

“I did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

The Gravity of Sour Cynicism

“The Pharisee stood and prayed within himself in this way: ‘God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector.’”
(Luke 18:11 MKJV)

Is cynicism a virtue or a vice? Is it constructive, or does it destroy? Might cynicism have the same poisonous power as hatred? I think most people have seen examples of corrosive cynicism, if not experiencing it themselves.

Some refer to cynicism as a healthy mistrust of human nature, the opposite of being gullible, but it’s often darker than that. Unhealthy cynicism is mistrust filtered through a lens clouded by scorn. Sour cynicism lacks the balance of grace and wisdom called for by the Lord Jesus Christ in all His people:

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16 MKJV).

Cynicism is often harmless, even helpful, but not always, as you will see.

In 1976, a spiritual acquaintance, Mickey Patrick, said to me, “Beware of cynicism. It’s a trap of the enemy.”

He was speaking of sour cynicism. I agree - cynicism can be a subtle trap, deceptive, and therefore effective in performing evil. After all, it doesn’t necessarily come across as hatred. It might even be mistaken for wisdom, objective judgment, and constructive criticism. However, when one discerns the spirit of it, can it not be similar to hatred and its fruits? And as always, the greatest victim is the one with the sin, the cynic.

The nature of cynicism isn’t one only of words, but of spirit. We can say true things constructively. We can criticize constructively. We can state negative facts with a right attitude, in innocence, like Nathanael the Israelite, a “white” cynic:

“And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can there be any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him and said of him, ‘Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile!’” (John 1:46-47 MKJV)

A “dark” cynic wouldn’t have come to see, or would have come to scoff, but here was an honest soul who had the grace of God to verify, believe, and receive the truth.

When we begin to deride, accuse, mock, scoff, scorn, or criticize with condemnation in spirit and desire, watch out - that’s enemy territory; it’s anti-Christ. Sour cynicism is a pit that gets deeper and darker with indulgence. The deeper it gets, the harder to climb out of it.

Sour cynicism is speaking as though you aren’t guilty of the things you say of others. Are you innocent? Jesus said:

“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings out good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings out evil things. But I say to you that every idle word,

whatever men may speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matthew 12:35-37 MKJV).

Are you prepared to be judged by your words and the standards you demand of others? Are you bitter because you’ve been hurt by those whom you thought you could trust? Have you been disillusioned? Let disillusionment (release from illusion) be a good thing, not bad, something to be thankful for, not miserable about. Isn’t it better to see things as they truly are and the purpose God intended, rather than being led astray by your unreal expectations and misconceptions?

Sour cynicism is cultivated when we fail to recognize the sovereignty of God and thank Him. Do the Scriptures say, “In everything *be cynical*, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 MKJV)?

Isn’t cynicism the opposite of giving thanks to our Almighty Creator, Who does all things, both good and evil? I’ve experienced tremendous victories and miracles in thanksgiving to God. I would say sour cynicism yields the very opposite, because it attributes power to men and to evil, and denies the will and sovereignty of God, Who works *all* things together for good. Being cynical in unbelief certainly hasn’t yielded me any benefits.

A sour cynic is someone who complains about, and is critical of, the deeds and motives of others, without having a right motive himself for his criticism. Let’s say you’re factually right. So you know better. So what? Will it help to mock, scorn, bitterly oppose, or criticize, as though you’ve never been wrong or guilty of the things you’re talking about?

Is it possible the ones you’re cynical of have been right about things you are, have been, or will be, wrong about? Do you know their heart and motives? Do you know what God is doing with them? Do you care about Him or them?

A sour cynic is essentially a faultfinder.

What does the Lord have to say of faultfinders?

Luke 7:31-35 MKJV

(31) And the Lord said, “To what then shall I compare the men of this generation? And to what are they like?

(32) They are like children sitting in a market and calling to one another, and saying, ‘We have played the flute to you, and you have not danced; we have mourned to you, and you did not weep.’

(33) For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’

(34) The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!’

(35) But wisdom has been justified by all her children.”

Sour cynicism can infect anyone, a professor of faith in Christ or the avowed atheist.

We mentioned the Lord's parable about the Pharisee and the publican, which is prefaced with these words: "And He spoke this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9 MKJV).

The Pharisee was a religious cynic, proudly professing faith in God while trusting in himself. He found fault with the publican, who humbly confessed his sins and was thereby justified before God. The dark cynic doesn't allow for the faith from above that brings true repentance and redemption. He suspects and believes the worst of others, without distinguishing the motives or forces at work.

An atheist cynic standing by watching the two men pray might say, "Thankfully I'm not like either of them, the sniveling publican who's been browbeaten by religion and will likely be back to his usual tricks in no time, or the pious Pharisee who is surely a hypocrite, hiding behind a religious façade."

