



Put That In Your Pipe...

If I could just quit smoking my pipe, I would be very close to perfect. But then, I wouldn't be writing to you, because perfect people don't associate with imperfect people. So, I'm glad I have that one sin...

I've been thinking recently about two mutually contradictory truths, to wit, first, that I'm a whole lot better than I was and, second, I'm a whole lot worse than I was.

I know you're thinking that I'm crazy. I'm not—well, maybe a bit—but not about this. In fact, if you'll let me explain, you might identify with what I'm feeling.

The first truth—that I'm a lot better than I was—is a truth about which I must be very careful. I have this tendency to get religious and to pretend that I'm better than I am. But with all of the humility that I can muster, I really am better. I'm not sure where it came from, but I'm not nearly as angry as I once was; and I think less lustful, prideful and bitter thoughts than I once did. Quite frankly, I pray better, live better and serve more faithfully and joyfully than I ever did before.

And that's the truth. Not only that, my goodness isn't because I'm old and tired nor is it because I'm cramming for finals. I'm really better...a lot better.

Honest!

(In fact, if I could just quit smoking my pipe, I would be very close to perfect. But then, I wouldn't be writing to you, because perfect people don't associate with imperfect people. So, I'm glad that I have that one sin...and if you believe that, you'll believe anything.)

Now, the flip side of what I just told you was haunting me even as I wrote what I wrote above. There is stuff in me so bad that it scares me. I don't know if I'm more sensitive, or if I'm really worse than I was. It's probably a bit of both. But, frankly (and, no, I'm not going to get very specific here—I may be a sinner, but I'm not stupid), I blush when I think of the things that I've

thought, the selfishness that defines me and the ego that drives me. I will go to any ends to protect me. I will even pretend humility, vulnerability and honesty so you will say, "Steve, is so honest, vulnerable and humble..."

I've been reading a book (also given to me by a friend, and I'm finding that if you have enough friends, you never have to buy books!) about the life and commitment of Bono and U2—*Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2*, by Steve Stockman. While I have never listened to a CD by U2 and, while I probably wouldn't like it if I did, they are, after all, the most popular rock band in the world. I had heard that Bono and the Christian members of the band had started out as Christians and then "gone the way of all flesh," leaving behind their commitment to Christ.

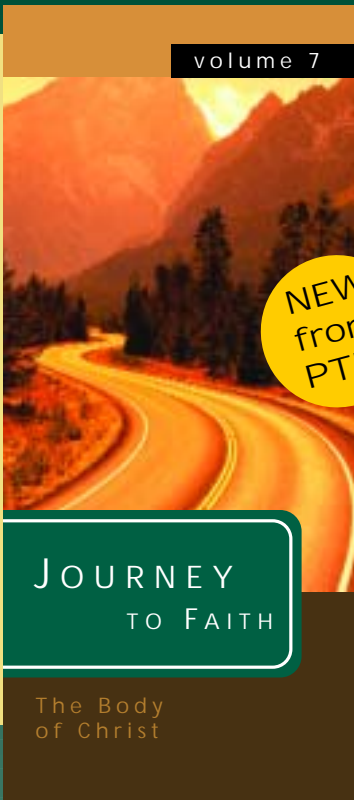
That's not true. In fact, what they have experienced, I believe, is not altogether different from what I've been trying to describe to you. The song many point to as a statement of Bono's leaving his "first love" is *I Still Haven't Found What I Was Looking For* which, believe it or not, is one of the clearest statements he has made about his commitment to Christ. It contains these lyrics:

*You broke the bonds
You loosed the chains
Carried the cross
And my shame
You know I believe it!*

Stockman writes: "Bono has been honest about his failings when it comes to his life and Christian journey."

Paul said it a lot better than Bono and certainly a lot better than I could ever say it: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate [the downside].... For I have the desire

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he asked me

to do what is right [the upside]...” (Romans 7:15, 18 ESV).

What’s the point? Listen and I’m going to tell you:

The point is that it doesn’t matter.

Well, that’s a bit strong. Of course it matters but not in the way you think. My goodness or lack thereof is irrelevant, and my concern with it (sometimes bordering on obsessiveness) is not only neurotic, it is another kind of pride.

I like to say that I measure myself only by myself and by Jesus, but you and I both know that’s a lie. I measure myself by how I’m doing compared to you or someone else.

Self-righteousness and self-condemnation are the flip sides of the same coin. Both are an undue concern with me, my reputation and my godliness.

Jesus always says, “Look at me. Quit looking at others and at yourself. That’s your problem and it will only make you sicker. I’m fond of you...whether you’re good or bad, and that’s the most important thing you need to know.”

Enough. I guess what I’m saying is that I give up...and, in the giving up, my goodness and my sin are both irrelevant to his love. And, I suppose the mix of genuine good (good that he has created in me) and genuine bad (I can do that by myself, thank you) will still stir up in my soul...and drive me to him.

Then I find myself free of my obsessiveness and my self-righteousness and my self-condemnation. They are the twin demons that can’t assail the walls of Christ’s unconditional love.

Now I think I’ll go and smoke my pipe.

And you can take what I’ve just written you and, as it were, “Put that in your pipe and smoke it.” Well...you probably won’t be happy with the way I put that; so, if you prefer, just think about it.

He asked me to remind you. ☐

—Steve Brown

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