

Gospelizing Disagreement & Conflict

It has happened to everyone. You have a conversation with other people about an event you mutually experienced. When you exchange memories, the recollections bear little resemblance or differ on critical points. Questions naturally come to mind: “How could *they* be so dense?” “Why are *they* lying?” “Are *they* losing their minds?”

I remember a puzzling experience like this. When I was on the campus of a seminary, I talked to men who had come and gone from ministry in local churches. They had much to say about *those people*. *Those people* who ran the churches with an iron fist and a closed mind. *Those people* who were not open to listen to the clear teaching of scripture. *Those people* who devised and executed elaborate plans of political treachery to manipulate church life and polity. Then I visited some churches to do pulpit supply and actually met some of *those people*. To my surprise, when they trusted me and opened up, *those people* in the churches started talking about *those people* who come and go from the seminaries. *Those people* who use a brief ministry in our church as a stepping-stone and a resume builder on their way to a bigger church. *Those people* who do not know us; our history, our pain, or our struggles—but have all the answers.

Each group of people experienced similar events, had similar conversations, attended the same meetings, but their experience and memories were radically different. With these kinds of hostile and contradictory interpretations of people and issues on both sides, it is little wonder that reports indicate, “Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.”¹

However, this problem is not limited to church leaders and members; it is an unfortunate part of the human experience. The Space Shuttle disasters, the 1992 L.A. riots (50 killed, thousands injured and over one billion in property damage)² and the worst aviation accident in history (Tenerife, Canary Islands; 578 people killed)³ were in great part caused or aggravated by the lack of effective communication. Indeed; “Without good communication, relationships become combative and self centered, results implode, departments fail, people are fired, marriages end, children crash, companies dive, people die of loneliness, and nations collapse.”⁴

The Bible has much explicit and implicit material to explain this frustrating reality, but we tend to ignore or misunderstand the explanation because we naturally interpret the biblical insight with the third person pronoun. We will never *really* see the truth we desperately need, as long as we use “those people” to describe the problem and assume that “I” am exempt from it. Recently, research from various fields dealing with human thought processes (some as cited below) has begun to explain this baffling experience. Now that science and popular knowledge are pounding on the door of our personal awareness (along with the Bible’s relentless pounding), can we answer?

¹ <http://mrclm.blogspot.com/2006/06/death-by-ministry-burnout.html>

² Nightline Special Investigation: Moment of Crises; Anatomy of a Riot, 5-28-92.

³ <http://www.airdisaster.com/special/special-pa1736.shtml>

⁴ Lee, Gus, *Courage: The Backbone of Leadership*, Jossey-Bass 2006, pg. 77

Blinding Presuppositions

In John 13:21-29, when Jesus explains who is going to betray Him, He unquestionably uses the most sound teaching methods possible—all those present should have understood, because practically every learning modality was utilized. However, the disciples did not “get it”. Notice the diagnosis of their inability to understand; their *presuppositions* about Judas *blinded them* from seeing what the world’s greatest teacher had obviously just taught them (John 13:28-29).

Blinding Presuppositions are Natural

Experience and empirical research have proven this implicit insight provided by John 13:21-29 beyond any reasonable doubt. When something happens that is inconsistent with what we expect or believe (not what we *want*, oddly enough) our preconscious and subconscious⁵ mental processes ignore (simply disengage from the incoming data stream or dialogue) or distort the perception.⁶ Consider how this process played out in John 13. Jesus clearly told the disciples that the one who would betray Him is the one to whom He will give the dipped bread. Nevertheless, when Jesus handed Judas the dipped bread and said, “What you are about to do, do quickly” no one knew what Jesus meant. They could not imagine that Judas, the man entrusted with the money, would betray Jesus.

Blinding Presuppositions are Impervious to Reason and are Contagious

We naturally assume ourselves to be objective observers and reporters of reality. However, there is not one shred of support—biblically⁷ or scientifically⁸—for this assumption. In reality, the functional limit of the human brain *requires* us preconsciously and subconsciously to:

⁵ This means that because our conscious thought mechanisms are by necessity slow, God gave, for our survival an extremely rapid cognition (thinking) process that operates without our conscious awareness. The affect (emotional or “affectional” response) of rapid cognition results in 1) the instantaneous involuntary release of stress hormones, which causes many changes in the mind and body 2) rapid facial expressions that display the affect upon us 3) reactionary physical movements (duck, flinch, flail, blink, etc). After this has all happened, (usually within a second—except under extreme duress) our conscious thought processes catch up and we become aware of our reaction. (The following footnotes will help explain this).

⁶ Dr. Marc Green, Eyewitness Memory is Unreliable. VISUAL EXPERT HUMAN FACTORS. <http://www.visualexpert.com/Resources/eyewitnessmemory.html> (accessed 9-20-09).
Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, Richards J. Heuer. CENTER for the STUDY of INTELLIGENCE Central Intelligence Agency. 1999, Page 9.

⁷ Jer. 17:9 The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (NASB)
Rom. 1: 18-22a For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...(Romans 1:18-22a, NASB, emphasis added)

⁸ Guidelines on Memory and the Law: Recommendations from the Scientific Study of Human Memory. The British Psychological Society. <http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/organisation-and-governance/research-board/steering-groups-and-working-parties/memory-and-the-law-working-party.cfm> (accessed August 30, 2009).

