present form is merely a result of time plus chance and thus provides no inherent value or rights for mankind.

Man Seeks to Heals Himself

Currently students in our public schools are being told that it is illegal for them to carry a Bible in class, or to even quote from the Bible in their assignments, while at the same time, it is quite alright to quote passages out of the current popular books on witchcraft or the occult, or the philosophical writings of atheists and evolutionists, many of whom validated their philosophies without the new knowledge we now have on the bases of improved scientific means of observation and measurement of the irreducible complexity of the design of creation.

We have to understand that these other systems in no way provide the ethical and moral foundations and influences that have shaped society in the past in significant ways that have resulted in greater opportunity and dignity to the individual. On the contrary, these other systems actually define man as valueless and at the mercy of utilitarian considerations and what is expedient for the concerns of the secular state.

The farther along materialistic humanism progresses, there is an inverse ratio to the loss of the humanity of man. Perhaps no better example of that is the organization known as Planned Parenthood, which was essentially founded on racist philosophies, and on the bases for those beliefs, determined that man should take into his own hands the responsibility for directing the selective process of breeding a superior race, and limiting the numbers of those borne who were deemed inferior.

These ideas had long been forming as man's philosophical speculation turned from revelation of God, and instead sought only what man's own experience could reveal by looking not above, but at the ground beneath his feet. It would be as if a beautiful pot where

smashed to the floor, and its broken pieces examined in the hope of discovering how the pot had formed itself. No knowledge of the creator of the pot will ever be found or acknowledged in this manner.

Yet man's pride is such, that he continues to imagine as yet unfounded deterministic systems by which he attempts to construct a plausible hypothetical argument for nature creating itself. Darwin thus did not discover the theory of evolution, rather he simply embarked on an expedition to attempt to find evidence to support an idea that was already well entrenched and accepted in the minds of those considered at the forefront of modern "enlightened" thinking, a philosophy founded first on man's insistence on the preeminence of his own reason, and not on the discoveries of an objective science.

A Wrong Turn Leads Down a Dark Path

Racist ideas in the hands of the those seeking to place themselves amongst the elite of mankind lead to genocide and oppression, and social prejudice. Margaret Sanger, the founder of the now Federally funded organization known as "Planned Parenthood" said or wrote the following for the historical record:

On blacks, immigrants and indigents:

"...human weeds,' 'reckless breeders,' 'spawning... human beings who never should have been born." *Margaret Sanger, Pivot of Civilization, referring to immigrants and poor people*

On sterilization & racial purification:

Sanger believed that, for the purpose of racial "purification," couples should be rewarded who chose sterilization. *Birth Control in America, The Career of Margaret Sanger*, by David Kennedy, p. 117, quoting a 1923 Sanger speech.

On the extermination of blacks:

"We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population," she said, "if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members." *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America*, by Linda Gordon

The racism that has arisen from the materialistic philosophies that deny the value given creation by its Creator attempt to provide a systematic means to limit the proportion of races deemed inferior and whose increasing numbers might destabilize the planners ideal vision of a perfect and controlled society that they feel can only succeed when the races or members of the elite that are thought to be superior maintain numerical and political dominance. The psychological structure behind this behavior in society is the self based on the flesh needing to disqualify its potential competitors.

The Casualties When Grace is Rejected

Due to the success of such influences, statistically, in some of our larger metropolitan cities, the most dangerous place for a minority to be is in its mother's womb. Recently a young girl gave birth, put her baby in a paper bag, and threw it down the trash chute in her apartment building.

To disregard the life any member of the human species at any point in the life cycle, is to devalue and deny it meaning in all others. Clearly our own image and value of ourselves is being eroded in proportion the lack of the revelation man is willing to receive both in nature and through the law and the prophets that God has given concerning the value He puts on His creation.

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Racist slavery is based a philosophy that defines man as but an accidental cog in the machine of a natural order randomly formed by time plus chance. Slavery in Biblical days was an economic servitude.

One entered into the rank of slave due to economic considerations, and the period of service was part of the economic transaction and negotiation. It was not something that one was born into due to race or gender. Indeed in Biblical times, slaves could become prominent and beloved members of households, as witnessed in the new testament when even Roman centurions humbled themselves to seek the healing power of Jesus on behalf of their servants.

In the 1700's and onward, slavery was more and more justified and excused by citing a science that no longer saw all men as equals as they were no longer children of God endowed with inalienable rights, but merely the results and by products of an assumed natural process of selection that would ultimately justify one group of men defining another with less dignity and rights as themselves.

