

From Conquest to Freedom Continued

Part 4 “Respect”

Theologies of conquest are those theologies that serve to set one people group over and against another, claiming for their own group legitimacy, mandate or destiny to violate the sovereignty, autonomy or self-determination of others.

Theologies of conquest have been and continue to be used time and again to encourage and excuse theft of lands, military and political subjugation and/or wholesale slaughter of human beings, as well as subtler forms of cultural, spiritual, social and economic oppression. It is the nature of theologies of conquest to claim exclusive ownership of universal truth and/or special status as *the* chosen people. Others are alienated and dehumanized as pagan, heathen, unsaved or heretical. Theologies of conquest serve to develop and maintain hierarchical systems of government and church structure, as well as racial and socio-economic caste systems.

Theologies of freedom are those theologies that encourage harmony – the same harmony (unity in diversity) that is the very nature of Creator as mirrored in creation. Theologies of freedom encourage harmony between human beings and other human beings, on both individual and group levels, as well as harmony between human beings and the rest of creation, through loving the other as oneself – giving self in quest of freedom *for all* from bondage and oppression of every sort.

Theologies of freedom encourage recognition of giftedness and chosenness as well as neediness of *all* peoples (one’s own as well as others). They encourage the understanding that there is no place where Creator is not already made known through Creator-Offspring, no place where Creator-Spirit does not already move. In regard to the sharing of good news, theologies of freedom encourage an attitude of watching and listening first for the good news already there. They encourage an expectation of seeing Creator-Offspring’s presence already evident in every aspect of creation, including each and every human people and culture.

Far from encouraging attempts to recreate others after one’s own image, theologies of freedom encourage a humble attitude of seeking, respectfully and with permission, to help with what Creator is already doing in and through others while accepting reciprocal help *from* others. Theologies of freedom yield an understanding that reconciliation and proper relationship with Creator and reconciliation and proper relationship between individuals and groups on earth are interrelated and inseparable, with greatness measured not by ability to control others but by the active giving of self that the people may live.

What follows here is the first in a series of talks on what I call the Four R's: the four essential and interdependent values of respect, reciprocity, reconciliation and relationship. These values are essential to living balanced lives, lives characterized by harmony and love – lives that value true freedom. This talk was originally shared in the Mid American Indian Fellowships in August 2005. Minor revisions have been made.

Tlemeha and Tewa

Long ago, all the peoples of the earth: the humans, the animals, the birds all got along well and lived in harmony. We could all speak one another's languages and had respect for one another. Then there came a time when the birds and the animals had a disagreement. There was conflict over some disputed territory. The conflict led to war, and after the birds and animals fought for many years, they were no nearer resolution than they were at the beginning. People continued to be killed and maimed on both sides, until finally someone said, "Hey, why don't we resolve this issue as the human people sometimes do, with a stickball game?"

Now, I have to explain about stickball. Maybe you've heard of lacrosse? Lacrosse, the national sport of Canada, is derived from northern stickball, in which each player uses only one stick. In the southern variety of stickball, each player uses two sticks, usually made of hickory wood, with little baskets on the end in which the ball may be picked up and either carried or thrown.

There are different ways in which stickball may be played, but generally it's played on a big field with a goal post at each end. On top of the goal post is a carved, wooden object, often in the shape of a buffalo fish, although it may be a circle, or something else. This is what the stickball players must hit with the ball in order to score a point. The game usually begins with a spiritual helper standing in the middle of the field, throwing the ball up in the air and getting quickly out of the way. This is done again every time a goal is scored. Whenever one team has made the number of goals previously agreed upon (could be 12 or another number), that team wins the stickball game.

Most usually, stickball is played between two teams of men. Other times, or on special occasions, a form of stickball may be played between a team of men and a team of women, with the women's team playing by an entirely different set of rules, just as in real life. When stickball is played by two teams of men, women may be allowed to come onto the field for the purpose of assisting their men, running interference against the other team by punching, gauging, tripping, wrestling or whatever. In these cases, men are allowed to do nothing to the women apart from trying to stay out of their way. This can get pretty rough. Even without the women's assistance, stickball can still get rough. As I said before, there are many variations in the way stickball is played, but for the tribes of southeastern North America, stickball is, in itself, always understood as a sacred ceremony.

