



## **“The Problem of Indebtedness”**

### **First in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship**

**By David Eckman, Ph.D.**

It has been a delightful experience to minister in China. I have been impressed with the dedication of the Chinese Christians and their willingness to endure hardship for the cause of Christ. They are friendly, studious, hard working individuals. Further, they have persevered in the face of not only external pressure from sometimes “unsympathetic” surrounding forces, but also daunting pressures from their cultural and family backgrounds. These same problems are found in Western Christians less or more, more so when they are from a legalistic background. For the next three editions of our newsletter we will be addressing the challenges of discipleship in China. We will start with the cultural challenge of indebtedness.

#### The problem of Indebtedness.

Hundreds of Chinese have indicated to me that China is a culture that believes in reciprocal gift giving. If you receive a gift, you are morally obligated to give a gift back of equal value to the giver. That creates a depressing problem for a Chinese Christian. How can you possibly pay back the infinite gift of Christ’s sacrifice?! This sense of obligation is nothing to be trifled with. It may well explain the burnout rate for national Chinese missionaries which is about 90% according to various church leaders in China. When Chinese become Christians, they instinctively believe that they must pay back the infinite gift of the God-Man’s death. They do this by working endless hours and they view exhaustion as proof of their sincerity. Exhaustion does not produce the fruit of the Spirit. Exhaustion produces discouragement, shame, and addictive behaviors.

Cultural and family background instincts are powerful whether it is an American Caucasian Christian in Texas or a Chinese Christian in Daming, China. During our last trip, I discussed this challenge of indebtedness with my class in Beijing. Having a translator Grace who has a great flair for the dramatic, I acted the part of a new Chinese convert. I said in feigned sorrow, “Oh this is depressing! God died for me and I have to pay Him back. I will have to work every second of every day for eternity to even make a down payment! This is the saddest moment in my life because I got the greatest gift and at the same time the greatest IOU.” My translator went to town on what I said and practically turned my words into a performance of Peking Opera where dramatic over-the-top acting is the norm. The class of fifty to sixty laughed through her performance. But what she did was critically important. She brought a powerful instinct to the surface of consciousness so that it could be examined. The first step in changing any false instinct is to carefully examine it.



After noticing the false instinct and discussing it for a while, I shared what the proper response is. Paul wrote in Colossians:

And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name (character, works, and reputation) of the Lord Jesus, while continually giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

The proper response is not an attempt to pay it back but an attitude and life of gratitude because salvation is a true gift!

Paul said the debt we owe is gratitude lived out in a Christlike life. Further in Colossians he said the same thing with even more force.

<sup>14</sup> And beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ act as an umpire in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and become inherently thankful ones. (Col. 3:14-15 my translation)

In verse fifteen he said we should become inherently thankful ones. Gratitude is the mark of those who recognize they have been given a gift; a sense of depressed indebtedness is the burden of those who do not know what a true gift is.

To illustrate my point I created a story. Salvation is similar to someone who delivers one million RMB (the Chinese currency) to your front door and knocks. When the door is opened the delivery man says, "I have a gift of one million RMB for you from someone who loves you deeply." Immediately the question enters the heart of the recipient of how will he be able to pay it back. Anticipating that thought, the delivery person says, "The only obligation you have is to carry the money into your house and spend it. That's it!" The true gift is there for the taking. What is the proper response? Gratitude not servitude. The grateful and noble heart will want to display gratitude by a wise use of the gift. Craven hearts squander the gift. Either way it is a true gift. Then, I threw an orange to a class member and said, "Here is a cultural difference. If you are an American and you are told the orange is a gift you will not throw the orange back. If you are Chinese, you have to throw the orange back." Different cultures have different false instincts. Often Americans have the false instinct of entitlement: as Americans we believe we have our rights. Chinese typically do not have a sense of entitlement. Americans however instinctively recognize that a gift is free; cultural Chinese do not. We spent some time on the illustration to drive home the point that a cultural instinct was undercutting the great truth of Christianity that salvation is a true gift. I can say with some confidence that these fine students understood what was communicated and were also integrating the truths into their hearts.