1. Determine what shred of the deluge of incoming data to focus on. Personal experience generally determines the focus of attention. For example, if a person who does dry wall work walks into a structure with a person who is a SWAT officer, the two will likely focus their attention on radically different facets of the structure.
2. Preexisting schemas (mental/emotional patterns created from previous experiences) and presuppositions (what we believe because of previous experiences) filter this information and load it with any emotional baggage deemed relevant. For example, the dry wall worker might consider if a fixture like the one in this room ever shocked him. A SWAT officer might consider if a corner like the one in this room ever concealed an ambush.
3. Memory and expectations fill in any missing or incomplete data. For example, in tense, uncertain, rapidly-evolving circumstances with low light, SWAT officers will occasionally *see* a gun when a wallet is presented.⁹
4. **THEN** our brain captures our filtered, blanks-filled-in interpretation of the small portion of the data stream that has our attention. We call this a memory and assume it is correct, complete and objective. *This is self-deception of the highest order because it assumes our own omniscience—but only God knows everything* (Is. 14:14). This is why one must humbly depend on God’s Word (Ps. 119:105) and Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-25) to interpret and respond to circumstances (Rom. 12:2). For example, consider the different perspectives and memories of the spies who reported on the Promised Land, and how one of the perspectives became dangerous groupthink¹⁰ (Refer to appendix Bible study¹).

This is not some phenomena found “out there somewhere”—it is the natural state of people, even among the most articulate, persuasive and gifted of us. In fact, research¹¹ and biblical data (Matt. 23: 1-6, Luke 18: 9-14, 1 Cor. 1: 18-31, Gal. 2: 11-12)¹² affirm that the more gifted, persuasive and effective we are, the more potent our problem is! In his landmark work on Biblical Eldership, Alexander Strauch effectively explains the problem of “blind spots” utilizing

⁹ Dr. Marc Green, “Is it a Gun or is it a Wallet”? Perceptual Factors in Police Shootings of Unarmed Suspects. VISUAL EXPERT HUMAN FACTORS. <http://www.visualexpert.com/Resources/policeshooting.html> (accessed 9-20-09)

This demonstrates that our blinding presuppositions are a natural (God given) part of being human. The officer “sees” a gun because all of his / her experiences and current schemas interpret the actions of the subject. When lighting is low or visual acuity otherwise compromised, the officer’s brain “fills in” the missing data. The officer “sees” a gun, REALLY. The officer has no evil intention; it is simply how the brain works. It is very similar to what happened to the disciples in the upper room and what happens to us every day. We “hear” or “see” what our preexisting schemas allow us to “hear” or “see.” If we “see” a threat, we shoot (off our mouths, or roll our eyes, or sigh, or shake our head, or make a veiled threat, or call in reinforcements...).

¹⁰ Conformity in thought and behavior among the members of a group, especially an unthinking acceptance of majority opinions—an all too common and natural social process

¹¹ Teaching Smart People How to Learn. Chris Argyris. 1991 Harvard Business Review Volume 4 Number 2 REFLECTIONS. http://www.velinperformance.com/downloads/chris_argyris_learning.pdf (accessed August 31, 2009).

¹² While these passages refer to abject spiritual blindness - as we will see; the Bible, church history and life experience provides ample evidence that all believers are subject to bouts of spiritual blindness Thus, the concern expressed by Ps. 19:12-13 and the warning of Gal. 5: 13-26...

C.S. Lewis's term "fatal flaw." Strauch points out that our fatal flaws are impervious to outside reason because we label *any person attempting to point out our flaw with blaming terms*. Then Strauch goes on to make this critically important observation:

These fatal flaws or blind spots distort our judgment. They deceive us. They can even destroy us. *This is particularly true of multitalented, charismatic leaders.* Blind to their own flaws and extreme views, some talented leaders have destroyed themselves because they have no peers to confront and balance them and, in fact, none wanted.¹³ [Thus, groupthink]

Strauch and Lewis recognize the reality of an implicit biblical principle captured by Heb. 3:13 "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (NASU). Whenever personal accountability to the truth is compromised (self-deception, particularly by a respected / popular leader who has "no peers to confront and balance them and, in fact, none wanted", Gal. 2:11) it puts extreme pressure on corporate responsibility. That is to say, those around or effected by the leader will *automatically begin to justify* the leader's positions and actions. This creates groupthink that increases social pressure to conform to / or justify the leader's self-deception. From more current history, groupthink allowed Hitler to come to power and enabled Jim Jones to persuade people to "drink the Kool-Aid." In the case of Hebrews, it was becoming popular (groupthink) to return to the Levitical system. The principle is this, when social pressure is present to compromise the truth, *absent DAILY mutual encouragement and accountability you WILL (in a 360° contagious, proselytizing manner) be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

While a major problem with sin is the harm it does to people, churches and ministries (that damage is great), John Piper¹⁴ points out that the ultimate issue with sin is the disdain it demonstrates toward God and how sin mocks His glory (2 Sam. 12:12). Take for example the grave warning of Matt 5:22 "and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." (NASU). The people whom Jesus addressed were sternly warned against applying the label "You fool" to anyone. But when *we* have angry "labeling" reactions against those that offend or disagree with us, it is not simply considered an *acceptable* sin; it is a *socially sanctified* sin in our current church culture. This is probably because (as will be seen below) we naturally label those people that offend or challenge us. Since we do not know what to do about how our minds instinctively label others and we all do it, it must be OK— this is an example of the groupthink that bears upon us. Nevertheless, in Matt. 7: 1-2 Jesus points out the eternal burden our "judgments of others" place on us personally, and in Rom. 2:1-5 Paul brings it all together to make sense of Jesus' stern warning in Matt. 5:22! While the biblical text below is a scathing indictment against self-righteous Jews, the passage addresses all who sin and judge others.