Stickball is often called, "The Little Brother of War." In the old days, wars between neighboring tribes were often avoided or brought to an end with a high-stakes stickball game. Of course, that was back when we were "savages." We are far too

“civilized” now to resolve major disputes on a level playing field. However, that is exactly what the birds and animals decided to do. The day and location of the big stickball game was arranged, and they set to the task of putting their teams together. Yona the Bear was chosen as captain of the animals’ stickball team. This was the Great Bear, not the small black bear of today. You must remember that the animals of long ago were much larger. The animals of today are but shadows of those who once were. And so the Bear was going up and down the roads, pulling up big trees by the roots and throwing them, saying, “That’s what I’ll do to any bird foolish enough to get in my way!” Ahwi the Deer was also on the animals’ team. He was going around saying, “I’m so fast and can jump so high, the birds don’t stand a chance against me.” Of course, in those days, the Deer also had teeth like a wolf. He was, all told, quite a fearsome fellow. And there was Daksi the Terrapin, also on the starting lineup of the animals’ stickball team. You probably thinking, “The Terrapin? He’s nothing!” But let me tell you, in those old days the Terrapin was a great warrior, with a shell 10 feet long! He was going around saying, “Any bird gets in my way.... I’ll fall on him and crush him flat!” Aside from these notables, the animals had many other impressive players on their team, including the wolf, the mountain lion and the bobcat. Is it any wonder the birds were worried?

The thing is, the birds didn’t have such a shabby team either. Uwohali the Eagle was the birds’ team captain. They also had Tawodi the Hawk and Tlanawa the Great Hawk who lived in those times and was so big he could carry children and even an occasional adult human being away to his nest in the mountains. All these and many other good stickball players were on the birds’ team, even so, with all the animals’ bragging and threats, the birds were really nervous.

So, the birds decided to get together and have a dance to pray for courage. They would not pray for victory, mind you, only for the courage to do their best. Someone brought a water drum, and they sang and danced and felt much better. Afterward, the birds were all sitting high up in a great tree, planning their strategy, when the Eagle, with his sharp eyes, looked down and saw a very strange sight. All the birds got quiet as, following the Eagle’s gaze, they spotted two tiny, furry creatures climbing up the trunk of the tree in which they were sitting. The birds continued watching in disbelief, as these two little animals, neither one much bigger than a mouse, scampered right out onto the very branch where the Eagle was perched. Boldly approaching the Eagle, the two looked up at that fierce bird. Then, as all the birds listened, with a squeaky little voice, one of the creatures said, “Please, we would both like to be on your stickball team.”

The Eagle, along with all the birds, was more than a little taken aback. “Umm....” the Eagle began. “You are clearly four-footed, furry creatures. You should go and join the animals’ team.”

“We have been there already,” one of the creatures explained. “The animals laughed at us. They said we are useless little things, and they drove us away.”

I can’t begin to tell you how impressed the Eagle and all the birds were with the bravery of these two tiny, furry little people who would hardly have made a meal for any of them. The birds began discussing among themselves how they could possibly include these two on their team. It seemed the major problem was the creatures’ lack of wings. In order to play on the birds’ team, they would have to have wings.

In answer, one of the birds took the groundhog hide from the top of the water drum. From this, the birds cut wings which they sewed onto one of the little creatures, so that he became Tlemeha the Bat. Having no more groundhog hide to use, two big herons took hold of the skin on the sides of the second creature. They pulled and pulled, and oh it hurt! But the skin stretched marvelously, and this creature became Tewa, the Flying Squirrel.

The day of the big stickball game arrived. The animals were all quite amused to see Tlemeha and Tewa on the birds' team, but their laughter died down quickly enough when the game started. When the ball was first thrown up, Tewa swooped in and caught it. He quickly passed the ball off to Tlemeha who went flying down the field to make the first goal. The ball was thrown up again, and the same thing happened. Only once did Tewa drop the ball. That time, the ball was saved by the Martin bird who dived down to scoop the ball up off the ground and then quickly passed the ball off to Tlemeha. Time and again, the animals could not even get near the ball due primarily to the quickness and strategy of Tlemeha and Tewa. Finally, the 12th point was scored for the birds, and the game was won. For all their bragging, neither the Terrapin, the Deer nor the Bear ever so much as gained possession of the ball.