To be motivated by gratitude and love is critical to the Christian life. Is that your motivation?



## “Disconnected Morality”

### Second in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship

By David Eckman, Ph.D.

Obviously I am spending a good deal of time in China and a great deal of time talking to Chinese Americans and Chinese nationals. Further, I am in the process of reading a book on Chinese Philosophy by Wu Chun and also articles on psychological differences between Chinese and Caucasian Americans. As I do this several thoughts have occurred to me which I am developing by writing devotionals for our electronic newsletter.

#### Bottom Up Morality

Often even when they become Christians, both Caucasian Americans and Chinese have a “bottom up morality”. What do I mean? Caucasian Americans based on much research are instinctively committed to individualism, and with that individualism a commitment to moral absolutes. That does not mean they practice morality but on the instinctive level they sense that is where they have to make their decisions about life. While on the other hand the Chinese national and the Chinese American has a relational morality: what is acceptable to the family, friends, and close associates determines their instinctive morality. “Chinese identity is defined in terms of the system of relationships in which a person is involved (Olwen Bedford and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, “Guilt and Shame in Chinese Culture,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 33, p. 130). For the Caucasian it is a guilt/innocent morality that is individualized and for the Chinese it is a shame/honor morality based on how the person does relationally. “Western individualism is premised on the conception of personal rights, rather than personal duties or social goals. In contrast, Confucian ethics are based on concepts of personal duties and social goals rather than on personal rights (Olwen Bedford and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, “Guilt and Shame in Chinese Culture,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 33, p. 131).”

When persons from each group become Christians, most often they carry that morality over to their Christianity and that determines their relationship to God the Father. The most striking example for me is, I once asked a group of Caucasian university students who were leaders in Campus Crusade (now called Cru), when they woke up in the morning did they wake up with a sense of new found fresh innocence with an expectation of living under the Father’s affection or did they wake up feeling guilty. Every one of them said they woke up guilty. The irony of course is that justification by faith should create a sense of fresh innocence. It did not because they were captured by their cultural instincts. Their morality was bottom up. Their cultural background determined how they related to the God who is up in Heaven.



In the same way when Chinese become Christian, they take their moral system of finding honor or acceptance by relational performance. So they have to obtain their sense of acceptance by what they do. With God, however, the reality is we can never do enough to gain the feeling of acceptance that is given as a gift in Christ. So their earthly way of finding acceptance again creates the “bottom up morality.” They take their cultural instincts and apply it to the God who is up in Heaven.

In a sense, culture is like a car stopped on a road. Imagine an American Caucasian is in front of the car, and a Chinese national in back of the car. The front bumper of the cultural car is guilt, and the back bumper is shame. When the cultural car goes forward, the Caucasian is hurt by guilt. When it goes backward, the Chinese person is damaged by shame. Ultimately no advantage occurs either through shame or guilt. If he did everything right, in theory, the Caucasian could be guilt free. But he does not. And the Chinese individual should feel perfectly honorable if he treated all of his relationships well. But he does not. So either way the cultural car runs them down. The way out is top down morality.

### Top Down Morality

Christianity works differently. Christianity is a Trinity based morality. Character comes from a top down relationship to the Father through what Jesus Christ has done and our unity with Him, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:11 described that top down approach.

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:11)

Notice how sin is addressed by a from the top relationship with the Father through our union with Christ. Further, the power of the Spirit of God raises our life above a legal system regardless if that legal system is rule based as with the Caucasians or relationally based with the Chinese.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22-23)

The character that comes from the Holy Spirit is not based on a legal system. Instead it is a top down relationship wherein character flows from a working relationship with the Trinity. This conceptual difference between a bottom up morality and a top down morality has to go from a concept to an instinct. The concept is fairly simple to understand, but it is a challenge to integrate. The starting point is to repent of bottom up morality.