¹³ Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. Lewis & Roth, 1995. Pages 40-41. (*Emphasis added*).

¹⁴ Piper, John, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Multnomah

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God... (Rom. 2: 1-5, NASU)

Our judgment(s) of others make(s) a mockery of “His kindness and tolerance and patience” which is why Jesus provides such a stern warning in Matt. 5:22. The personal cost of such judgments is that they create an internal torture chamber in our own mind¹⁵ and heart that spills into eternity (Matt. 18: 22-35 see microwave illustration in final appendix). The corporate cost of such judgmentalness is that you “bite, devour and consume” one another (Gal. 5:17) and create “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions” (Gal 5:20, NASU).

Here is how the problem plays out in everyday life. We naturally (preconsciously and subconsciously) assume that anyone who disagrees (has a different perspective or memory) with the way we see reality is either:

- Lying (or practicing some other form of intentional evil)
- Foolish (or exhibiting some other form of unintentional dim-wittedness such as lazy)
- Psychotic (or simply out of touch with reality-as I see it, which is all that matters)¹⁶

When we have this internal mind-set toward someone, we WILL communicate it to him or her regardless of how we attempt to mask it with phony piousness (see seventeenth footnote). In other words, if you are thinking “I can’t believe you remember that conversation/meeting like

¹⁵ Dr. Daniel G. Amen has reported on problems when a portion of the brain he calls the cingulate system becomes over active. *By allowing one’s self to become stuck on a thought* such as an emotional hurt (festering to destroy a relationship) or another’s driving (erupting into violent road rage). “When the cingulate system is abnormal, people have a tendency to get stuck on things, locked into things, to rethink the same thought over and over and over [Gen. 6: 5, Matt. 15: 19, Rom. 1: 28-31, 3: 9-17]. They may become worriers and continually obsess on the same thought. They may hold onto hurts or grudges from the past [Matt. 18:28, Eph.4:31], unable to let them go. They may also get stuck on negative behaviors or develop compulsions such as hand washing or excessively checking locks” [Matt. 23:23-26]. *Change Your Brain Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger, and Impulsiveness*. Daniel G. Amen, M.D. Randomhouse, NY.

¹⁶ Dr. Amen reports on how labeling others is detrimental to brain health, Further, research has repeatedly demonstrated that people are favorably predisposed to be violent or abusive toward others because of something as seemingly innocuous as a one-word dehumanizing label. Melissa Dittman, “What Makes Good People Do Bad Things?” APA Online: Monitor on Psychology 35, no. 9 (October 2004): <http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct04/goodbad.html>.

that! What is wrong with you?” you will communicate this judgmental attitude through reflexive facial expressions and voice intonation, whether you say judgmental words or not.¹⁷ The concept is this; regardless of whether you are self-deceived or you know you are intentionally masking—deception and hostility “leak out.” To understand the cited research biblically, read Prov. 26:23-26, 23:6-8 along with Matt. 23: 27-28. We instinctively conceal our sinfulness by couching it in mannerisms we find socially useful. These innate processes are, in fact, contagious, naturally proselytizing others to be like us (Matt. 23:15).

That said - the PRIMARY issue related to this instinctive labeling process is how it becomes our autobiographical (lived out rather than written down) commentary on who God and Satan are. Satan is the Father of all lies, and murderous anger (John 8:44). It is the height of irony that in our instinctive labeling process, we essentially *accuse* our human “adversary” (the person who has aggravated us) of being “like”, or “of” Satan. They are either:

- Misrepresenting what **we perceive** to be the obvious truth. or
- Behaving in a way that does not coincide with my judgments of good and evil

Just as in the original temptation by Satan, we set ourselves in a position of being "like God" (Gen 3:4). By doing this we *actually become* “like” or “of” Satan. In our own personal court, we are the Law Maker, Law Enforcer, Judge, Jury and Executioner (proclaiming their guilt). The ESV Bible study notes on **Job 19:28–29** are instructive.

Job tells his friends their certainty that **the root of the matter is found in him** has led them to pursue him in **wrath**. Job uses the image of the **sword** to refer to passing **judgment** and to warn the friends against their presumption that they can understand, and actually wield, the sword of judgment that belongs to God alone. In calling his friends to be careful how they judge him lest they fall under the punishment of the very sword they presume to wield, Job suggests something similar to what Jesus will teach explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 7:1–5).