The Ten Commandments

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

- Exodus 20:1-17 K.J.V

I'm not sure of the origin of what are commonly called the "Native American Commandments." There may be more than one version out there. Here is the one version I have seen.

Native American Commandments

- Treat the Earth and all that dwell thereon with respect.
- Remain close to the Great Spirit.
- Show great respect for your fellow beings.
- Work together for the benefit of all mankind.
- Give assistance and kindness wherever needed.
- Do what you know to be right.
- Look after the well-being of mind and body.
- Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good.
- Be truthful and honest at all times.
- Take full responsibility for your actions.

Both these codes center on one major value, that being the value of respect: respect for Creator, respect for creation, respect for self. Respect is a crucial aspect of a balanced life. Respect is essential for harmonious living. Respect is an aspect of love. Respect is essential for true freedom.

Respect Defined

My definition of respect, paraphrased from Webster's definition, is this: Respect means holding one another in high regard and practicing an attitude of non-interference.

Many people are surprised by the "attitude of non-interference" being included in a definition of respect, but it is right there in the dictionary.

Proper respect comes from an understanding that all things: every life, every ethnicity, every culture is a special gift of Creator with its own special purpose to fulfill.

Respect means being aware of *and* appreciative of differences and diversity. Respect means being careful to do nothing that would diminish or take away from others their values of choice and self-determination. Respect includes awareness of boundaries: physical, mental, spiritual and cultural, taking care to cross those boundaries *only* with proper and freely given permission.

Speaking of Boundaries

After receiving information that the National Collegiate Athletic Association would meet in August 2005 to discuss the American Indian mascot issue, I sent the following letter to NCAA President, Myles Brand.

Dear Mr. Brand,

Here in western Missouri, where I live, I walked into a public school not long ago to be accosted by a poster bearing the image of a tiger dressed as a cowboy shooting an Indian. The image in the poster was in reference to an upcoming game between that school and another school that has an Indian mascot.

I am a Cherokee Indian. I take images of violence against Indians very seriously. I know my people's history. I know the history of this country. I know what still goes on. Whether in public schools, colleges or pro-teams, Indian mascots promote images of violence against American Indian people. According to government statistics, American Indians are more apt to be victims of violent crime than are members of any other ethnicity in the U.S., and most violent crimes committed against American Indians are committed by non-Indians. Is there a link between Indian mascots and violent crime committed against Indians? I can't say for sure, but I believe that both grow from an attitude that says American Indians are merely part of the fauna of this land, here to be exploited, used, abused or eliminated at whim.

I do not feel honored by the use of Indian mascots any more than a Jewish person could be expected to feel honored if there were soccer teams in Germany with names such as the Berlin Rabbis, the Bonn Cohens or the Munich Hebrews. At halftime, mascots would dance about in overdone hats, fake side curls, beards and masks with grossly exaggerated noses. Fans would wear fake phylacteries on their heads and rock back and forth in mock prayer whenever their team scored. A headline might read something like, "Hebrews Gassed in Last Night's Playoff Game!" Of course the Germans might argue that their motive is to "honor the memory of their Jews." Would they be stupid enough to believe their own lie?

Do the right thing. Put a ban on Indian mascots. It's time to lay such racist imagery aside.

Do'hi (Peace in Cherokee),
Robert Francis, consultant/helper
Mid American Indian Fellowships

You may well point out that my use of the word "stupid" in the letter to Mr. Brand shows some lack of respect, on my part, to those who hold a different opinion.

You may well be right. If my words or deeds cause someone to feel put down, I have not shown a proper attitude of respect toward that person. If someone feels disrespected or put down by me and tells me so, which is better: to make excuses and deny the put-down or to closely examine and improve my own behavior?

According to Cherokee tradition, as taught to me, when compelled to criticize or rebuke another's behavior, I should do so once, twice at the most, then leave it alone. Anything more is considered disrespectful interference, unless the behavior is clearly posing a danger to that person or to others.

Again, according to Cherokee tradition, as I understand it, it is considered more respectful to criticize indirectly than directly, perhaps through telling a story or sharing about a similar situation that may cause the person to reconsider their own behavior. If I do feel compelled to criticize or rebuke an individual directly, it is much more respectful to do so in private rather than in public. Of course, there are exceptional cases.

The Indian mascot issue is not a private debate; it is a public dispute over boundaries. The letter I sent to Mr. Brand was in response to an invitation for all concerned parties to contribute information. The letter I wrote was not meant as a rebuke of Mr. Brand or of the NCAA, but rather as an encouragement to consider the feelings of others.