So the question is: are you trapped in a bottom up relationship with the Father or a top down relationship with the Father?



## **“Shame or Living in the Light and Love of God”**

### **Third in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship**

**By David Eckman, Ph.D.**

I was talking about the differences between American Caucasians and the Chinese with a fine Chinese-American brother. We discussed how the American culture has guilt as a critical part of personal identity: one's view of self is determined by meeting a self-approved standard. In Chinese culture shame is a critical part of identity however it goes beyond the self to include the larger circles of relationships. “Shame is far worse than guilt,” he observed. I believe he is right.

The Caucasian thinks instinctively, “I have failed to meet my own standard, and I am guilty in this specific area within myself.” Quite differently the Chinese thinks instinctively, “I have failed others as a person.” It is one thing to fail oneself; it is much different to suffer shame with a crowd.

“At its strongest is the feeling of having a *hei dien* (stain) on one's face, such that anyone who sees one will immediately know of one's shame and condemn one” (Olwen Bedford & Kwang-Kuo Hwang, “Guilt and Shame in Chinese Culture, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 33:2, page 137)

When a Caucasian becomes a Christian, he or she will instinctively carry over those guilt based assumptions and project them on God or assume that God views his personal guilt the same way. The practice is naïve, unbiblical, but pervasive among Caucasian Christians. Ironically the Caucasians who become believers often say they believe in justification by faith. In actual fact they are often tormented by far more personal guilt after becoming believers than when they were not Christians. While having a theoretical knowledge of justification by faith, they also have an emotional and instinctive burden of unaddressed guilt.

When a Chinese national or Chinese American becomes a believer, she or he will instinctively carry over the shame/honor system into their Christianity. And normally because of the sense of debt that comes with Chinese Christianity so also a sense of shame and unacceptability comes too. In fact, I sometimes have the impression that the “Chinese Christian Cultural” expectation is that a Christian should be ashamed and that shame should be a powerful motivator to change. The problem is complete change never comes nor shame ever seems to take the hint and leave.

We addressed these issues in Seattle at a family conference for a Chinese Church. As a result, one of the church leaders sent me a sermon he gave. He related how he was

profoundly influenced by what we taught at the conference and by reading our books. In the sermon he used, and changed, the classic illustration of the old time train with the engine representing “facts”, the coal car representing “faith” and the caboose representing “feelings”. He said in Chinese Christian culture the “facts” really are Christian duties. When that is so, shame results. Since no one can perform well all the time, shame sets in or grows.

He said *Becoming What God Intended* showed him a new engine.

“God's overpowering love and acceptance is my new engine. God led me to have a more secure and loving relationship with Him. My emotions are more positive now,” was what Fred L. said. He then illustrated the place of Christian works by placing them at the end of the train, but at the front, he placed “God’s Love and Acceptance.” He also realized his sense of shame diminished: “I notice I am more transparent and vulnerable to share my struggle.”

As believers either Chinese or Caucasian cast aside their cultural instincts that naturally happens. They find the virtue of transparency because they feel loved by God the Father. Acceptance means you are loved as you are. Through Christ God the Father has established a way of fully loving and delighting in us. As we accept His acceptance, it liberates us from shame and guilt.



Fred L.’s commentary on the train illustration was:

For the train illustration, I also added a fourth cart...For the fact cart on love and acceptance, it is also based on what you said in the book knowing the heart of the father page 100..."Without a sense of being loved and liked by the Father, growth in spirituality is impossible." A strong statement, but I wholeheartedly buy it now.

The Trinity has strongly and convincingly addressed the issue of shame. For example, Christ is not ashamed of us so we should not be!



<sup>10</sup> For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to complete the originator of their salvation through sufferings.

<sup>11</sup> For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, (Hebrews 2:10-11)

Nor is the fruit of the Spirit shame, guilt, and worthlessness. Justification by faith means that we are accepted by the Father the way Christ is accepted by the Father. Christ has no shame or guilt. So in the Father's eyes there is none with us because we are clothed in Christ, we are immersed into Him.