Judging and labeling people or circumstances as evil, liar etc... (of or like Satan) brings dangerous spiritual blindness to us who are applying the label. When we blame satanic forces or other people for problems, we are able to excuse ourselves from responsibility. In thinking this way, my own sin is not my enemy, the visible workings of Satan are. I see myself as an innocent party, fighting the evil “out there”. Thus the way we context the problem instills pride when, again ironically, the Spiritual / Biblical weapon against Satan is repentance and humility not judgment. As Pastor John Piper puts it, “*Concealed sin keeps us from seeing the light of Christ. Sin is like spiritual leprosy. It deadens your spiritual senses so that you rip your [and others] soul to shreds and don't even feel it.*”¹⁸

¹⁷ “The Name of the Game Is Shame,” Jefferson Medical College report to the Academic Advisory Council of the National Campaign against Youth Violence (first distributed December 2000 and presented in part at the Secret Service Building in Washington, D.C.), current rev. March 2003, <http://www.tomkins.org/PDF/library/articles/thenameofthegameisshame.pdf> (accessed 28 October 2008).

¹⁸ Piper, John, (Chapter 3, Emphasis added)

James 4:6-12 “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. 11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (NASU)

This process naturally and continuously occurs *on both sides of all issues all the time*. Our reactions to these judgments serve to create a self-propagating loop with others and increase sin (James 4:1-12).

It is not only obvious why there is confusion and discord; it is remarkable that (by God’s grace) there is not more! Try quietly listening to the implication of conversations around disagreements or conflict. Listen to the streams of personal justifications and/or blame directed at the object of disagreement. (I used the word “object” intentionally to refer to the other person because that is how they are effectively seen at this point. They are an obstacle to presuppositions and beliefs about the circumstances). The more biblically informed, self-confident and articulate I am; the more I can see and effectively articulate *your problem*—as we said above, you are a liar, foolish, psychotic or devilish. Everything you say and do to defend your position simply reinforces mine; “more lies!” “more foolishness!” “more evidence of your psychosis!” “more of Satan using you”—rendering my blinding presupposition impervious to reason (see Matt. 12: 10-14 & John 8:59).

Research on brain functionality once again supports what is implicit in the Bible (see Matt. 26:74, Acts 5:33, and especially Acts 7: 54-58 which provides the contrast of a Spirit filled response to adversity versus a “natural” fleshly response to adversity). Whenever someone disagrees with us, confronts us, or presents an alternative perspective we do not like, our brain releases hormones, including adrenaline. *We only have one stress mechanism. If attacked by a wild animal, we have this same response.* Some of the natural side effects are:

- Elimination of *all but the most rudimentary thought processes*
- Decreased ability to listen or communicate clearly
- *Increased proclivity toward violence* (mental, verbal and physical - Matt. 5:22)
- Loss of fine motor skills, dry mouth, digestive malfunctions, sweating, increased heart rate

In this state, the brain goes into its *instinctual responses* to fear. Recall the previous quote about pastor attrition; consider this pre-indicator of burnout “Fight-or-flight cycles where you rise up to intimidate and conquer others or run away from difficulties just to avoid them.” To be more exact the instinctual responses to fear include: (Keeping in mind that “aggressor” is a *subjective sensation* for the one reacting)

- Fight (to go to war against the aggressor)
- Flight (to run away from the aggressor)
- Freeze (reportedly at least one victim in the Virginia Tech shootings did not even get up from her desk)
- Submit (to try to survive by resigning one's self to the will of the aggressor)
- Posture (to puff one's self up to appear intimidating without actually fighting the aggressor)

Stated in terms of dialogue (verbal and non-verbal, passive and aggressive)

Silence (flight, freeze, and submit)

- Avoiding, clamming up, walking away, looking down, avoiding eye contact, brooding, quietly coping, being distant, stone-faced, weeping, ignoring, going through the motions, fixing gaze away, dropping hints, sulking, perspiring, dry mouth, queasiness. *Waiting* as a "silence" mode merits some further explanation: When I *appear* to be patiently *waiting*, it does not *necessarily* mean that I am humble or listening. The tactic here is to *wait out* the other's monologue by simply detaching. I can do this intentionally, or it can also be an unintentional reflexive response. As referred to in the content around footnotes five and six, unconsciously ignoring dialogue that does not fit into the channels of my pre-existing presupposition is a very natural, albeit mindless, response. I can *look* like I am humbly listening when I am doing nothing more than waiting to interrupt and get the conversation back to my predetermined agenda. Again, the person in front of me is simply an object, and what they are saying to me is an obstacle. Instead of mowing the obstacle down with anger, I am simply *waiting* it out.

Violence (fight, posture)

- Yelling, screaming, pointing or poking, closing in, puffing up, snub, isolate, marginalize, direct threats, veiled threats, leading questions, intimidating, discount, turn away and talk to others as if the object of anger is not present, cold shoulder, look right through, humiliate, coarsely rebuke, shame, insult, cut off, roll eyes, scoff, gasp, label, negatively characterize. *Conduct gossip, rumor and character assassination strategies to build an ally/collaborator base (the sophisticated/ pious will do this in the form of prayer requests or pious conversations).*

During these fearful reactionary cycles the brain *craves safety*¹⁹ (fight, flight) and in this altered state *requires simplicity* (label the "adversary;" liar, idiot, psychotic, devilish *and control* dialogue—read John 9 for a perfect example of how the Pharisees did this). It is as if the person in conflict *reinforces the fortifications* around their own internal presuppositions and personal justifications. They then begin to *shoot arrows of blame* at the "adversary," who simply said or

¹⁹ It is critical to begin to **redefine the safety** that our brains all clamor for (not in the natural manner, by being in control, or by getting my way) but in the supernatural manner – **Abiding in Christ through humility, repentance and faith.** This precipitates a consistent *internal* peace (John 14:27) that is distinct from *external* circumstances and manifest itself as the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). This will be explained further below.

did something they did not want to hear or experience. For example, consider how suddenly road rage (in the form of thoughts, words or actions) can erupt when one motorist disapproves of the driving of another.

