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“When an Iceberg Knows a Crystal”

I Corinthians 13:8-13

George C. Anderson

Heard of Confirmation bias?

That’s gathering evidence of what you already believe.

“*I knew it!*”

Heard of Hindsight bias?

That’s when, after something happens, you convince yourself you knew it was going to happen.

“*I saw it coming.*”

What about Attribution bias?

That’s when you are highly confident in your ability to figure others out

“*I can see right through him... or her.*”,

but not confident at all in others ability to figure *you* out

“*You don’t know me.*”

Each bias is different, but they all have this in common: they make you think you have more *clarity* than you really have. You might call each bias “artificial intelligence” because it makes you feel smarter than you really are;

more confident than you should be,

having more control than you really have.



That's not all bad. To take actions and make decisions in this confusing world requires some good measure of confidence and trust in what you think you know and what you think you should do. However, we know that too much clarity—too much certitude—can get in the way.

Not my clarity, of course. Not my certitude. I'm not talking about me. I'm talking about everyone else.

There's that Attribution bias again. A mature Paul sees it... not just in others but also in himself. Hear what he has to say at the end of that chapter about love from I Corinthians that is read at many weddings:

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

“Now we see in a mirror dimly.”

Those of you who grew up with the King James Version of the Bible will remember this translation? “Now we see in a glass darkly.”

Which is it, a mirror or a window?

I didn't check the Greek to answer that question because I don't want to know. This is like the two ways the Lord's Prayer is prayed: “forgive us our debts,” and “forgive us our trespasses.” Why should we choose between the two? Sin is both what we owe to God and do not do, and what we do that we should not have done.

In the same way, let's not choose between mirror and window because they are also two sides of the same true coin. If you look at a fogged mirror, it is your reflection that is hard to make out. If you look through a glass darkly, it is what is outside you that is hard to make out—others, the world—God.

Paul had no reason to know that later studies would back up what he learned in in-life training. These studies have revealed what Paul knew, that we tend to have a different understanding of how knowable others are as opposed to how knowable we think ourselves to be. That is, most people tend to think our mirrors and windows are clear and other people's mirrors and windows are dark or fogged. Thinking that,

we easily feel justified in drawing conclusions about others

but easily feel victimized when others draw conclusions about us.

In summing up these studies, Kathryn Schulz puts it this way (I've quoted her before. She's the author of *Being Wrong*). She says that other people are crystals to us. Everything important about them is refracted on a visible surface. While it may take a while to really study and understand all the different ways the sides of the crystals present themselves, with enough study you can get to know the crystal pretty well. Meanwhile, we view ourselves as icebergs. What is



visible to other people is only a small part of who we are. Most of who we are is hidden beneath the surface.

I have just described again what Attribution Bias is all about. You can see that this bias is not only in error but is fundamentally unfair. It holds yourself to a different standard than you hold others.

- Because I am overly confident about who I am, I am overly confident about who you are.
 - That can make me judgmental.
- Because I am confident you don't really know who I am, that makes me confident you don't really know who you are either.
 - You can't see where you are wrong about me so you can't see your own faults.

Here again is the amazing feat of this bias: it can make you judgmental and feel like a victim at the same time. **"I see you and judge you. You think you see me and you judge me and that offends me."**

Bias can really mess up a friendship. It can mess up a marriage too. It can mess up faith in God. When we are so clear within ourselves about who others are supposed to be—including God—we can give up on them.

This might be a good time for the pastoral counseling that can be offered by the Apostle Paul.

Paul has not always been given credit for his pastoral side. He has been treated, you see, like a crystal. People have read verses of his writing out of context, and those verses have become surfaces of a crystal that make people think they have figured Paul out

- That surface that seems harsh,
- that surface that seems sexist,
- that surface that seems negative,
- that surface that seems judgmental about things like sex.

But when Paul is read within the context of his time, and within the context of his writings, and within the context of his life, one learns that surface readings of Paul just will not do.

Our passage, for instance, has wonderful pastoral advice, especially when it is read in the context of his life.

Let's begin with his childhood. Or better yet, let's begin with his *childishness*.

"When I was a child, I thought like a child, I spoke like a child, I reasoned like a child," he says. Paul is not just talking about when he was a child in his parent's home. He is also talking about when, even as an adult, he was childish in his thinking. He once was a young man whose window and mirror were both clear giving him *way more clarity* that he really had.

As a young Pharisee looking at a mirror, he was confident of his ability to keep the Law of God in all the ways the Pharisees thought were important..., and, looking out the window, was equally confident in his condemnation of those who fell outside the Law of God.



Like Christians. They committed the same sins as the one they claimed to follow.

- They worked on the Sabbath,
 - using compassion as an excuse.
- They don't follow the dietary laws that Jews have followed for generations—
 - dietary laws that not only set Jews apart from pagans but kept them healthy from many diseases.
- They didn't follow the Holiness code in many ways
 - when the code didn't make sense to them.
- And the men refuse to be circumcised
 - when that had been the defining sacrament of the people since Abraham.

