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The Logic Of Love

Chapter 5: How To Safely Mix Love, Logic, Freewill, and God

Question:

How can you safely transport a lion and a lamb in the same cage?

Answer:

Make two trips.

When Selfish Sam drove to work each day, he would pass by the bus stop a block from his house. Long-Sufferin' Luke was always standing there in the weather, waiting by the curb. Because Sam and Luke happened to work in the same office building, they also often saw each other at the end of the day. Luke would see Sam walking toward the parking garage, and Sam would watch Luke running to catch the 5:10 bus. Sam never gave a thought to offering Luke a ride.

Selfish Sam lived in Buffalo, New York. People used to say he was "more foul than the weather." But Sam took little notice of the weather or what others thought of him, locked away as he was behind the tinted windows of his climate control world. There in his little sanctuary of self-absorption, Sam enjoyed every creature comfort that ever came out of Detroit. He had a control knob that could do just about everything, except make the morning coffee and provide companionship for a lonely heart.

One Sunday afternoon, Sam was hiking alone in the mountains. He, of course, had no friends with whom to share the day. And because he was alone, he had plenty of time to think about how important it was to him to be selfish. He believed that everyone was just as selfish as he was, the only difference was that they tried to hide it in order to get what they wanted. This perspective led Sam to hate deception above all other offenses to ethics and morality. For although Sam was selfish, his ego nonetheless found great comfort in thinking that it owned the moral high ground.

As Sam walked along his chosen path, he reflected on the value of his selfish perspective on life. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, the air became very still around him and the sounds of nature ceased. Sam watched in amazement as the clouds in front of him began to part. As they did, a soft, shimmering, golden light poured down from the heavens. Then, the voice of God spoke to him saying, "I am your God, Sam. All people on this earth are my children. I love you all and want you love each other. Now, go and act accordingly!"

Selfish Sam was awe-struck. But awe was not all that he felt. This unexpected appearance of God was also an annoying source of cognitive dissonance. The last thing Sam wanted was a paradigm shift, and no god was about to spoil his attempts to commune with nature. Once he regained his composure, the mental tools he had purchased with a lifetime of persistent skepticism were again at his disposal.

"How do I know that you really are God and that I am not just dreaming this?" he demanded.

Then God, who is always so cool, answered, "Tell me what it takes to convince you, Sam, and I will prove it to your satisfaction."

So Sam asked for his proof and God gave it to him.

Then God said, “Now that you know I exist and that I want you to act with love (as that term was defined in chapter one of Halbert Katzen’s *The Logic of Love*), I expect I can rely on your whole-hearted cooperation.”

“God knows, you will certainly get my cooperation,” responded Selfish Sam. “I know how to apply standards as well as anyone. You can rely on me for that much. But I’m not sure what you mean by “whole-hearted.” As I understand Halbert’s use of the term love, it stands for a freewill interplay between attitude and action. If the actions of love are *required*, this pulls the plug on the current of freewill. The *experience* of the reality of one’s love is lost once the acts of love become coerced. Perhaps, God, you should reread his chapter on freewill if you are still unclear about this.

“I must admit, this revelation of yourself is an extraordinary event that will change my life forever. It makes the personal value of acting with love a lot less glorious, however, because I feel far less free to act than when I woke up this morning. If acting with love was against the law, I could certainly get out of it by claiming extreme duress. After all, I understand your willingness to extend mercy is balanced by ultimate justice. Fair as you may be in your perfect administration of these values, my freewill is very sensitive to the significance of anticipated outcomes. The last thing I want to do is open myself up to your judgment by acting out in unloving ways.

“And while we’re on the subject of love, seeing you here in all your power and glory, I cannot begin to understand why you would fill a whole planet with such a selfish and deceitful lot. I cannot imagine growing to love them. After all, aren’t we humans in the habit of killing the best and brightest promoters of love? Nevertheless, I know what it means to act in the interests of others and will go forth to do so. Who am I to deny God?”

On his way to work the next day, Selfish Sam spotted Long-Sufferin’ Luke at the bus stop. Without hesitation, Sam pulled up to the bus stop. He offered Luke a ride, confident that he was acting in accordance with God’s will. Luke didn’t even have time to put on his seatbelt before Sam started talking a mile a minute about how his life had changed since he met God.