So both the Caucasian Christian and the Chinese Christian both have to repent of their cultural instincts of guilt and shame respectively and embrace the Father's delight in them!



## **“Who is God the Father Angry With?”**

### **Fourth in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship**

**By David Eckman, Ph.D.**

One of the striking things about being a Bible teacher in China is the impression I get that many Chinese Christians believe that God the Father is angry all the time. When we sin, he is outraged. I have not seen the same among many Caucasian Christians but I have often observed that with Chinese-American Christians. I think there may be a cultural reason. Typically traditional Chinese fathers are fairly emotionless except for the sporadic outbursts of anger.

A Chinese American Christian sent me an email asking if God is grieved, and by implication sad, and angry with believers. What prompted that was a book she was reading which said:

“Though God is grieved and saddened, His plan will not fail. Nothing is beyond His throne or above it. God reigns!”

Then she went on to write:

I remember you mentioned that our Father will not be saddened because of our sins. It is because Jesus has already redeemed us and that we became righteous in front of God. God wouldn't look at our sins but at His Son Jesus Christ. You explained in describing picture like our Father is not like a yoyo to be pulled down when we sin. (Not your exact wording though) Did I understand you correctly?

I used to think that God can be grieved and saddened when we sin against Him. Also in the Bible says in Ephesians 4:30 "do not grieve the Holy Spirit"

These are excellent questions that she asked. In order to answer, I have to make some distinctions. Those distinctions are from the New Testament. First, the Trinity is most clearly and vividly presented in the New Testament. Further, the relationship between believers, Christians, and non-Christians is really emphasized in the New Testament. When it comes to anger, it is striking what you find when it comes to God's attitude toward those who want no part of Jesus Christ and those who have trusted in him. As I said, I am not just going to look at the idea of grieving and sadness but I think it is very necessary in approaching this subject to look at how God manifests anger.

When you look at the New Testament the distinction between the two groups is fascinating: non-believers are described as objects of wrath and God is angry with them, and for believers none of that language appears with God the Father or the Son. Those words are simply not used for believers with the Two Persons, Father and Son. Instead what we find is that Romans will emphasize God's anger at idolaters and his anger at the Jews who rejected grace (Idolaters and Jews: Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 9:22; 12:19). We find in



Hebrews God is angry with unbelieving Israelites (Hebrews 3:11; 4:3). In the Book of Revelation it is clear that God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ, are outraged with those who believe in the Antichrist, the Beast (Revelation 6:16; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). But it is clearly stated that believers are rescued from that wrath (1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9).

Why are we saved from the wrath of God? Because of Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (Rom 5:9 NAS)

The Father is satisfied or propitiated because Christ has provided the propitiation (1 John 2:1-2). The emphasis in the New Testament is that the Father is satisfied, the Son is the Satisfier, and the Holy Spirit is the one who conforms us to Christ. The Holy Spirit is not said to be angry with us but Christians are told not to be angry, bitter, and wrathful people because God is not like that.

The word used of the Spirit is sad not angry:

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

<sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:30-32 NAS)

Interestingly the Holy Spirit is grieved or sad because we are angry with one another! We are not to be angry with one another because God is not angry with us: he has forgiven us (Ephesians 5:32). The Greek word “grieved” means sad. Notice how it is defined below.

25.275 λυπέω: (derivative of λύπη 'state of sadness,' 25.273) to cause someone to be sad, sorrowful, or distressed - 'to make sad, to sadden.' εἰ δέ τις λελύπηκεν 'if anyone has made someone sad' 2 Cor 2.5; μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ θεοῦ 'don't make God's Holy Spirit sad' Eph 4.30 (Louw-Nida)

God the Father and the Son are angry with non-believers because they have rejected the revelation of God, the grace of God, and the propitiation of Christ. The word anger or wrath is never used of the Holy Spirit interestingly enough.