Paul's clear mirror and window gave him such confidence that he became a dangerous man with a clear conscience.

- It is the kind of confidence two people can have when they try to destroy each other in a divorce,
- or the kind of confidence that ends a friendship when a political argument then defines how they then see each other,
- or the kind of confidence that can destroy a community or nation when entire groups of people can define, demonize, and then cancel each other out,
- the kind of confidence that can cause someone to give up on a church or on God because the church or God doesn't fit into their clarity about what that church, or that God, should be.

Paul had such clarity that he had the moral cover he needed to take on the work of persecution. We don't know how far that persecution went, except that Paul himself described it as violent. He also had the confidence to travel that road to Damascus carrying a sword he intended to use.

And then... well, his window darkened, and mirror fogged. Paul was stopped in his tracks by the one who was crucified. He was stopped in his tracks by Jesus who overly confident Pharisees before him—Pharisees he admired—had questioned, then quarreled with, then opposed, and then helped get arrested and killed. Paul was carrying a sword, but he could see that Jesus' hands and ankles had already been pierced.

And this crucified one asked Paul, “**Why? Why are you persecuting me?**” In that moment, Paul suddenly saw *that his own clarity was his sin*. His fogged mirror reflected this: his Attribution Bias which over-estimated his own righteousness and over-estimated others' sin had turned him into someone who would murder... even God, in God's name. At that moment of recognition, he goes blind because he is going to have to learn to see himself and the world differently. Three days later, his sight returns, and he begins to leave behind his childish ways.

There is around a ten-year gap between Paul's Damascus experience and his first missionary journey. This is a season of maturing—a decade of self-examination and reassessment that leads to a greater humility about what he knows and doesn't know.



By the time Paul writes his letters to Corinth, he realizes that what is true when he looks in the mirror is also true of others when he looks through the window. You'll notice in our passage that he uses the first person plural when he says, "Now *we* see in the mirror dimly" ... or, if you prefer, "through the glass darkly."

The greatest pastoral care Paul can offer when two parties become judgmental about each other while feeling victimized by each other is this: "*Remember, your window is also dark. Your mirror is also fogged.*"

Think about who you were 10, 15, 35 years ago. Go as far back as you need to where you now can acknowledge you were wrong (Some of us are so stubborn, ten years ago looks just fine). It is easy today to see where you were wrong... not about everything, but about a lot of things. You can see things that were crystal clear to you, things that need revision now. Now consider this about what today you are crystal clear about. In 10, 15, 35 years, don't you know that you're going to be seen as wrong—if not by yourself because you remain stubborn, at least by others who are watching. You're going to be seen as wrong. Not about everything, but at least wrong about something...or at least wrong about something *in everything* you believe to be true.

Whoever is that idiot, that racist, that manipulator, that enabler, that hypocrite, that crusader-
whoever you think you are right about, you are also wrong.

Those Pro-life people who don't care about children after they are born,

Those Pro-Choice people who don't care about the unborn;"

Those Democrats who are socialists,

Those Republicans who are deniers,

Those rich people who don't care,

Those poor people who are lazy;

Those Christians who won't believe science,

Those agnostics who have no morals;

Those conservative Christians who are way too political,

Those progressive Christians who are way too political;

That God who lets bad things happen,

and who can be such a bully to some people, including God's own son-
whatever you think you are right about, you are also wrong.

The bad news, you see, is that we are human, which by definition means we are wrong. We can't help but see ourselves in a mirror dimly and we can't help but look at others through a window darkly.

We are limited... finite. We are wrong because we are not God. Being wrong is not our sin. There is so much we don't know and so much we have to learn that of course we are going to get things wrong—about the world, about others and about ourselves. Learning and growing is the adventure of life. The source of our sin is when we think we are right and forget that inevitably we are wrong.

But here is the good news. "*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" There is Paul's pastoral counseling again. The good news is that God meets us in our humanity. God meets us



precisely in our wrongness. He is crucified because of the clarity of righteousness. But God so loves us sinners that he meets us in our sin.

And what does he do? He doesn't teach us what is true so now we can be right about everything. He teaches us how to love. He teaches us how to love ourselves even though we look into a fogged mirror. He teaches us how to love others even though we see them through darkened windows.

For reconciliation and peace in our lives and our world, the way forward is not final clarity which is dangerous. The way forward is love—

- love that is gracious and not condemning,
- love that is patient and does not give up,
- love that is kind and not cruel,
- love that gives the benefit of the doubt, and also allows for a change of mind,
- love that is curious, love that is courageous, and love that bears and believes and does not end.

If you didn't recognize it, that paraphrases his whole chapter on love.

To give up on clarity but remain stubborn in love, that is what Paul learned to do and encourages us to do. Or as Norman McLean says in his masterful novella, *A River Runs Through It*, which is about a father's love of a son who remains a mystery to him:

[“We can love completely what we cannot completely understand.”](#)