What happened? In the August meeting, the NCAA ruled that colleges with American Indian mascots will be banned from postseason NCAA sponsored tournaments. According to the NCAA statement, "Colleges and universities may adopt any mascot that they wish, as that is an institutional matter. But as a national association, we believe that mascots, nicknames or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity or national origin should not be visible at the championship events that we control."

Do I believe my letter led to this ruling? No, I don't. But my letter, along with hundreds of other letters, speeches and acts of non-violent protest delivered by American Indian people and others over the course of many years, have come together to finally make a difference. Public debate is public, and public debate must go on past the first and second word. Even so, there is no place for disrespect, in public or in private.

When I learned of the NCAA decision, I wrote another letter, not to Myles Brand this time but rather to Bernard Franklin, NCAA Senior Vice-President for Governance and Membership. Mr. Franklin is the one who answered my first letter after it was forwarded to his office. Here's my letter to him:

Dear Mr. Franklin,

I want to express my appreciation to you and the NCAA for your courage in making a large stride in the direction of respectful consideration for those who feel disrespected by the continued use of demeaning and stereotypical images of American Indians in sports. Wa-do (Thank you.)

Do'hi (Peace in Cherokee),
Robert Francis

The American Indian mascot issue has to do with respecting cultural boundaries. What about respecting spiritual boundaries?

In the Bible there is a story about a man named Job. In the story, Job is described as one who “was blameless and upright; [had proper reverence for] God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Basically, we are told in the story that Job has a right relationship with Creator. He is not a fool, in the biblical sense of that word, a fool being one who lacks a relationship with Creator. “Unsaved” is the modern word. So, in this story, Job is not unsaved. We are assured of this from the beginning.

Creator has revealed himself to Job. Job has responded to Creator. Creator’s love flows through Job. And guess what? Job has lived his life without ever hearing a missionary speak about Jesus. Here is something else: Job is not even Jewish. Where he lives pretty much assures us that this man is of an Arab tribe (Job 1:1-5). But, some bad things happen to this good man, Job. Job loses nearly everything: his livestock, his children, his health. Some is taken by storm, some by disease and some by the Sabeans and Chaldeans, the “civilized” people of the day who felt it their God-given right to steal others blind.

Job winds up sitting on an ash heap, scraping sores with a broken piece of pottery, totally devastated, numb with the enormity of it all, completely, totally confused about why Creator would allow all this to happen. Then the missionaries come, “friends” from foreign lands: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite (Job 2:8, 11). Well, at least they aren’t Chaldeans or Sabeans.

Job is in such bad shape that when the friends see him they begin to cry and weep out loud. They tear their clothes. They throw dust on their heads, and they sit on the ground with Job, in silence, for seven days and nights. They are entering into Job’s grief, behaving in a respectful way. But, when Job finally speaks, expressing his hurt, his anger, his pain, his confusion as best he can, the friends’ attitude changes. They stop listening. Everything Job says, they turn around to fit their own preconceived notions of reality. They try to convince Job of what a wicked, low-down, evil, unsaved heathen he must be for all this to have happened to him (Job 2:12-5:27, 8:1-22, 11:1-20). The friends basically call Job a fool to his face, but here Job has a good response:

“Doubtless you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you!
But I have a mind as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know all these things?”
- Job 12:2-3

Among American Indian people, there is an understanding that each of us may gain spiritual wisdom and insight simply by looking around us, observing the natural world. There is also an understanding that Creator speaks directly to the spirit of each person. Remembering these things helps us treat others with respect. There was great diversity among the peoples of this land long before the Europeans got here. From this there developed an understanding and appreciation for diversity among American Indian people that continues to the present day. We look around us and see that Creator must

truly love variety. For this reason, when we attend or visit a ceremony conducted by another tribe or band or even by another spiritual helper within our own tribe or band, we don't start saying things like, "You're doing it all wrong; *we* do it this other way." Instead, we respect the people and respect the ways of the people. If their ways are different from our own ways, we respect that too. The main thing is, no matter who we are or where we've been, when going onto someone else's territory, whether to a ceremony or even to a powwow, it's important to not put ourselves forward, to be quiet, to be carefully observant and especially to listen.