Biblical narrative seems to recognize this physiological reality. Consider the manner in which Nathan confronted David regarding his adultery and murder. Review the narrative (2 Sam. 12: 1-15)²⁰. Note that Nathan did not simply walk up and “confront” David directly—this would have probably been suicidal for Nathan and then only served to increase David’s guilt (giving him motive for another murder). David apparently had a divided conscience. He had fortified his bulwarks. Instead of working in the way God intended, all the *accusations* of his conscience were directed *out* toward others and all the *justifications* were directed *inward*, excusing himself (Rom. 2:15). Nathan wisely utilized the natural flow of David’s divided conscience (the most natural state for all of us) to get David to *condemn the evil person out there*. Once David made this judgment, it was as if Nathan had pulled a Trojan horse behind David’s fortification of self-deception. Nathan simply unpacked the “soldiers of truth” by proclaiming, “You are the man!”²¹

Blinding Presuppositions can be Overcome

By now, you may wonder: If blinding presuppositions are impervious to reason and anything one says simply reinforces the self-deception of the other and vice versa, and this *process naturally happens on both sides of the issue*, what hope is there?

Interestingly, the Bible, Jonathan Edwards²² and current research into brain functionality all offer the same remedy to these blinding preconscious and subconscious suppositions and the problems they cause. That remedy, in a word is—**humility**.

To help explain—let me compare and contrast humility with the absence of humility, when dealing with someone who disagrees with us and has the audacity to say so.

²⁰ It is crucial to consider Nathan’s approach along with texts such as Matt. 5:5, 11:29, 18, Luke 15, 2 Tim. 1-2 (gospelizing and restoring) responses to the sins of others. We naturally tend to justify our harshness and judgmentalness (stated and unstated) toward others by citing prophetic utterances of the Bible. However, many of the harsh utterances were not ordained to create true repentance, but were part of the hardening, judging process (Deuteronomy 29:4, Isaiah 43:8, Jeremiah 5:21, Ezekiel 12:2, Is. 6: 9- 10, Matt. 13:14, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40, Acts 28:26, Acts 28:27, Romans 10:16, Romans 11:8). Further, we are by necessity in danger of judging according to the flesh (John 8:15). When true repentance was the end, more often the approach commended to us was gentle (Matt. 11:28-30, Luke 15, John 8: 1-11, 13:1-19, Philippians 2:5ff; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6). In 2 Tim. 1-2 *Paul directly links the power of the gospel* to humility, patience and kindness in the face of hostility. The NT, at least sternly warns against— at most, strictly forbids—judgmentalness (Matt. 7:1-5, Luke 6:37; Luke 6:41; Romans 14:10-13). *The biblical process is to be determinative*, not our inherently dangerous personal fleshly, presupposition and schema driven judgments (Matt. 18).

²¹ This is not to say that the “Nathan” response is the only method, you will see others in the Appendix. It is to say that Nathan seemed to take into account the universal human reality of self-deception and a divided conscience. Thus, we can learn from the implication.

²² Jonathan Edwards; considered by many to be the humblest; most God entranced brightest Christian theologian / pastor to ever live in North America.

Absent humility

The moment I realize you do not agree with me, I preconsciously and subconsciously begin an internal / external dialog that leverages my “rightness” and virtue against your “wrongness” and impiety (Luke 18:9-12). This act makes a judgment about you (as the source of my anger or frustration). This act also presents me as an innocent victim of your actions and as a righteous judge, carrying out legitimate retribution toward you (like Cain toward Abel, Gen. 4:1-8). Given the opportunity, I will usually talk about you (James 4:11) with someone else. The conversation will include a stream of my personal justifications (why I am right) and accusations (why you are wrong) towards you (couched possibly as a prayer request or using some other pious reason). Perhaps building team spirit is the intent of my conversation with the ally, but the subtle implication is; “This is how I treat my brothers (gossip and rumoring behind their back) if they cross me.” If this process is unabated, *the blinding, judgmental supposition about this person becomes groupthink* (Numbers 13:31-14:8, Luke 18:9-12 with Matt. 23: 1-36).

The Historical Need for Humility

What are the chances that I or anyone else will fall victim to suppressing the truth (deceiving myself) about God, ourselves, other people and circumstances? Consider just a few examples:

- Adam and Eve (pre-fall man) rejected God and believed the serpent’s lie after less than fifty words of discourse (Gen. 3)
- The Israelites made a golden calf and proclaimed that it delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 32:4)
- The people and Priests to whom Malachi preached had no idea they were wrong and did not repent (Malachi)
- The Pharisees were the quintessential “self-righteous, self deceived hypocrites” but were also the undisputed Bible scholars of their day (Matt. 23)
- Peter was self deceived on several occasions—Paul had to rebuke him on one of them (Gal. 2:11-13)
- Paul’s primary argument as to why all men need the gospel is that *all men* suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18)
- Paul caught himself repeatedly in cycles of evil actions (Rom. 7:14ff)
- John Calvin believed execution was a legitimate way to handle those who disagree (Michael Servetus)
- Jonathan Edwards’ church (the seedbed of the Great Awakening) dismissed him after more than 25 years of ministry because he developed a more biblical view of the sacraments