The problem with the wrong kind of cynicism (some mistrust or questioning can be good) is that it negates the power of God to transform a life. The sour cynic denies that others can keep God's Commandments, though His grace is available for them to do so. Dark cynicism mocks at the necessary failure all must experience in trying to keep the Law, which precedes the grace of God that comes to those who confess His Law is good, but they are not. And the atheist cynic won't humble himself to lift a finger in that direction, except when God has taken hold of him. God knows how to humble and make believers of such cynics. (Failure and the recognition of powerlessness to keep the Law is also a work of grace.)

Sour cynicism is the attitude of taking credit for producing what has been given to us, as though we were our own Provider.

Dark cynicism is to presume we know all we need to know and to assume others should know as much as we do, or at least more than they do. But isn't it God Who decides who knows what and who is capable of knowing anything?

Do we have all the facts? Even if we did, can we know anything unless the Lord gives it? If He *does* give it, shall we take credit for it?

Soured cynics take pride in their knowledge.

We can gather good information and knowledge that prove so many others wrong. How shall we allow our newly acquired possessions to affect us? Haven't you known people who changed when they transitioned from poverty and obscurity to wealth and fame?

Having been rather humble in their former circumstances, some eventually become proud and arrogant when they meet with success. They allow their wealth and new privileges to puff them up, and their attitude toward others changes. Of them the complaint is heard, "It's like he doesn't know us any more. He now thinks he's better than everybody."

"The poor speaks humble requests, but the rich answers roughly" (Proverbs 18:23 MKJV).

In such a way, knowledge puffs a person up: “But concerning the sacrifices to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1 MKJV).

Soured cynics have lost their judgment and objectivity, which makes them highly distrustful of people and information that don’t agree with the prejudices they’ve cultivated.

An example is the conspiratorialist who, being rich in his knowledge, is distrustful and disdainful of others, and of any knowledge that doesn’t agree with his own. I’ve found a few such people to be generally insecure and fearful.

For a time I was watching Stan Johnson’s *The Prophecy Club*. I listened to several speakers who brought forth information, some factual, some prophetic, some speculative, and some sensational. Many were proud of their “inside knowledge.” Some were alarmed, but few knew what to do about their information.

What good was it doing them, in many cases? The focus wasn’t on God or their personal accountability toward God; it was trained on culprits and wrongs - not a healthy or productive focus. Their attitude was, “Everything is the other guy’s fault.”

Time and again, I find these persons laying the blame for troubles, present and future, at the feet of certain entities seeking to undermine the wellbeing of others and to overpower, even destroy, the world - [conspirators](#). And these conspiratorialists are fearful. If they were in humility, fearing only God, as with the publican over whom the cynical Pharisee was glorying, they would be justified and have peace. Instead, they fear men and circumstances.

We know there are many powerful people who would like to control everything in this world. They’re already doing it in many ways and have been for millennia, as Daniel’s image reveals (Daniel 2). However, the cure isn’t in knowing them or their political, economic, religious, military, or social devices. Their earthly powers can be scary to those without power or hope, as are conspiratorialists. The only true answer and hope, though, is to know and fear God, knowing He reigns supreme, governing both good and evil.

The sour cynical state of mind, the “blame game,” plays out not only on the world scene, but certainly in our personal lives.

The cynic whines, “They didn’t treat me right. They don’t understand me. I wouldn’t be this way, I wouldn’t have lost, I’d be better off... if they hadn’t done what they did. It’s not my fault; I’m innocent, a [victim](#) of chance circumstances or of the evil or incompetent people creating them.”

Negative cynicism is fear of man. In the fear of God, there’s no room for sour cynicism.

A sour cynic is given over to distrust, not as a wise precaution, but as an illness of disposition. In such a state, we suspect, and are fearfully wary of, those all around us. Ironically, fear of man manifests itself in looking to him for benefit, as well as distrusting him. But how can you depend on those you don’t trust, and who ultimately don’t decide

things anyway? Cynicism is indeed a trap.

“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever puts his trust in the LORD shall be safe. Many seek the ruler’s favor; but each man’s judgment comes from the LORD” (Proverbs 29:25-26 MKJV).

Certain cynics came to Jesus, warning Him to flee from Herod who, they said, sought to kill Him, but Jesus brushed them off (Luke 13:31-33). He remained focused on His Father’s will, determined to finish the work He was sent to do. He knew that “the Lord God Omnipotent reigns.” He knew Herod and the Roman Empire were under a Greater Authority, their destinies determined from above. He said to Pilate, “You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above” (John 19:11).

Sour cynicism is judging after the appearance of things.

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24 KJV).

What do we fear that we should unjustly criticize, accuse, condemn, gossip, malign, slander, or verbally abuse our neighbor, and that, secretly? What do we fear that we should speak with derision and scorn about circumstances and developments? Why do we do that? Could it be a root of bitterness that defiles?

Hebrews 12:14-17 MKJV

(14) Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord;

(15) looking diligently lest any fail of the grace of God, or lest any root of bitterness springing up disturb you, and by it many are defiled

(16) (lest there be any fornicator, or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

(17) For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he did not find any place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears).