In the old days, among Indian people, even when a person went to visit in the home of a friend, the visit began with a respectful span of silence, and the visitor was not the one to break this silence. With a wave of the hand, the visitor was invited into the house, shown a place to sit and hospitably provided with something to eat and something to drink, the very best the host had to offer. After everyone had some refreshment and ample opportunity to sit quietly together, the silence was broken, but again, not by the visitor. Visitors ventured to speak only after listening carefully to what the host or the person they were visiting had to say. It would be good if we could relearn some of these old ways. Today, we are afraid of silence. We are always flapping our gums, always talking, even when we have nothing to say. If we maintained more silence, maybe the voice of Creator could be heard more often.

Also, in keeping with Cherokee tradition, as I understand it, a healer or spiritual helper does not give direct advice without being asked. Otherwise that person may be considered presumptuous, pushing himself or herself onto others. Also, there is a respectful way to ask help or favors or advice from a traditional healer, helper or elder. Maybe you have heard the phrase, "To ask in a good way." This means we bring a small gift, most usually a gift of tobacco, although it may be something else. We give this gift before we ask. This is to show our respect and also to indicate that we are ready to take the words of this person seriously.

It is not only to the elders, helpers and healers of the people to whom we are to show respect. Everyone, right down to the smallest child, is worthy of our respect. Even our enemies are worthy of respect. In the old days, Indian people did not disparage or dehumanize their enemies. When I disparage another, even my enemy, I disparage myself. But, if I have a worthy enemy, it must be that I am involved in a worthwhile struggle. We are to respect all persons. This also applies to non-human persons. We are all related, after all, and the person who says, "Animals don't have rights," should read the Ten Commandments over again. Creator grants a day of rest even to the cattle.

I've been watching and listening lately. It hurts my heart to say it, but judging from the behavior of some who claim to follow Jesus, there must be an understanding of Jesus or of the servant of God as one who speaks without listening or as one who forces his way on people or as one who goes so far as to conquer and destroy those who are different. The prophet Isaiah shows another understanding:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him
and he will bring justice to the nations.

he will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.”
- Isaiah 42:1-3

There are those who go door to door as if thinking no one can possibly know Creator apart from their intervention. I listened to the story of an Islamic woman from Egypt working as a Medical Doctor in a southwestern Missouri city. She spoke of uninvited guests repeatedly coming to her home, Bibles in hand, in vain attempts to convert her to this or that brand of Christianity. No doubt each of these visitors is thinking, “If I don’t go now and witness to this poor, unsaved woman, she may die tonight and go to hell.” Hey, I used to do that same sort of thing. I can’t say I was ever very comfortable with it, but I used to go knocking on doors where I wasn’t invited. I was a Baptist minister, and this was expected of me. When I reconsidered and started waiting for people to seek *me* out or invite me to their homes, it was a sore spot with some of the deacons. It seems I was no longer sufficiently annoying their “unchurched” relatives.

Someone may say, “But wait a minute. In the Bible they went visiting in other people’s homes. What about Peter? He went to that Italian soldier’s house. What was his name...Cornelius?”

Yes, Peter went to Cornelius’ house. He went there *after* being specifically sought out and asked (Acts 10:1-33).

As I have said before, in the Indian or indigenous way of understanding, there is an assumption that Creator speaks directly to the heart of each person. To assume otherwise is considered disrespectful. This goes right along with what is written in the prophet Jeremiah:

“No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord,
“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”
- Jeremiah 31:34

Creator honors creation by letting us help in the work, but no task is ever turned over fully. Yes, it is good to share what Creator has done in our lives, but ease up. No one is going to hell simply because someone is not willing to invade their privacy and disrespectfully interfere in their life without permission. Neither you nor I may be held fully responsible for the salvation (health and wholeness) of another person. Creator still works, even on Sunday (John 5:17). Today, I endeavor to go only where invited. I try to remember that there is nothing really that I can teach anyone. I might be able to help someone, but only if they really feel they need and want my help. I also try to keep in touch with the reality that I am just as much in need of help as the next person.