With humility

The moment I realize you do not agree with me, I intentionally reinterpret the automatic flow of adrenaline and subsequent emotions. *My frustration is NOT unquestionable evidence of your guilt (of course you are an idiot or liar! Look how frustrated I am!). Rather I interpret my reaction as unquestionable evidence of MY GUILT* (Matt. 5:21-23). In other words, I force myself (probably the most difficult work I will ever do) to think in terms of Jonathan Edwards’

eighth resolution: “Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings *promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.*”

Similarly— *I force myself* (again, probably the hardest work one will ever do) to think in terms of Matt. 5:1-25 and Philippians 2:1-8:

Matt. 5:1-25 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

Phil. 2:1-8 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This humble response automatically interrupts the natural fleshly progression (explained above) by presenting a competing hypothesis—a different method of interpreting—what has happened and is happening. Please follow along in Matthew 18, as the competing hypothesis:

- Calls *me* to repentance and humility (Matt. 18:1-4)
- Gives me a sense of *spiritual responsibility* as opposed to *spiritual superiority* (Matt. 18:5-11)
- Allows me to integrate my efforts with the *will of the Father* rather than my *human inclinations* (Matt. 18:12-14)
- Renders *me* a clean vessel (founded in repentance and humility, *constrained and consumed by the love of Christ and others as well as* emboldened by the will of the Father) for restoration (Matt. 18:15-20). My "showing the fault" will look and feel more like servile "foot-washing" (Matt. 18: 1-4, John 13: 1-17) than pharisaical condemnation.ⁱⁱ I will humbly listen, not reacting in emotional self-defense to your perspective. I will not argue or debate because I assume that your perspective is either relevant to my better understanding of the situation or to "washing your feet" of your worldly perspectives. On the other hand, I may find that—based on my limited previous understanding— I was simply wrong!
- Perpetuates forgiveness—keeping the slate of my heart and mind clean of blinding presuppositions, emotional detachment and torturing bitterness (Matt. 18:21-35)

With true humility, interaction around disagreement and conflict will be decisive as well as, humble, kind, gentle, patient and above all—restorative (Matt. 18) and gospelizing (2 Tim. 1-2)

OVER FOES WITHIN

By Amy Charmichael

*Make us valiant warriors, Jesus, Over self and sin; Lead us, lead us, on to triumph
Over foes within. Lead us forth in any service Thou, dear Lord, shalt choose;
Make us steadfast, make us faithful, Meet for Thee to use.*

Appendix

Bible Study on how presuppositions blind us to a Godly Spiritual Perspective of God, ourselves and others.

How we interpret our circumstances has more to do with the construct of our own heart and mind than with the reality of what is before us. This is clearly seen in the account of Goliath (1 Sam. 17). Read the account and ask yourself the following questions:

- What did the armies of Israel *see* when they saw Goliath?
- What did David *see* when he saw Goliath?

The text gives several clues as to why, even though the *external* situation they saw was identical, what they saw *internally* was entirely different. Compare/contrast the Goliath incident with the account of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) along with Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39).

- What did David see when he saw Bathsheba?
- What did Joseph see when he saw Potiphar's wife?
- Examine the texts for clues as to what so drastically changed David's perspective and what protected Joseph's perspective.

To further demonstrate the importance of maintaining the construct of our own hearts and minds read Romans 8:6 and Col. 3:2 and then answer these questions about David and Joseph:

- Who had greater knowledge of Scripture, David or Joseph?
- Whose temptation was far off and who was "caught by his garment?"
- Who had a longer track record and maturity of walking with the Lord?
- Did David or Joseph have others around them to whom they could have gone to ask to be encouraged in the faith?

-
- Who faced negative consequences only if they said “no” to the temptation, and who faced negative consequences only if they said “yes”?
 - Who had been abandoned, and who was occupying a palace filled with wives and concubines when the temptation came?

Note that although David had every advantage (both spiritual and temporal) he still fell headlong into sin. Joseph, however, because of the pure construct of his heart (before life's events were upon him) faced trials and temptations with a relentless pursuit of righteousness. The circumstances of life revealed rather than created the internal construct of their heart (Matt. 15:18-19).

Read Numbers 13-14:8 regarding the report of the spies.

- Did all twelve spies see the exact same thing *externally*?
- Why did two of the spies see something *internally* that was completely different from the other ten?

That is why *any circumstance* could potentially produce the “Fruit of the Spirit” or “Deeds of the Flesh” (Gal. 5). It is a result of the internal construct of the heart and mind *not* the external circumstances (Prov. 23:6-8).

A godless view of self, God and others naturally clings to our heart and mind as we walk through this world. This requires daily "one another" cleansing of the filth and renewing in the ways and words of Christ.

To remind you of the context that the foot washing took place in...

Luke 22:24 And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a *dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.* -

To arrive at the meal, the disciples would have bathed, but had to *walk on streets with animal droppings, and open sewage wearing sandals.* **THEY NEEDED THEIR FEET WASHED.** This is a very practical ministry; the cleansing they received from Christ was a picture of the need, not of salvation, but of daily cleansing from the filth of the world. (John 13:10)

It is as if Christ said; Gentlemen, you have been trudging through the sewer lagoon of this world, and you have worldly perspectives stinking and staining your thinking and attitudes. Even though I taught you about repentance from positional covetousness and toward servant leadership in Matt. 18, I want to give you some corrective discipleship and commend this ministry to you.

