

A message to Christians

## **THE BLINDING EFFECT OF SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

A huge obstacle to receiving God's greatest gift.

### **The Bible tells us:**

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). Thus, *we're all subject to that pernicious deceitful disease of the heart that blinds all mankind; and is most insidious when found in Christians. Leading naturally to the proverb: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes ...”* (Prov. 21:2). *Here is wisdom: “See you a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him”* (Prov. 26:21). *Have you ever tried to explain something to a person who has a prideful attitude of superiority and knows more than you? Their lack of humility renders them unteachable. Sadly, that attitude can be found in many Christians. “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD”* (Lam. 3:40).

Paul agrees, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (II Cor. 13:5). *The onus is on us!* He continues, “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:3-5). “And if we judged

ourselves rightly, we would not be judged” (I Cor. 11:31). *But that’s our problem. We can’t judge ourselves because our own self-righteous eyes have blinded us; we can’t see ourselves as others see us. Consequently, we must seek outside help.*

### **Psalms 26:2-3 and 39:23-24 point the way**

“Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.” “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” *It’s an internal condition of the heart that must be excised.*

### **Jesus illustrates our problem**

“... (Jesus) spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,’ ‘God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon 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 every one that exalts

himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14). To one degree or another, Jesus is speaking to all of us who:

1. Are blinded by self-righteousness, disregarding Isaiah 64:6 which calls our best works filthy rags.

2. Feel their religious knowledge is so above the norm that they have little need for further instruction or correction.

3. Have an attitude of superiority to anyone not of their class, denomination or rank. Pure religious snobbery!

Does this describe anyone you know -- have you looked in a mirror lately?

### **To be specific**

The Pharisee exemplifies anyone who considers himself above average in religious knowledge and piety. The Publican is descriptive of anyone held in contempt by the religious prude. The Pharisee’s prayer was all about himself, even implying how fortunate God was to have such a loyal subject as he, not like that poor sinner over there.

What did Proverbs 26:12 reveal about those who were wise in their own conceits? Also, II Corinthians 10:12 tells us not to join ourselves with those that commend themselves, and measure themselves by themselves, comparing themselves among themselves, for they are not wise. (Often found in

denominationalism as well as splinter groups.)

The Pharisee bragged to God of his many good deeds. Does God really need to be reminded of one's wonderful works? The Pharisee displayed arrogance, self-righteousness, and pride. James 4:6 tells us, "... God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble." The publican demonstrated a repentant, humble and teachable attitude; and acknowledged his sinful condition. He demonstrated his belief and faith by the way he approached God. He did not compare himself to others; neither did he blame others for his condition, but acknowledged that his sins were his alone.

Jesus concludes with this imperative statement: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."

The lesson: by promoting self or belittling others, our religious testimony is severely hindered.

### **Purifying our religion**

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

### **Jesus' example of undefiled religion**

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand. ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.’”

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?’ And the King shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’”

### **The lackadaisical Christian**

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.’”

“Then shall they also answer him, saying, ‘Lord,

when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?’ Then shall he answer them, saying, ‘Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.’ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:34-46). *What a scary thought; these are Christians who are comfortable in their own self-righteousness, perhaps with a Laodicean mentality (Rev. 3:14-22)?*

James speaks out on that same subject. “Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well" — but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?”

“So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all — it is dead and useless” (James 2:14-17 NLT).

### **The hypocritical Christian**

“Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out

devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?’ (*Church leaders - Ministers – teachers, beware, heed Matthew 24:5*). And then will I profess unto them, ‘I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (unrighteousness)’ (Matt. 7:21-25).

Obviously, wonderful works alone are not enough, so, what is that essential missing ingredient common to both groups turned down by Christ? Both groups are very religious, one depended on faith alone, the other espoused their wonderful deeds; what’s missing?

Paul lays the foundation by telling us to esteem others better than ourselves and reminds us that even Jesus took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:3-8). I Corinthians 13 identifies the missing ingredient very well, but to put it in perspective and gain its full impact, we need to review chapter twelve.

## **I Corinthians 12**

Here Paul speaks of the many wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit given to those chosen by God to receive them. Some are chosen to be apostles, others prophets, others teachers, and some to do miracles, some have the gift of healing, and helping others, some administrators (getting things done) and those who can speak in other languages. These are noble gifts, given for the strengthening, protecting and enlightening of God’s Church and all worthy goals.

We learn from them many important things, wisdom, knowledge, truth, caring etc, and we are all reinforced in the faith by them. The importance of these gifts is obvious and cannot be overly emphasized. But then Paul speaks of a greater gift and one to be desired over all these; ("one that is greater by far and highest of then all -- love" AMP). a very precious gift that those rejected by Christ at the resurrection did not have.

### **The missing ingredient**

In I Corinthians 13 we are given the key to why some people's wonderful works profit them nothing. We are told of a love that exemplifies the very character of God and that we should strive to become the conduit for it.

### **I Corinthians 13 NASU**

Starting in verse one Paul states, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

4 "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous;

love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

8 “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but **the greatest of these is love.**”

In the light of what we’ve just read the full impact of I John 4:8 becomes clear. “He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.”

Truly God is love, and if love is the manifestation of God’s character consider this: “we only have this lifetime to develop character, but we will have eternity to learn knowledge” -- Dwight L. Moody.

### **What Satan lacked**

Bear in mind, Satan was one of the most knowledgeable of God's angels, but he lacked character, therefore, while we have the opportunity, build the character that is based on God's love. Not that knowledge is not good and even necessary, consider the deep meanings found in Hebrews 6:1-2, but as we have seen, knowledge without the love of God is useless. Therefore seek the greatest gift, love; the rest will be added as needed.

David found the way, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalms 51:10). Paul adds more, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." (Rom. 12:3). Also, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, snobbish, high-minded or exclusive, but readily adjust yourself to people and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits." (Rom. 12:16 AMP).

Now we know the greatest of all of God's gifts:

### **Love!**

We can be a conduit for that love described in I Corinthians 13 by helping others be all they can be. Rather than criticize, encourage – rather than complain, inspire – rather than condemn, forgive.

Be a help not a hindrance.

Put into practice the gift that is to be desired above

all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and do remember the parable of the two men who went into the temple to pray. Then listen, for the time will come when you will hear those wonderful words, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you...”

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### **Descriptions of the love of God**

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:11-14).

“The person who has My commands and keeps them is the one who [really] loves Me; and whoever [really] loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I [too] will love him and will show (reveal, manifest) Myself to him. [I will let Myself be clearly seen by him and make Myself real to him]” (John 14:21 AMP).

“... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye

are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. “And thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. “And the second is like, namely this, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:29-31).

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

### **Caution**

"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished. *But* By loving kindness and truth iniquity is atoned for." (Prov. 16:5-6 NASU).

Remember verse 8, Love never fails, it's eternal, but other gifts mentioned in chapter 12 pass away.

Other subjects of interest:

A STORY OF GRACE -- BRINGING MANY SONS TO  
GLORY -- CREATED FOR HIS GLORY -- SPENDING  
TIME WITH A FRIEND -- THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

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