Getting back to the Ten Commandments, Jesus made some pointed comments on this ancient code of the Jewish people in what is commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to the judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, [‘You worthless phlegm in my throat!’] is answerable to the [Council]. But anyone who says, ‘You [moral or spiritual] fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

- Matthew

5:21-22

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

- Matthew 5:27-28

“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

- Matthew 5:37

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets....do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners [and in the high school gymnasiums] to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

- Matthew 6:1-6

I hope I’m not boring you with all the Bible quotes, but you see, it’s all about respect. Here’s a question posed by Paul, strangely reminiscent of words spoken by Job so long before:

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

- 1 Corinthians 14:36

Here’s a quote from 1 John that may also help us be more respectful:

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches

you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him. - 1 John 2:27

Insomuch as we apply this to ourselves, we should also apply it to others, even those from entirely different traditions.

Again, from painful observation, it seems there are those who read the Bible yet have a hard time understanding this whole concept of respect. Maybe it's because in the King James Version of the Bible, when the word "respect" is used, it generally means "favoritism," as when Peter went to Cornelius' house and came to the shocking realization that Creator loves Italians just as much as Creator loves Jews.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. - Acts 10:34 K.J.V.

A person who understands and speaks 21st Century English might look at that and say, "Well, if God doesn't respect people, why should I?" Even "tolerance" is a bad word today in some religious circles. I have heard it said that Christianity is "the most intolerant of all religions." I've heard this from Christians, spoken not with regret but with considerable pride! So, what is intolerance, and what is tolerance? From my own observation, in its more extreme form, intolerance is that attitude which says, "I hate that person for who that person is and will do what I can to distance myself from and/or rid myself of that person." In its less extreme form, intolerance says, "I despise that person's culture, religion or chosen lifestyle to the extent that I will stop at nothing to change that person, even if this means taking away that person's freedom or taking away that person's life." Tolerance is that attitude which says, "Although I may hate the way that person looks or the language that person speaks, although I may despise that person's culture, religion or chosen lifestyle, even so, I grant that person the rights to eat, drink and breathe, along with the benefits of other rights and privileges I enjoy." Regrettably, the attitudes of intolerance *and* tolerance both flow from an attitude of superiority. Tolerance is not the same as respect, it is only somewhere along the road between disrespect and respect, somewhere between outright hate and love, somewhere between violence and a helping hand. At least that's got to count for something. Without, at least, a sense of tolerance, a person cannot even approach an attitude of respect and will come nowhere near love, for respect is an aspect of love. Without respect, love is imperfect, incomplete. No matter how much religious talk comes spouting forth from our mouths, without love, we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). With a hurting heart, I have to say I agree with the assessment about Christianity being "the most intolerant of religions." Intolerance begets violence, and when all the violence committed against humanity is finally tallied up, I think we will see that the larger part has been committed in the name of Christianity. Going door-to-door to push one's religion without invitation, or going country-to-country on crusade to conquer and "liberate" – is there a great difference? This is why I no longer even call myself a Christian. I do not ascribe to any Christian creed or statement of faith. I endeavor only to follow Jesus and in the much greater sense, to be a Cherokee follower of Creator-Offspring*.

Some will point an accusing finger, saying, “Oh, but *you* are also intolerant. *You* are intolerant of intolerance.” Maybe they are right. I do choose to speak out against intolerance. At the same time, I do not seek to take away the rights of the intolerant, with the exception of their supposed right to hurt others. If speaking out against intolerance means that a person is intolerant of intolerance, well then, I am unabashedly intolerant of intolerance. As I see it, it is the unwillingness or lack of courage to speak out against intolerance that allows this hateful disease to fester and spread. Yes, it is this tolerance of intolerance that allows crimes of hate and human genocide to go unchecked. The earth herself is intolerant of intolerance. Even if no one else cares, the earth cries out for the blood of her slain children. Even so, I have to watch *myself*. The impulse to want to control others is not good. Self control, that’s what is required for an attitude of proper respect leading in the direction of love.

If I am letting my anger get out of control, murdering the self-esteem and reputations of others, that’s neither respectful nor loving. If, even though I am married, I go lusting after other women, this is not respectful or loving to my wife or to other women. If I cannot keep my word without taking an oath, well, I probably can’t keep my word even with an oath. That is not respectful either. And as for this in-your-face righteousness....There is a way of giving to the poor that is no more an act of charity than spitting on their shoes. We must learn to help in quiet and respectful ways. And, which is better: to put a Ten Commandments bumper sticker on your car, to put a Ten Commandments sign in your yard, to post a stone monument of the Ten Commandments in the county courthouse or to have the laws of Creator written in your heart? Even a little child knows the answer to this one.