In Matthew Jesus TAUGHT the principles that respond to the problem of worldly values. In John 13 He ACTS OUT the principles of response to worldly values. Turn to Matt. 18 - This is a call to repentance-what is it a call to repent of?

Matt 18:1-3 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is calling the disciples to repent of having a godless view of self, God and others that sees others as objects, vehicles, idols, stepping-stones to personal advancement.

Some believe that the disciples likely argued, contended, maybe even tussled with each other to avoid getting stuck washing feet, and to sit in the seat of honor next to Jesus. Why would they resort to deeds of the flesh to contend with each other? Because they had godless presuppositions of self, God and others. So what does the repentance Jesus is talking about look like?

Matt. 18:4-6 "Whoever then humbles himself as this child (worth noting: the youngest child was often the foot washer), he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever receives

one such child in My name receives Me; (being a humbled sinner, saved by Christ's grace who pursues Christ by forgiving and pursuing sinners) 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Could the warning be more severe? We risk an eternity in the depths of Hell if we do not forgive and pursue sinners with Christ-like forgiveness as He forgave and pursued us!)

Instead of the disciple's perspective on the events of the evening being the Ways and Words of Christ - their perspective was completely a product of how the popular culture and experience had pressed upon them.

Matt . 16:13-23 points out how easily and quickly the thinking and perspectives of this world affect us. One cannot walk through a sewer lagoon and not get sewage on them!

Sometimes these *godless perspectives can evolve within the church...*Remember the believers among the Thessalonians had disengaged from life, waiting for Christ return and had to be admonished? PAUL WASHED THEIR FEET.

Sometimes godless perspectives can come from *respected church leaders*. In Gal. 2:11-14, PAUL WASHES PETER'S FEET

Recall John 13:21-30. The John 13 text demonstrates how the subtle, yet powerful presuppositions, blind us to the obvious.

As you walk through the sewer lagoon of this world, your presuppositions set by the ways and words of the world, will NATURALLY cover and stain your cleanliness in Christ. That is why we need daily cleansing from a godless view of self, God and others set upon us by experience and cultural norms and expectations – We need those godless perspectives cleaned to expose the ways and words of Christ.

To illustrate how this works - Don't you love automatic car washes? I am old enough to remember having to get the wand, get on my hands and knees in the cold dirty nasty wash bay, point the wand up and get the back spray of sludge and grime all over me. But with AUTOMATIC CAR WASHES-the bottom blast cleans the nasty stuff off the bottom and it goes down the drain. No one has to see it or deal with it, no one has to get dirty, no one has to get messy, no one has to be uncomfortable.

It is easy to develop a normative idea that Church should work like an automatic car wash. Use the high- pressure bottom blast of some good exegetical preaching- bottom blast the nasty stuff off the bottom and it goes down the drain, no one has to see it or deal with it, no one has to get dirty, no one has to get messy, no one has to be uncomfortable.

In Jesus' kingdom, there is no drive through cleansing. Someone has to put on the slaves towel.

Someone has to get dirty, someone has to get the stuff on him or her, someone has to touch, and someone must see and smell dirty feet.

Someone has to have the mind of Christ...

Phil 2:2-9 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. NASU

That is the attitude of Christ. What does imitating Christ look like?

John 13:12-18 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. NASU

The act of washing feet was a very practical, very humbling, very dirty, very distasteful job. However it is the essence of "one another" ministry commended to us by Christ. In fact, in John 13:8 where Jesus tells Peter he would have no part with Him unless he allows his feet to be washed, it could be argued that Jesus is pointing out to Peter what the new commandment in John 13:34-35 (Love one another as I have loved you) looks like in everyday life. In order to love one another we must wash one another's sinfulness in the love of Christ. Gospel love requires us to display forgiveness towards each other.

Foot Washing Step One – Listen

The first step to washing dirty feet is the most unnatural: Stoop down, allow the feet near your face *without reacting to the filth in self-righteous indignation*. (See above "Blinding Presuppositions are Impervious to Reason and are Contagious")

Prov 18:13 He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him. NASU

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel. NASU

James 1:26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. NASU

Prov 20:5 A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out. NASU

Disciplined Listening

As human beings, we live with a natural disposition to have a Pharisaical, self-righteous, contemptuous attitude toward others. One of the most glaring manifestations of this contempt toward others is our unwillingness to listen to other people. Unfortunately, we assume that we *do* listen! Current research seems to have stumbled upon what readers of God's Word have known for thousands of years—the average person does not take the time to listen, and lack of listening leads to devastated relationships, split churches and marriages, along with social and civil catastrophes. This is why James 1:19-20 tells us “Know this my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” The significance of disciplined listening comes from the fact that the human “heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9). It deceives itself by its own nature and hides the deception from itself very well. At the same time, it is important to know our hearts because they reflect who we actually are (Prov. 27:19). The words we speak are a prime way our hearts are made manifest (Luke 6:45). Disciplined listening draws out the “deep waters” (Prov. 20:5) of a man's heart, and builds a basis for true, deep, cleansing repentance which brings healing to a man's body and soul (Ps. 32:3-6, James 5:16).