In the New Testament God and Jesus exhibit anger with non-believers because of:

- Hardness of heart (Mark 3:5)
- Choosing idols and worshipping animals (Romans 1:18)
- Seeking one's own righteousness and rejecting God's grace (Romans 2:5, 8)



- Rejecting the Gospel (Ephesians 2:3)
- Rejecting the Lamb, Jesus, and accepting the Beast, the antichrist (Revelation 6:16-17)

At the same time the New Testament speaks continually of the peace and acceptance that comes to believers (Romans 5:1-2).

After saying all of this I would say that God the Father or Christ are sometimes irritated, and exasperated, with believers. But a vast difference exists in the New Testament with God's anger towards non-believers who reject the grace of God and the death of the God-Man for them, and God's irritation with believers who are recipients of grace.

Christ was irritated with his disciples.

But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant (exasperated) and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Mar 10:14 NAS)

The Greek word indignant is not the word for anger or wrath, but it does show that disciples can be irritating to Christ, and I think it is fair to say believers can be irritating to God.

Christ would confront his followers.

<sup>16</sup> 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

<sup>17</sup> 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

<sup>18</sup> I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

<sup>19</sup> 'Those whom I love (*phileo*: like as a relative or close friend), I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. (Rev 3:16-19 NAS)

Christ strongly confronts the church members, but at the end he says he loves them or has a deep friendship with them and that is why he rebukes and disciplines believers.

In the New Testament the standard words for anger or outrage (*orgae, thumos*) are not used with believers. Certainly though anger and outrage is directly connected with non-believers. Why does there not appear to be anger and outrage connected with believers? On the one hand, we have done what the world has not done. We have recognized the man dying on the cross as the Son of God, and we have trusted him. That removed us from God's wrath.



"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36 NAS)

On the other hand, we are identified with Christ and he is identified with us. In our union with him, we can never be objects of wrath or anger because Christ himself would be subjected to such also!

**Summary:**

Nowhere in the New Testament does it state that God and his Son are angry with or wrathful with believers. That is really striking. Nor does it say the Father or the Son is in sorrow or grieving over believers. It does say in one place that we should not grieve or sadden the Holy Spirit by being angry or bitter with other believers. The reason we should not is because God in relationship to Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:30-32). We are not objects of wrath so we should not make others objects of our wrath. The primary agents in justification are the Father and the Son; neither of them are said to have anger with believers. The agent of sanctification is the Holy Spirit, and he is the one who is said to grieve. He is not said to be angry. As for non-believers they are the objects of God's wrath.



## **“Tell Me What to Do!”**

### **Fifth in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship**

**By David Eckman, Ph.D.**

One of the sisters in our mentoring group asked what I would say is the classic Chinese Christian request, “Tell me what to do.” Chinese culture is not a place that asks what should I feel or what should my perspective be, but is a place where the question is, “What should I do?” That appears to be the response to the acceptance of the Gospel: tell me what to do. On the one hand, it is a noble response. On the other hand, it could be a dangerous response. Why? In Christianity you have to “be” before you “do.” You have to be a certain kind of person before you can begin different sorts of activity.

What we do is very important but it is on a continuum. Putting it another way: before we do we have to go through a transformational cycle. The Bible is very interested in telling us what to do, but a larger part of its answer is: before you do you have to become a different person. Most troubling situations in life are better solved by us becoming a different person, than by us starting a different activity.

However the answer to the question “what shall we do?” is answered by saying we must enter into a cycle changing who we are so that we can effectively do what God would tell us.

