

Daily Life with Christ. Love-30: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love: self-fragmentation due to the problems of guilt and shame.

(Pdf copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/040918.pdf>; for background and complete series, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).



George: I can see that personal relationships with people are not to be thought as being plugged into some power, as you call it “conduit systems” like toasters. I can also see how that applies to a 2nd person personal relationship with God. But I still believe that confession of sin as per 1 John 1:9 is very important for divine forgiveness.

Stephen: I do too. I just don’t think the appropriate analogy is found in modern science and technology—like being disconnected from power source when one sins and getting reconnected to the power source upon confession and divine forgiveness—like unplugging and plugging in a toaster. Relationships with people do not work that way and personal relationship with God does not work that way. In fact, no human relationship works that way. As I noted, a 2nd person relationship is all about mutual and conscious sharing of lives between two people who are fully conscious of each other and empathetic to each other. This connection is much different than just plugging something into a power source for instant power—there is nothing personal about that among human beings or with God. One cannot have a truly personal relationship with another person or with God just through mechanics—which is, at best, mere lip service; religionism comes in many “flavors.”

George: Yes, but the Bible teaches that if we confess our sins, He will forgive us, 1 John 1:9. Are you saying we have to work up great sorrow for Him to forgive us?

Stephen: No! However, the confession needs to be in 2nd person orientation instead of thinking in terms of being plugged back into a power source—which is more akin to lip service, which God explicitly declares He hates, see Isaiah chapter 1, and 29:13: “Therefore the Lord said: “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.” They were saying and doing all the right things, exactly according to the commands of God, but God hated it because it was just ritual. This was the perennial problem with many of the people of God in the Old Testament and New Testament: there was no 2nd person personal relationship between the believer and God, it was all about just going through the motions and living impersonally before God based on some spiritual formula, which only testifies to the instrumental view of God to get Him to bless them in some way, not much different that a genie god. If I may say so, isn’t this more akin to spiritual prostitution than a living and loving 2nd person relationship with Him? Does not Satan say that the only reason believers worship God is because God gives them stuff? That God is not worthy to be worshipped in Himself? Life with God is just about the “benes”? Consider Job 1:10: “Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ “But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” Satan’s charge is plain: believers only worship God because He pays them with blessings.

George: Let’s get back to confession of sin and divine forgiveness. So, if a person confesses his sins personally to God in a real 2nd person relationship and God forgives him isn’t the believer now in fellowship with God.

Stephen: Not necessarily—recall what the Bible says in 1 John 1:7 vs. 1:9. Fellowship is active 2nd person life with God as per 1 John 1:7, not a state of being plugged in or out of 1 Jn 1:9. Besides, forgiveness is only one side of the coin. There is also the issue of shame. Forgiveness in and of itself does not take care of the issue of shame. One can be forgiven and still remain so self-fragmented due to shame that he is unable to live in the presence of God. A person who lives in shame lives in self-alienation, and as we discussed, any person who lives with self-alienation due to fragmentation cannot be close to anyone because he cannot be close or whole in himself. A person in shame loathes himself. Again, taking care of the shame problem is much different than the forgiveness problem. In sum, guilt can be relieved by forgiveness, whereas shame cannot be resolved by forgiveness alone. To be forgiven does not give value and honor. It only takes care of the past failings; it only cleans the slate.

George: So, what is the difference between guilt and shame?

Stephen: A guilty person can desire that the slate is clean with regard to sin, and upon true confession, he can be forgiven. But shame is different. Shame defiles the whole person. In shame a person feels ugly and inadequate. To feel shame is to feel ugly and unworthy. In extreme cases, this leads to self-hatred and self-loathing—despising of self. A person who despises himself will

never feel comfortable to live in the presence of God. He feels too unworthy. He does not measure up.

George: I still do not see how forgiveness does not take care of the shame problem. If we are forgiven, then the sins between God and us are gone . . . so all shame should be gone too!

Stephen: Forgiveness cleans the slate, but it does not in and of itself bestow value and beauty. Let's think about a few examples, what if a husband took his wife for granted. He never talks to her, leaves his dirty clothes all around the house, never cleans up his messes in the kitchen or bathroom. He is fully aware that he is not the husband he should be. What if he confesses his wrongdoings to her, but never changes: he never connects with her in 2nd person relationship. Could he conceivably have a personal relationship with her based on just confessing these continuing faults, even if she forgave him every time? What if a believer was very active in his church, but he was also engaged in regular illicit sex; sex he knew that the Lord did not approve of? He asked for confession and felt that the slate was cleaned each time. Could he conceivably feel good living in the presence of God while he continued in this activity—confessing along the way? What if a believer rejected God's command to be part of a local church, a body of fellow believers, even though the option of being with likeminded believers was an option for him? As he thinks about it, he confesses the sin, but is it conceivable that he could feel good about himself not being part of a local body of fellow believers as His Lord desires? How could any person feel good about himself if he continued in bad behavior even if God kept forgiving him along the way? A person can feel shame for the way he is living even if he knows Christ died for all his sins. That shame will keep him from living in the presence of God—he feels he is simply too unworthy, again, even if his sins are forgiven.

George: So, what does it take to get rid of shame, that sense of unworthiness? I guess it would require in the examples that you give above that a person start doing the right thing.

Stephen: Unfortunately, it takes more than simply doing the right thing to gain true value and beauty as a human being. It requires nothing less than displacing the inherent inner fragmentation with a whole integration of the person around the Good. This is what sanctification is all about, having a whole heart, but man is powerfully inclined to prefer his own power and pleasure over greater good. Man inherently seeks lower goods (sense desires, sins) over the higher good (God, righteousness). No matter how he may try to suppress this fact, he knows this is true and he knows it is wrong which only intensifies the self-fragmentation and self-alienation, which always gets in the way of His relationship with God. The truth is that even God cannot personally be close to a person or united with a person in 2nd person mutual shared attention mode if that person is alienated from himself. The same is true in the human realm, when a person is so fragmented that he cannot truly be close to anyone else in any 2nd person personal mode. Again, he cannot even be close to himself. He suffers from self-alienation due to the fact that he is not the kind of person he knows he should be and could be.

George: So, what is the solution? I know you said sanctification, but could you be more specific? Could you elaborate on internal integration around the Good?

Stephen: 2nd person love for God.

George: You mean surrender everything to God?

Stephen: Not really. A life of surrender may be part of it, but that is not the first or the main part. A person can surrender himself and all that he has to God, but out of a servile attitude. A servile attitude is not one that is primarily one of love. A person can claim all kinds of promises in the Word of God, only to fail again and again at integration around the Good. It all comes down to proper 2nd person love. As Paul put it, we could give all that we have to feed the poor and give our own bodies to be burned, but if not out of love for God, it is of no profit (1 Cor 13:3). Can you think of more sacrifice than bestowing all of one's goods to feed the poor or giving body over to be burned?