

Nope, this is NOT a typical Christmas, end-of-year “letter. Nor is it a pastoral-shepherd’s epistle. At best, it’s just an OLD sheepdog’s encouragement (no bite, just a bark) to warn the Good Shepherd’s sheep.

PAINFUL HOLIDAYS? It doesn’t take spending the past 30 years as a family counselor, like me, to know that “holidays” can be the most difficult and painful of times. This is inevitable for many people, and usually not their fault. During holidays we remember loved ones who’ve passed on and are no longer here to share special moments with us. Their absence is like a hole in our holidays reminding us that our heart is no longer whole – it’s broken by loss. Grief is necessary, it’s understandable, and it takes time.

However, a lot of the painful experiences that arise during holidays are “our fault”. Not always intentionally, though. Usually it’s because we follow *natural* human tendencies when dealing with soul to soul, *interpersonal* relationships. And at a larger scale, group to group and country to country, *international* relationships. The solution is to consciously refuse to follow the natural way, and choose instead an unnatural, “super”-natural Way that transcends above this chaotic world. Our need is for a source of pure, unselfish love that we cannot generate on our own. An unnatural love that is willing even to love our enemies.

UNCERTAIN TIMES. With each unfolding day, “News” sources reveal escalating cultural conflicts, shockingly widespread abuses of power, and even pervasive deceptions within those *news* sources themselves. It’s no wonder surveys show most youth and young adults are plagued with mistrust and a growing concern that there’s no hope of finding any trustworthy source for “truth”.

But realize this, that in the **last days difficult times** will come. For men will be **lovers of self**, lovers of **money**, boastful, **arrogant**, revilers, **disobedient** to parents, **ungrateful**, ... without self-control, brutal, **haters** of good, ... conceited, lovers of pleasure **rather than lovers of God**, ... always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ... but **wanting** to have their **ears tickled**, they will **accumulate** for themselves **teachers** in accordance to their **own desires**, and will **turn away** their ears **from the truth** and will turn aside to **myths**.

2 Timothy 3:1-7; ... 4:3-4

Modern technologies and digital devices have flooded our lives, families, and jobs with “information”, an ever-expanding list of techno-tasks, and a dizzying array of activities. All of which we are told, are “good”. But it seems like very few people are asking a profoundly simple question, “Are these ‘good’ things really helping us to understand and achieve what’s “best”?”

THE VALUE OF GROWING OLD. While getting old has a lot of downsides, there are some positives aspects that make me

grateful to have lived this long so far. Hopefully, I’ve learned from the many errors of my youth. Sadly, many of my fellow elders don’t realize they have these benefits, so they fail to use them. Worse is that many who are still *young* often reject even the possibility of any positive input from *old* people. Why? Because the common culturally conditioned consensus is the belief that whatever is “old”, is either useless, or wrong, or dangerously outdated.

The first elder quality that I’m referring to is the ability to have a broad perspective on life and reality that comes only from many years of *experience*. The second and related quality is the possession of a deeper base of *knowledge (evidence)* for critical examination of current problems and popular *claims* about promised *solutions*. Of course, this second quality is only possible if the elder’s past years were used diligently for serious study and not just the pursuit of superficial security, societal status, and personal entertainment.



THE CHOICE. As I’ve watched many of my students, some of my own children at times, and society at large, facing the reality of a world full of escalating problems, I’m concerned about a common pattern of response and communication. It seems to have become a self-protective, yet self-defeating “cocoon”. It’s a pattern, especially of youth, to separate and isolate from “others” who might differ in beliefs, values, and practices.

This separation isn’t always a *physical* division. Instead, people in families, schools, or jobs still spend time together *bodily*, but conversations are intentionally kept “safe” and *superficially* limited to favorite foods, entertainment, “job-stuff”, weather, etc. What gets isolated from the interaction is real, in-depth, ongoing soul to soul dialog about the truly big questions of life and relationships. Therefore, so many people feel like saying, “*nobody understands me*”. Yet, true understanding is only possible thru open dialog, heart to heart. And when that’s avoided, then misunderstanding is inevitable.

Sure, I understand that being more transparent and sharing together real views about truly important issues and questions is risky. It risks disagreements and the possibility that some people might try to argue. But remember it takes two to argue, so as an individual, you never have to contribute to conflict.

Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, **love** and **peace**, with those who call on the Lord from a **pure heart**. But **refuse** foolish and ignorant **speculations**, knowing that they produce quarrels. The

Lord's bond-servant must **not be argumentative**, but be **kind** to all, able to **teach**, **patient** when wronged, with **gentleness** correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps **God may grant them** repentance leading to the **knowledge of the truth,**" 2 Timothy 2:22-26

The flip side however, is that isolating our true selves from others guarantees destructive results. And it seems we are witnessing many of these playing out in our society all around us. It ensures that blind assumptions will be made about what the "others" think and believe – that means, who "they" really are *inside*. Those assumptions are usually inaccurate or exaggerated and lead to further misunderstandings. These in turn generate *unnecessary* hurt, which naturally tempts toward emotional - and eventually physical - withdrawal and division, even in previously *close* families.

To answer **before** listening - that is folly and shame.
The **first** to plead his case **seems right**,
Until another comes and examines him.
Proverbs 18:13 & 17

Such *lack of accurate knowledge* about "others" is called *ignorance*. And the assumption that our own private, protected view is the only correct one leads to *arrogance*. The two together produce one of the most dangerous and destructive forces in families and societies, *arrogant-ignorance*. I know because it was me throughout most of my foolish youth and young adulthood. Nationally it can lead to civil war as factions like Antifa and the many conflicting identity-groups and interest-groups react to one another instead of interacting through mature dialog. Internationally it threatens World War III and global chaos.

What is the **source** of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your **pleasures** that wage **war** in your members? You **desire** and do not have; so you commit murder. You are **envious** and cannot obtain; so you **fight** and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because **you ask with wrong motives**, so that you may **spend it on your pleasures**.
James 4:1-3

THE WAY THAT TRANSCENDS THIS WORLD. So, what's the "super"-natural "Way" to prevent this vicious natural cycle, and reverse it if its already escalating? It's not a program, but a *person*. It's not a set of man-made rules, traditions, and rituals. It's a restored *relationship* with our *super-natural* Creator who transcends the physical creation.

Sadly, the majority today have been brain-washed by cultural conditioning to blindly believe that instead of a personal, supernatural Good Shepherd Creator, some unknown, unseen, *natural M&M's (Mystery Mechanisms)* back in history made everything. They believe that some unknown, unseen, *natural M&M* made *nothing* somehow explode and made all the space, time, matter, and energy – the universe. But this violates the first and second laws of thermodynamics. They also believe another *natural M&M*

later somehow made non-living chemicals become a living cell with coded DNA information and micro-molecular machinery. But that would have violated the laws of Biogenesis and information generation. They also believe some unknown *natural M&M* somehow made the massive amount of *new* coded information that would have been necessary for all the millions of diverse genomes and kinds of organisms that now fill the earth. And they believe another *natural M&M* somehow repaired the millions of mutations and the accumulating genetic meltdown that is now known to occur over time. But none of this is objective, observed science. It's just a speculative "story" about the past, about history, that cannot be proven.

In contrast, Christmas is all about real history, His-story. The reason for the season is a time to remember who our Creator is and what our Creator has done to make reconciliation and restoration possible. It was predicted in detailed prophecies hundreds of times for hundreds of years and then fulfilled as proof beyond reasonable doubt in the person, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a **sign**: Behold, a **virgin** will be with child and **bear a son**, and she will call **His name** Immanuel [literally "**God with us**"]. **Isaiah 7:14**

For a **child** will be **born** to us, a son will be **given** to us;
And the **government** will rest on His shoulders;
And His **name** will be called Wonderful **Counselor**, Mighty **God**, Eternal **Father**, Prince of **Peace**. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of **peace**,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and **forevermore**.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7

Jesus said to him, "**I AM the Way**, and the **truth**, and the **life**; no one comes to the Father **but through Me**. He who has **seen Me** has **seen the Father**; **John 14:6**

Every man-made "*religion*" on earth teaches the same *false* message – that we can make ourselves good *enough* to be reconciled to our Creator. In contrast, the truth of the Gospel (Good News) of Christ is that our Creator did what we could not do for ourselves. He took on human form to *live* the pure life we could not, to *bear* the penalty of separation (death) we deserve for our selfish rebellion, and *rose* again to prove who He is and offer His gift (grace) to anyone willing to receive Him by humble, submissive, surrendering trust. He won't force you. The choice is yours, until your time is up. Please don't wait until it's too late.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,
Mr. Galloway BS, M.DIV. (Sid, Dad, Scotty's keeper, ...)
Just an OLD sheepdog of the Good Shepherd Creator Christ