#### Beginning of the Cycle

<sup>10</sup> For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

<sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,

The beginning point of all spirituality is always chaos. It is the chaos of painful emotions, compelling appetites, and selfish perspectives. Sin within gives commands not in an audible voice but through inaudible emotions which are in pain, through out of control desires, and through a perspective formed by fear and selfishness. So that when Paul says assume or count yourself dead or a corpse to sin, he is saying in the strongest possible way: ignore the moods, desires and perspective of sin. Nothing is as disinterested and unconnected as a corpse. Through the work of Christ we have been disconnected from the power of sin within, and now we are being told not to look for the outlet to plug ourselves back in. Then, in the same sentence, he says assume that you are continually alive to God in Christ Jesus. Making sure that the reader understands what he is saying, Paul states do not listen to King Sin. How then does King Sin give its order? It is through mismanaged appetites. The word



for obey is literally “listen to.” Don’t listen to the kingly orders of sin by listening to your mismanaged appetites. Instead focus all of your attention on your new .life in Christ and your new relationship to your Heavenly Father.

### The Middle Point of the Cycle

<sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

The beginning point of the cycle is to turn ones attention from sin within with its disturbed emotions, misaligned desires, and shallow and devious perspectives. After that Paul says we are not to go on presenting our bodily members as weapons to be used by sin. Instead we are to immediately present ourselves to God the Father.

The word present means “to stand around”. Time after time in the Bible it merely means to be in the presence of someone. For instance, it is used by Luke in Acts to describe how Paul was sent to Caesar to “stand around” until the Emperor gave orders concerning him (Acts 27:24), or how Peter and others stood around the fire in the High Priest’s courtyard as he watched what was happening to Jesus (Mark 14:69). Another usage describes soldiers standing around waiting for orders from the High Priest (Acts 23:2).

How are we to stand around God the Father? First of all, as those who are alive from the dead. Meaning we have been joined to Christ in his resurrection (Paul said that in Romans 6:4-5, 8). Paul used the term “as or like” because we physically have not been raised from the dead but in Christ God the Father sees us that way. That means that all obligation or indictments or penalties have been shattered by our resurrection with Christ. We owe nothing to sin, not even the slightest flicker of attention. Instead we are completely welcome into the Father’s presence as Christ is welcomed (to be justified by faith means to be accepted in the Father the way Jesus is accepted). Not only do we receive a royal welcome, we will receive help in our time of need.

As we stand around the presence of God the Father and focus on him something wonderful happens, we become a new and different person.

Most problems in life can be solved by us becoming a different person. If you are having problems in your marriage become a different person. Let somebody else than you come home. If you are struggling with your emotions, become a different person with different emotional responses. The old person we were has the tremendous opportunity of becoming a new person by living our lives in the Father’s presence. Our anxiety will become peace; our bitterness will become compassion; our slavery will be broken. The shackles or chains of sin will be ended. Freedom to change will be ours in the Father’s



presence. We will experience freeing emotions, self-control, and a different perspective. We will be different persons.

Then, we are to use the members of our body as weapons of righteousness to live a changed life. Before we answer the question of “what shall we do?” we have to become a different person.

### The Completion of the Cycle

<sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.  
(Rom 6:10-14)

Then, in a sense, we return to this earth to do something. But whatever we do, it is as a different person. When the heart changes, true changes in behavior become easier. Christian character is never a matter of just doing something. The emotions, desires, and perspective have to be changed in a living relationship with the Father, through our identity in Christ, as empowered by the Holy Spirit. So when someone says, “Tell me what to do!” The Christian answer is to participate in the cycle of the changed life. Go to heaven while leaving the attractions of the flesh behind. Stay in the Father’s presence, experience his complete acceptance, share your life with him, and expect the Holy Spirit will change you. What you will discover is that his changes will come with liberating power. So much so that you will feel like a different person because you are. Then, on earth meet the challenges of life with the life of Christ within you.



## “Dedication and Love”

### Sixth in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship

By David Eckman, Ph.D.

When I was at the universities in Beijing, I interviewed a counselor in front of the class. He was a therapist at one of the counseling centers. I asked him about how his father raised him. He said every day his father would yell at him, sometimes abused him, and these experiences might last hours in a day. I asked him if he thought his father loved him. His answer was of course he did. I asked if his father knew how much pain he was inflicting on his son. The counselor said no of course not. I asked again how could his father have loved him if he did not know or understand the pain his son was going through. Again he assured me his father loved him. I asked if he would do the same to his own child. He said absolutely not.