For example, if a child explains why he hit his sibling by listing all the actions of his sibling that “made me mad,” it sounds like he is only telling on his sibling. We immediately want to interrupt and stop him. In reality he is revealing his own heart in:

- 1) How he sees life in a way that does not cause him to honor and thank God (Rom. 1:21ff).
- 2) What he loves more than God and others (Matt. 22:37-40), for example, the *toy* the other child grabbed from him.
- 3) How he erroneously holds the functional belief that fulfilling what *he* wants and needs is the goal of life (Matt. 22:37-39, Mark 9:35, 1 Cor. 10:31).

You could merely punish him and cause the child to change his behavior (consistent lovingly applied consequences are critical for a child's spiritual, emotional and social development – particularly at younger ages), but the sinful perspective of God, self and others may not have been affected (Matt. 5:21-24). The child may be well behaved, but still on the broad path that

leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14, Luke 18:9-14). How will you know unless you take the time to listen to and draw out the overflow of the heart?

Whenever someone talks to us, our minds were created to work rapidly to make connections, and to relate to what others are saying. The connections are made to past experiences and beliefs that make up the *construct of our own heart and mind*. The instant our minds make connections, it causes us to “think” or assume we know what the speaker is going to say. This subconscious process is usually complete within a couple seconds or less. In this instant we quit listening; begin to formulate our response and wait for an opportunity to interrupt, comment or interject.

Breaking this cycle requires maximum effort because it goes against how our minds are hard-wired. There are two ways to break this cycle: 1) Have a change of heart about the listening process; really believe that listening to another is an act of Christ honoring humility and a loving service to them (this is the ultimate goal). 2) Employ methods (see below) that permit true listening to take place, allowing you to see the spiritual power of ministry it holds, which in turn, God uses to manifest the change of heart noted (#1) to take place.

Since only God can change your heart towards others and give you intrinsic motivation to listen, here is a simple method to use in the mean time. Even while using this method, beseech God daily to give you a heart of love and compassion towards others that motivates you to listen. When you set out to engage in “disciplined listening” resist the temptation to interrupt with your own stories, experiences, assessments and assumptions.

To draw out the deep waters of another’s heart, start with open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no response. Rather than asking, “Did you have a good day?” say, “Tell me about your devotion time this morning.”

If what someone is telling you contains a lot of emotion or it is critical to knowing their heart, *briefly* say back to the other what you *hear* them saying, and/or, how they *seem* to feel about it. This will: 1) Keep you from hi-jacking the account of their heart and contaminating it by mixing in your own account. 2) Give them a chance to clarify any discrepancies between what they are intending to say and what you are hearing. So, in its simplest form, it might sound like: “When she said that, you felt hurt,” or “You feel upset because he ignored you,” or “You feel overwhelmed.” This can take many forms. There is no ‘magical’ formula, it is more important to keep you from hijacking their account and letting their heart manifest itself than to know exactly what to say. While this can seem awkward, if it is an expression of a loving and interested hearer, it will manifest grace. If you try this simple process, you will be amazed at what the lack of interruption and intermingling will draw out of their heart through their mouth. Having said this, we trust in God and not in means. Remember, this process is only a temporary method to utilize as you develop the inner motivation and competence of disciplined listening.

Do not quit listening until the speaker says something like: "That's it - that is exactly how I see it and how I feel about it."

Foot Washing
Step Two – Reconciliation

Now give *them* a chance to be reconciled with God (Matt. 5:23, Matt. 18, James 1:22-25 & 5:16).

How do you assess _____ (describe behavior only do not assume motive or character) _____ **in light of** _____ (scripture or previous judgment made by the person - 2 Sam. 12) _____?

In 2 Samuel 12 David's quickness to judge the fictional man who stole the sheep with Ex. 22:1 is exactly the point of how to help others to make external (third person) judgments, and then turn the mirror of the Word upon their exposed soul! It could be likened to throwing rocks of truth against a massive wall of self deception (how most people are taught to confront sin) verses getting someone to open the gates of self deception to receive a gift (understanding without judgment - someone who will actually deal with and wash my dirty feet without reacting to them). *Think of the Trojan Horse. Once the gates of self deception slam shut behind it, God can unleash the soldiers of truth into their heart- DAVID YOU'RE THE MAN (2 Samuel 12:7)!*

Now give them a chance to be reconciled with you;

Matt 5:23-25 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. NASU

When you _____ (behavior only - no motive ascribing or character evaluations)

_____ **I felt like** _____ (Do not say "you made me feel." You are responsible for your emotions before God, they are not.) _____.

It is critical to get THEM to make the personal assessment of their own attitudes and behaviors in light of God's Word. This is the only means of true repentance and not simply feigned behavior modification from human manipulation (James 1:23-25).

Do you need to be reconciled to them?

If you had a fleshly reaction to another's sin at first, use the situation to *examine your own heart* and confess/apologize to others and repent before God.

Through the fleshly emotional reaction I had in response to your behavior, God has shown me the following area(s) that I need to confess and repent of my ungodly perspective along with the resulting fleshly words and deeds, and bring all under the authority of God's Word and Spirit. These are my areas of repentance _____,

_____.

Through the above confession we access the gospel (1 John 1: 9-10) for ourselves and model the gospel to others. *This glorifies Christ, and accomplishes our created purpose.*