In the Final Analysis

Speaking of the Ten Commandments, here is something that may surprise you: In the final exam of an Old Testament class in seminary, we were required to write the Ten Commandments from memory. I missed one. I was sure I remembered a commandment that says, “Thou shalt not lie.” Guess what? That is not one of the Ten Commandments. What the commandment actually says is, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” So....get this: If I tell a lie to cover up some bad behavior, some indiscretion on my part, well, that’s not good. I will have broken at least two and maybe as many as seven of the Native American Commandments, depending on how they’re interpreted, but I can console myself in the knowledge that, at least, I have not broken one of the Ten Commandments of the Bible. On the other hand, if I lie about someone else, in order to get that person in trouble, then I definitely *have* broken one of the Big Ten of the Christian Bible. Let’s say the lie or lies I tell on another person result in my gaining something that was once in the possession of the person or persons on whom I tell the lie. Maybe I gain this for myself or for friends or associates who are apt to share with me. Maybe it’s my neighbor’s ox or my neighbor’s ass, or maybe it’s my neighbor’s land or gold or “black gold” or whatever. Well then, I have just broken another commandment. Furthermore, if my eye is on this person’s property before I receive it, and if desire for that property is the motive behind the lie or lies I tell, yet another commandment gets busted right in two! I’m up to three now. Are you with me? Alright then, if the lie or lies I tell result in someone’s death or in the deaths of hundreds, thousands or tens of

thousands of people, hey, there goes another commandment, broken, Big Time. And then, if I have the audacity to bring the name of God into this, making the claim that the Almighty is guiding my footsteps as I weave my web of covetousness, false witness, theft and murder, still another commandment gets broken. If there *is* a god leading me in all of this, rest assured it is the god of greed to whom I bow. There's another commandment down the tubes or really two more shot down. So, what am I up to, seven out of ten? Now, let's say I stick with this lie on the Sabbath Day....What is the Sabbath Day? Some say Saturday. Some say Sunday. Some say Friday. For some, every day is the Sabbath. Others don't have a Sabbath Day at all. But, if I continue with this lie for more than six days in a row, you'd be justified in saying I'm running rough-shod over yet another commandment! So, that's eight of the Ten Commandments I've wasted in this scenario, and by this time, my parents are sure to feel dishonored. So, there goes commandment number nine, but at least I have not committed adultery! Well....that depends on your definition of adultery. Anyone, in doing all of this, will have definitely, umm....interfered with an awful lot of people.

If you read into the previous paragraph some cryptic message concerning, say, one or more Presidents of the United States of America, so be it.

To recap: Committing adultery *is* against the Ten Commandments. There is no doubt about that. Lying about one's own adulterous behavior, while not a good thing, at least breaks none of the Biblical Ten Commandments, which, I may add, contain more and larger loopholes than the Native American Commandments. The Biblical Ten Commandments only prohibit lies specifically told with the intention of hurting others. The Ten Commandments, both the Biblical Big Ten and the Native American Commandments are about respect. Lying to hurt others is *not* respectful. But if I go along with a hurtful lie told by someone else, if I choose to believe a hurtful lie, even when all the evidence points to the fact that it is, indeed, a lie, does that make me an accessory to the crimes resulting from the lie?

Doing anything that hurts others, that invades others' privacy, sacred space or territory, that diminishes others' freedom of choice or that puts others down – this is disrespectful and nowhere near loving. Creator gives purpose, space and freedom, yes even freedom to make mistakes, to all creation. Who are we, who is anyone to take that freedom away? Respect one another. Respect everyone and everything, no matter how big, no matter how small. Respect every least creature Creator has fashioned. We don't yet know who may wind up being the most valuable player on the team.

End of Part Four

To Be Continued....

* By no means do I intend the statement made above to be taken as an indictment of all who call themselves “Christian.” Ever since followers of Jesus were first called “Christians” in Antioch during the first century C.E. (Acts 11:18), there have been and continue to be many good, sincere, respectful and loving people who call themselves “Christian” and, judging by their actions they have been and are positively endeavoring to follow in the way of Jesus Christ. However, for me, the cultural and political baggage attached to the name “Christian,” through a legacy of violence stretching from the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine to the present, is more than I am willing to bear.

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