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## ***The Logic of Love***

### **Chapter 24: Love Is in the Present**

*In God we trust.*

Love is always experienced in the present because love is simultaneously attitude and action, a way of being as well as a way of doing. (Conversations count as action. That's why prayer and worship provide the faithful with the experience of receiving God's love.) Sometimes when we imagine the future or look back upon the past, we decide that our imagined future or our interpretation of the past is a valid excuse for not loving someone in the present. *Fear* will be used to generally describe a rationalization for selfishness based on possible future events. *Judgment* (meaning spiritual judgment—presuming the right and ability to look into the inner life of another) will be used to generally describe the rationalization for justifying the right to withhold love based on past events.

Spiritual judgment of another is always inappropriate. Posing the question of whether someone is worthy of love is the problem. We can't get a good answer to a bad question. What justifies judging Mother Theresa a saint also justifies judging Hitler a sinner. People are worthy of love not because of how they *act* in the world, but because of who we *are* in the world. The issue isn't accuracy. It's attitude. *Love must be unconditional*. The question is whether we are willing to be spiritual vigilantes. Although vigilantes sometimes get the right person, this does not justify taking the "law" into one's own hands.

By looking at fear and judgment we will see what faith-beliefs are necessary to fully liberate us from these obstacles to love.

#### ***Fear: The Seed of Selfishness***

Our relationship to mortality eventually becomes either a desert wasteland or the rich soil in which the roots of love can grow most deeply. Whether mortality becomes the excuse for a "me first" attitude or the backdrop for supreme expressions of love is all up to us. There is no sitting on the fence with this one. Without a sense of security about an afterlife, morality is mercilessly subjective, hope is lost, trust is irrational, and the vindication of love is but a fanciful dream of wishful thinkers.

This very same sense of mortality also creates the opportunity for the most supreme expression of love—the willingness to lay down one's life for another. Mortality does not contradict the goodness of God. If love is the highest value, then an environment that stimulates and provides an opportunity for experiencing the most profound manifestations of love is consistent with the concept of a loving God.

Death is our most primal fear and a fundamental inhibitor to the full liberation of love. But the problem is not with the fact of death. The problem is not having a faith-belief that vanquishes the fear of death. In one form or another, almost every religion addresses this issue. From reincarnation to eternal life in heaven, cosmologies have been developed to overcome the fear of death. Some religions also teach that hell awaits those who, having rejected God, must face the final judgment. This type of doctrine must be distinguished from teachings that suggest God practices tough love, that God blesses us with consequences for our actions so that we might learn a better way of living.

There is an important difference between being made to suffer just but loving consequences for

misdeeds and suffering punishment for the sake of retribution. Doctrines of eternal damnation play upon selfishness. While they may encourage moral behavior (not to mention any other agendas of the institutions that perpetuate such doctrines), they play on fear rather than inspire love. By playing upon insecurities about mortality, such doctrines may promote good actions, but they invariably undermine the development of a good attitude because they are coercive in nature.

The mercy of God must, of course, be tempered by the justice of God. Knowing all the details of the administration of divine justice, however, is not necessary for the adoption of faith-beliefs that liberate love. Our task is to determine which beliefs (consistent with love as the highest value) are minimally necessary to fully liberate love. We are not required to take a position on the fate of those who do not choose to hold love as the highest value.

Our definition of God implies that there is an afterlife and that this afterlife preserves the continuity of identity because the absence of an afterlife would either be a limitation on the omnipotence of God or an affront to the love of God. If we, as imperfect earthly parents, can love our children enough that we want to continue our relationships with them even after they have grown up, then we should not presume that God's love for us would allow us to perish. The notion that God loves us but does not care to have us around once our mortal life has ended is a limitation on the expression of God's love and, therefore, should be rejected. As well, the idea that God would allow death to forever separate us from those we love is also inconsistent with belief in a loving God.