“Of course, I do not expect that you are any more loveable than—well, than me, for instance,” explained Sam. “But hey, if God says I should do good acts for others, so be it. I tried to tell chen that I think we’re all just a bunch of jerks, anyway. So what’s the point, right? But che’s into chens benevolence trip, so I said I’d play along!”

What Sam did not realize was that Luke had been harboring deep resentments toward Sam for years. It started one foul day several winters back when Sam soaked Luke with slush one day while driving past him at the bus stop. Luke had always been able to sense that Sam was a selfish bastard. And that slush was the last straw. Luke swore on that day that if Sam ever gave him cause for offense again, he would shoot Sam three times in the heart. So ever since then, Luke carried around a .357 Magnum, just in case cause was given.

Well, nothing offended Luke more than when people pretended to care because they had to, rather than because they wanted to. So, when he heard how Sam was only being nice because God said he had to be, Long-Sufferin’ Luke pulled out his .357 Magnum and shot Selfish Sam three times in the heart. As Luke put his gun back in its holster, he smiled as he considered that he really had done Sam a favor. He figured that Sam would have suffered more had he lived out the rest of his life from a place that left his freewill with no meaningful choice.

The story of Selfish Sam reveals the nature of what I call life’s *Freewill Love Factor*. The Freewill Love Factor stands for the appreciation of how a revelation of God can undermine our opportunity to know that our love is real, that it is not coerced by a fear of ultimate judgment. Love, as an attitude put into action, cannot be coerced. Coercion makes it extremely difficult to assess motivation. It undermines our ability to experience service to others as the reflection of a loving attitude. Love and selfishness may at times motivate the same actions, but they never produce the same inner experience.

Wake-up calls are a double-edged sword. Though they may motivate us to do what is right, overwhelming experiences can galvanize fear-based motivations as powerfully as they can inspire an attitude of love. The one thing that Sam and Luke had in common was that they both hated what Sam had become—a slave to the fear of judgment. A world where Selfish Sam can exist is a world that maximizes the experience of freewill, and this, in turn, is what makes the attitude of love so beautiful and good. The perception of the possibility that our actions may not have consequences, that there is no ultimate form of justice, gives freewill a field to play on and provides the best experiential assurance that love is real.

The Freewill Love Factor not only holds open the possibility of experiencing the reality of our love for others, but also enables us to experience receiving love from others. The temptation is always present to question someone's sincerity when they are pressured to act in a certain way. Remember when you were young and some kid did something mean to you? And then chens mother made chen apologize. Remember how hollow the words "I'm sorry." sounded?

It may be okay for biological parents to require their children to exhibit social grace. But the Freewill Love Factor reflects how things need to work out differently on the spiritual level. Spiritually freedom is crucial. That we can only approach God through faith assures that we do not miss out on the thrilling opportunity to experience the reality of love.

Many people claim to have direct experience with God. Whether it's feeling the presence of God, being miraculously healed, raising the dead, or parting the sea, people have long asserted that the reality of God can be experienced. Is this inconsistent with what has just been stated about the relationship between love and freewill? Not at all. On the contrary, for those who have faith in God, the progressive development of love-motivated acts increasingly safeguards freewill from being overawed by experiences of God. If we *first* demonstrate our love through the choices we make in life, *then* our willingness to do this before ever having a knowledge of God can work to safeguard our appreciation for the reality of love.

There are countless opportunities every day—some big, some small—to love. If we are willing to love first, then the progressive accumulation of these experiences make it possible to progressively experience God without endangering the opportunity to appreciate the experience of love. At least in theory, a love-motivated life should have the potential to make what would be impossible (freewill and the experience of God) possible. The refusal to have faith in God guarantees that no experience in life can be interpreted as an experience of God. The necessity of believing in God in advance of experiencing God is a reasonable and wise door of separation because this preserves the integrity of love and freewill. The willingness to hold love as the highest value is the key to this door. Such a supreme assertion of human thought—to believe and act for the sake of love—is the essence of faith.

If love is the supreme value, and if we are to know by our experience that love is real in our lives, then experiences with God must be in proportion to the quality of faith-activated love that we demonstrate in our lives. This is not to say that we must have faith in God in order to know that love is real. This is only to say that we cannot know that our love is real if we first have knowledge of God's existence. For this reason, faith in God—the willingness to act upon belief—is a plausible way to transcend the limitations of the Freewill Love Factor without sacrificing freewill. For maximum impact, assume that the proof Selfish Sam wanted was exactly the same one that you would want.

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