Modern Times

And so in modern times, there are some ethnic or racial groups that are born with a cultural stigma. While society seeks to be loving and compassionate, yet the foundational principles of modern thinking have precluded any inherent worth given by a divine Creator, and man is simply at his base value, merely an assembly of chemicals and matter that have randomly evolved through natural selection through time plus chance within the human species resulting in different levels of racial development.

Each year, new studies are introduced supposedly introducing new evidence that racial, ethnic, and even religious or political groups of people are inherently born with limitations or inferior traits, and which coincidentally, support the elite, those seeking to lead and determine mankind's next collective evolution, in believing that they are by nature superior. Recently one such study was presented that claimed measurements of the brains of those professing faith in religion, and we note, in particular, the Christian faith, seemed to find smaller brain sizes. One supposes that such Christians as Sir Isaac Newton, and George Washington Carver were not included in this survey.

Those raised in this culture, even after their particular group may have been granted equal rights of participation in the political and legal systems of society, are still defined within the modern system by secular materialistic criteria.

Man's true value is today based on theories of selective evolution. And in this system, some ethnic groups will be pre-defined as inferior, especially as fallen man will always seek to place himself above those with whom he is in competition and by which he is instinctively measuring himself, his fellow man.

Our current world is dominated by a secular doctrine where reason is used to establish man's autonomy from God, due to empirical reason being deified above historical revelation, and thus based on man's limited knowledge and personal experience.

Man using reason based on his own personal empirical experience fails to validate the proposition of a Creator, for in the end, man can only see from his own perspective within creation. In this world, born in this world, and programmed to think of oneself as defined by this mindset, those members of the designated inferior ethnic groups begin and walk through life with less of a cultural foundation than those in the approved groups who assume that their membership in a particular ethnic or racial category grants them credit and status that puts them at a starting position above the rest.

These attitudes are reflected all too often in the economics and politics of society where those in the elite classes are often oblivious to the racism functioning around them due to the fact that they never personally experience its limiting effects as they are not themselves members of the classes that are being discriminated against.

But the Bible goes deeper than merely condemning cultural racism and prejudice, and indeed looks to man's heart and his inability to allow his fallen condition to be exposed in the light of God's law, and thus choosing to remain in darkness lest his deeds be exposed, man fails to realize his need for the gift God offers fallen man in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Racism and prejudice, condemnation and un-forgiveness are due to the carnal system of determining who is the most advanced, not as a mandate of science, but of the need of our fallen nature to justify itself by measuring ourselves by ourselves. In this world of the fallen nature

of man who is seeking a system to justify himself by finding fault with others who may have sinned externally in their behavior to an even greater degree than themselves, there will always need to find and single out those that can be targeted and judged as lower, in order to allow the accusers to in their own minds seem relatively closer to the top, that place man is born seeking where he can finally overcome his inherited fallen condition and achieves the right or ability to possess eternal life.

Those Who Find the Cure

Why do some ethic groups seem so vibrant and fervent in their expression of Christian faith? From the heart man believes. God is looking for truth in the inner most parts. It may be the inhumanity of their fellow man that pushes such outside the camp, where often there is the cry:

Psalm 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*

The situation of the Dalits of the Hindu caste system in India is a religious counterpart to the secular dehumanizing trends in western society, yet with many parallels as the Hindu religion affords individual fallen man without any rights or dignity apart from his progress towards ultimate assimilation back into the oneness of a posited pantheistic cosmos, at which point the whole process of material creation on a progression back to assimilation into the divine oneness begins ever again.

It supports a legitimate religious cover for man's innate desire to lord his authority over his fellow man, and to find his worth by measuring the worthlessness of those who fail to meet that truth's standard. Indeed, the Pharisees were most offended when Jesus pronounced sinners forgiven. It rendered the currency of their own works and values bankrupt.

Yet though Jesus, as God, could pronounce the sins of a sinner forgiving, He did not do so as one simply erasing an entry from a dusty ledger in an archive. No, He did so on the authority of one who Himself would taste the punishment of sin, death, for all men, and then, as death could not hold Him, become a new way to once again create a unity between the Creator and His creation.

At its base, it is the same psychological and spiritual mechanisms of man attempting to justify himself by distinguishing himself above his fellow man. We find unique expressions of its practice in different cultures, yet in its system, and man's motivation and participation in it, we find nothing new.

There are approximately 300 million people who are deemed "untouchable" and comprise the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system. Since the origin of this system 3,000 years ago, the Dalits have lived in bondage to the code of caste. They have been unable to escape their fate and are deprived of even the most basic liberties and privileges, including the freedom to decide where to live, work and worship.