Based on stories and experiences like the young man described, my observation is that Chinese culture sometimes confuses dedication and love. I would argue that the Chinese father in my story was dedicated to his son. However I am not sure at all that he loved him. There is a difference between those two terms.

Dedication may simply be culturally based blind loyalty. A performance based culture produces a performance based family life. Because dedication or performance based morality comes from the culture and family background it will be entirely subconscious. It may well not be love. There is a distinct difference between dedication and love. Love, on the one hand, is based on a personal delight in another person. The beginning of love is enjoyment and pleasure that love finds in the other. The beginning of dedication is an act of the will that maybe culturally derived and based on family expectations. To delight in another person assumes some acquaintance with their heart that results in compassion and mercy. To be dedicated to another person may not involve compassion or mercy. In fact, with regards to love, dedication may result many times. To the contrary dedication may not produce love at all.

DEDICATION	LOVE
A choice of the will	An attraction and delight of the heart Song 8:6-7
Based often on cultural instinct: functions on subconscious level	Based on pleasure in the other person
Dedication may exist without love	Love often produces dedication

Total dedication is unacceptable to God without love 1 Cor. 13:3	Love is inherently acceptable to God
Compassion is not innate in dedication	Compassion is innate in love 1 Cor. 13:4-6
Mercy is not innate in dedication	Mercy is innate in love Eph. 2:4
God is not dedication	God is love 1 John 4:8, 16

In Christianity, loving dedication follows an experience and understanding of God’s grace and mercy. In chapters 1-8 of Romans, Paul the Apostle described how God has dealt with the problem of sin within and how we are supposed to deal with it. In chapters 9-11 he addressed the issue of God’s setting aside of Israel and his choice of the gentiles through Christ. In chapters 12-16 he addressed the practical issues of Christian service and action in the community of the church and in the world. At the very beginning of this third section (12-16) Paul called for dedication, but it is a dedication based on an understanding and experience of God’s love, mercy, and grace. Understanding where in the context of Romans, Romans 12:1-2 occurs is critical. The Bible does not demand blind loyalty or dedication instead it asks for dedication based upon a prior experience of being loved (as described in chapters 1-11).

In the Greek language of the New Testament, dedicating one’s self is presenting ourselves to serve God using a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit.

**1** I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

**2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2 NAS)

In Paul’s thought dedication is in the middle of two experiences. The first experience is that of being loved, of being treated compassionately by God, and that should be the basis of Christian dedication. Such dedication leads to another experience: the discovery that God’s will that we surrender to is good for us or beneficial; it is also pleasing to us in bringing us pleasure; it is also complete in fitting who we are well. In Christianity sacrifice, or extreme dedication, is meaningless without experiencing love and responding in love. Christian dedication is to follow an experience of God’s mercy. To ask for dedication without it being based in love, compassion, and mercy is dangerous. Such unanchored dedication can become cruel and compassionless.



Further, ultimate dedication is not acceptable to God if it is not driven by love or a passionate delight in another person.

<sup>3</sup> And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1Co 13:3 NAS)

But notice how love is described by Paul. It is a profoundly connected emotional relationship.

Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, (1Co 13:4 NAS)

Culture and family background produces the subconscious substructure of people's relationships. Therefore, a person may have a subconscious commitment to dedication based on their background, but it does not necessarily follow that is love. Dedication as blind loyalty is not what the Bible asks for. The Bible expects that the human heart will be wooed and won by God's kindness and once the heart is won it will respond with love.