It is not enough, however, to focus only on being consistent in our application of the value of love and our definition of God. Because the task is to determine which faith-beliefs work best for the liberation of love, we must take an active role in adopting beliefs that discourage selfishness. As imperfect people, if we do not have a belief in an afterlife, then we are hampered to some degree in our ability to express love. This is not to say that one cannot be a loving person unless she believes in an afterlife, nor should this be taken to imply that all who believe in an afterlife are more loving than those who do not. The point is that, *all other things being equal*, having a faith-belief in an afterlife helps to liberate love. Fear of death is a primal instinct; it has great survival value for any species. Replacing this instinct for self-preservation with a service-motivated attitude not only preserves the value of self-preservation, but also works to keep the value of self-preservation in check when love calls on us to lay down our life for another.

Belief in an afterlife not only helps to liberate us from the fear of death; it also liberates us from fear in general. When an eternity lies ahead in which to redress problems, make sense of that which seems senseless, and vindicate the hope of better things to come, then the future loses the power to promote fear. Trusting in God's plan for the future helps us dissolve selfishness in the present. It encourages us to face each moment as a new opportunity for the expression of love.

### ***Letting Go of Judgment***

Recognizing all people as children of God creates the connection that liberates love. Trusting that God will provide for us after death allows us to be liberated from fear of the future. Refusing to spiritually judge others liberates us from the arrogance of presuming to be the arbiter of which children of God are worthy of love.

Judgment is a tricky issue because there is both a spiritual and a secular context in which the word "judgment" gets used. The word *judgment* is similar to words such as *faith*, *belief*, and *knowledge* in that these words take on very different meaning depending on whether they are used in a secular context or a spiritual context. Secular judgment addresses the *actions* of others; spiritual judgment addresses the *worth* of others. Secular judgment is concerned with determining what kind of behavior is appropriate and what to do about misbehavior. Maintaining healthy boundaries in one's relationships is an act of love, not a withholding of it. Spiritual judgment presumes the ability to look into the depths of another's soul to determine whether she is worthy of being loved. Letting go of spiritual judgment liberates love through acceptance of the precept that judging another is simply not our job.

The appropriateness of exercising judgment—be it spiritual or secular—is based on one's right to be in a position of authority. There are various types of authority, and each one has a corresponding type of judgment associated with it. For instance, we enjoy a cultural appreciation for personal authority to choose our close friends. The love we have for our friends cannot be coerced. Others may correctly or incorrectly identify our friends, but they cannot pick them for us.

The authority of a judge or a jury is a socially sanctioned authority. The right to exercise this type of authority comes from the power given to government by citizens to orchestrate social relations and to arbitrate private disputes. We can all have an opinion about whether O.J. did it, but we do not all have the power of a juror to exercise that opinion as a judgment. Although sometimes jurors are called upon to make a determination about someone's intentions, this is not a matter of spiritual judgment. The question before jurors is not whether the accused is loveable. Developing beliefs about what a defendant may have done or thought in the past is merely a socially sanctioned system designed for the preservation of healthy social boundaries in the material world. No one presumes that jurors are endowed with the power to see into another's heart; they are simply asked to help make the best of a bad situation.

In an effort to cease judging others, some people adopt the attitude that everyone has a good heart and is doing their best. This position has the value of defining everyone as worthy of love. But when we do this, we destroy the integrity of freewill. To presume that we are always doing our best implies one of two things, neither of which is desirable. Either we are presuming people are perfect in their use of freewill, which eliminates the value of the process of achieving perfection, or we have eliminated the possibility of choosing to be selfish, which in turn corrodes the concept of freewill and takes the glory out of love. The issue is not with the conclusion of this type of judgment, but with the willingness to ask the question.

The question that comes up when anyone steps into the role of a spiritual judge is "Who made you God?" One of the implications of considering ourselves children of God is that we are *equally* children of God. Although older and stronger siblings may sometimes "lord it over" younger and weaker ones, such behavior is never appropriate unless authorized by the parents. Unless we sink to the level of "might makes right," being older, stronger, wiser, or even *correct* does not confer the right of authority. This is why spiritual judgment invites the question: "Who made you God?" and why younger siblings learn how to say, "You're not my boss!" at a very young age.

*The refusal to attempt the usurpation of authority strengthens the foundation on which we build healthy, loving relationships. This is equally true for biological family relationships, social relationships, and spiritual relationships.*

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