In this world, those defined at birth as lowest, such as the Untouchables (Kshudra), the lowest class in India, will perhaps struggle with doubts of their worthiness as they seek the will to compete against seemingly insurmountable barriers to their own advancement in society. But is their weakness as a defined racial group to be used to explain why they may show a more proportionate response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Or is it the case that all have sinned, but few come to the truth of their need for God?

It is not unreasonable to suspect that those deemed inferior in society, who suffer the effects of prejudice in society, more quickly come to the point of self revelation that the Bible says all men must come to, but do not if they fail to realize their utter need for what God offers mankind in Christ. Due to oppression, a persecuted individual may more quickly come to the place that all men must come to, the place of experiential knowledge of our need for Christ. It is often our confidence in ourselves that can prove the greatest hindrance to our

recognizing our need for the salvation offered to those who would place their faith in Christ.

Mark 2:15-17 *Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"*

When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Luke 18:9-14 *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Perhaps, as regrettable as man's inhumanity to man may become, and apart from God man will inevitably become increasingly demonic, sharing in the nature of the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of the darkened minds of those who refuse to come into God's revealing

light, yet there will be some who are driven to the front of the line, for the Bible teaches that the poor in spirit shall be blessed, those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness rather than their own will be satisfied, for they shall seek, and they shall find when they search with all their heart for the truth.

Some who would suppose themselves the sophisticated in society, would look down on those with a high love and passion for God. For the very circumstances brought about by the evil that men do may have led some to travel to a place few will go, but yet in truth, a place to which all who would not ultimately perish must journey. It is a place that when men abide there, and the influence of their lives is felt in society, that the greatest changes both in the individual and in society have taken place, changes that result in equality and equal value for all men. It is the fruit of charity, and of concern for one's fellow man.

A man may have doubts about himself. Society may have so branded him that when faced with challenges he may doubt his ability to match the capabilities and socially granted advantages of those in competition with him. But when Paul wrote that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him, he was not saying that God had made his own capabilities strong, he was saying he was strong when relying on God for his strength.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

And so we are to be bond slaves to God, those who have received all, and who now gladly and from the heart choose to serve Him, not out of obligation or as a practice of religion (If we do A, we will be owed and given B). In the family of God there is a natural equality that occurs, as all are clothed in Christ, members of His body. There is no longer slave, free, Jew, Greek, male or female.

When we see how large is the debt we owe, not due to our individual failings, but due indeed to our very nature due to our being born into the fallen condition of the first Adam, then we love much and serve out of gratitude and not obligation on behalf of the grace of God who offered His only begotten Son due to His love for a fallen world where men were born children of wrath. For we have received what we could not earn or achieve on our own.

In the parable of the talents, the one who related to God as a task master yielded no fruit. He did not enter into the joy of His master.

We are all slaves to sin, to the demands of the flesh to continue itself against the onslaught of eternity against its finite nature. We are

born captive to the fate of the sinful nature, destined to die physically, and spiritually, separated from the life and presence of God.

Those who are rich and in need of nothing, are those who are lukewarm in the response to the Gospel, for they do not realize how great their need is, and thus do not realize how great and at what sacrifice is the gift that God offers in Christ. They do not love much because they have only received from God what they think they need. If all they think they need is a little advice, or a spiritual "pick-me-up", they will love little. Those who are forgiven much, love much.

Jesus said, that this was the greatest commandment:

Mark 12:28-31 *Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"*

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

1 John 4:18-19 *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.*

Romans 8:32 *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

The devil does not keep people in hell with him by his own strength keeping the door to freedom shut. He keeps men imprisoned by stealing the seed of the Gospel when it is sown into a man's heart. He leads men to conditions where they are but rocky soil so that the seed of the Gospel will not grow. He encourages weeds to be allowed to grow that choke the word of Christ.

And so the devil would forestall indefinitely the final judgment, taking as many hostages as he can convince to believe his lies to forfeit their ability to accept God's offer of eternal life to instead be cast into the outer darkness of dissolution together with the devil for eternity. The devil's hostages are those God loves and of which He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

There is no biological predisposition to accepting Christ as Lord and savior. There is, however, a predisposition inherent in all men to be religious in the true sense of the word.

The root of the word "religion" is usually traced back to the Latin word "religare" (re: back, and ligare: to bind), so that the word could be understood to mean "being bound". Religion is thus man's attempt to find a way to bind himself to God, or to have God bound to man through contractual means.

Our works therefore, are trusted by man to be sufficient currency to obligate God on man's behalf, and failing that, man will then go on to seek to become as God himself. All of this is indicated at the account of the fall of mankind in Adam, where the serpent persuaded man that

God was not to be trusted, and that through knowledge of the things God Himself knows, man could survive independent of his creator, and even become as the creator himself.