## **“When there is no comparison, there is no hurt.”**

### **Chinese Proverb**

#### **Seventh in a Series on the Chinese and Discipleship**

Regularly we have a Skype meeting with those leaders in Beijing who are involved with **Head to Heart** Groups. Even though it is 7:30 AM in Beijing and 5:030 PM in California, the conversations are lively and interesting. As we talked a week ago the different participants shared their family backgrounds. The only person in the group from a healthy family described how she was deeply loved by those around her. Further, she was not criticized or compared to others as is common in Mainland Chinese families. Then, she quoted a Chinese proverb, “When there is no comparison, there is no hurt.” Immediately when she said that my mind became ablaze not just with the implications of the proverb which are profound, but also ablaze with how it connected to the truths of the New Testament.

The books of the New Testament describe how we have been delivered from comparisons. In fact, we have been rescued from the great comparison. That great comparison is with the Law and moral expectations of the Old Testament. The great legal comparison of every human being with the Law of the Old Testament had one intention. Every mouth was to be left speechlessly shut without any defense against the Law’s condemnation.

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be shut, and all the world may become under guilt to God;

<sup>20</sup> because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the complete experience of sin. (Rom 3:19-20 my translation).

Paul went on to say in Romans 7 that the Law energized painful emotions within us. The phrase painful emotions is translated from a Greek word often rendered in English as passions. In Paul’s use of the term, these passions are painful emotions inundating the heart.

<sup>5</sup> For while we were in the flesh [unsaved], the painful emotions accompanying sins, which were being energized by the Law in the members of our body bore fruit for death. (Rom 7:5 my translation)

These painful emotions would be guilt, shame, and worthlessness. What happens to us when we are unfavorably compared to others: we feel shame, worthlessness and guilt because we do not measure up to the comparison. The Law does the same. Paul the Apostle gave an example in Romans 7 of what the Law condemned.

I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not desire or lust after that which is not your own." (Rom 7:7b my translation)

When we covet or lust, the Law condemns us and we feel pain. The pain of the comparison is the same dynamic occurring within the performance based family. In such homes parents manipulate



the offspring through comparing their children to the superior performance of their relative's children.

When all mouths are closed, it means everyone is defenseless before the comparison with the Law and must flee to a different source of righteousness. When all hearts are filled with discomfort due to a comparison with the Law, they must flee to a true source of peace. Christianity delivers the Christian from those death dealing comparisons by placing us in Union with the Incomparable Christ. The verse before Romans 7:5 that emphasized the pain coming through the Law states that we are delivered from the comparison with the Law (we died to the Law) by our Union with Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to someone very different, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. (Rom 7:4 my translation)

Christ is the Incomparable. Jesus is the God-Man. He is infinitely more righteous than the Law because He is Divine – He is God. No moral comparison can be made with Him. As He said to the Jews which of them can convict him of sin: none could (John 8:46). We have been placed in Union with not only He is who is sinless but He who is infinitely righteous. So we are left in this incredible position wherein we have the righteousness of God imputed to us, but at the same time NEVER in our lives on earth will we ever be able to fully understand it or fully sense such a stunning reality.

He made Him who continually never experienced or knew sin, sin on our behalf, with the result we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2Cor 5:21 my translation)

He so identified with us that He became our sin, and we are so identified with Him that we became His righteousness. In this life we will only get glimmers of what it means to be joined to Christ, and to have God the Father's righteousness in Him. Yet when we do our hearts experience profound tranquility, deep compassion from God, and loyal devotion to Christ and our Father.

What are the implications?

- Daily we must recognize by faith our Union with Christ, and not rely on our religious performance.
- Daily we must base our prayer on our Union with Him and not our ability to satisfy the Law.
- Daily we must realize we are not under the punitive menace of the Law, but under the paternal daily care of our Father in Heaven.
- Daily we must exercise the gift of transparency, or walking in the light (1 John 1) so as to be cleansed from the clammy claws of sin within, and its deadening emotions.
- Daily we must share what we have received, the gift of allowing others to be like us, weak people who need help.

“Where there is no comparison, there is no pain!” In Christ, no comparison exists with anything outside of Him, neither Law nor morality. All is Christ, the Incomparable Christ! With Him, no pain abides.