Unbelieving cynicism values the seen over the unseen.

Esau’s cynicism cost him dearly:

Genesis 25:30-33 MKJV

(30) And Esau said to Jacob, ‘I beg you, let me eat of the red, this red soup, for I am faint.’ Therefore his name was called Edom.

(31) And Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright today.’

(32) And Esau said, ‘**Behold, I am at the point of dying, and what profit shall this birthright be to me?**’

(33) And Jacob said, ‘Swear to me this day.’ And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob.

What idols do we have that make us think and feel we’re wiser and better than others? Do we believe we have wisdom? Are we proud of our understanding? If we are truly secure in what we know and worship, we won’t feel threatened or behave cynically towards people and circumstances. All cynics I’ve met are as faulty as anyone else, and perhaps more so when sourly cynical.

Unless God does something, the slippery slope of cynicism is insurmountable.

I've been a sour cynic, and I think it was at least partly because of low self-esteem and bitterness, and partly in discovering I'd been deceived and abused. I've been guilty of having a critical attitude, and of course, having that attitude was anything but healthy - spiritually, mentally, or physically. Even if we're technically correct in **what** we say, it's **why** we say it and the **way** we say it that matter.

I used to say, "If I was in charge [if I was Prime Minister or President], I'd do things very differently. If I was him or her, I'd do this or that." That can be dark cynicism, presuming you know, or can do, better when you haven't been in others' shoes to prove it. There came a time when the Lord decided to address me in that disposition. I soon discovered I couldn't do anything right, and I didn't know anything as I thought.

"And if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2 MKJV).

Oh, how wise we can be, so proud of ourselves, and not realize it. Again, dark cynicism is as a growing trap, a subtly developing attitude, like gradual addiction. Traps are concealed, made to appear as though they don't exist or are benign. The trap of cynicism, let it be known, is real, and anything but benign.

I was as Nebuchadnezzar who, proud and boastful of his perceived accomplishments, was turned into a beast, grazing on grass for an appointed time (Daniel 4). All his glory and abilities as ruler were taken away from him. He went from proud prince to brute beast overnight.

I was placed in a position where I couldn't determine the course of anything, not a person or an event. I was rendered impotent - set aside for three and a half years - until the Lord was done His work with me. In the latter portion of that appointed time, I entered a dark cloud where I couldn't tell left from right, darkness from light, foolishness from wisdom, flesh from spirit, error from truth, and evil from good. Though my basic needs were generously provided for, everything in terms of status and power was essentially taken from me.

The process was the Lord's doing, from start to finish. In it, I learned He governed all things, including the spirits of men at all times. The message that came with me from that trial was, "The Kingdom of God reigns supreme." I was, then, no longer the sour cynic I had been.

Wasn't that the message Nebuchadnezzar received from his humbling ordeal? You may say, "Nebuchadnezzar's vice was pride, rather than cynicism." Isn't dark cynicism a fruit or form of pride? Doesn't a sour cynic believe he knows better than God?

A sour cynic is one who trusts in himself.

I had been proud. In pride, no person is free of cynicism. He thinks he knows better than others. He sees himself as superior in some way, be it in knowledge, abilities, gifts, or other attributes. How else could he be cynical?

Wasn't Job suffering from cynicism? Though he possessed the grace of God to be upright in his ways, he also trusted in his own righteousness. When his calamity came, he justified himself rather than God. The sum of his complaint was: "I am righteous, and God has taken away my right; should I lie against my right? My wound cannot be cured; I am without rebellion" (Job 34:5-6 MKJV).

Job's three friends who answered this complaint only stoked his cynicism, because they condemned Job without identifying the issue. It wasn't until Elihu, the fourth friend, came and spoke, that the truth was spoken:

Job 34:7-12 MKJV

- (7) "What man is like Job, who drinks up scorning like water;
- (8) who goes in company with the workers of iniquity, and walks with wicked men?
- (9) For he has said, 'It profits a man nothing when he is accepted with God.'
- (10) Therefore listen to me, O man of heart; far be it from God to commit iniquity; and from the Almighty, to do wrong.
- (11) For He repays man's work, and causes him to find according to his ways.
- (12) Yes, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert justice."

Then God spoke and really straightened out Job, after which Job said:

"I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6 HNV).

Now *there* is the death knell of darkened cynicism, glory to God! And to seal the deal, God corrected Job's erring friends and had Job pray for them, after which he was accepted of God, with all restored to him.

Deliverance from cynicism is the pathway to reconciliation for all.

If you're a dark cynic, you're hateful. If you're hateful, you're a murderer (Matthew 5:21-22). You're not fearing God and keeping His Commandments. Have you ever thought of cynicism that way?

A word for the sour cynic (let him who has ears to hear, hear):

"To the pure all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15 MKJV).

Do consider. Fear God and give thanks and praise to Him instead, and you'll soon realize you're out of the pit, no longer the enemy's prisoner, no longer doing his will, but able to run freely and conquer evil in the Lord's Name, wherever you may find it.

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