The root is not the gate the masses are said to seek, but rather the continued disposition of man's fallen nature that surrendered dependence on God to attempt to become as God. This is the slavery of sin Paul spoke of, as we are now not only the captain of our own fate, we are also the boat we are trying to sail through this life to eternity.

Accepting Christ is a matter of heart and will and the knowledge of God's revelation in Christ. The first commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. Again, it is worth repeating here that he who is forgiven much, loves much.

Luke 7:36-50 *Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."*

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.”

And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.” Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

There are those who have a casual acquaintance with the Gospel, who perhaps are indeed able to give full mental ascent to Christian doctrine, yet do not have the depth of love that is the true response to the Gospel, and the motivation for a sincere love and attitude of forgiveness (1 Peter 1:22).

Acts of love expressed as a means of controlling or obligating others is love in hypocrisy. When we love because we have truly come to see our need for salvation, and have received the grace of God through faith in Christ, there is a fruit from this orientation of faith and relationship to God that should naturally produce the fruit of love, joy and peace.

Matthew 6: 9-15 *"In this manner, therefore, pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.*

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

We are starting from the same source even if we differ in which particular places of darkness we have shown the light of the Gospel, dispelled the shadows, and brought illumination to the subject. All thoughts are to be taken captive to the obedience of Christ.

We will be slaves to sin, and face inevitable final separation from God, passing into the state of dissolution when no longer being held together in God, we pass from His light, shunning it ourselves, to find ourselves in outer darkness for eternity.

Or we can be bond slaves to God, serving God in newness of spirit, not in oldness of the letter. His law can be written on broken and soft tablets of a heart that has truly come to see it's complete need and dependence on the life God offers by His grace to those who would approach His throne, and be in union with Him through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 *We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says:*

*“ In an acceptable time I have heard you,
And in the day of salvation I have helped you.”*

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

There are two groups of people, one that says "oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this bondage of this death?" the few that actually allow the light of both the law and the gospel to penetrate the usually dark places in our hearts in which we hide from others and ourselves the true nature of our fallen condition, and there are the other men who say, "Oh special man that I am".

Luke 18:9-14 *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

The Opiate Cure

Karl Marx, in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, said that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness."

But one needs to reexamine that claim. Is Christianity the opiate of the masses? Those seeking to dull their pain would hardly seek a religion where the cause of that pain is confronted and resolved not by the justice of an eye for an eye, but by the mediation of the Grace of God. True faith in Christ results in a profound change of character that is not based on revenge or overcoming the oppressor, but instead begins a true transformation of the hearts of believing individuals through identification with Christ.

In one of her writings, Corrie Ten Boom describes how after miraculously being released from the concentration camp where her family were killed, she came face to face with one of the guards from that prison while speaking at a church in Munich in 1947.

Memories of the concentration camp came back to her in a rush, and she clearly remembered seeing this man during some of her most humiliating and degrading experiences. She and her sister Betsie had been arrested for concealing Jews in their home during the Nazi occupation of Holland, and she recognized this man as one of the guards at the Ravensbruck concentration camp where they were sent.

And now he stood before her with his hand thrust out saying, "A fine message, fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" He admitted that he had indeed been a guard at Ravensbruck, but since that time he had become a

Christian, and now stood before Corrie Ten Boon with his hand outstretched asking her to personally forgive him. Corrie struggled for a moment with her memories, but knew that the Bible teaches that to receive God's forgiveness for our own sins, we must be willing to show the same forgiveness to others.

And so she forced herself to go through the motions of taking his outstretched hand. She recounts that as she did, an incredible thing took place. She felt a current that started in her shoulder. It then raced down her arm, then into their joined hands. She then felt this healing warmth flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" she cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment they grasped each other's hands, the former guard and former prisoner. She says she had never known God's love so intensely as she did at that moment.

A Unique Remedy

Those who would insist that the Bible is merely a human artifact will need to demonstrate using their own natural philosophies to explain the absolutely alien and unique nature of the message contained in the full Christian witness in the scriptures, a message of not one man or age, but presented through accounts of historical events and people over a period of some 2500 years, collected in 66 books written by 40 authors. A book that tells the end of things from the beginning, a book that proclaims a message like no other. When taken in their entirety they proclaim an account of God's work amongst man to redeem man from his fallen condition not on the bases of man's work, but on the bases of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 44: 22 *I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."*

It remains to be seen how we can account for how such a collection of writings could come into existence, proclaiming as it does a truth, a system of religion, that is diametrically opposite the normal trend of man's entire catalogue of secular and religious philosophies and theologies that so far man on his own account has provided as an explanation for who he is and where he is going.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."*

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 *Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

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